

Interview with Janine Jacobs By Anhthu Lai and Jennie Her

AL: The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of the Century High School. The interviewee is Janine Jacobs. The interviewers were Anhthu Lai and Jennie Her. The interview took place at Century High School on May 30, 2002 at 8:40 A.M.

JH: What is JagCrew?

JJ: JagCrew is a group of juniors and seniors that mentor freshmen. Welcome them to Century and kind of teach them the climate of the school. And the idea is for them to connect with a group of 9-10 kids and stay connected with them all year. Kind of help them out, you know, be a big brother, big sister...seeing them in the halls. Just make them feel like there are older kids that care about them here at Century.

JH: Why did you think JagCrew was important for Century High School?

JJ: Well, besides the statistics that showed that freshmen have such a hard time academically and socially, it was their very first time that we've never had freshmen in high schools before. We haven't had them for a long time. We needed to try to get a group of older kids that would teach them how to be in high school. That was kind of how we started. It was also supposed to give them the ideas to have them connected with the older kids so that they could learn appropriate behaviors, how to do well in classes. Like I said, to learn that somebody cares about them and they could come to and get help from them if they needed to. Rather than another choice of theirs could be dropping out, just to bail and without anybody caring about them.

JH: Did we have JagCrew the first year that Century opened?

JJ: No, we didn't, but we didn't have seniors either. We started that our second year.

JH: Were you the leader since the beginning?

JJ: Yes.

JH: Why did you decide to have JagCrew and you be the one who started it?

JJ: Well, I went to Ms. Montgomery, and Mr. Barnekoff sent me where I learned about the program. So, that's when I decided that I wanted to do it.

AL: What was the vision of Century when it started and how has it changed?

JJ: Well, that's a good question. I think the vision was to have the school that was divided into smaller communities which I think is still a work in progress. The vision was to involve students in extracurricular activities and clubs, sports, drama, well, you know we have a good drama program. Our vision was to get kids not to only get involved in classroom activities, but also in all the stuff that goes on in school.

AL: Do you think the number of student involvement has increased by JagCrew?

JJ: Oh, definitely! I mean our first year we had about sixty JagCrew members and this year, or on Monday, when we're going to do our first welcome, we're going to have 150 kids coming to that meeting. So that's implying that they want to be in JagCrew.

AL: What qualities do you need to be a JagCrew leader?

JJ: To be a student leader. First of all you have to like being with younger kids. You have to look at the group of freshmen as not just the little kids that you can pick on, but a group that can be leaders in the school eventually. You have to care about them. You have to care about your school because we want JagCrew members to promote our school spirit and that kind of stuff... Ha! Ha! Ha! I lost my train of thought. Anyways, just somebody who wants to stick to the program. A lot of the kids think it's fun the first month and then they kind of drop out, which is okay, but we don't want everyone to do that.

AL: What activities have the most effect when you have JagCrew?

JJ: Well, they do freshman orientation, so that's a big deal because that's the very first shot at what the freshmen see high school's all about. So, it's a great day because they see all the JagCrew kids and it's a fun day for them, they feel really welcome. That's one of the most important things our JagCrew does. We also did Breaking Down the Walls this year and the year before, not last year but the year before, and that has a significant impact on the whole student body and just not on freshmen. And the jag Crew class goes, we teach anti-bullying lessons in the grade schools. And I think we have eight or nine grade schools we've gone to, to do lessons for the kids. That's been a big deal. I think those are the and also eighth grade visitations, so we welcome the eighth graders here.

AL: You mentioned Breaking Down the Walls, Can you explain what it is?

JJ: it's kind of hard to explain. Breaking Down the Walls is a program that we bring to our school. It's facilitated, that means it's run by Jag Crew but the head guy is Stu, who is itself the program. And he alone with Jag crew goes through a series of, activities and team building things with students on staff, students and staff here. It is really designed to show how kids are not so different from each other. They might look different and they might come from different backgrounds but they all have, they all think the same thing at different ages. They all worry about being popular, and they all worry about school and they worry about families and it kind of shows them to, it gives them an idea that kids are a lot more alike them than they think.

AL: How did you know that Breaking Down the Walls was successful?

JJ: I think that the number of kids that wanted to attend and how it increased after the first day is a good indicator that the kids liked it because they wanted to come back or they wanted to send their friends. We hit about 600 between 700 kids, so that's a nice chunk of the school. I think that the things that I saw that come out of there were kids that broke out of their clicks and I don't know for how long but they did for awhile to make friends with kids they wouldn't have normally make friends with. Many of them wanted to start Breaking Down the Walls Club and we had one started. It's gone away because we don't have club time anymore.

But I can see that a lot of kids still probably wanted to do that. They wanted to take on issues after breaking down the walls to promote spirit at assemblies, to promote, you know a little more positive behaviors in the hall ways, and I think we had kids that made personal commitments to do things like that themselves. That's the idea behind breaking down the walls so that's why I think it was successful.

AL: What was the most bazaar or interesting happening at Breaking Down The Walls?

JJ: I think what the kids like the most is Crossing the Line. Crossing the Line was where the whole, where Stu the facilitator would ask questions that would range from, are you a good kisser to you know, or even thoughts to suicide, or you know and drug issues. They range from kind of lighthearted questions to really hard questions. Kids had a choice to cross the line and to show other kids that they had even made some poor decisions in the pass and that they had, they were thinking, basically the kids had crossed the line to show that there's more kids like them, so that was a pretty powerful things for the kids. Then afterwards the team building exercise where we did the jump rope. And it showed the kids that how you break into small teams that your, that your designed to be against one another like girls against boys, that you're not as successful as completing a project, and when you all join together and not have that competition between you, that you can, you know, that you can get your goals accomplished together. And that's what the jumping the rope thing actually did. So it was easier for 15 kids to jump the rope than it actually was for 2 kids to jump the rope because the 15 kids had a common goal to be successful than to beat out somebody else. So that's kind of what I liked.

AL: What are some of the obstacles and challenges for coordinating Jag Crew and Breaking Down the Walls?

JJ: Well, Jag Crew, the coordinating of the job is hard for one person to do so Mrs. Hamilton will be helping me out next year. It's really a money issue more than anything. It's very expensive to get trained. Breaking Down the Walls is very expensive for the school. Our district helped us with some money with that. So it's not something we can do every year. It's funding, which is probably the biggest obstacle. And then the other obstacle is

getting a time to meet more. The only time we can meet is during the kids time, 7:30 in the morning and that's really hard for them to come. And then we're not having a class next year, so that'll be a challenge for us to try and do as many activities as we did this year without having any class time to do it.

JH: Why aren't you having the class next year?

JJ: It was taken out of the curriculum guide. And so since it wasn't in there you can't sign up for it. We are going to offer a zero period class though. So kids can earn half a credit, and they can come during zero period. It'll be kind of flexible, it'll be from 7:00-8:00, twice a week and the hours the kids put in as far as any out side time can count for those hours in the morning too. So that's how we are going to try to make up for not having that class.

AL: I heard that during Breaking Down The Walls, In order to go you have to be invited. How do you make the decision to invite people?

JJ: Well, the staff was; we gave a sheet to the staff to fill out about the kids that they thought might benefit from Breaking Down the Walls and the boundaries for that wasn't just the top leaders from the school but for the kids who benefit by the experience. So taking the kids by the experience. So it could be kids that, you know, it could be kids from all walks of life, you know, from all different clicks. And we wanted some leaders and we wanted some followers as well. So it really was based on teacher recommendation. What I did was, I let the kids self nominate too. So kids who come up to me and if they haven't been invited by a teacher, they could actually come in and get on my list. So I think that everyone who wanted to participate got to.

AL: Do you think the cultural difference at Century High School comes from Breaking Down the Walls and Jag Crew?

JJ: I think so. I think Century's unique and we have a rich diversity of kids here and I think that we respect one another for that. Jag Crew has kids from all different ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds. We see more and more of that. I mean I see more people of color, people that you know some of our kids that are really poor around there and they share some of their experience with some of the kids that have failed over and

over again. And those are really good kids to use too because they have really good stories to tell. You know, don't fail as a freshman like I did, you know. I think that just in my visit with other schools, the fact that we are so diverse, we handle that very well here as a high school. I know that some kids think that we have a lot of racial issues but I think it not nearly as much as when going to some of the other schools. So I think we are lucky that way.

AL: Are there any other schools that have this kind of program that we have?

JJ: Yeah, Southridge has it, West View has it, Hill Hi is going to have it next year, it'll be their first year. I think Glencoe has had it in the past but they don't have it anymore, Lake Ridge. I would have to say that in the Metropolitan Area there has to be 20-25 schools that have it.

AL: How do we compare to them, are we better than them?

JJ: Well, I think that we exceed the expectation of Jag Crew. Number one because most of those schools don't have a class, and number two, most of them have a one or two time shot at the beginning and at the end of the school year and then their Jag Crew doesn't do stuff through out the year. Our Jag Crew does stuff through out the year. We have a class that makes it even more you know that makes it more visible and makes it you know, the goal of the class is to figure out things to do for people, so I think that we've taken the link crew program and we've made it our Jag Crew program. I think it's a really good program.

AL: Do you have anything you want to tell us?

JJ: No, I just think that it's a great program and it needs to be supported, you know financially. And that's not going to come from us kids and that has to come from the district. I think that we have a staff that supports it because we pull kids out a lot through out the year and with only a little repercussion about that so the staff is pretty positive about jag Crew.