

Ed Bear (Planning Team)
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This interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewee is Ed Bear, the interviewers are Lauren Thompson and Jacob Powell.

LT: What was your first involvement with Century High School?

EB: My first involvement was Planning Team. And the process with that was to fill out an application if we had an interest of being on the planning team...So first we had to fill out an application and submit that to the district. Obviously, Mr. Barnekoff was to be the principal. He was already named the principal. And after that process, then they set up interviews and so we went through the interview process and then I think it was a couple of weeks later that we found out if we were named to the planning team or not.

LT: Were you involved in another school before Century?

EB: I student taught at Hillsboro High School in 1990. And returned there in the fall...up until the opening of Century High School...so that was my only...out of college that was my only...that was the only school I had taught at.

LT: How were decisions made when you were on the planning team? Was it democratic...were there some people who had more ideas than others? Was it hard to get ideas passed around?

EB: That's multi-faceted. It was democratic. I mean, there were certain things that our principal...that Mr. Barnekoff made as the Principal. And, obviously I'm sure he'll fill people in on that...I may not even be aware of some of those things...and then there were decisions that were made by the district, that weren't even his decisions. But in terms of Century High School and the visions and things that we need to do in preparation to the opening of the school, it was very democratic, and that was one of the neatest things about the planning team, that we were empowered to be creative...to have visions, to brainstorm, to collectively create what we hoped would be the best possible school in Century High School and that...depending on people's areas of expertise were...like I was more of a science person...some people had stronger strengths not only in other curricular areas, but just other experiences as well...some people played larger roles in the process...

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JP: Do you feel that the students have an equal voice?

EB: Do or did?

JP: It doesn't matter, now or when you first started?

EB: Ok, in terms of the planning team, and before Century opened, because we did a lot of preparation, we met a lot. It was a pretty big undertaking. Students did not have a real large voice, in that piece of it. The strongest voice the students had in the preliminary stuff would be school colors, and mascot, those types of things. And then those were...some students were involved in those committees and that process. In terms of the planning team work we did, no students were on the planning team. We basically went from what we knew of students, and what we felt student's wanted...so in the planning stage, students didn't have a real active voice...and once the school opened, students have had a voice...an equal voice, no I don't think they've had an equal voice...I don't know if students ever have an equal voice...just because there are so many logistic things that...one example...say students want an open campus...well, that's...most students always want that...but there are legalities. We can't...there can't be a voice from students on that because...it's just not going to happen. There are higher ups in the district. They make those decisions.

LT: We read the staff comments of April 97, and we looked through the documents and it was talking about unity, and how there would be no home room, because we didn't want that kind of separation, and I was wondering if you still think those are the feelings here at Century?

EB: I think unity has been and still is a problem at Century. And I think that way back when the decision was made about not having a homeroom, it made sense, but on the same hand, I think we lost something that we've never really found yet, and that is truly getting students connected and feeling like a part of the school...I think a lot of students feel connected and they are part of the school, but there is, in my opinion, way too many students that come and go and don't have any real issues. One of the problems, I think is that it's not just a student lack of connectedness. It's also a staff issue. You know how the school is laid out with the north and south? And it's very separated. Part of that happened...just the physical setting of the school...I mean, it's a large building but it's not...the first couple of years, we really tried hard to have office parties, or mixers, or things like that so we'd actually see people who teach at the other end of the building and things like that. And that helped, but it became this huge undertaking for the offices, and for people to put together. More work, more stress, so that's out for the most part. I guess the reason I'm mentioning that is because I think as a direct result of how staff are connected with each other, that falls down to the students as well. And that's not the only piece of it...I think that with us being on a block schedule, a lot of students can leave school early on the early release because it's easy to get the number of credits you guys need to get through four years, and I think that between early release and students working, and things like that, students leave here early, and don't come back for activities, and don't care about activities, and stuff like that. I think part of that is natural with a new school. I think it takes years and years to truly develop a school...a true identity. I think we're still developing that, and I think it will happen, and I think we've made some movement that way, but I think as a whole we're not there yet, and I don't know how long that will take. But, those are some of the things that being on the planning team...in your mind you create this perfect picture of how you hope and want things to be, and you're putting all your energy and time into it, and those types of issues

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that I've really observed over the years are troubling...I don't have great answers, solutions, and things, but I think it has, in my mind, slowed our progress as a school to truly get an identity.

LT: How much of the original vision has been realized?

EB: I think a lot of it, it's a highly, reasonably highly technological school, in terms of the lab 2000. Even though it's frustrating sometimes not being able to get on a computer, or something, we have a lot of computers here. A lot more than most schools. Those were emphasized. Our block schedule was a huge emphasis...now the first year the school opened, we did not start on a block schedule, but that was the decision that the planning team made together. It was clear that we were going to be on the block schedule, but we decided opening a new school was enough of an undertaking, and that we'd delay that for the second year of the school, because it was too much...and to truly teach on the block schedule, it was going to take some training and some working toward, instead of just do it, type of thing. So I think that those things have definitely been maintained in terms of visions and stuff. Teachers offices were set up as inter-disciplinary offices, meaning...lots of traditional school, you have your science office, and you have your English, and you have your foreign language, and they are all separated...and that's wonderful because you collaborate with you colleagues and get lots of ideas.. and that's great, but we were set up to have, like, one or two science people, one or two English people, etc. etc, all intermixed in the offices. And there's positives to that too, because you go out of your box, you don't just think of health, or just science, or whatever your subject matter is, so they're both nice, and yet with the way we are set up, we ...I don't see a lot of the fellow science teachers, and that's not a good thing, because...you know, you need to be in touch, and talk about what people are doing, and how they do thing, so...the way our offices were set up is still in tact, they are still very multi-disciplinary set up. But, I mean, I guess those are the strongest thing...the block schedule was a huge vision, and a huge piece of things, I don't know how...our superintendent is forcing the district to go on a form of block schedule... the trimesters, well, we've been allowed to stay on our current block schedule instead of the trimester...that's a pretty huge thing. How long that will continue, that they'll allow us to be different, I don't know, but I think that because we were kind of the pioneers of...in the district in doing that, they've given us a little bit of latitude and allowed us to continue doing something that we believe in pretty strongly, and that was a huge component of the interview process. Obviously, for planning team members, but also for when we interviewed other staff to come to Century...block scheduling...if someone didn't feel like they wanted and desired to teach on the block schedule, they pretty much weren't going to come here and teach. Because that was going to happen.

Interdisciplinary offices

Interview criteria

JP: What have been the most important decisions that you have participated in?

EB: I guess...I'm going way back to finite details, as a science person, I was extremely involved in all the science stuff. Putting thing into order, to open the school... that was a major thing that I spent hours and hours on. It sounds like not that big of a deal, but in terms of science, and the different types of scienceI mean, there's marine biology,

integrated, man, you end up talking about test tubes, rubber stoppers, chemicals, dissecting trays, I mean just on and on and on...microscopes...it becomes this huge huge process. So that was probably a major thing. School policies...again, some of that is set by higher ups, but in terms of how we wanted things to work...we discussed things at length...like, do we want to have a bell to sound at the end and beginning of periods? And we really...a lot of us didn't want that, but we ended up going with that collectively the group decided that we would. Sounds like a little thing, but it actually generated a lot of discussion. Because we get so programmed to bells, I mean why can't we just look at a clock? I mean, we're reasonably smart people, I hope, and think, and anyway, it just came down to the belief that it would be too much room for error...if a teacher forgets, or this or that. It would cause too much chaos. Decisions, a lot of collective decisions, were truly the group and a team who did these things. When Century first opened, I personally did not want to be a science coordinator. That was not something that interested me. There can be an awful lot of red tape involved with that that I didn't care to be involved with but what I did do was got on to the site council. And so for three years, I remained on that to actively make decisions about things...some of that was continuing the block schedule this year. We have to vote on that each year, because we waive our contract to do that. And so it's not something we just do the staff has to have and 80% or higher vote to allow us to continue us to do that since we're...we're in essence the way it works out minute wise is that we end up teaching more for less money....and that's you know, there are lots of angles to that. But, anyway, so we have to waive that...so I was pretty actively involved in doing things we needed to do with that, and part of that was parent and community survey...a student survey so they could voice their opinions about the block schedule having actual votes, educating new staff members on what the block is and how that operates. So I'd say those are the main things that come to mind.

LT: Do you have any stories?

EB: It was the first year that Century opened, and the staff bathroom had a deadbolt, deadlock thing on it and you twist it, and that's how it locks, so no one walk in on you. And, I had...I don't remember if it was...I think it was toward the end of the day maybe right after school got out...It was on a Friday, and I was going to go running with a friend and so I went into the bathroom to change into my running clothes and we were supposed to meet at say 3:30...whatever time, and when I went in to the bathroom, and locked the thing, it kind of made a different noise and it sounded kind of weird so when I turned the lock it made a weird sound. I changed into my running clothes and went to leave the room, and it wouldn't unlock. So the little thing kept spinning around, so it had obviously broken. So, I was kind of jiggling the door handle and before I knew it, that snapped...it just kept spinning around. So I was stuck in the bathroom. And, it was on a Friday, and it was after school, and it's like...you're inside of another room, so I just yelled...I didn't think it was going to do anything, so I figured I'd just wait until I heard someone come in...hoping that someone would. I guess supposedly, or conceivably I could have been stuck in there all weekend, but not really. So eventually, I heard someone come in, so I kind of said from behind the door...behind the bathroom door, "Who's out there?" and they were like..."Uhh, it's Sally." It was Sally Pettit, she was a teacher assistant. And she couldn't figure out why someone was talking to her from

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inside the bathroom, she thought that was pretty strange, so she was pretty hesitant, but I said who I was, and I told her that I was stuck...and I think that's literally what I said, and I probably should have termed it differently...you know, "Stuck where?" "In the bathroom"...so you know...So I said "I can't get out, can you call for a custodian?" so she did, and after I don't know, a while, I probably had been in there for 30 minutes by this time, so eventually a custodian came and I was talking to him from the other side of the door, and he thought it was kind of funny, you know. And he couldn't get anything done, so pretty soon there was a second custodian and a third...eventually there were like 5 or 6 custodians in there trying to get this door unlocked or whatever...long story short, after about 2 hours, they basically cut the door down because they could not get anything done to get it open. And...even to this day there are at least one or two of the custodians who were here at that time that are still here that when they see me in the hall they're kind of like "Hey, you get stuck in any bathrooms?" they thought it was pretty funny...but the funny piece of that story is that, who was known to everyone in the school as just my running partner, someone I ran with was at the time Ms. Ventura, and we were actually dating although we weren't...know one knew that...people maybe might have had ideas, but the answer was "Oh, we're just running partners"...and that was fine, because we were...and anyway, I hadn't been dating her that long, and I'm sure she thought I was a total flake because we had a set time that we were going to go running, I didn't show up, didn't call, didn't say anything...I couldn't, you know...Umm...obviously after she heard what had happened...she didn't think I was a flake, just maybe weird because I was stuck in a bathroom. But then eventually we got married, and we're married now...and because of that at the end of the school year we have an end of the school year kind of party, and someone came up with the idea that we should have a stupidest thing of the year award...Mr. Stotka had this trophy and this toilet bowl thing and he put the toilet bowl on the trophy and named it the Toilet bowl award, and so I was the first recipient of that. And, every year that is given to someone else...Mr. Girod has gotten it, I can't really remember who the other people are...Oberhue got it for opening the "I love you" virus. From a couple years ago. That's a fun but corny tradition set through my bad luck.

LT: Anything else you'd like to tell us?

EB: There's so much more...not specifically...

JP: You mentioned you were on Site council...can you real quick say what that was about?

EB: Just again, it was making decisions for the school, being a voice and that was you know, you take on different roles, that is made up by a certain number of teachers, certain number of community member, students, so you know...it's a mixture of people...the idea behind it is a good one, although, three years of doing it has made me really frustrated...I felt like a lot of people on the site council were yes people, and what I mean by that is that whatever the administration wanted, they would follow and support. And I felt like I was voted onto the Site Council by my colleagues and I needed to be a true voice for them. And I often felt like I was the bad guy, I would simply be representing

what fellow teachers were talking to me about, and it maybe didn't agree with what the most of the site council felt...and I didn't have a problem doing that, but it gets old. Because you're fighting uphill battles, and so that was...I have mixed feelings about that...I feel good about how I tried to represent our school and our staff, didn't always make the positive gains I thought I would, but it's a big piece of decision making that continues to go on. The Site council.

LT: One last question! When you retire, what do you want named after you?

EB: I guess because I'm a soccer coach and soccer person...I've never thought about this before...I would hope to have a highly successful soccer program...maybe a soccer field...I just want to play golf when I retire.