

Interview

with

RAY SPAIN

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By Goldie F. Wells

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INTERVIEW WITH DR. RAY SPAIN

By Goldie WELLS

Goldie: This is an interview that we are having in Lewiston, N.C. with Dr. Ray Spain. He is the principal of Bertie High School and we are going to have him respond to some questions that we need for our research.

Dr. Spain: This is Ray Spain and I am principal of Bertie High School in Windsor, North Carolina.

Goldie: Dr. Spain, can you tell me how you became a high school principal?

Dr. Spain: Well, that is kind of interesting. I was employed in Northampton County prior to coming to Bertie County. That was about eight years ago in January of 1983, and in Northampton I had worked as a principal of an alternative school for about two years and I decided I wanted to pursue a principalship at a regular school rather than at an alternative kind of program. So I began to look for principalships in the area and applied for an assistant principal's position in Northampton and nothing came through. I decided to look outside of the county and when I did I heard about an opening in Bertie County and applied. There is a lot of history behind that because prior to my becoming principal at Bertie High School they had not had a Black principal there. So it was pretty much a paramount situation where you would have a Black Superintendent for the first time. So there was a lot of protest about a new Black principal coming and I came into a situation where a very popular assistant principal was also given a principalship at the high school.

Goldie: Was he Black or White?

Dr. Spain: He was White.

Goldie: Had there not been some history about a Black principal here back in the '60's that was denied the principalship of the high school?

Dr. Spain: No, you are talking about Winn Newcutt. He worked at the central office as Assistant Superintendent and when the superintendency became vacant he applied and was not hired and he has since left. I think he is in Raleigh now working at the State Department of Public Instruction. I think that is what you have reference to.

Goldie: So becoming a principal was your desire and you said that you would move to pursue your ambition. Did you have to literally move from your county to another?

Dr. Spain: Yes, I had to move from Halifax County in the Roanoke Rapids area and working in Northampton and when the position became available here I moved the first year and then after the year ended my family moved. So we have been about eight years now.

Goldie: Tell me something about the school where you are working now. Tell about Bertie High School.

Dr. Spain: Bertie High School is the only high school in the county. We have roughly 4,200+ students in the county school system and we have seven K-8 schools and one 9-12 school. And so all the high school students in the county attend Bertie High School. It is a fairly large school for a rural area and we have approximately 1240 students this year and we have a staff of all total including cafeteria workers about 120 and a teaching staff of roughly 87. So it is a fairly large school. We have a very strong vocational program. We offer some very good courses in the vocational area. We have started an honor's program in English and some of the other areas and making quite a few curriculum changes for the past few years. I think one of the most notable change has meant a move toward a semester organization pretty much like colleges and universities have.

Goldie: Having your exams before you go home for Christmas.

Dr. Spain: No, it is after Christmas but all courses are graded as semester courses. In effect it's like having two academic years. The first year is over at the semester and then we start the second semester. So everything is kind of wiped clean and it has been interesting working through that with the faculty. Approximately half of our staff is Black and half is White, most of our staff members are from either this county or surrounding counties. Recently we have started getting in more staff members from Pennsylvania and Maryland, and Kentucky and some of those states where they really are depressing and teachers are looking for jobs so we have picked up staff members in needed areas from out of state but our teaching staff is largely home-grown folk who have been here, in fact quite a few of them graduated from this school and attended East Carolina or Elizabeth State University and then went back home to work and raise families.

Goldie: So you have those people to supervise. It sounds like a large staff.

Dr. Spain: It is a good-sized staff. The whole thing that makes it even larger is that our campus is organized around separate buildings so once you enter you've got to move around to get to classes so it makes it even more difficult because some of the buildings are far from the main building and unless you make an effort to see people you don't see

them.

Goldie: So it is kinda like a college campus. So if you don't see people that means you have to be out of the office to really see people and really supervise.

Dr. Spain: That is right.

Goldie: Do you have any assistants?

Dr. Spain: Three assistants.

Goldie: Are they men or women?

Dr. Spain: All three are men.

Goldie: All Black or White?

Dr. Spain: Two are Black and one White.

Goldie: Tell us--you did mention something about the changing in your curriculum. Do you have much input in the curriculum and how you set up the courses and what is important to your community or what you think is important?

Dr. Spain: Probably pretty much total autonomy when it comes to curriculum and quite a few other things too. I think that has more to do with the philosophy of the Superintendent in allowing us and wanting the principals to take the lead in curriculum development and curriculum management and so on. I would say we have quite a bit of autonomy and I try to share that with teachers. In fact we are going through our registration process now and typically this time of the year we begin to discuss what we want to offer next year and I try to make sure that discussion occurs among departments and looking at what they feel is important to teach and important to offer. We start that around this time of the year, a series of department meetings to talk about that and put together a pre-registration handbook for students and to do the planning for the next school year.

Goldie: The BEP. Of course the guidelines are there. How strict is your Superintendent about following what the State says what you must do?

Dr. Spain: Well, another process that we follow each year--we require teachers to do course outlines and we tell them that they need to take the Standard Course of Study along with the objectives from the End of Course Test and the textbook and sit down together as a group if they are teaching the same course and jointly plan their curriculum for that course so the curriculum that is not the textbook is not the Standard Course of Study but it is a combination of all those things and things that we consider important and

that is a process that we go through each year. Now we are doing it each semester. In fact, we have done the first round for the first semester and working toward doing it for the second semester now. We also require teachers to do course syllabi for each course and in that they get the students pretty much what would happen if they took college class, the first day of class you get a course syllabus and you know when you are going to be tested on what you are going to be tested, how you are going to be graded, what things are going to be emphasized in the course. You have an outline and expectations, of course, and that has worked really well.

Goldie: Have you had any feedback from your students that have gone to college? Have you had any problems because of your new plan. Does it help them when they go to college?

Dr. Spain: We are beginning to get some feedback now and what we will probably do at some point is do some kind of survey and get something a lot more concrete than just comments. But some of the things we are doing, comments that we hear from students is that it has been helpful.

Goldie: What about discipline? How do you deal with discipline?

Dr. Spain: The best way we can.

Goldie: You and the other three!

Dr. Spain: I don't know if there is any real answer to discipline. I think our students are fairly well disciplined. We have this year changed our discipline program, our organization and how we deal with discipline. We have the in-school suspension program but this years is more counseling based and it works; where a teacher is having a problem with a student they may refer the student to what we call the student intervention room. There we have a full-time counselor and they work with the students on trying to come up with some contract or plan to deal with whatever problem that student and teacher might have and then we try to get the student back to class. We also have personal advisors and those are staff members who teach high risk students or students who have been identified as having discipline problems or attendance problems or potential dropouts. They see those students every day in the class we call communication skills. They also are the people who handle all the particulars about a student, the paperwork, if the student is having a discipline problem they take care of that, if we need to make a home visit they do that, if you need to schedule the student or change some classes they are involved in that. The knowledge that we use initially was they were the student's personal banker. We call them

personal advisors now. They pretty much keep up with the students.

Goldie: How many students are there in each group?

Dr. Spain: No more than twelve so we try to depend it on the workload of the staff member and the restraints or constraints on the particular program area. It fluctuates in reference to how many students I can work with.

Goldie: So how long do they see that student for a day.

Dr. Spain: A class period. We are taking a course with that teacher or staff member. Then of course we have also this year begun to send more students home with indefinite suspension and call parents on the first offense the first time they come to the office and that has been very --we have gotten good feedback from that because we let the parents know very early what kinds of problems the students are having and before it gets to the point where we have to suspend the student.

Goldie: So they go home as soon as something happens with the parent having to come back with them to discuss it.

Dr. Spain: That is correct. In some cases the parents will come directly--either leave work or leave home and come to the school.

Goldie: So you can fix it that day. Within the hour.

Dr. Spain: That's right. It has taken a lot of our time because we have to either take time or the assistant principal has to talk with parents and that is time consuming but it is time well spent.

Goldie: Do you have offenders who come back again and again?

Dr. Spain: Yes and in a lot of cases those students suspended indefinitely don't come back but we have students we see quite often.

Goldie: What about transportation? Would having so many students in the county and the county being so large what about transportation? How do you deal with that?

Dr. Spain: Well, they just ride buses or drive cars.

Goldie: How many buses do you have coming to your school?

Dr. Spain: I think this year it is thirty-one. It will cover an entire county so some students have a long bus ride but that is one of the things that you have to deal with in having one school in the county.

Goldie: It is a large county. One of the largest in the state. Do you have one of your assistants assigned to transportation. One is assigned to transportation and maintenance, school facilities; he takes care of things. One works with discipline and substitute teachers and another works with textbooks and does the bulk of the teacher observations. The way I work we often meet either during the summer or at the beginning of the year and we talk about the organization of our work. What kinds of things we have to do. And I asked the Assistant Principals what kinds of things they want to do--if they want any change in assignments and often I will often I will already have some things in mind for them to do but I give them the option to do some things they might like to do. Typically we will meet two to three times a month for about an hour or so and just sit down and talk about what is happening in school and sharing information. They are pretty much involved decisions even down to the point of helping to develop or put together an agenda for a faculty meeting or department meeting.

Goldie: How often do you have faculty meetings?

Dr. Spain: No more than I need them so sometimes they are frequent and some months I may not even have a faculty meeting.

Goldie: So you use memos?

Dr. Spain: Memos and pretty much department chairpeople. I work pretty closely with our department chairs because we are so large and it is very difficult to do anything in a faculty meeting except share information so if there is any work to be done you either work through committees or departments.

Goldie: What about funds? The utilization of funds.

Dr. Spain: Well, of course we have our school budget and we are allotted funds directly from the school board that we can use at our discretion. Some are state funds and they are restricted as to what you can spend and we have to send them purchase orders but we pretty much have monies we have or that is allotted to us we have some control over how we spend those and usually what I will do at the very beginning of the year is to bring in all of our budgets that we have money that has been allotted from the county office and meet with our department chair people and say this is the money that we have. This is what we can spend. How do you want to spend it? They will submit a list of needs based on their department. They will talk with the teachers and come up with a budget and we will bring all that information back and say well this how much money we have and this is what we can fund this year and if we have a new program that is started or something we need to put more money in it but of course,

we allow money for that and that would mean that some departments couldn't get as much as they want. But pretty much that is the process that we use. Also we have capital outlay money allotted and that is money again from the school board that we can make decisions on how we want to spend for the school and typically what we do around February is to submit from the schools to the Superintendent a capital outlay budget or request and then the school board based on what is funded from the County Commissioners will -- say you have X number of dollars Bertie High School and then we have to do a revised budget cause we never get what we ask for. But it does give us quite a bit of flexibility so we will sit around and we'll talk about what the needs are. And typically what we are trying to do now is to fund each department in the school so we have a duplicator and a processor and those are things the teachers use quite a bit so instead of centralizing and only having one in the teacher's lounge or in the library we are trying to make sure that each department has one.

Goldie: Do you raise any funds at the school or PTA?

Dr. Spain: No we don't. Organizations do. But as far as a school-wide fund raiser about the only thing we don't have a school-wide project for the school but we do have are organizations, clubs that will raise money to fund their projects. The Beta Club or Student Council will have a dance or do a candy sale or something like that to raise money or the band will do fruit or pizzas or something. The only fund raiser that we have are picture sales and of course that is something we really don't have to try to raise funds. It just kind of happens every year.

Goldie: Students like that and then it gives you a little money to do some things that you would like to do. What about your football?

Dr. Spain: Well, football we have to subsidize. We have a very good athletic program but football is a very expensive sport as well as other sports and typically we subsidize that both from the county and the school. I mentioned our capital outlay and we usually allot for equipment purposes money from our school outlay just to meet the basic needs of students as far as safety requirements for helmets, shoulder pads and things like that.

Goldie: And you give supplements to the coaches and all that?

Dr. Spain: Well, that comes from the School Board.

Goldie: Now the cafeteria management. How much are you involved with the management of the cafeteria?

Dr. Spain: No more than I have to be. Then again, my management style and philosophy is that if you have competent people or departments on your staff, and they can do a job then let them do. So we have gone through some changes in our food service in our cafeteria and with a new manager in fact this month so I pretty much keep a hand's off and tell them if they need me that I am there to support them. In general these are the things that I expect, and these are the things I want and I think we need to do. But as far as any kind of supervision or direct management of the cafeteria staff I try to stay away from that.

Goldie: Do you have a County Director of Food, a Child Nutritionist so she/he decides who comes to be your cafeteria manager?

Dr. Spain: No, I select my manager and teachers also. Then again I think that has a lot to do with the philosophy of the Superintendent. He allows us to make decisions on staff members and make those recommendations and with rare exceptions will he appoint or send someone to the school.

Goldie: Do you have someone in your central office that is in charge of personnel? So they will screen to a point to say we have these folk in the file and you may interview them and you make the final selection and then make a recommendation back to personnel.

Dr. Spain: That's right. Unless there are some problems and I can remember a few it is pretty much the principal's recommendation that goes as far as hiring staff members.

Goldie: Do you allow your department chair to sit in on the interviews when you have selected someone for a position?

Dr. Spain: I don't allow them to sit in on the interviews; I do allow them to interview people or to talk to them. I encourage them, in fact during the summer when we are hiring if they are in town I will call them and ask them to come out to the school and talk to the perspective teacher and then I will discuss their impressions with them before making a decision. So I really try to do that as much as possible because we are trying to build a strong department organization and again my philosophy is that a school the size of Bertie, it is too hard for one person to manage or even an administrative staff to manage and do an effective job so I really depend on department chairpeople to help in supervision and management particularly in instruction. I try to keep them away from administrative things.

Goldie: Now with Senate Bill 2 and all the teacher empowerment, has it been a problem for your teachers? It seems like your style is already in the shared decision-making and teacher empowerment and some schools are

experiencing some problems because principals do not know how to give up the authority and teachers do not know how to assume and have you had any problems with that too. And I think some of the problems are misconceptions about what Senate Bill 2 is and what teacher empowerment means, and decision making and which decisions are appropriate for teachers and which are not and so I've had my share of problems with that. I think that is one of the real pitfalls is that there was not any training for teachers to really get involved in this process and so there are a lot of misconceptions. In fact it had gotten so bad this fall that I planned a faculty meeting and just talked about Senate Bill 2. Gave every teacher a copy and went through it paragraph by paragraph and discussed what was in there, what was meant by the Bill and what kind of impact it had on education and Bertie High School. But still I've got teachers that think that I have to check with them before I make any kind of decision and that's been a problem.

Goldie: Sometimes I think they blame NCAE for that.

Dr. Spain: I do. I think that they are having a lot to do encouraging teachers and I think that they are just trying to take advantage of the situation to increase their membership you know, to be honest.

Goldie: Buildings and grounds. Do you have much to do with that?

Dr. Spain: Again, in all these areas any management or supervisory kind of activity or task I try to delegate to somebody and that's worked well in some areas where people either administrators or teachers that enjoy doing certain kinds of work who will those kinds of responsibilities. Probably the extent to which I am involved with buildings and grounds is when we can't get something done and seem to be moving very slowly. For instance, if we have a problem with getting something fixed whether it is a door, bathroom fixture or whatever and if we have already sent in a work request to have the work done then I will call the Superintendent or the Director of Maintenance and say we have this problem out here. Can you help us with it?

Goldie: And that is after your assistant has already tried and it's the last straw and you have to use your authority.

Goldie: What about the community? How does Bertie High fit into your total community?

Dr. Spain: I think pretty well. We're the only high school. A lot of activities are centered at the school and when I say centered I'm talking about most of the school-based activities. Of course the community uses the buildings quite a bit for various programs. So in a lot of ways it pulls the

community into the school and pulls them together since we only have one high school, one band, one course, one athletic program and everybody is supportive of that. I think we have a lot of community support, at least I feel that we do. Of course you never know about the community until you have some problems but the kinds of comments I hear and sometimes the absence of complaints, folks were upset is an indication that things are going okay. We have now a lot of folks upset about a lot of things so I think things are going well. So I sense a lot of community support and a lot of positive comments about things that we are doing.

Goldie: When you go out into the community you will know that I am sure.

Dr. Spain: I'm well known all over the county and surrounding counties too because I in Chowan County, Martin County, and County, Northampton so I'm pretty much known throughout this area.

Goldie: Now as far as having administrative power you share your decision-making but you delegate a lot. Do you feel--I think you have already said you felt that you had a lot of autonomy to do--the relationship with the Superintendent gives you the autonomy to do a lot of things that you'd like to do. Do you feel that you have power and control of your situation of your site?

Dr. Spain: Yes. I think that there are a couple of things that when I mention autonomy the relationship with the Superintendent is one because we have worked together before and we know each other well and I have a very good working relationship.

Goldie: You had worked together in Northampton?

Dr. Spain: In Northampton. So this is our second time of working together. So we know each other fairly well and understand our philosophy and the fact that he is pretty much my mentor. So in that sense, some of the autonomy is based on our relationship, some of it is based on the fact that his philosophy is to decentralize things and put the people in the schools as the people who should be making the decisions rather than the people in the central office staff members and the central office being there to support the schools. So that gives you some autonomy and also I think being a high school principal and this I think is typical of any high school principal or any high school is somewhat different that being an elementary school principal and that the high school is looked at as the final step or the final institution in the community for a lot people and so as such it has a great deal of prestige and importance in the community and if you judged the quality of your program it's often judged by what you offer in the high school and how

well you prepare your students to go out and go to work, to go to college and so forth. So I think that gives you a certain amount of autonomy and that would vary but I think then a combination of work with the Superintendent and knowing him well and his philosophy about decentralizing gives a great deal of autonomy.

Goldie: Sounds like you all have a trust level there.

Dr. Spain: Yes.

Goldie: Desegregation of schools. How do you think that affected your role of principal of a high school?

Dr. Spain: It's kind of difficult to answer that because when schools desegregated I was not a principal and really from what I've read and what I know from personal experience as a high school student during desegregation I really don't know a great deal about what it was like for a principal back then. The only reference points I have is just from my own experience you know working in a school system that is pretty much 75% Black and 25% White and really don't know how to answer your question.

Goldie: Earlier in the interview you mentioned that for you to have a job, a Black principal in the only high school in Bertie County, do you think that it would have been as hard for your selection had that school been an all Black school?

Dr. Spain: Oh no. No not at all.

Goldie: The desegregation process--do you think it has made it harder for Black principal in high schools?

Dr. Spain: Yes, I think it has made it a lot more competitive and I can think of some counties which have more than one high school with higher of Black population. They typically will appoint one White and one Black high school principal. But in the county where you only have one high school then again prior to my appointment to Bertie High School, they didn't have any Black high school principal in the county of just the one high school and probably didn't ever conceive of having one so I think that that's made a difference where you have one high school, particularly in an Eastern county. More than likely, and I haven't done a survey, I'm just kind of thinking now about the principals I know in this area, you are going a White high school principal.

Goldie: Mostly the elementary principals the Black--

Dr. Spain: Elementary or middle schools.

Goldie: Do you enjoy your job?

Dr. Spain: I thoroughly enjoy my job.
Goldie: That's great!

Dr. Spain: I thoroughly enjoy it. I look at it as a real challenge and particularly enjoy the rewards of my job and that is to see things happen, you know to see some changes just being made and see some results from those changes and some of those are long term. Also, being able to work with teachers and see some excitement, being able to do some things to excite them or allowing them to do some things that they think are a reward for them.

Goldie: What do you consider the major problem of your principalship?

Dr. Spain: Well, there are a lot of problems. I would say personnel--just having enough personnel to do an adequate job of supervision and administering the site. For instance, we could use one or two more clerical people.

Goldie: How many secretaries do you have?

Dr. Spain: Well, we have three secretaries, one is full-time bookkeeper, one is full-time receptionist, and the other secretary is really not a secretary. She is a SIMS clerk. She handles the SIMS Program and that's full time. What I need or could use is full-time personal secretary. Someone to screen calls, to handle some correspondence, to screen visitors, to make appointments and so forth. And that could make my time more efficient and probably a lot more effective with the time I do have to spend. So, I think that is one problem. Another problem is not really having enough supervisors to supervise the staff. I think it is ridiculous to think a staff of about 90-100 that you can do an adequate job of supervising one to twenty people. With that kind of ratio and typically in businesses a ratio is somewhere around 1-8 to 1-10 and to really do a good job of supervising and knowing what folks are doing and having the opportunity to work for people. That's one reason I'm spending so much time with trying to free up department chair people and every opportunity I can free them for an additional planning period and I think this year we have maybe four or maybe five of the department chair people who have four classes. Typically our teachers have five classes where we free up department chair people to do some things for the departments, to look at the course outlines and work with those and to do some supervising in department administrative kinds of things. Not administrative work that we would do but things that would enhance their program areas. But that is a real problem--is having enough people to do the jobs of supervision.

Goldie: Now what do you do if you have those mediocre people? Do you give that mentoring task to the department

chair?

Dr. Spain: There are some of the department chair people typically those are the mentors and then you have others. We try to make sure that we have enough people on staff to work with the new teachers.

Goldie: So you would say two of the major problems are personnel and supervision of personnel?

Dr. Spain: Yes, I think that is the major problem. I would like to spend a lot more time working more closely with teachers in the instructional program but I am now just spending a lot of time dealing with things as they come up.

Goldie: Putting out a lot of fires.

Dr. Spain: Yes, well putting out a lot of fires and things that I mentioned or even before putting out matches in some cases as I mentioned with discipline. It takes a lot of time.

Goldie: What do you consider the most rewarding about your principalship and I think that you have eluded to that already.

Dr. Spain: Seeing some of the results of our efforts and trying to get people involved and making some of those decisions and some of those changes. You know--getting teachers involved and that has been real rewarding.

Goldie: Suppose there were a Black male or female that had the same aspiration as you did a few years ago and wanted to become a high school principal in the State of North Carolina (There were in 1989, forty-one Black high school principals and as I began my research, I found that all of those were not principals of high schools that graduated students. There were some who were principals of alternative schools.)and you had to give advice as to how they could become a principal of a high school in the State of North Carolina. What advice would you give them?

Dr. Spain: To make sure that they wanted to do that, not just because they are Black but anybody that wants to become a high school principal I think it takes more than a mere commitment. It takes a lot of work and I often say being a high school principal is like having two wives. You have one at home and the other at school and sometimes you can't please either one. So I think it takes a tremendous commitment of time and energy and sometimes if you are going to do the job and keep your head above water, that's got to be one of the most important things to you and typically I'd spend a lot of weekends and nights working just trying to keep up and doing things I needed to do or had to do. I schedule a lot of things around school activities so my

comment would be to make sure that you know what is involved in being a high school principal and then secondly to know what you've got to face as a Black high school principal. Particularly if you're in an area that is either suburban or urban or even the rural area such as Bertie County where you are going to be pretty much on display. If you're ready for that, that is the kind of commitment you want to make. Those would be the kinds of things I would share and then secondly, to talk about the kinds of experiences that you will need if you are going to be successful or kinds of things you need to be able to do.

Goldie: Can you think of some of those things that you really need to be able to do?

Dr. Spain: Well, you need to know about budget. How to handle money. You need to know about scheduling and that is one of the most important things even if you don't do it you need to know how it is done and need to make decisions about that because I think the master schedule is the key to a school. Either you can create some problems or you can solve some problems by doing the master schedule, directing that. I think you need to know something about how to handle the people and how organizations work because there are not a lot of things I take personally even though sometimes they can come to me that way, things are said a certain way. I don't take those things personally because I understand some things about organizations and how they operate and how people function in organizations and what kinds of things motivate people. I mean those kinds of things are important. You pretty much have to have a thick skin and not be bothered by a lot of things. Not let a lot of things worry you. Because I think you have to be political also. I think that is critical because if you aren't you just won't survive. You have to know the people who have power in the community, who has power at school, molders of public opinion; those people who know the school board members or county commissioners or what kinds of things are happening now--on and on. So you have to kind of be in tune to what is happening politically and to some extent you have to play a political game. I think the high school principalship is very political.

Goldie: Well, you just finished your doctorate and congratulation on doing that. That's really wonderful. Do you think that this was part of your goal? Do you think this will be an asset to your principalship. The role that you have now.

Dr. Spain: Oh, I think definitely. If no more reason than the prestige and the weight it carries I think means a lot and I think it puts me in a position to maybe listen to more and my opinion and comments might be weighed more heavily so I see it as a definite benefit and then again it could be--I wouldn't say detrimental. There are some pluses and minuses

and I think on the minus side is usually when people obtain a high degree then everybody thinks that they are going to leave--that they have only been here this long to reach this point. Now they are going to be going somewhere and so on the part of some, there might be an attitude that we really don't have to do all of that now because he's not going to be around very long. I would also think it would be a problem if I let it be a problem or created a kind of situation where people have to refer to me by that title or had to do certain things to appease me because I have obtained this status and I should be put on a pedestal and all that. I really don't think it is really that important. I won't let it be that important.

Goldie: It has been a personal goal too, I'm sure.

Dr. Spain: Oh, yes!

Goldie: Someone told me that it always helps people to think you know more and the title does help you. It gives you an advantage. But were you encouraged by your Superintendent?

Dr. Spain: Very much encouraged and supported. I started the program with UNC with Dr. Julio George.

Goldie: Yes, he is my advisor.

Dr. Spain: We are real good friends but I started the program at UNC when I was at Northampton and just continued and when I moved here the commuting distance was just too far so I transferred to Virginia Tech and of course finished earlier this year. But I've had a lot of encouragement by all my superintendents and I've had three since I started the program and so I've had a lot of support.

Goldie: Well, is there anything you just want to share with me because one of the outcomes, one of my desired outcomes is that the research that I do with the present principals, if they have any advice to help the ones who really want to come along the same path, because it is difficult because of our situation in the state. If you have any other advice or words of wisdom...

Dr. Spain: I think one of the things that we don't do, those of us who are in the principalship, particularly those of us who are fairly young and I would consider myself fairly young, we really don't consult with the older principals who have been around--you know John Freeman, John Lucas, and those kind of folks who have been around for a good while and there are many others in various parts of the state. I think that we can learn a lot from each other. Not only from those who have been principals years ago and they have years of experience and wisdom, but also those who are principals now and I think there are a lot of things that we can do to help

one another and we'll start efforts to trying to pull together, you know Black high school principals, and share some of our expertise.

Goldie: That is good because they had an Old School Master's Organization and all of them were members of it and they have talked to me about that and how much fun they used to have and I don't think you have that much networking going on now. But you are trying to get something.

Dr. Spain: Well, there are some particularly, and I suppose this might be true in the Eastern part of the state because most of the principals, we know each other and try to get together at conferences and things like that to get together and share information and call one another on the phone particularly if there is something that somebody feels that I can help with or if there is another principal that I know has had a similar kind of experience or has a particular program that might be beneficial then I'll call him. But I think we need to do more about it or at least be a lot more formal than it is now.

Goldie: Well maybe since I'm getting everybody together, maybe at the end of this we have one big hurrah and all the people who have helped we can get together and share what we have learned.

Dr. Spain: I would certainly like to get a copy of your interview and the addresses of the principals because I've got some but you probably have the most complete list.

Goldie: I think I've contacted just about everybody that is available and of the old timers there are not that many because most of them are seventy-seven and seventy-five and some of them are in poor health and can't really talk to me. The ones that are going to talk to me though, I think I have nine that are able to communicate well enough and remember enough to talk to me and, I think I'll get a lot of information from them.

Dr. Spain: But if you have a current mailing list of the present high school principals, I would very much like to get a copy of that.

Goldie: I would be happy to share that with you. I certainly appreciate you taking the time today to talk to me, and I'll give you a copy of this transcription too so that you will know what you have said.

Dr. Spain: Okay, good luck to you.

Goldie: All right. Thanks a lot!

AN ADDENDUM TO THE WORK EXPERIENCE OF DR. SPAIN

Dr. Spain: Mostly I started my career in education as as teacher assistant in Halifax County schools and worked for two years and then stopped in 1971, and completed my degree at Wesleyan College in Rocky Mount. And upon graduating I worked with a Day Care Organization about two years and was unemployed and did a lot of substitute work for about a year or so during the recession we had when Nixon was in office. When I had an opportunity to teach I had two job offers, one was a teacher's position and one was a position to work with in-school suspension programs in Northampton County. That was the position I took so I ended up in the central office for about five years before funding a alternative program

I became the principal for an alternative school for about two years. After that I moved to Bertie County and that is where I have been since. So I have not have the advantage of teaching full time with the exception of substitute work that I have done over the years.

Goldie: Has that been a disadvantage to you?

Dr. Spain: I think initially it was a disadvantage in that that was about the only criticism that people had prior to my coming here is that I wasn't a teacher or hadn't taught and my strength and background is in administrative work and supervision. I think that since I have been here that that has not really been a problem but I think initially-- and that would be another thing that I would mention to anyone considering going into administration, particularly one that is Black, to make sure that they have covered the bases because it is difficult if there is an opportunity not to hire you and that opportunity can be to something that is legitimate than that is going to be done.

Goldie: So come through the ranks and learn everything you can about every stage of it.

Dr. Spain: Well, even if you don't come through the ranks, cause I think that's a problem too, because problems and principals are often criticized for not being very effective but all principals, with the exception of a very few, came through the ranks and so I don't really think that is the answer. My comment had more to do with making sure that you cover your bases. That if you want to pursue something, and there are certain prerequisites or certain things that are probably going to be looked at or at least you are going to be scrutinized probably more closely than someone else and you need to make sure that if this is something that you want to do that you have done all the things you need to do it.