

Interview

with

LEON GOOLSBY

December 27, 1990

By Goldie F. Wells

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Original transcript on deposit at
The Southern Historical Collection
Louis Round Wilson Library

Copyright © 1991 The University of North Carolina

INTERVIEW WITH LEON GOOLSBY

By Goldie F. Wells

Goldie: This is December 27, 1990, and we are interviewing Mr. Leon Goolsby who is the principal of Gillespie High School.

Mr. Goolsby: I know this is being recorded. I'm Leon F. Goolsby, principal of Greensboro Public School, Alternative Education Center. We have grades 6-8. We started off as just 10-12 but through the years we have changed that. We have an alternative school and we started out in 1974, but we have moved to three different sites and through the years we have gone down from high school until we have reached the 6th grade.

Goldie: Tell us how you became a principal there.

Mr. Goolsby: First of all I became a guidance counselor. I went to UNC-G and A.H. Peeler told me to go on to administration because you could make more impact on kids with your decisions so I took my class from UNC-G and went to A & T and got a Master's in Administration.

Goldie: Didn't you work for a while as a drop-out prevention person?

Mr. Goolsby: I worked as a visiting teacher whereas I went to different schools and I had group sessions and some other situations like going to classrooms and working with kids. I always visited homes whether it was on Saturday, Sunday or whatever.

Goldie: Okay, I think when I first met you you used to come over to Murphy School to see the children that were having problems in coming to school.

Mr. Goolsby: I worked about I don't know how many schools it was but I worked several different schools. They would change me around from year to year, but we worked different schools, worked with the parents, the churches and other organizations and things in the community to help the kids solve their problems because we knew they had problems and they could not function in school.

Goldie: All right would you tell us something about--I know your school is different because you have an alternative program but could you tell us something about how you supervise your personnel and how your teachers are chosen.

Mr. Goolsby: The teachers are chosen as they are in all other schools. You have to have at least three interviews.

Everyone has to be certified in content area and I have an assistant principal, a program director, and myself and we do the supervision of personnel.

Goldie: Now these assistants that you have. Do you have them with specific assignments like one in charge of transportation or one in discipline.

Mr. Goolsby: Oh yes, we are all included in discipline except for the director of programs but Dr. Fuller and myself we take care of the discipline. Dr. Fuller takes care of the high school and I take care of the middle school. As far as our curriculum, we are just highly flexible in it. We have so many kids who are multi-retainees that we just try to have such a high range of situation in high intensity situations whereas a kids can who want to learn, our instruction goes way above and way below in a sense. We have kids over there with 120-130 IQ's but sometimes behavior comes into it and sometimes our discipline right now--discipline a lot of times we find out it stems from the home and a lot of times I have conferences with parents and students and more than likely I should have just had the conference with the kid because the parents can't control the kids and that seems to be a big situation in our nation today.

Goldie: Are most of you eluded to the fact that discipline comes in with some of these students even though they have a high IQ. Are they assigned to your school mainly because of discipline or because they don't fit into the regular school program.

Mr. Goolsby: Prior to this year they were but however this year we have changed and kids are only admitted to this school at the end of each nine weeks. There is a screening committee at each school and then we have a system-wide screening committee so therefore where we used to have 800-900 thousand kids we have not gone over 250 this year because they have been screened and we know exactly where they are coming from as where before they would just say, go to Gillespie, go to Gillespie, go to Gillespie! We have a referral form that has to be filled out if the kids are not where we think they should be that we can help then we have to take them but before that is what it was. I going to tell you about our transportation right now. We have transportation all over the district for the Greensboro City Schools but there is no problem for a kid getting to school but like I said, it's a different time frame.

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

Mr. Goolsby: We have approximately ten buses coming to school. Let me say that I have mentioned the day care center which has about forty-some kids in it and I have not mentioned the on-site health center.

Goldie: Well, tell us about the programs. That is unique.

Mr. Goolsby: The day care center is a cooperation between United Day Care and Greensboro City Schools. It cost about \$1600-\$1700 for a kid to stay in there a year. If a youngster qualifies for a grant then we can give them a grant. We get money from Social Services and other agencies within the community. The health clinic was the and we wrote a grant for about--a grant costing \$600,000 and we were ten of one hundred and some school systems that qualified for it in the United States so we are on our third year of that and we have had our attendance to arise whereas kids would have been sick.

Mr. Goolsby: The utilization of funds we get federal funds, local funds and state funds. Here lately we have been put on the priority list by the Greensboro Board of Education. It was fifty some thousand dollars last year extra and this year they gave us about one hundred thousand dollars within the budget so we were put on the priority list.

Mr. Goolsby: Cafeteria management...

Goldie: Wait a minute. When it comes to the utilization of funds how do you decide how the funds will be used?

Mr. Goolsby: The teachers decide how the funds are going to be used. I put a person in charge and they get a prioritized list and then there is a committee that decides what is priority. Like what I generally do with my funds, I allocate the funds after the people put in what they need. Now I look at that like you may have vocational funds or whatever and then after the last two or three years I just said this department will get this, this department will get this and this one will get this. So we are on our last cycle of that like everybody will want a computer you know. So they get their computer and I generally get their software.

Goldie: So the teachers do have input in how the funds will be used. That will make you have shared decisions. I let them decide everything, no that's a lie, I don't let them decide everything. I let them decide what they can decide but generally they know what they need, I don't know and I depend upon my media specialist very highly because she is the coordinator for materials and things.

Goldie: Do you have a cafeteria?

Mr. Goolsby: Yes, we have a cafeteria, however, we in Greensboro are on a satellite situation where food is brought in and put on a steam table. We do not prepare food in the cafeteria and nothing of that nature.

Goldie: Do you have to deal with the funds of the cafeteria

or is all that handled by the child nutrition director here in the city?

Mr. Goolsby: I do not touch a penny of money at a school. People get in trouble when they touch that money you see. So I don't touch any money.

Goldie: Buildings and grounds. Tell us about your buildings and grounds and how you keep them maintained.

Mr. Goolsby: Well, the buildings and grounds are in terrible shape to be honest with you. We are supposed to be on the painting list for the building after they finish the other high schools. The grounds -- we spent about \$3,000 on them about a year and a half ago and the heat and the cold messed them up. When we come back the Boy Scouts, by the way we just started a Boy Scout Troop this year, and they are talking about taking over the beautification of the grounds. I have two scouts trying to make Eagle and they are talking about trying to do a beautification job or whatever it is.

Goldie: Are you on a cycle for people to come by and mow your lawns?

Mr. Goolsby: No, the central office does that -- central management. We have a maintenance department that does the mowing and all of that other stuff that you have to do little side things by yourself.

Goldie: What relationship do you think your school has with the total community because I know that you pull children from all over the city and not over in that section of Greensboro?

Mr. Goolsby: Well, we have just started but we had T. Lorillard to adopt us as a school and we just recently had First Home Federal to adopt us and we have had a yard sale and of course, donations that Home Federal is doing. Also what they are doing is what we need most. They are providing tutors to come into the school on Thursdays or whatever time the kids can get a ride home. Sometimes the teachers take them home but the main thing, supervision, tutoring and they have been giving us monetary type situations and plus we have a possibility of two or three other companies becoming involved with us. We are always involved with the different community agencies, like the health department, social services, the juvenile people. We have several situations where we are involved with the people.

Goldie: Do you think the Greensboro community knows about your school? Do you think that about everybody in Greensboro knows about this school and what it offers?

Mr. Goolsby: No, I would have to say no on that. I guess it is my fault in a sense because I've got to get out and do a little publicizing of the school. People know about the school because they have heard at various situations about the school but whenever they come in there and I tell them to come in when they want to. Just come in free and go around the school and look at it and they do it but I need to do some publication of the school, I guess, the positive type situation.

Goldie: How do you feel about the administrative control? Do you think that you have a lot of power at your site?

Mr. Goolsby: I have more power than any other principal in their school because I have all the flexibility that it takes to run this school. I do not have to follow all the policies such as, attendance seven days or you got an F and all that kind of stuff. I have a lot of flexibilities so I fit in my situation and where I am I have more power than anybody else as far as it is concerned.

Goldie: What is your relationship to the central office and the superintendent?

Mr. Goolsby: Oh, I have a lot of support. I have a lot of support from the superintendent and the central office.

Goldie: Do you interact with them very much. Are you down there a lot or is somebody over at your school a lot?

Mr. Goolsby: Yes, almost every day I'm down there or they are over here. As far as decision-making, my decisions have not been overrun.

Goldie: Very good. It sounds like you have a real good relationship with the powers that be so to speak.

Goldie: Now the question that I have on my interview guide is how did the desegregation of schools affect your role as a principal? Do you think that desegregation of schools had anything to do with the creation of your school?

Mr. Goolsby: That was in 1971, wasn't it?

Goldie: Well, they started moving the teachers around. I was not a principal at the time. However, the school that I am working at the present time was formed or came into creation about 1974, because after desegregation came along the dropout rate for the minorities went up and so that is when the people in the community were talking about the dropout rate and how bad it was in Greensboro. So you had clergymen, administrators, teachers, lay people who were concerned about it. That is when we went down to Pinehurst and the idea of the alternative school came up so naturally

it would affect that situation but my role as a principal, no because I cannot speak to that. I was only an assistant principal at the time and I was at a school which was really 52% White and 49% Black.

Goldie: Do you enjoy your job?

Mr. Goolsby: Oh, very much. If not, I wouldn't have stayed in it this long. I've been principal for about thirteen years, assistant principal for four years so when I see students who people have given up on and then they come back and say, "How are you doing, Mr. Goolsby? I'm glad that you were hard on me, etc." That makes me feel good because they have already made it however, you are disappointed in the ones that didn't. My situation is that I have so many bright kids over there who are smart as I don't know what but you can't deal with the attitudes which were not made overnight.

Goldie: You feel that you have made an impact on their lives with the attitudes. You have been able to see some of them turn around--some of your success stories.

Mr. Goolsby: I know for a positive fact that I have. A lot of times you don't want to be too modest or nothing like that but I know that I have made an impact on a lot of kids, otherwise, I wouldn't be doing what I am doing now.

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

Mr. Goolsby: Money. No, I don't really have a problem with the principalship as such. I say they should pay more and people say teachers should make more and I agree with that too. That's all I can say about that.

Goldie: The most rewarding thing and I think you have already eluded to that.

Mr. Goolsby: Yes, when the kids come out that people have given up on and you see them come out and it makes you feel very good.

Goldie: If you had to give some advice to--this study I am doing I'm just dealing with Black high school principals--and you know in the sixties there were over 200 Black high school principals and in 1989, there were only 41 and some of them of alternative schools like you are, but if you had some advice to give to a Black person who was aspiring to become a high school principal, what kind of advice would you give them?

Mr. Goolsby: First of all, be competent. Know what you are doing and have your stones in order or whatever you call it.

going down this road and that is it. Be able to manipulate and all that kind of stuff. That is the way I do mine anyhow.

Goldie: And that has been most successful for you--being flexible.

Mr. Goolsby: Flexibility and following the law.

Goldie: How would you rate your interpersonal skills as an administrator? Do you feel that if you were giving someone some advice, how would you place that on the list of requirements--interpersonal skills--being able to work with other folks?

Mr. Goolsby: Very highly because people are always coming to me with problems, with their personal problems. I have so much in my head it should be bursting open. I give my personal opinion and that is it.

Goldie: Do you have anything to add?

Mr. Goolsby: No.

Goldie: Thank you so much, Mr. Goolsby for sharing with us and taking your time to let me know about your role as a principal. I realize the principalship is a tough role and getting worse and is it the cause of our changing times, do you think?

Mr. Goolsby: Oh yes, It used to be you got a whipping at the school and a whipping at home. Now parents are going to want to whip you. That is the way it goes!

Goldie: It is a tough role but when you find a good administrator you find a good administrator. I've known you through the years and I think you have done an excellent job over there with that program. One thing I want to go back to. The day care that you have. Is it just for the children of the students in your school?

Mr. Goolsby: No, if you go the alternative education program, your kids will be picked up with you but if you go to another high school, then they have to get their own transportation.

Goldie: So the children of any high school student in Greensboro can attend that program.

Mr. Goolsby: Middle grade or high school.

Goldie: That is true--we do have some young, young mothers now days.

Mr. Goolsby: Yes, but I don't see many now since they went

down to the middle grades. It's nothing to see a kid 14, 16 with two kids. Seems a shame. I don't condone the situation but you have to do something for them anyhow you see.

Goldie: Have you all started passing out condoms at school yet?

Mr. Goolsby: We do not do that here. We have no contraception. We have an extension and they go to another place on Devonne Street to do that. That was the big thing they were talking about when they had the clinic coming up. Contraceptives and condoms and all that stuff. We had no idea of doing that kind of stuff you see. But they do go over to Devonne Street which is an extension of that. We do dental work and everything over there.

Goldie: Who do you consider, or do you feel that you had a mentor in your pursuing the principalship?

Mr. Goolsby: Abraham Peeler. There are no if's and and's about it. I don't even have to think about that. That is my second dad.

Goldie: He saw something in you and encouraged you to go on with the principalship. Mr. Peeler has been an outstanding principal himself through the years.

Mr. Goolsby: He sure is. As a matter of fact we were at a principal situation with the assistant superintendent and they had a little program going around where the question you asked was, "Who was the most outstanding person that did so and so?" We had six different groups. Black and White mixed up. Abe Peeler came up in all of them.

Goldie: Was he there? I see him on the street sometimes and he is always bubbling over. He is an exceptional person.

Mr. Goolsby: Every group had his name and there were thirty some people, almost forty people there. We divided up into groups and his name came up in every group. As a matter of fact there was one time he had Mel Swan and Fulmore just downtown assistants. He had Medlin, Fisher in the reading; he had Spencer Gwynn and Mrs. McDougale came too, and Wylie Yours, Shaw over at A & T came too and then myself. I can't remember all those people so many came.

Goldie: Now you'll be naming the folks that you have helped through the years. What I have found in teaching -- and your wife and I taught together for several years -- the thing is the children that gave us the most problems they have come back and said thank you so much and the others just passed along. They just thought they were the means toward the end and they were looking for what they could get out of us but

those others that we spent so much time on would come back and tell us "thank you." And I'm sure that you are going to have that over and over again.

Mr. Goolsby: I've already had that. As a matter of fact I had two kids come back and say, "I sure do appreciate you. We aren't engineers or nothing like that but you taught us good work habits and you told me I wouldn't be any good if I didn't go to work. I don't care how good I was, if I didn't go to work I didn't have a job."

Goldie: I think that is what we need to recognize the fact. That is what school is about -- to produce productive citizens. Everybody is not going to college. Everybody is not going to be an engineer but we need to help them to learn how to follow the law, learn how to keep a good job. When you are an engineer you are making a lot of money doing your job so you can buy more things but the man who is doing the street job is doing the same thing. He has to provide for his family and you just do it in different ways.

Mr. Goolsby: And if he doesn't do it, somebody has to do it. If somebody doesn't pick up that trash today or whatever it is, it affects the whole community. It's a domino effect.

Goldie: I think we ought to help everyone to feel good about what they can do because we need maids to do those rooms when we go on trips, and so take pride in doing those beds and doing whatever you are going to do. I just compliment people on everything that they do because that is part of it. That is life.