

INTERVIEW

with

LINWOOD EDWARDS

Principal
Dudley High School

January 11, 1991

by Goldie F. Wells

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Goldie: I am in the office of Mr. Linwood Edwards who is the principal of Dudley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina. The date is January 11, 1991. Mr. Edwards, I wish that you would introduce yourself and say that you know this interview is being recorded.

Mr. Edwards: Thank you Mrs. Wells. I am Linwood Edwards, principal of Dudley High School and I am well aware that the interview is being recorded.

Goldie: I am doing some research. I am going to interview principals who were high school principals in 1964, of Black high schools and principals who were principals in 1989. What I really want to focus on is to see if the perceptions of the principals in 1989, are the same as the perceptions of principals in 1964. So I am going to ask you some questions and I want you to tell me some things and just be yourself.

Goldie: I want you to tell me how you became a high school principal.

Mr. Edwards: Well, I came into administration after coaching and teaching physical education and health for a long time. First of all, I was an assistant principal at a middle school and at a high school then I became principal of an elementary school in hopes of moving to the secondary area. This was some twelve years ago. When the opportunity became available I was somewhat shocked at the elementary school because I learned on Friday that there was a vacancy at this particular job and of course I moved into it the following Monday.

Goldie: That quick? Now, how many years did all this take?

Mr. Edwards: In terms of my education into the principalship is twelve. This is a secondary school with a career goal but it just became available so quickly and I was approached and had an opportunity to apply for it and so I accepted.

Goldie: Tell us something about Dudley High School.

Mr. Edwards: Dudley High School is very rich in tradition. It is sixty years old. We have 1154 students and 81 staff members and that is certified staff and then of course some non-certified members. We have three assistant principals and myself. We are basically a Black school with 96% Black but from that population we have people coming from different neighborhoods in our communities. Therefore they are bringing their different lifestyles and cultures and level of socio-economic living if you had to label them. But we do

aspire for academic excellence. We are not where we want to be in terms of achieving school-wide but we have some very bright, talented students here as well as some of those who need an extra push or challenge to get their education. We have a rich heritage. As I said our school is sixty years old, so we have the support of a lot of alumni as well wishers in the community because at one time historically this school was a model school for North Carolina in terms of being laid out well in a facility in the organization. We credit most of this to the first principal. So generally I don't know if I'm answering your questions or not.

Goldie: I'm going to ask you something about your school and responsibilities that you have here and I am going to give you specific areas so that we can target those. Tell me about the school and the responsibilities that you have and how you deal with them. Tell me how you deal with supervision of personnel and how you select your teachers.

Mr. Edwards: Supervision of personnel--we have an administrative team here and that team consists of the three assistant principals, the athletic director, the chairman of the Guidance Department and myself and I chair that administrative team. For supervision in terms of performance is done both formally and informally and we share this in that different people are given a responsibility for the correct form of supervision and of course, my job is to keep this moving smoothly and to talk to others to keep everybody toughen and abreast. We try to meet the deadlines in terms of formal observations and if there are ways that we can provide service, supervise and hold people accountable for certain things we do that as a team. Selection of teachers is done--there is a pool from the administration in the central office. From that pool we make sure that the records are properly filed, the application, certification and all of that. Then the interviews are done here at this campus. Of course we select people and send our recommendations down town but for the most part we do hire them.

Goldie: Curriculum and instruction.

Mr. Edwards: In addition to the other tasks that are going one I try to assume the role of being an instructional leader at the school with the school-wide roles and the programs, coordinating all the services of the various departments. We depend heavily on our department chairs. I don't mean to indicate that we are obligating our responsibilities as far as working with them but we do depend on them. For instance, we have an essay that someone will want to try in our school so we go directly to the English Department and we will talk this over as a group and then make our decision. The Science Fair is another way so we operate in the departments. So this is the way that we supervise our instruction and if there is a change in the curriculum it usually will start at

the level of the department. Of course we are locked into the city-wide instruction also.

Goldie: Discipline.

Mr. Edwards: Discipline is a big problem because we share that also. We have one person, Robert Edwards, who is responsible for it but at the same time we do not hesitate to come in and assist him with discipline. All of us are well aware of all the standard procedures, rules and regulations and we do take actions on whatever the situation is but for the most part Robert Edwards has it and the referrals come to him and if they start stacking up we give him some relief in terms of working with him.

Goldie: Transportation.

Mr. Edwards: We have a city-wide--we have eight--some buses that are housed here but they also feed the elementary schools. We have a person city-wide who is basically responsible for that so we coordinate the services with him but in terms of the bus schedule or rearranging the bus times or substitutes that would be handled by that coordinator.

Goldie: So you don't have that responsibility. Utilization of funds.

Mr. Edwards: I'm assuming that you are talking about the general funds that are allocated from the state. Pete Green, our assistant principal for instruction, is the coordinator for this service. We all have input in it. He has to do staff development funding and the capital projects I mostly coordinate that. But for staff development activities and instructional supplies, all of it is subject to my approval of course but Pete Green is the prime mover of this particular segment of it.

Goldie: Cafeteria management.

Mr. Edwards: Once again that falls under our area so we work closely with Robert Edwards also and then we have a manager who reports directly to him and then of course he will in turn operate from a city-wide general frame of operation. There are not a lot of decisions and things like that.

Goldie: Mainly you just make sure that there is a cafeteria and the students go to the cafeteria.

Mr. Edwards: We do take care of our students as far as supervision and making sure that they are in line properly.

Goldie: Buildings and grounds.

Mr. Edwards: We have nine and one-half custodians and once

again Mr. Edwards works with them and we also assist him again. The coach has three of them over there in the gym and it is separate and apart because of the evening activities. He supervises those directly. But for the others we have some coming night and some coming day and different schedules that we have.

Goldie: Community relations. I think you eluded to that earlier about the support but how do you think Dudley fits into this community?

Mr. Edwards: In Greensboro. I think it is very well received in as much as there are so many people who graduated from here and they have vested interest here and they have their children in here now and this is fifth or sixth generations that have been here. The community really is anxious about making sure that Dudley provides for a quality educational experience for its students as well as a place in which community people can rally around and its a focus point. We do a number of weekend activities and things in the auditorium and gospel singing and this type thing. Of course we have the old timers returning for the games and enjoying talking about the old days so it is well received by the community.

Goldie: Do you think it is definitely set up a Black school?

Mr. Edwards: I think so. Let me set you an example. We have some White students here and we do work with them very closely and I want to point that out very clearly and we do not get into discriminating in terms of getting them involved in the programs or what have you. We have about twenty-some organizations and they are mostly like giving scholarships that are earmarked especially for Dudley and some of them are small but at the same time it lets you know that they are really interested in the school.

Goldie: Do you feel that you have a different type of power because you are at a Black school? Do you feel that you would administrate the same if you were at a White school?

Mr. Edwards: I think in my style what I try to do consciously and unconsciously I guess is to support my constituency--that means the patrons, the parents, the students but wherever I am--so to answer your question, I don't think that I would change the mode of operations but the emphasis may be on a different thing. I think the pride that we see in a child growing and achieving is universal and I don't think it is that much different.

Goldie: How much administrative power and control do you feel you have over this school and your responsibilities?

Mr. Edwards: Well, that is a very good question. I try not

to dabble over that end too much. I know that whatever goes on here is my responsibility be it good or bad. I try to appeal to people who are my subordinates that this is their school too and that they cannot be successful unless I am successful and we are a team and I can't be successful unless they are successful. So when it comes to power and control it is something that we don't talk about. I realize that half of the buck stops here and some things we just say no, you can't do that. I realize that but at the same time we do a lot of dialogue and if people can convince me that we need to do it this way then we match and try to move on and get the best job done.

Goldie: So that you share equally.

Mr. Edwards: Yes, we do that all the way down the line.

Goldie: How much did the desegregation of schools affect your role as a principal?

Mr. Edwards: Quite honestly, from a personal standpoint looking back, it delayed my entry as far as moving into administration. You were talking about integration back in 1974. I was a coach when we started integrating the schools I moved to Carson Junior High from Lincoln. Well there were three of us-Black teachers, to move there , a predominantly White school in 1966, and then of course I moved to Page and then after Page I left and I had some interests in administration but I really wasn't moving as fast in my own department in P.E. So I left the system and went to a private school and stayed six years. So while the big step in integration came I was there. So I felt it but didn't feel it but I am well aware that during those times in hind sight I should have stayed and then I would have been ready in a little more quickly at age 34 as opposed to age 38-40.

Goldie: Where was the private school?

Mr. Edwards: Greensboro Day School.

Goldie: Oh, you taught there?

Mr. Edwards: Six years.

Goldie: Well, do you enjoy your job?

Mr. Edwards: I do. I enjoy my job. I have a lot to do in terms of interacting with the kids and working with them and fraternizing with them and even with staff too. My biggest hang up is that I don't think unless you are in the role that people can appreciate the number of things that you have to do and that is frustrating because I am anxious to do everything that I am able to do and I want to do it well so it creates some anxiety so you have to start prioritizing and

that is the easy word to say but if you ignore this then that arises and if you ignore that then this rises. I think that you can relate to that having been in education. I think it is just one of the job hazards but in terms of interacting with students, with teachers and the secretarial staff I enjoy that and a new day has a new challenge.

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

Mr. Edwards: Well, I just eluded to it a minute ago the wearing of the many hats and I think because we are public service people they want us to do a lot of things. We just finished a conversation with a young lady who has been criminally assaulted and of course we are supposed to provide some counseling and those kinds of things for her and have a talk with mom and then we are also dealing with the press. External things which may not have anything to do with how the student has mastered this math problem. Society has come to believe that the school can teach drivers ed, sex ed, aids ed, every kind of ed that you can. Sure we are supposed to meet the needs but at some time we have to start talking about some math, reading, and writing.

Goldie: Especially when we are going to be getting a report card.

Mr. Edwards: So you see we are taking on too much and it is society's expectations. That is the biggest hangup I have and I think one day I'll write about it.

Goldie: What do you consider the most rewarding thing about your principalship?

Mr. Edwards: I eluded to it earlier. I think graduation day you see the kids crying thinking that they are happy to be out and maybe not me but I see them telling their teachers that and knowing out of all this hassle that you have given them they knew that you were right. I like working with the staff and ours is a jovial staff. They tell a joke and they tell a joke on me and if they learn a good joke they pass it on and it puts some humor in the work place and I enjoy that aspect of it.

Goldie: What's the small number of Black principals--there were only 41 on the list sent to me from the State Department and I found out some of them were principals of traditional--not traditional schools but alternative schools so they won't be good for my research. But if you had to give some advice to a Black person, male or female, that was aspiring to be a high school principal in the state of North Carolina what advice would you give that person?

Mr. Edwards: Well, first of all it depends on where they

are. If they are young and in school and they just started to have their second or third year of teaching I would say first of all to get as much training as you can and be aware that things are changing all the time. My advice is to be able to cope beyond the level of victimization. Victimization means that you may be overpassed for a job simply because you are Black or you are a male or female but at the same time I don't mean for you to sound like you are beating your head on the wall. But let's not dwell on that. Let's make our case and your point and then move on. But I think sometimes we get caught up in it and it's real but if you plan to succeed you have to go beyond victimization and move on to something else. Move on to the next level of achievement. I think the main PR in public relations aspect is working with kids and the people around--if you are a teacher you ought to try to head up some committees or make yourself highly visible. Use your talents--whatever talents you have and that would be my advice to them because I think if you are good people will find you.

Goldie: Well, do you have anything else that you would like to say?

Mr. Edwards: Well, basically I have enjoyed this but I do think we as a state probably passed up some of the best administrators in the world simply because of race, religion, region and all of this and until such time that we can get pass this one hurdle this is one of the biggest problems in North Carolina. We need to become more culturally aware and I not talking primarily about the Black administrator, even some Asian people who come, the native American, I think this is important for all of us as school people to be able to recognize talent and give those people an opportunity to work with the students.

Goldie: I appreciate you taking the time, Mr. Edwards. I know that you have a busy schedule and I know that you have a meeting with your doctor in a few minutes and I appreciate you taking the time. This has been quite informative. You have gotten right to the point and the information has been very good.

Mr. Edwards: I have enjoyed talking with you and I wish you good luck in your endeavors and we are proud of you.