

Allen Schmertzler

## Planning team interview

- The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of the Century High School. The interviewee is Allen Schmertzler. The interviewer is Alisia Phay. The interview took place at 7:30, Tuesday, May 21, 2002.
- What was your first involvement of CHS?
- First involvement was being selected to be serving on the planning team for Century High School, so when I was involved there was no building no nothing just an idea for a school. It was about 14 months that we worked before the building was opened and ready to go.
- Why did you choose to come here?
- Well before I taught at J.B Thomas a junior high and then I went to Hilhi, a High School. I just decided that I ran a full chores of my career that there was nothing else for me to do at that time. I was interested in working with new colleagues who had more of an open mind toward making some changes in "education. " I taught it would be really exciting and cool thing to be able to open a school. I've never had that experience before. So it was an opportunity so I jumped.
- How did you become a part of the Planning Team?
- The principle who was assigned to the building set up interviews to talk to people. It was a voluntary thing, like you step forward you say I willing to do this and I wanna be on the planning team and then the time the principle who was Mr. Bannekoff, he interviewed a lot of people who were interested. And then made selections of people based on that.
- Were there a lot of volunteers?
- None of us new exactly who will walk us, in some degree there was some competitiveness about it because there was going to be only a certain selected group of people will get chosen. What he wanted to do was to get people from representatives from different curricular areas. So let say there's 3 or 4 people interested in Social Studies, only 1 person would be selected most likely and that was the all schools from the district and that can be a lot of people. So you better know how many, or exactly who else, so I don't know what would happen with other people. But surprisingly though the school I was teaching at, Hilhi I was the only Social Studies teacher who was interested. Most everybody didn't or was suspicious about it, didn't trust it, they didn't want to be involved, they weren't sure about the changes in schools. I was very clear and motivated to do it. And I don't remember how many people were selected on the planning team, I think there was about 14, not a large group.
- How would you compare that experience to your experience at Century High School?
- Well sadly enough Century High School has become a boring bland typical American, or I should say Hillsboro, Oregon High school. It's become very much like any other school I've been in. The building is more modern, it's been very

well cared for. But the actual job is gotten be, I don't think I've every worked as hard in any school. I don't think people understand how much more work, for me, what I teach. So in that sense it's become, it's gots all flaws and successes that you would expect to see in a school.

- Why did you say you have more work to do than at other schools?
- Because the schedule, there are far more classes and far more students and because we're crowded in this building, we're sharing resources, we're often times not in our classrooms when we have prep time, so we're juggling from one place to another, we're sharing classrooms, so teachers and moving in and out, they can't set their classroom up. Every year I've been here there has been a fair amount of change, which makes alot of extra work. The first year we didn't have seniors. A lot of us have been teaching mainly subject a new subject for many years. I think they finally stabilized why I think they're going to change in a couple of years or so. And always that takes a lot of extra work. But personally the block schedule, preparing for a 90 min class, and or preparing for 6 classes in the Spring semester is just too many students, too much work. Very hard.
- On the planning team what were your responsibilities, what did you have to do?
- I had to go to meeting, plan a vision for school, we had to put all the frame work together, before we put a building together, and then build the frame work and then plaster work and the last thing you do is slip a little paint and Voila the building is ready! I also helped select social teachers in my curriculum area. So I was in all the interviewing and hiring of other teachers in my curricular area. I have to help plan the courses that we would offer and how it would be presented in the student handbook, in the curricular course offerings. I had to get books, maps, supplies ordered for all the areas in social studies that we would teach. I had to make decisions, help make decisions about the physical space. The color scheme. What kind of desk, chairs, white board, black board, grey board, chalk board, what the furniture would look like. It was a shell of a school so everything else about it was supposed to be discussed. So from some level I was a participant in this whole process. But once we moved in. I had to help establish the office that I was in charge of. And help colleagues get settled in and built commodity and a little bit of a school culture here. So there were a lot of decision making.
- Was it a "democratic" process?
- Oh as much as democratic process, are democratic, it's the illusion your making there are more decisions that you make. It was some what a shared process. But finally the principle and the district office, with their money budgets those decisions out weighed all the other decisions. But I felt I was part of the process. I felt that when I said something it was considered.
- What role did the principle play?
- Oh yeah he was the BIG GUY. He had an agenda. He knew what had to happen. But he in many ways was like a fisilitator , he would through the issue out and he would have meetings and he would have agenda items to get addressed and his job was to organize a discussion and move it toward some decision. And then he had to over see that process and make sure if it was active or not. So basically, it's like a pyramid, there's a group discussion, top 6 principles, and then the final decisions are finally his. He also served to negotiate between opinions and

interpersonal struggles that might have heard that one department wants to do this and that. So it might conflict the bigger vision of the school or the personal issues. SO he had to work all that out. And it was hard for him too because he's never opened a school before. He was the right person for the job. A lot of that is because everyone trusted him. He was like spiritual leader. He had to build the idea that this first planning team was going to become the structure of the school culture and we're going to be those folks to anchor the school for the first year to 2 years. Had to make sure that we were working well together.

- What were the biggest challenges you faced on the Planning team and how were they resolved?
- Well one was trying to get a handle on all the things I had to do and as well as being a teacher because this was extra time. A little time out of the classroom for meetings but everything else was extra time. But helping to select the right kind of staff was that most interesting because of the personality, peace, and getting the right people to teach the right subject. That was really challenging. I had old friendships, other teachers, they might have not been the right person to come to Century. And on top of that I had to prepare to teach my classes that I was going to teach.
- What classes did you have in mind to teach at Century.
- I had in mind that I'm going to teach the classes I teach now which are Cartooning, Psychology and Sociology. But the first year I had to teach US History which was my major. I hadn't taught it in high school for 15 years. So I had to do a lot of reading and catching up about specific events, stories, details so I could effectively teach my students and get the right kind of materials. Actually Ms Duychick was wonderfully helpful, sharing her materials because she was actively teaching it. It took a lot of work. That spent all summer and all year on weekends to get everything ready to go. So it was a lot of work to do. One of the reasons we didn't have a senior class that year. We had more sophomores and freshmen. My classes traditionally more juniors and seniors. My class #'s were down. A lot of us had to teach classes that we didn't choose to teach for the first year or 2.
- What were some of the greatest satisfactions you had as a member of the Team?
- Getting and to meet with new Colleagues. That was great. There was a lot of excitement. The last week of August before we opened the doors for the kids that was really exciting
- What was your initial "vision" of CHS?
- Nothing like how it looks. We were encouraged to be dreamers and think like idealist. If there was a perfect world how would your school look like and its nothing like that. It's typical when you get a bunch of professionals together and you tell them to just dream. It's a very silly process. It's almost a rip off. There was an under current in the conversations that we know that this can't really be like this, will the district let one school be so different from the other schools. But being in a new school and the design of the school and as well as having the technology the new toys, that was a Big encouragement. That was the big focus, how are we going to use all this technology the first school in Hillsboro. To best give students the education they want. That was the big part of the vision. The

Sean K

school was supposed to be more free-er than it turned out to be. Students were supposed to have more freedom of movement but when we opened our doors and we had <sup>serious</sup> ~~radical~~ problems, fights the first week, jockeying for higher position. We were more crowded than we were supposed to be. I think we had a lower quality academic type of students so it surprised a lot of us. So most of the visions of how students should be managed in the building. We had to change a lot of our policies. We had study halls for everybody. We thought that opening the doors letting people be great learners but when we really opened the doors the students wondered the halls and got into fights didn't want to do any work. Played games on the computers and played cards in the halls and really we quickly realized that too much unstructured freedom wasn't going to work. We had to bring them in the room, shut the room, take roll and house the students because most of them didn't know what to do with all the freedom.

Katina Destiny

- How much of the vision had been realized?
- Very little. Most of what we <sup>en</sup>visioned has not come to pass. The biggest thing that has passed is the block schedules. We wanted offices that were interdisciplinary. But they haven't served what they were <sup>en</sup>visioned as. Century has become like any other school. The first 2 years was mainly settling and trying things out. Now we're stuck in the mud like every other school. We had a plan that we thought would work but only some got done. It's just like any other schools.
- Based on your experiences, what advice would you give to the Liberty planning team?
- Be realistic. They have to reinvent education. But no body will let them. It's going to be really hard for them to fit a big circle in a little box. I would encourage them to fight hard to make big changes early. Because once everyone's settled in it's going to be hard.
- What were the most significant changes you've seen at Century since it opened?
- We got too crowed, our staffs have changed a lot .Most people don't know how Century was like when it first opened.
- How would you describe the culture of CHS?
- On individual levels I think there is a lot of chemistry. I think we're too big. The north and south end. There is a lot less tradition here as supposed to other school. It's like a bottle in the ocean it's doing everything it can to stay floating. It's an excellent school.
- What do you think we should do to make it a better school.
- I think the building. The building is too spread out. I think we have to have more of an interdisciplinary blocking. We need to have smaller groups of students. We need to have new ways to teach students and new ways for students to experience things out side of school. Our technology is out of date. The system is slow. We have to make a lot of changes. The first important thing is to have smaller classes. And teachers have to have better ways to group students. Hopefully Liberty will do better than what we didn't succeed at. With Liberty as the 4<sup>th</sup> school they won't have the over crowding problems. Because we got hit so hard.
- Is there any thing else you want to tell me.

- I think we succeeded in we got a school on the map. We have good programs. We have a great radio tv communications programs. I love what our students do with that. There are other parts that we're having trouble with. We have a great drama department. The drama department was one of the most exciting things. Century is a great place but then it's also a place with a lot of ghost because I saw it grow. So what you can do it look through year books and see who's new The newer teachers don't know what I've seen. They don't have the same level of understanding of Century. I'm the person to remind people about our Century. When we were about to open we had a T-shirt but now it's an artifact because when the school was opened they made a new one.