

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Mary Ellen Daneels

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Illinois Civics Education Oral History project

Interview # ECE-A-L-2019-060

Mary Ellen Daneels, a career teacher who played a key role in implementing civics education in Illinois schools, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Education is Key – Public School Funding* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Aug 27, 2019 Location: Santori Public Library, Aurora, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Philip Pogue, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:28 / 1.47 hrs.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on November 26, 2019.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Interview being
processed

Abstract

Mary Ellen Daneels, *Education in Illinois – Civics*, ECE-A-L-2019-060

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Mary Ellen Daneels was born in Winfield, Illinois in December 1968. She graduated from Crystal Lake Central High School in 1986. Mary Ellen then attended McHenry Community College and later Northern Illinois University (NIU), graduating in 1990 with majors in social studies and history education. After graduating, Mary Ellen taught at West Chicago High School where she had done her student teaching. In 1995 Mary Ellen earned her MA degree from NIU in curriculum instruction. At the time of this interview, Mary Ellen was still teaching social studies at West Chicago High. In 2016, she took a sabbatical to work for the McCormick Foundation, training teachers in the state's new mandate for high school civics. During Mary Ellen's time at West Chicago she participated in exchanges, teaching in Australia, Angola, China, Estonia, and Belarus. Daneels has served on the Board of Delegates for the National Council of Social Studies as well as on the Illinois Task Force in 2016, which developed new social studies standards. She is also a National Board Teacher in adolescence and young adult (2008) and social studies-history (2018). Among her other distinctions, Mary Ellen has taught for Aurora University, and is a Mikva Challenge Grantee. She has been published, was featured on a CBS Sunday morning show on "The Importance of Civics Lessons," and has done hundreds of presentations.

Daneels discusses how civics education had been taught at West Chicago High School twenty-five years before the new state mandate requiring a semester of high school civics. That curricula included simulations, service projects, inquiry, and examination of controversial topics. When the Civics requirement went into effect in 2016-17, Mary Ellen became a lead teacher trainer. She highlights the training provided over a three year period to civics teachers throughout the state. The roles of the Regional Offices of Education and ROE mentors were discussed, as was the content of the training. Daneels also talks about training principals so they could become instructional leaders in their buildings. She discusses the meaning of being a 'Democracy School,' developing a team of educators, students, and administrators to implement the concept in high schools. Mary Ellen also reviewed the new Illinois Social Standards, and challenges posed by contemporary journalism (bias, fact/opinion, echo chambers, and polarization).

Subject Headings/Key Words: civics education and social studies requirements at West Chicago High School; teacher training in civics education; Democracy Schools in Illinois' Civics Education state mandate; McCormick Foundation; Illinois's social studies standards

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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