Rick Strot

Let’s see. Today is March 9, 2004. It’s 3:50 in the afternoon. I’m interviewing—this is Rick Strot. I’m interviewing Dr. Thomas Proctor in his office at Baylor University. Thank you for agreeing to this interview, Dr. Proctor, and I will call you Tom during the interview.

Dr. Thomas

Thank you.

Proctor

Now, we’re exploring the beginnings of Hillcrest Professional Development School. So, my first question to you is when did you first become involved with Hillcrest Professional Development School?

Proctor

I was on the planning group that was formed to design and create Hillcrest. So I was part of that original group. And I don’t—to tell you the truth—I don’t remember—I guess we were all—we were appointed; I know I volunteered because I was interested in the creation of a professional development school. So, I mean, I was very eager to be involved and so became part of that group that included people like Fred Curtis and others from here. There were folks from
WISD [Waco Independent School District] there were folks from MCC [McLennan Community College] and TSTC [Texas State Technical College]. So it was different community representatives as well as Baylor and WISD that we met for a year to plan what Hillcrest was gonna be.

Who were the—who was instrumental in getting that together? If you can, if you recall at all who was sort of in charge of forming the committee?

Well, when it was decided that the dean and department chairs, those that were part of the Holmes group, you know, the famous van ride to Dallas or wherever it was that—when they decided Lampkin was the dean at the time and they decided to do this. And then—so Lampkin, you know, I’m sure, was actually the one that appointed the people to the committee in conjunction with WISD. Elden Barrett was involved in it and I think was instrumental in getting a grant, a planning grant from TEA [Texas Education Agency], which was important at the time ’cause then it gave some money to—some resources to actually come up with a plan, so he was involved with that.

When you think back to that time before you went on the committee with Hillcrest, what was your understanding of what a PDS [Professional Development School] was or should be doing? Oh, and first of all, let me just backtrack. At that time, what was your position
at Baylor?

Proctor

Well, I was professor of ed psych and taught mainly the special ed courses, undergraduate special ed. Directed that program or was the coordinator for undergraduate special ed and all of my teaching, then, was in the special ed courses which were—many of them were field based in different schools.

Strot

Okay, and then—so you already have a strong field base component in your own coursework. So, think back to that time then when the term PDS was first being used within the School of Ed or at meetings you were going to. And what was your understanding at that time of what a PDS was or would be doing?

Proctor

Well, you know, the analogy, of course, was used of the teaching hospital and having a school then that was a partner school to provide extended field experiences for teacher candidates. So the internship was kind of the focus, I guess, of the thinking at that time in terms of getting a more extended opportunity to really be part of a school for a year rather than the just part of one semester student teaching. So it was the, you know, a school, a partner school that was—collaborated with the university to provide those extended field experiences, which also, then would contribute to the professional development of the teachers in the school as well as the university faculty. I guess that was really the focus 'cause it was—you could tell that from the way that
Hillcrest was originally designed that there was—a team of two teachers who co-taught and then two interns to make a team of four. So those two interns were really going to be half of the instructional team, and the idea was that one of the teachers would be a novice teacher. So, in the original plan was that three of the team was going to change every year, but I guess I say all that to say the focus really was on the interns and them being part of the teaching team and then really being part of the school for the whole year in a way that was much more extensive than anything we did in student teaching. That was definitely our focus.

Well, say a little bit more then about that process of becoming then a part of Hillcrest PDS. You’ve already mentioned you were on the original committee that was appointed, so when did that occur and then what did you do as Hillcrest evolved? Your role in it.

Well, I was a part of the original planning, but then as the plan began to come into effect, and I mean part of the plan was designing the school, how it was gonna look. So as we were planning, we realized what the school was gonna be; it was gonna be the old Hillcrest and so we participated in how it was gonna be remolded and all of that. But once all that was done, during that—at the end of that year—then I wasn’t sure—I knew I kind of wanted to be involved, but I kind of waited to see what was gonna happen. I guess I wasn’t sure—is this
really gonna happen? Are they really gonna pull this off?

Strot
So that first round of planning when the school was designed, you said lasted about a year. Was that the year before the school opened or was that even—or was that in a time before that?

Proctor
Yeah, it would’ve been—I mean the school opened in '93, right? The summer of '93.

Strot
Yes, summer of '93.

Proctor
So, '92–'93 was preparation year, but it was the year before that that was the planning year.

Strot
So the '91–'92 was the year. Then after all those decisions were made, then you said you kind of stepped back to see what would happen to it. Let’s pick up right there.

Proctor
So, then they hired a— I guess the next step they’d hired a principal or they were in the process of hiring a principal. No, I guess they’d already hired the principal, Ron McIntire. And, you know, I was watching to see who was involved and not that many people seemed to be coming forward so I decided, well, I want to meet the new principal anyway and talk with him and just see, is this something I really want to be involved in. So I was kind of taking a cautious stance. (chuckle) So I met with—met with Mac [McIntire] over lunch. He’d been hired, but then he came for a visit to begin getting things going, and so I asked to meet him. And so we had lunch together over at the
Harrington House and I basically said, I’m interested but I want to know—I want to hear what your goals are and how you see this and how you see the Baylor faculty being involved. And so after that discussion and being reinsured that he really meant that he wanted us to be involved and really saw it as a partnership and saw the Baylor faculty as being part of the school. So I took him at his word and said, well, I wanted to be on board. So then I got involved in the hiring process then of the personnel for Hillcrest. So I got to be in on that from the beginning; hiring—starting hiring the teachers, hiring you as an adjunct—not as an adjunct but as a lecturer—who would be a full-time connection with Hillcrest. So then I got involved in that whole process of hiring the folks and being in on the additional planning then from there on.

**Strot**

You mentioned that—you said that not many people were coming forward. Was this then sort of a volunteer, people were asked who was interested in working at Hillcrest from the Baylor side?

**Proctor**

Well, yeah, as I remember it, people were saying, This is what I wanna do or not. And so then, I guess, based not just on their desire, but then—I mean it was kind of like letting the dean know and then—then the ones were selected that were actually going to do the work.

**Strot**

Tell me a little bit about what attracted you to Hillcrest PDS then at that time when you were deciding that yes, you wanted to get involved.
Proctor: Well, again, the chance to have the extended field experiences that I felt strongly about that we were doing with the special ed program and I felt like the whole teacher ed program could benefit from that. But it was also—I mean, you know—this had been in my mind for a long time. In the late eighties, the School of Ed had actually talked about redoing the whole teacher ed program; in fact, it spent time, a lot of time, discussing it, coming up with a plan which involved early field experiences, involved an internship. And then the new state standards came out and restricted the education hours to eighteen hours and that just kind of blew the whole thing out of the water. So, what I mean, the thinking about this had been going on for some time. So, it was like, you know, this was going to be like a dream come true. And to have a chance to really be involved in this kind of extended student teaching intern experience—

Strot: Was there a change in those state guidelines that made it more feasible to do a PDS than in the early nineties?

Proctor: What happened is, you know, even though the restriction was there, there was a lot of—because of the interdisciplinary studies that actually—see the other part of it, I guess I didn’t say—the plan we came up with in ’86, ’87, whenever it was, it was right before the ’88 standards, involved—the internship was really a fifth year, and it was really a fifth-year program that would end up with coursework for a
master’s. Like, by the end of that fifth year, they would have about half of the coursework needed for a master’s degree, so it was a little bit different. So, what we ended up with in terms of Hillcrest then was just staying within the four years and, like I said, because of the interdisciplinary studies program that we came up with, we were able to include other kinds of educational courses without them being officially education.

Strot

Okay. When you think back about Hillcrest PDS in particular then as it was being formulated and those first year, what—how would you describe the vision that became established for Hillcrest?

Proctor

Well, the vision became very much a collaboration, shared decision making. Those who were most involved in making it happen should have most to say about how it happens. I mean, that was the vision; to have a school that was truly collaborative that involved university as well as school faculty in that kind of a process. So, you know, group problem solving, group decision making, consensus building and that was part of the vision. The multi-age classrooms was part of the continuous progress kind of notion of individualizing. So having multi-age classrooms where the individual is the focus and not the class and subject matter, that was all part of the vision. Having the double classrooms with team teachers and then, including interns on the team. You know that, again, was part of that collaborative—
everything was seen as a collaboration, as a teaming in order to provide that greater individualization. Inclusion was part of the vision; that every student would be part of an environment and that there weren’t separate resource rooms initially for kids to come to resource. And so when kids were pulled out, they were pulled out into small groups in the hallway. But the idea was that they were pulled out for specialized services but that they were part of the classroom and really not to be set off as a separate group so that we were proud of the fact that the students didn’t know who was special ed and who wasn’t, because a lot of times—then in those pullouts into the hallway—I mean, they weren’t all special ed. Kids that needed extra help were given extra help, so that there was individualization based on what they needed and not special ed labels. That was, again, so that inclusion was a part of the vision, and that kind of changed over time. It became—the kids were still always part of an environment but it became—the idea that their primary education would be in that regular classroom, I think that began changing and then finally they ended up creating actual classrooms as opposed to trying to block off the hallways with partitions. So, let’s see. Going back then, it was a collaboration; the teaming of the teachers, multi-age classrooms to focus on individual progress, inclusion. Positive behavior management was another part of the vision. Having expectations that were school-wide and
reinforcing positive behavior rather than a focus on punishment; that was another part of the vision. All children can learn; very important to have a diverse group. When we began, we were able to select students based on the percentage of ethnicity in the district so that we could replicate the percentages of diversity in the school and that was very important, that it be a school of diversity and that we show that all students could learn within a diverse environment.

What was your particular role in formulating and implementing this vision for Hillcrest? What particular role did you see yourself playing in that process?

Well I mean, really it was just by being part of the team but because my interest was behavior management, so again, following Mac’s kind of guideline, you know those—why do you want to be there if you can’t have an impact in terms of what your vision is? Then I was given some leadership in terms of formulating the school-wide behavior plan and coming up with the guidelines for that and so I was allowed to have that kind of direct influence. I also had one of my special ed classes was a math methods class and so I had some influence in terms of the math curriculum that was used at the school that I wanted my students to have practice in. So those were two examples where things that I was particularly interested in and had some background in and that was my influence whereas, others that had different pieces to
contribute, then they had their influence. But that’s really—was Mac’s way of bringing people in and then letting them have their influence in terms of the whole.

Tell me about the people who you collaborated with at Hillcrest; their roles and how this collaboration was different or similar to that at other school that you had had experience with.

We had—initially, we had a lot of meetings. There were school-wide meetings; in fact I remember meeting in the morning. A lot of times we’d meet at 7:15 or 7:30 in order to get everybody together and talk about issues, try to solve problems, and deal with disagreements. So, I mean, I was collaborating with all the teachers and as well as the—well, the whole team of the school. Everybody was involved. There was also—we started two groups. One was a steering council, just of Hillcrest folks and Baylor folks to plan for the curriculum and everything that we needed to coordinate the teacher ed with the school. Then there was a, kind of an over—and I don’t even remember what we called it—but there was a larger group that was made up of any Baylor faculty and WISD folks that was looking at going beyond Hillcrest and forming a partnership in the district, creating other schools besides Hillcrest. So that was another collaboration. But the steering council itself, I remember, you know, there was like five Baylor faculty and five Hillcrest faculty that were on
that group. And, you know, that’s where a lot of the working things out in terms of the internship and how it was gonna work and those kinds of things were decided.

Well, when you’re talking about things that are decided then, in terms of curriculum and instruction at Hillcrest in those early years, what influenced in your mind—were the major influences on decisions that were made about curriculum and instruction at the school?

Well, again it was done in a collaborative way initially and in terms of math, there was an agreement to do—to have a school wide math time so that students could be grouped across environments, again as part of that individualization. We decided, with math, then the students wouldn’t just stay in their learning environment, but it would depend on whichever math group could most fit their needs because the math program had a placement test so that we were able to place kids where they needed to be regardless of the grade level. So that was—that’s the way it was started initially; that was the rationale for it, and I guess that it was, in other areas, it was, you know, left up to the teacher. Like in reading, there really wasn’t a school-wide literacy program to begin with. It was kind of up to the individual teachers. So that’s how things began, but then, in terms of decisions, it depended on the progress. The reading, there was not sufficient progress to begin with and this was determined, not only by the TAAS [Texas Assessment of
Academic Skills] scores, but by—Mac kept a folder that had various kinds of assessments in them, liking running records and reading. He kept progress on all the kids and if they, or enough kids not making progress in reading, then he initiated problem solving. Okay, what are we gonna do? Getting everybody involved in coming up with a plan. Teachers going and observing and researching different approaches and then coming back and reporting and then reaching consensus on, in this case, guided reading has to be something to be implemented school-wide. And in math, there was actually pretty good progress in math, but a lot of teachers were not happy with the scripted program that had been adopted and didn’t feel like it gave enough opportunity for hands-on kinds of things but, again, the decision making came out of the group, out of the schools as a whole. And then, again, individuals researched other programs and everyday math was presented as a curriculum to adopt and then that was adopted. So, just a couple examples of how the process worked, but it was a very collaborative, problem solving kind of an approach.

You’ve already touched on this and sort of described it, but if you could, if you could again describe—was there an overall vision for student learning at Hillcrest that you think was pervasive at the school in terms of a vision for how students should progress and learn? Well, in that, yeah, that all students are gonna be successful at learning.
I mean, that was very important; that we find ways so that all students would be successful and that learning not just be something that was in the school, but that would extend outside the school. So it was, you know, learning in the broad sense and not just book learning, but that’s where the everywhere school came from.

How was this kind of collaboration and vision development different at Hillcrest than at other schools where you had had field placements before?

Well, at other schools where I had field placements, it was like we were welcome. They were very happy to kind of lend us their students for my students to work with. So you know—we would take over a classroom or pull students out in small groups and, you know, my students would provide the instruction and I would provide the supervision. And so, you know, we found schools that were very happy to do that. But as far as being part of the school or having any input into what went on in the school, you know, there just wasn’t any. It was like, you know, we were visitors who were allowed to borrow the students and, you know, as long as we could help them make progress then, you know, that was okay. But there was no input into the school. So to actually be part of a school, part of the decision making was what was totally, totally different from anything I’d experienced; it was night and day.
I’m gonna stop and turn the tape over.

*Side 1, tape 1 ends; Side 2, tape 1 begins.*

Okay, this is Rick Strot continuing the interview with Tom Proctor.

Describe, if you could, the families who sent their children to Hillcrest those first year or two of the school.

It was—it was a diverse group since it was a magnet school and they could choose to be there. And they drew from all over the district. A lot of times you got parents that then weren’t satisfied or happy with what was going on in their own schools and so that could’ve been then for a variety of reasons; because they didn’t feel like their student was being challenged enough, wasn’t being given you know, a challenging or an accelerated curriculum. Or it could’ve been because their child was having discipline problems and then not being successful in the school or it could’ve been because they were having learning problems. And so it was a chance to go somewhere else were they might, might have a better chance. So, again, I mean if you think about it, anybody—since it was starting new and it was a magnet school drawing from all over the district, you know, you’re not going to get parents that are already satisfied with how things are going on, so you’re gonna get parents that are not completely satisfied for one reason or another. So, as a result, you know, we had a very diverse group, and at some times people would think that we were a school for
the gifted, and others would say we must be a school for special ed, and others said we must be a private school because of all that, all those differences, you know. It’s interesting to be thought of both as a school for the gifted and a school for special ed at the same time.

Think back to the first time you, if you can, think back to one of the first times that you went into the school when the children were there and maybe some of their parents were there as well. Might’ve been opening day, it might’ve been later on. But describe your feelings as you walk through the school and saw it actually operating after having worked on the setup for so long.

Well, it was really—that first year is just kind of a blur (laughs) because it was—I mean it was so intense. I mean, it was, you know—just think that nobody really thought about the complexity of what we’re trying to pull off with, not only all the students are new to each other, all the staff’s new to each other. Everybody’s new, what we’re doing is new. So, you know, my first recollections are just how overwhelming it all was. And, you know, I can remember the Mars® environment with John and Eyiksa. No, John was in Mars®, Eyiksa—John was in Milky Way®, Eyiksa was in Mars®. But they planned similar kinds of things in terms of getting to know the kids, interest kinds of things and things, you know, that had been successful for them in other situations. And I remember him saying, you know, at the end of the
day it was like, wow, we tried everything. I thought I was gonna get something wonderful and nothing worked. So, it was kind of like (laughs), you know, again, they had some really tough kids to deal with because of those things that I mentioned earlier. And, you know, the interns were just thrown into it; we really didn’t have any course structure, we didn’t have any seminar structure set up. It was kind of just learn by doing. So, it seemed like it was a year of problem solving. Solving problems in terms of the kids and discipline and coming up with the discipline plan. Solving problems with the interns. I remember at one point, they met and then they had a spokesperson or two come and address the faculty with their concerns. And so then, there was more problems to solve. So, it’s like, I don’t think it was till the second or third year that the kind of thing you’re talking about came more to the floor. The first year was just a lot of intense, hard work and problem solving and then there were, you know, criticisms from Baylor faculty that weren’t there in terms of some of the things that were going on. So, it was dealing with a lot of those issues, you know. What overcame that was the things that I’ve already talked about, is being part of the problem solving, part of building the behavior management that made everything become, you know, gradually over time a whole lot better and made people feel good about what they were doing. But that took time. The initial year was
overwhelming.

Strot

When you think back on that overwhelming first year and then there was a year of planning that had preceded it, what kinds of things were not—is there anything that jumps out at you that was obviously just overlooked in terms of people thinking it through in the planning stage before the school opened or was it just all things that came up new that nobody had thought of?

Proctor

Well, again, I don’t think anybody really thought about the difficulty of starting everything new. You know, starting everything from kindergarten to fifth grade, multi-age, all new staff, all new kids. Of just starting all of that from the beginning. So, I think that was a lot of—you know, when you really got to think about it, I mean, that’s a tremendous undertaking ’cause usually, you know, there’s veterans that are there that help those that aren’t veterans. There’s kids that, you know, there’s only major influx of the first-grade level and so there’s a tradition among the students as well as the staff that kind of helps guide and adjust. And, you know, we just didn’t have any of that, so I think that was just not really foreseen to the extent—and maybe we couldn’t have. Maybe if we would’ve foreseen it, we wouldn’t have done it; I don’t know. But you know, we kept saying, Well the good thing is everything’s new, nothing’s set in stone. We can make things whatever we want them to be. And then the bad news is everything’s
new, nothing’s set in stone, and we have to figure it all out ourselves.

I remember that phrase being said many times. (both laugh) Let’s talk about issues of equity and diversity for a minute. Were there issues of equity involved in Hillcrest PDS between Baylor faculty, Waco ISD faculty, administrators, teachers? Were there issues in terms of equity that had to be dealt with and if so, how was that handled?

Equity in terms of—?

Everybody feeling an equal partner, I guess. An equal sharing of partnership.

I think those at Hillcrest, Baylor faculty and school faculty—I think that that—the equity issue, the equal voice I don’t think was an issue. What was an issue is that feeling like—the Baylor faculty feeling like they didn’t have the equity compared to the School of Ed administration back on campus. That the decisions were starting to be made that affected us that we didn’t have any voice in. So we had the voice there, and we were—we felt like the voices were equal there, but then we felt like we were being superseded by voices from here that weren’t directly involved in the day-to-day that then were making it harder for us to do what we needed to do. That was—that’s where I remember where the issues were. (talking simultaneously) And that was in the school—

(talking simultaneously) And how were those issues then dealt with
and resolved, or were they?

Proctor

Well, they, you know, they were dealt with in those steering council meetings and that bigger group that I mentioned. There was a lot of discussions and differences of opinions and people objecting to things. There was a lot of meetings here among the Baylor faculty and other faculty here that weren’t directly involved in trying to sort out some of that.

Strot

Can you think of any examples of the kinds of issues that were talked about and dealt with in those meetings?

Proctor

Well, yeah. Like, for example, the interns in terms of coursework. Like I said, that initially, you know, it was all seen as hands-on or all seen as learning from doing—from being in the classrooms, from getting involved and getting feedback and learning from doing. Not in having a lot of seminars. And so the idea was that whatever—in the fall, whatever courses they were enrolled in, you know, they would get credit for those courses by being in the classrooms. But there were Baylor faculty that were in disagreement with that; that disagreed with the fact that they should be just getting course credit for just being in the classroom without doing what everybody else at Baylor was doing to get credit for those courses.

Strot

Which was the normal lecture type course?

Proctor

Right. So that’s an example of the kind of thing I was thinking of. So,
you know, we were fine in terms of the collaboration at the school, but
then we were having trouble because we were being criticized for the
way that we were delivering the coursework.

Now, at that time, there was a new dean when the school opened, and
so was the dean’s role crucial then in helping solve some of those
differences of opinion among the faculty? What role did the School of
Ed administration play in resolving those or supporting or not
supporting PDS?

Well, I guess that was part of the problem, I mean, because, you know,
the dean had a cabinet so the Baylor faculty or department chairs
would bring these issues, these criticisms to the cabinet. And so then,
decisions were made there that affected us without those more directly
involved being part of that process. So, initially, it was a matter of
dealing with that; of saying, well, wait, that’s not going to work—to
make decisions here without involving those of us that are most
involved in the process itself. So, I can remember the dean then
coming to the school and trying to deal with those issues. But that was
a source of—that was a problem then, the governance issue was a
problem. (phone rings)

Can we let that ring, or do you need to take it?

Um—

We could stop the interview here and continue another time because it
is getting close to class time.

**Proctor**

Yeah, it’s 4:30.

**Strot**

Let’s do that. We’ll stop here. Thank you.