

An interview with Mrs. Bernice Cox Lowe

June 29, 1993

Presented in loving memory of Mrs. Lowe

to her daughters and grandchildren

Rick Smith, a peer teacher

June 8, 2012

SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY OR SCHOOL IN COMMUNITY:
CONFLICTING VALUES IN CONTROL AND
PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE	ii
CHAPTER	
I. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	1
Background	1
Westfield Community	10
Historical Perspective	17
II. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE	42
III. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES	59
Background	59
Rationale	59
The Retired Teachers	62
An Added Proposal	66
Interviews and Interpretations	68
Mrs. Gladys Addison Jessup	68
Mrs. Vera Cox Smith	86
Mrs. Roxie Hunter Payne Christian	116
Mrs. Ersie Pell McIntyre	154
Mrs. Lena Matthews Smith	197
Mrs. Bernice Cox Lowe	214
Mr. Fletcher Vance Dearmin, III	255
IV. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: A COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS	304
Boundaries	305
Socioeconomic	305
Political Boundaries	306
Democratic/Republican	306
Stokes/Surry	306
Religion	307
Race	308
Others	309
Transients	310

CHAPTER	Page
Gender	311
Boundaries Within Boundaries	312
Integrity	313
Family, Churches, School	313
Community History, Traditions, and Personal Relationships	314
The Community School	315
Operational Functions	315
Symbolic Functions	317
Loss	322
Change	325
Place	329
Teachers' Reactions to the Interviews ...	338
 V. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE	340
Introduction	340
School and Community: Historical and Theoretical Interpretations	346
A Conversation With Teachers of Both the Old and New Westfield Schools	357
Personal Reflections	384
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	392
 APPENDIX A. MAPS	396
 APPENDIX B. MEMORABILIA	401

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The purpose of this research was to study (1) the dilemma of teachers' professional demands versus community expectations and (2) the issues regarding local control of schools versus centralization and the relationship between these two issues.

The history of a particular community is first presented, followed by historical research based on the revisionist works of Michael Katz, David Tyack and Carol Kaestle to reveal some of the origins and dimensions of the dilemma involved in professional versus community control.

Using the methodology of Alan Peshkin, who studied the effects of centralization upon a community, six retired community teachers and a school principal were interviewed. Following each interview, an interpretation was given. A collective analysis of the interviews was then presented.

This study concludes that the rise of the professionals, who have come to power to dominate educational decision-making for the past century, has eroded local communities' control over their schools. Local teachers are often in conflict between their

professional and community responsibilities, particularly in the area of merger or consolidation, for they see the community school, along with their families and their church, as an integral part of their community.

Professionals tend to view schools as communities within themselves.

Mrs. Bernice Cox Lowe Interview:

June 29, 1993

Our conversation began with Mrs. Lowe's early life.

"I started right above the school [Ridge-Westfield] there. I don't know if you know the farm that Delmar Joyce owns, but that was our homeplace. During the depression, they said that my Daddy lost it. But, nobody had a deed to the land, until it was sold for taxes. It was advertised for auction and Delmar bought it for the taxes owed. Nobody came to the auction and that is how he got a deed.

"Ten of us were born in the house. It was a little two-room house with two rooms upstairs, one for the boys and one for the girls. Mamma and Daddy slept downstairs, and we had the kitchen. We grew just about everything. We grew apples, peaches, cherries, and walnuts. We had bushels and bushels of wheat. When he would sell his tobacco in the fall, he would buy flour by the hundred-pound. He would buy hundred-pound sacks of rice, I remember that. He would buy a hundred pounds of sugar. He would buy cases of salmon. We did not know what it was to be hungry. Mamma canned everything that could be thought of. He grew huge watermelon patches. We had our

own cows, hogs, and chickens. We all ate at the table together. There was no such thing as television. We didn't even have a radio when I was growing up. We got one when I was in about the seventh grade. We got the first television after I had finished college." Her parents built the house in which Mrs. Lowe now lives with her husband Tom and an older sister, in 1943. The lot was purchased from Rufus East, who needed some money, by her brother, Thomas Woodrow Cox, (nicknamed "Gorrell" after a tobacco warehouseman) and sister Julia. "The title was in Julia's name, but all of us contributed.

"My Daddy and Mother believed in education. They were not educated people. Mama taught herself to read. She said that all she ever got out of school was a blue-back speller. That was the only book she ever had. But she was a very, very good reader, but could not write her name. She read novels, but she mostly read the Bible. She loved to recite the poem, "The House by the Side of the Road", which was what she always wanted so that she could help someone. She got her wish before she died. She could recite any number of poems, she just had a love of poetry."

Mrs. Lowe, the youngest of the Cox children, began school in 1929. "I attended Chestnut Ridge School. When they combined the Westfield Colored School and the Chestnut Ridge School, they called it the Ridge Westfield

School. Chestnut Ridge was located right where Ridge Westfield is now. I expect I walked eight miles a day to school. We had an adjoining farm, but the people who owned the land between the farms would not allow us to cross their land, so we had to walk around their farm. We didn't miss. We went those ninety days or whatever it was, for the six month school term. I think we had good teachers.

"I don't remember that much about the first grades, but what really impressed me was when I got up to about the sixth grade. I wasn't a good reader. But the teacher kept me in one day and said, 'You can read this.' He gave me a passage in a geography book. He said, 'You read this without missing any words and read with expression, or you aren't going to get any recess.' He did the whole class like that. I was the first in the class that completed that. He was teaching the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades; three classes in one room. I thought he was doing a fantastic job. There was never any such thing as getting up and doing what you pleased, and talking or disturbing other classes. You had to sit there and work while he was working with the other kids. It was pretty enjoyable. For the extra curricula activities we had baseball, basketball, and a glee club. Our glee club went all over the county singing. I wasn't allowed to sing, I had asthma, and they didn't like my voice. But the glee

club went to the white schools, the white churches, and all around. They were an outstanding group. They even performed at the country club in Mount Airy.

"I stayed at the Ridges until I finished the eighth grade. I attended Atkins High School [in Winston-Salem, NC], because there was not a school for us in the county then. They had a school, but it was in a house in Mount Airy, but my sisters and Mamma didn't want me to go there. They thought that I wouldn't get what they wanted me to have. We had no transportation, anyway. There were no buses. The best thing they could do for me was to put me where I could walk to school. I went to Atkins and stayed with my sister, Zelma. She lived about fifteen minutes from the school. She did not have many conveniences. She had three kids and three rooms. She lived in a long straight apartment with a toilet on the back porch. She was a strict lady, I had to study. My sister was a strict disciplinarian. If I went somewhere, I had to be back on time. Zelma was raising her children by herself. The way my parents paid her was by carrying her hams, chickens, and most of her food. They helped pay her house rent which was fifteen or twenty dollars a month, which was still a lot of money back then. When I went to Atkins High, there were poor records from my school. I don't remember carrying any records from my school. I just registered and they placed me. They probably had about

12

ten freshmen classes and they put me next to the bottom to see what I could do. I stayed in there for two weeks and they moved me to the second highest group. They didn't put me in the top group, because they didn't think that I could take Latin. Latin was taught in the top eighth grade class. I made it from there, every year I made it. I made the honor roll some years, and some years I didn't. I stayed there for four years of high school, and I graduated in the top ten of my class. I would come home in the summer and go back in September. In the summertime I helped Daddy to plow. I would hold the plow while he guided the mule."

She also helped a brother who was a tenant farmer on Toms Creek Road, who gave her a small patch of tobacco which provided her with funds. Mrs. Lowe explained that when, due to age, her father was unable to "house" the tobacco, by placing the sticks of green tied tobacco on tier poles in the barn, she would do all of the housing for him. This very strenuous work was normally done only by men.

"When I finished, my parents decided that I was smart enough to go college. They didn't have any money", added Mrs. Lowe quickly with a laugh. I then asked her more about the educational system for blacks in Surry County at that time. She explained that the school in Mount Airy was the only high school for blacks in the

county. There was no bus transportation until she was a junior in high school, about 1939.

There was a small private Baptist boarding school in Winston-Salem where "two of my brothers and three or four of my sisters attended. They got a preacher out of Winston named Pitts, Robert McCarther, and Julia Cox [older sister] went to Raleigh to petition for a bus. They got one bus, but that high school produced some pretty smart people." These included an older sister who attended after Mrs. Lowe started at Atkins High. She lived with a lady in Mount Airy. Mrs. Lowe explained that her parents felt "she was old enough to take care of herself, and not to get into any trouble." Her sister, Julia, "left home in the early '20s and lived in Winston-Salem with Zelma. She and Zelma went to Winston and worked for some Jews. Zelma was working so that Julia could go to school. She kept those kids, and that is how Julia got through high school and college. She went to the president of Winston-Salem State Teachers' College and told him that she did not have any money, but she wanted to go to school. Our people always believed in a lot of prayer. He told her, 'You just go to school. If anyone says anything, you just send them to me. You just take this slip and if you ever get anything you can give us something. That is how she got through school, without any

12

money, just what my sister could work in service and give her a little. That was all that they had."

Mrs. Lowe explained that her sister, Julia Cox Flowers, graduated and became a teacher at Ridge-Westfield for forty-five years. "Back then you could teach if you had finished seventh grade. She taught before she even went to high school. All these people around here who were of the same age always said, 'You were my teacher.'

"I don't know where they got the money to pay for my tuition, I really don't. It wasn't that high then. The first year I was there, I didn't work, but then the second year I got a job in the cafeteria, and that helped to pay my way. Later I worked in the dormitory. Then the girls couldn't go out at night. The matron told them at bedtime that they had to go to bed. I worked in the dormitory at the desk to check to see if the girls were in or out of the dorm. They gave me credit for that, and that is really how I got through school."

Mrs. Lowe noted that her clothes were "just whatever there was. I was grateful. None of the kids who were better dressed made any fun of me. I had the best of friends. The best of students were my friends. I don't know how that happened, but it happened. I was a little "raggedy" girl going to school. They were always trying to save at home. I remember homecoming when the freshman class was supposed to be dressed in red and white. Then

1/6

the girls wore white socks, and they had got me some black and white saddle oxfords. They made me a skirt, and bought me a white button-up sweater in Mount Airy. The skirt did not fit correctly," she said laughing, "but no one made fun of me, I remember that so well. All the other kids had things that were ready-made. But I was right in there! Nobody would believe it, but I played basketball in high school and college. I was supposed to be a pretty good basketball player," said Mrs. Lowe with a chuckle. "It was a lot of fun. After I played basketball, I got to be a cheerleader. I was just blessed to be in the better things at school. I realize it more and more now. As for recreation, there was not much. There was a lot of discipline. I came out in four years, graduating in 1945. I think I did well.

"When I came out of school, there was a lot of jealousy, because I was the first person in the black community who was sent out of the community and graduated from college. Julia had finished college first in the summers. Mr. Jones family in Mount Airy were the first in the county.

"There were two teachers at Chestnut Ridge. My sister Julia was one of the teachers. She went to the black committeemen and told them that she had a sister who had graduated from college and that 'we need her at home and here in the community.' Some of the committeemen were

for hiring me and some were against it. I got the job. When the Surry County Board of Education heard about me, they wanted to give me a job, to see what a home girl could do. I taught the first year and worked under Julia. They gave me the sixth, seventh and eighth grades, fresh out of college. We did well that year.

I also inquired of the Westfield Colored School on Toms Creek Road. "It was just a two-room school. We had a school put up by Julius Rosenwald, with the parents contributing. We had four big classrooms. One of the classrooms could be opened up with folding doors to make an auditorium. They gave some fantastic plays in there. "When I came there was just the two of us. We worked to get the attendance up, so that the next year we got another teacher. We had to get the average daily membership up. Let me tell you about the lunchroom. The kids didn't have anything for lunch. Julia started the lunchroom. In the back of the Rosenwald school was a large hall. They turned that into a kitchen and put a stove in there. They bought little round tin pans, and at first they only had beans for lunch, and something like potatoes. After I came we started getting commodities. We got an icebox, we didn't have a refrigerator. We hired a cook. Then it seemed that the school just started growing. Then the third year [1948] they decided to combine the schools. There was not a bus when I began. A

8

man was hired to haul the students that lived a long way from the school in a car. Later, the enrollment dropped and we were cut to two teachers, Julia and I. There was talk of moving everyone to Mount Airy. People really wanted it moved to Mount Airy, because that was going to make Jones School bigger. We wanted to keep our school so badly.

"Mr. Tharrington, the Surry County Schools Superintendent came out one day in 1950, and said, 'We're trying to decide if we are going to build a school here or put it in Mount Airy for the black people.' Then they had some people come up from Raleigh. We had no idea that anybody was coming. But I was in one room with a group of children and going back and forth to another room because there were so many children in the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Julia was doing the same thing with the first, second, and third graders. Those eighth-grade kids were so smart. They were just great helpers. When they would learn something, they were out trying to teach the others. When those people walked in from Raleigh, the kids were so good. There was a group sitting here working, and a group over here working, and then this group in another room working. When they walked in, they were surprised. I was just walking back and forth from room to room. I heard a man say 'I've never come across anything like this, anywhere we have been. If we build a

19

school, this is where it ought to be. And that is how we got the new building in 1956 that is up there now. They came in and caught us as we were just moving back and forth, working with the kids. Everybody was working. If a child needed some help and another could help him, they would do it. The kids became teachers.

"Katie Hatcher, [currently a Chapter I teacher at Shoals Elementary School] was a local girl who had gone to Jones in Mount Airy and Winston-Salem State. She was a cousin, and then my sister became her step-mother. We got her in. After that we got another teacher from Winston-Salem. But she did not prove to do very well. She didn't help out in the community. All she did was to come on Monday, stay until Friday and then leave the community to go back to Winston-Salem.

"I think it is very important for a teacher to live within her community, because teaching school does not stop at the end of the day, that is a continuous process. If you are going to be a good citizen, you have got to have an interest in the community where they are living. They have got to be interested in you. We found that by working with our kids through Sunday, there was some respect they had, that the kids don't have now. They had respect for you. If they did something at church on Sunday, we were able to discipline them when they came to school on Monday. We would tell them that that was wrong.

20

I won't call myself bragging, but we were building some good citizens. Out of that group we were teaching, nobody had any involvement with the law. You did not hear of them getting into a lot of trouble, because there was a kind of respect.

"Right around 1956, the kids started bringing knives to school. One day I decided I was going to examine them. I said, 'Everybody has got to turn their pockets inside out. There is nobody in here that is bad, because bad people don't go to this school. There are none here but good people. I am the worst thing here, and you know that I am good. Now all of you turn out your pockets.' I just found some of them the other night, ten or twelve knives, that the kids had in their pockets. Nobody resisted giving them to me, everybody gave those knives up. I don't know if you could do that now, from what I can hear. But they were good about turning those knives in. We had very few discipline problems.

I commented that I noticed the respect that all of the children had for Mrs. Lowe from the first time I began teaching at Westfield in 1967. "When the kids went into that new building [1956], that did something to them, and it did something for the parents. They found out that they could do something, that they could be somebody, if they really tried. They could say, 'Bernice Cox went to school, and her parents didn't have any money. We are

21

going to go.' Every family that I know of in this community have had at least three or four college graduates. I am not saying it is a result of [my efforts], but it built something into them that they then decided that they could do it. They didn't always have to have money to go to school. Eugene McCather had twelve children who attended Ridge-Westfield. I missed one, Deborah. Everyone of them finished college, and they did not have any money, I know they didn't. They finally got to the place that they could get loans, but in the beginning they could not. Another family that you know about is the Jessups. John Jessup has been a principal in Winston-Salem. I taught him, he got his foundation at Ridge-Westfield. We were proud of our little community. We tried to instill in our kids that they could be somebody if they wanted to be.

"This school was a source of pride for them. They didn't know what an indoor toilet was. All of them were tenant farmers, who had to pay with half their crops. This was how we ran our lunchroom. The kids would come to school and say that mama or daddy did not have any money and would ask to eat on credit. Yes. Some of them were faithful to pay the money back. When I made out the lunch report I had some who could eat free and some who paid. If they didn't pay, that meant that I had been embezzling the money. So at the end of the school year if they came

22

up short, I had to see that that money was put in. The best I can remember I was making \$125.00 per month.

"We had no secretary. I had to do all of the reports. Julia had been the principal, but as quickly as she could, she put it off on me. They [Surry County Board of Education] were glad to give it to me, because I had an A certificate and a degree. Julia had worked and gone to summer schools to get her A certificate. They gave the principalship to me and I did all of the bookkeeping and bus reports when we got a bus in 1959.

"Our kids would ride the [Jones] high school bus which would put them off at Ridge-Westfield. They finally gave us one bus, and that bus had to cover most of the county and part of Stokes County, too, because they [Stokes County] didn't have a school near Westfield.

I noted that when the Stokes County students were riding the buses to Westfield, we had a total of six buses to cover the district, and four after the Stokes students could no longer ride.

"The bus was just packed with kids. Those that were able, who lived not far away, walked to school. Until then they were hauled in cars."

I then wanted to talk to Mrs. Lowe about the loss of a school. She had lost Ridge-Westfield which she and her family had attended and which she and her sister had so devotedly served throughout their careers.

02

"Well, the law was passed that the schools had to be integrated. We did have some white kids from the Flat Rock community who said they were coming to Ridge-Westfield to keep the school from being closed. They lived in a black community. Their children had played together. They had just as soon their children come there as anywhere, just as long as they were taught. They were tenant farmers, too, poor people. It did not materialize. The Surry superintendent had told us that if the white students came, the school would not be closed. But, they did that for maybe two or three weeks and later they closed the school down. This was in 1966.

"It was sad. It was a sad time, because we realized that we were losing something. We would probably be losing our culture and our identity and everything. We would not have as big a say in our school as we had been having over our kids. We tried to prepare the children. We told them that regardless of what happened, 'You go to school to learn. You go to school to improve yourself, to help improve you race. I don't care what happens in school, the thing that you are going for is to learn. If the teacher is teaching anything, you get it. What you get in your head, nobody can take it away from you. Your purpose in going to school is to learn, not to fight and keep up a disturbance. It doesn't make any difference what they call you.' You know then 'nigger' was a big

24

word. People didn't know that a nigger who had no particular color, but was just a low-down person. They thought that was referring to them. We tried to instill in them that that did not make a bit of difference, unless they decided to let it. I said 'Somebody can call you a dog. You look down and see if you've got four legs. That would make a dog. You wouldn't be a dog, that would just be a lie. If you act like what they call you then that is what you are.' I really think that it helped our kids to make it through."

I asked Mrs. Lowe if the identity was indeed lost. "It probably happened to some of the kids. But I can truthfully say that when I went to Westfield I didn't lose anything. I gained a lot of friends. I wouldn't have wanted to have been treated any better. I went there to work and gain because that was my job. I knew that some of the parents were skeptical of me. Even some of them did not want their kids in my room, because they didn't know me. I can understand that. I wouldn't want my child going somewhere that I didn't know what was going to happen to them if I had been told all the time that 'These people are "boogeymen," they'll get you!' I remember so very well one little girl. Her mother did not want her in my room, she just did everything she could to keep her out. At the end of the school, the child cried because

25

she did not want to be promoted and said, 'I won't get to be in Mrs. Lowe's room. I think I gained some friends.'

This was a revelation to me. I started teaching at Westfield in 1967 only one year after integration and saw no problems at all. Mrs. Lowe told me that integration went the smoothest at Westfield of any school in the county. I had thought that integration at Westfield had occurred while I was at college, for there had been two black girls who attended East Surry High during my senior year of 1963-1964.

"The first year [1966] I started teaching [at Westfield] I think that I had the ideal class. There was Jeannette Hunter, Sherri Jessup, Phil Sutphin and Mark Tilley. I think that their parents had told them to be respectful. It seemed to be something different about the kids. They were so nice and so mannerly. None of them gave me any trouble. I was teaching the sixth grade and I hadn't taught the sixth grade in a good while, but that was just an ideal class. I won't ever forget them. They were a nice group of kids. Out of that group I had two black girls, Ann Ceasar and Vicky McCarther. All the rest of them were white kids. It was a big class, about thirty-five or forty.

"The next year [1967] Mr. Norman Smith came as principal. I had been looking at the special education kids. My heart just went out to them. I felt that I

26

could do something for those kids. I guess we had some retarded kids at Ridge-Westfield, but there were not that many of them together. We didn't have a special class for them, they were just integrated with the other kids. I was going to lunch one day with Mr. Smith and I told him that I would like to teach those kids. Now some of the black teachers said they were forced into special education, but I asked for it. I stayed there until it was required that I have a special certificate. I was not going back to school, it was too near retirement, and I moved to the fourth grade. But I enjoyed those kids."

I then asked Mrs. Lowe how she felt about Westfield School being closed and if she saw it as being moved out of the community. "I do see it as being moved out of the community. That was a landmark and that is something that the people of the community just looked forward to. I don't believe they will continue to have the closeness that they had with each other. That was their center. The center of their meetings and everything that they desired to do centered around that school. This is almost like setting up a new community, that is the way that I feel about it. Closing a school down like that is almost like losing a member of the family because it has become so close to the people. This is the second school that I have lost, I really felt close to Westfield because the people there were so nice. I was the only black teacher

there. There was never any discrimination against me in any way. My nephew Robert Leo Cox went there for half a year, that first year, but he didn't stay. He went to work for the Yadkin Valley Economic Development. He thought he was getting a promotion. He was young and didn't understand that you give some and you take some. I just went in there like another person, and that is the way they treated me, the whole community. I had very little difficulty with any of the parents."

I commented that Mrs. Lowe not only had the respect of the black community and students, but that her reputation had preceded her to Westfield. "A lot of the kids I taught, I didn't know that I knew a lot of their parents when I was growing up. We were surrounded by white people. We were the only black people in the community and had grown up playing together. The white students would come and tell me that I had played with their grandparents. My brother had lived with your granddaddy for years."

We then talked about local control of the schools. I asked her whether, when she first started teaching at Chestnut Ridge School, the local community had more input into the school. "They did. They had more say, and it seemed that it caused their interest to be higher. I think that there should be a lot of local control in the community. Because, who would want to do anything better.

A
2

A community is just like a home. As a community grows so grow the people within the community. Naturally the people who live in Westfield are going to be more interested in the students than the people who live in Dobson or Raleigh or Washington, DC. The people who live in the community can do more for the community. States are built upon communities. If every group is interested in its own community and works to see that you have a good community, [then there are] good citizens in that community. Good citizens are built in the schools. If the teachers are interested in the kids and the community and try to see that everyone becomes a good citizen, that is going to spread out across the state, and from the state to the nation. I think that what has really happened to cause us to be in such a bad shape in America with so much crime and violence is because people have lost interest in their communities. Someone has taken control of their communities and the citizens have decided to let them run it, and nobody is running anything. Everybody is just going wild, the kids are going wild. They have lost respect for the teachers. They have lost respect for the law enforcement officers. The law enforcement officers are supposed to be built within the community. We aren't supposed to have to go to Winston-Salem to find someone to serve in Surry County, that's not right. That is the same thing that I say about

teachers. A local teacher will do more good than one you bring in from the outside, because he or she is more interested in everything that takes place in that community, because he or she is trying to build a better place to live. So naturally he or she is going to be more interested than a person who just comes for five days a week and can't wait for time to leave."

Mrs. Lowe noted earlier that at Chestnut-Ridge they had a fourth teacher from Winston-Salem who came for only five days per week. "That's all. She wouldn't live in the community. She wouldn't board with anyone. All the money she made went back to that county. She took the money from our county and took it back to her county to spend", said Mrs. Lowe laughing. "That wasn't the reason she didn't come back. She got a better job."

Mrs. Lowe mentioned that there was a local school committee made up of three black citizens. "They tried to select them from a wide area, probably as large as Westfield and Flat Rock School Districts combined. They tried to get one from every section, the white local committee, too. Mr. Hauser's daddy was one, and so was Glenn Payne. Sometimes if we had any problems with the black school, we could go to them and get it settled. The black committee could go to the superintendent but sometimes he would send them back and tell them to settle

19

it within the community. Then we would get together with the white committee and work everything out."

I then asked Mrs. Lowe about her experiences in teaching any of her own three daughters. "I taught LaShene [currently a teacher of exceptional children at Westfield School]. She will tell you that maybe I was one of the toughest teachers she had. I taught her in the seventh and eighth grades at Ridge-Westfield. It seemed to me that maybe I was stricter on her than I was on some of the other children. The other kids were always looking to see if she was the pet, if I was making any difference."

I then asked Mrs. Lowe how she thought the moving of the school would affect the community. Mrs. Lowe thought for a moment and said, "That is a hard question. I believe that the community is going to lose its interest in some of its meetings. That was a meeting place where they could meet for someone who was sick or disadvantaged. I don't believe that they are going to have the same freedom that they had when the school was right here in Westfield. I may be wrong, but I don't think they will have that same privilege that they had of doing things as a community when it was a local school. It is still a local school, but there are other communities involved."

Mrs. Lowe felt that the black community never came to see Westfield School as their own school after

Ridge-Westfield was merged into Westfield School in 1966. "The parents didn't attend the PTA meetings the way they did when they were at their own school. They didn't come to see about their children or to see what they were doing. Only a few of the parents came to see about their kids. Those were probably those whose kids started out as first-graders at Westfield. But those who had had children up at Ridge-Westfield School never really felt that they were a part of the school. They felt as though they were outsiders. That is one of the problems. It may not be this way at the new school that they have built, because the people know one another. They will all be in a new place together. Everything is going to be new. But when the school is already there and established, those going in feel that 'I am an outsider. This is not really mine. This is their school and we are just coming to it.'"

I asked Mrs. Lowe if she felt that the people of Westfield would come to see the new school as a part of the community. "Maybe they will."

I commented that I knew personally that many of the black students over the years felt that Westfield was their school, especially the Cokleys, relatives of Mrs. Lowe. "Yes they did. That was just as much their school as anyone's. That is because their kids started

2

kindergarten there. It was the only school that they knew, that made the difference."

Mrs. Lowe explained that the Ridge-Westfield School had been sold to the Chestnut Ridge Primitive Baptist Church which was located next door. This provided a focus, a center for meetings for the black community. She noted that "it would be a good thing if they would leave some of the buildings at Westfield for a recreation area for the community. Since it has been there for so long, it would be good if, for nothing else, they would just leave the gym or maybe build a recreational center around there for the community."

I then asked Mrs. Lowe to verify a story I had heard about the Westfield Colored School. One of the black parents had gone to John Lowe, a member of the local school committee and told him that the blacks needed a new school. John had told the parent that if the school burned, they would get a new school. The school burned that night. "Yes, that is true," said Mrs. Lowe with a smile, "that is a true story. That building was worse in shape than our wooden building. That building was an old building, put up locally. The one that they built was not in that bad of a shape when they moved out of it. It was a nice little two-room school."

When I asked Mrs. Lowe if she had any thoughts about the Westfield students who would be attending the

3
3

new Pilot Mountain Middle School, she asked, "Are they transferring any Westfield teachers over there?" I explained that only Richard Hauser would be one of the veterans to transfer to the middle school while the other K-5 teachers would be going to staff the new Westfield School. She then commented, "Some of those kids who live in Pilot Mountain might feel that the school is their home and that the children from Westfield and Shoals were outsiders coming in. I am just wondering about that. I hope that it doesn't work out that way. Maybe they already have some friends and will make friends. The only rivalry they had was in sports. If the kids become good friends, it will work out. That is the main thing, if the children like each other."

Toward the end of the conversation, I commented that I had always felt that the smooth transition as the black Ridge-Westfield students merged into the white Westfield School was in large part due to the presence of Mrs. Lowe who was not only a former teacher and principal at Ridge-Westfield and leader in the church, but also served as a role model to the black children. "They need a role model. I wish that in every school they could have at least one black teacher. That would make a difference in their conduct, in the way the kids strive to do their work. If they think that they are not going to become anything, if they think they are not going to get a

54

teaching position, they might not think that if they could see just one black teacher."

Agreeing with Mrs. Lowe for the need for black teachers in the schools, as a white male teacher, I asked her if she felt that male teachers were also needed in the elementary schools. "Certainly, because I can tell you this, this applies not only to the schools, but to the church as well. My son-in-law goes up there to work with the junior choir, it makes all the difference in the world. They see a man helping them. We've had several black teachers from this community who were excellent: John Jessup, Thomas Dodd. We've had several black female teachers. Out of LaShene's class at Ridge-Westfield [Class of 1970], every one of them finished college except one who married and now she is going back to Surry Community College. The class was not that big, there were only about fifteen of them, but they did it."

Mrs. Bernice Cox Lowe Interview: Interpretation.

Mrs. Bernice Lowe's greatest contribution to my understanding of the Westfield community and its school came from her discussion of the black community. The one-room Westfield Colored School was built in 1900 and burned in 1913. It was rebuilt as a two-room school in 1915 and remained until 1947 when it was consolidated with the Chestnut Ridge School. Chestnut Ridge School was built in 1920 for black children with funds contributed by

42

members of the black community and the Julius Rosenwald Foundation. When the Westfield Colored School was closed and its students consolidated into Chestnut Ridge School in 1947, the name of the school was changed to Ridge-Westfield School. The building was replaced by a modern brick facility in 1956 which was used until 1966 when all the schools in Surry County were integrated. The building is still in good condition and belongs to the Chestnut Ridge Progressive Primitive Baptist Church which is adjacent. Mrs. Lowe has lived and taught all of her life in the Westfield community beginning at the all-black Chestnut-Ridge School, serving as a teacher and principal of the all-black consolidated Ridge-Westfield School and retiring from the integrated and formerly all-white Westfield School. The greatest boundary that was implied throughout the conversation with Mrs. Lowe was that of race. At a young age, she encountered both physical and racial boundaries. "I expect I walked eight miles a day to school. We had an adjoining farm, but the [white] people who owned the land between the farms would not allow us to cross their land, so we had to walk around their farm." She rather consistently refers to Ridge-Westfield as "ours", while the Westfield School community is often mentioned as "theirs." She speaks of "white schools," "white churches," and "there was not a high school for us in the county then." The fact that the

np

only high school for blacks in the county was located in Mount Airy and that there were "poor records" from Ridge-Westfield speak to a very different social setting from that described by the other teachers.

The black community of Westfield represented a class different from kind the white community. Mrs. Lowe's parents and many of her peers were not formally educated. Therefore, the issues involved are not only those of race, but also of a social and educational background. In a seemingly contradictory situation, she even felt some inverted discrimination from her own community when she returned from college. "There was a lot of jealousy, because I was the first person in the black community who was sent out of the community and graduated from college." Thus the notion of class, not only in relation to the white community, but also within the black community, overlaps with the white community.

She further recognized economic boundaries which could have potentially separated her from other students at Winston-Salem State. Through academic achievement and extra curricular activities, however, she could proudly state, "But I was right in there!" Thus she felt that she had found her place, that she was accepted by the other students whom she perceived as more advantaged. As with the other teachers, personal intervention was vitally important. Not only did her relationships with her

5

college classmates help her, but she spoke of a personal contact with the President of WSSU, who allowed her to enter and continue her education with limited funds.

The poor conditions of her living standards, Westfield Colored School, and Ridge-Westfield School, including lack of buses, a cafeteria, and toilets, are addressed factually and largely as a background to emphasize the achievements of her sister, herself, and other citizens of the black community. That Ridge-Westfield suffered is demonstrated in her statements that local problems referred to the county superintendent of schools were often sent back to the local white Westfield committee to resolve jointly with the black local board. Thus, even while there was a strong sense of community in Westfield, there was also divisiveness.

Mrs. Lowe sees family, school, and church as joint partners in building good citizens. To Mrs. Lowe, being a good citizen is defined largely as being socially responsible. As she went off to college her parents felt that she was "old enough to take care of herself and not to get into any trouble." Participating in community events, especially those associated with the school and the church are also important. "I think it is very important for a teacher to live within her community, because teaching school does not stop at the end of the day; that is a continuous process. If you are going to be

a good citizen, you have got to have an interest in the community where they [students] are living." Respect for authority is implied in her definition of a good citizen, that is, respect not only for community, church, and school leaders, but also for legal authority. "Out of that group we were teaching, nobody had any involvement with the law. You did not hear of them getting into a lot of trouble, because there was a kind of respect." The concept of respect is also instrumental in her handling of the situation of some students bringing knives to school.

Mrs. Lowe also sees achievement as a mark of a good citizen, especially in educational goals. "They found out that they could do something, that they could be somebody if they really tried. They could say, 'Bernice Cox went to school, and her parents didn't have any money. We are going to go.'" Every family that I know of in this community had at least three or four college graduates. I'm not saying that it is a result of [my efforts], but it built something into them that they then decided that they could do it."

With respect for others and educational achievement as the foundations for becoming good citizens, Mrs. Lowe implied self-esteem is also enhanced. "We were proud of our little community. We tried to instill in our kids that they could be somebody if they wanted to be." As the matriarch of her family, as was her late mother, and as a

29

former teacher, principal and life-long leader of her church, Mrs. Lowe exemplifies the strong bonds among these three institutions and the importance of personal intervention.

Mrs. Lowe discussed the same notions of connections between the school and the community as did the other teachers. She sees local schools as the foundation which serves to build good citizens for the county, state, and nation. "States are built upon communities. If every [local] group is interested in their own community, [they will] work to see that you have a good community, good citizens in that community." She strongly believes that schools serve as the foundation for good citizens and exist to serve the community: "Good citizens are built in the schools. If the teachers are interested in the kids and the community and try to see that everyone becomes a good citizen, that is going to spread out across the state, and from the state to the nation."

In order for the community school to serve the community, Mrs. Lowe believes that a critical factor is the local teacher. "A local teacher will do more good than one you bring in from the outside, because he or she is interested in everything that takes place in the community, because he or she is trying to build a better place to live." Because her life has been intertwined with devotion to her family, her school, and her church,

40

she has used these bonds to build students of outstanding citizenship and achievement, although nearly all began from very modest economic backgrounds.

The poor conditions of the Westfield School, and the original Ridge-Westfield School are quite remarkable, even for the times in which they existed. Mrs. Lowe was able to see a new modern facility built at Ridge-Westfield which was closed due to racial integration even though, by any criteria, it was a physical facility superior to the Westfield School. "This school was a source of pride for them." It now belongs to Mrs. Lowe's Chestnut Ridge Primitive Baptist Church which has always been adjacent. In reference to Westfield School, she noted "that was a landmark and that is something that the people of the community just looked forward to. I don't believe they will continue to have the closeness that they had with each other. That was their center. Their meetings and everything that they desired to do centered around that school. This is almost like setting up a new community; that is the way I feel about it." Although Mrs. Lowe is comparing two schools, and in a sense two communities, black and white, she points to the pride and the centeredness both schools represented to their respective communities.

Mrs. Lowe sees the moving of the school as a cause for the community to "lose interest in some of its

41

meetings. That [Westfield School] was a meeting place where they could meet for someone who was sick or disadvantaged. I don't believe they are going to have the same freedom that they had when the school was right here in Westfield." Because students from the communities of Holly Springs, South Westfield, and the Town of Pilot Mountain will be attending the new Westfield School, Mrs. Lowe sees these as potentially competing interests in using the school as a community resource, such as a meeting place for community functions. "I may be wrong, but I don't think they will have the same privilege that they had of doing things as a community when it was a local school. It is still a local school, but there are other communities involved [now]." It is interesting that Mrs. Lowe refers to the citizens as "they" as opposed to "we." Perhaps she is referring to the parents of current students, but more likely she is addressing the white parents, which again speaks to her own alienation.

Mrs. Lowe believed that the local citizens felt they had a greater control of Ridge-Westfield School in earlier years. "It caused their interest to be higher. I think there should be a lot of local control in the community." Perhaps the neglect of the local white school committee and the county administration was the greatest impetus to cause the local black community to support their own school. Mrs. Lowe again has stressed the

92

importance of personal intervention and similar notions of community, but she is speaking within a different realm.

Mrs. Lowe sees a hierarchy of control from the community, to the county, the state and the nation, with those closest to the school having the most interest. She sees the schools as serving the community. "The people who live in the community can do more for the community. States are built upon communities."

Certainly Mrs. Lowe sees local control as being the basis upon which good schools are built. She and her sister worked for many years to increase school attendance, set up bus routes, serve hot meals, and strengthen other nonacademic areas. This was largely done through their own initiative without support from the central administration, but with the support of the black community.

She further sees that the standards for good communities largely come from local teachers. "A local teacher will do more good than one you bring in from outside, because he or she is more interested in everything that takes place in the community, because she or she is trying to build a better place to live. So naturally he or she is going to be more interested than a person who just comes in for five days a week and can't wait for time to leave."

43

Mrs. Lowe strongly feels that it is important for a teacher to live and teach in the same community. "If you are going to be a good citizen, you have to have an interest in the community in which they are living. They [citizens] have got to be interested in you." Mrs. Lowe feels a powerful integration between the church and the school, which also points to her personal intervention. "We found that out by working with our kids through Sunday, there was some respect . . . If they did something at church on Sunday, we were able to discipline them when they came to school on Monday . . . we were building some good citizens." Certainly Mrs. Lowe as principal, teacher and daughter of the founder of the church which was next door to the school, was able to exert significant influence upon her students fully six days of the week.

For Mrs. Lowe, professionalism counted more than her membership in the community. If she was not a member of the community, she was nevertheless a good teacher. This can be interpreted as an argument for professionalism for although one might not be of the same race, religion, social class, or economic background, one can be judged as an equal in terms of performance alone. In speaking of the integration of Ridge-Westfield and Westfield in 1966, Mrs. Lowe noted, "I just went in there like every other person, and that is the way they treated me, the whole community. I had very little difficulty with any of the

44

parents I was the only black teacher there. There was never any discrimination against me in any way . . . But I can truthfully say that when I went to Westfield I didn't lose anything. I gained a lot of friends. I wouldn't have wanted to have been treated any better. I went there to work and gain because that was my job." Although she felt that "white parents resented," she felt that she belonged. This speaks to her struggle. The fact that she felt the principal problem was that the white parents "didn't know me" verifies the importance she places on personal relationships and the scale of this personal intervention. She understood that some white children had been taught to perceive of blacks as "boogeymen," but also that this could be overcome when they came to know her on a personal basis.

I also believe that coming to know a person is very important. I know Mrs. Lowe very well as a professional, for we taught as peer teachers for several years until her retirement. Although I feel that I have come to know her better through this conversation, I found her conversation to be the more difficult to interpret because I do not know her personally as well as I do other teachers. Beneath our conversation about the school lies the notion that conversations such as these between the white teachers and white parents and between Mrs. Lowe and the black parents have already been held over a number of

45

years. By the time the students entered school, a great deal of personal connection had already occurred as a consequence of everyday life in the church, civic meetings, and other social settings within the community.

Such conversations did not occur prior to integration between Mrs. Lowe and the white students or between the white teachers and the black students. Therefore, the integration of Ridge-Westfield School and Westfield School resulted in the loss of identity for the black students. As Mrs. Lowe noted, "It probably happened to some of the [black] kids." The black parents did not participate in school functions at Westfield as they had at Ridge-Westfield. "They didn't come to see about their children or to see what they were doing. Only a few of the parents came to see about their kids. Those were probably those whose kids started out as first-graders at Westfield. But those who had children up at Ridge-Westfield School never really felt they were a part of the school. They felt as though they were outsiders."

The mixed feelings that Mrs. Lowe expresses about the integration of the schools is also felt by others who see integration as a professional imposition which in some ways is parallel to the closing of Westfield School. Professionally, while Mrs. Lowe believes that integration of the schools and the closing of the schools of Ridge-Westfield School and now Westfield School are for the

46

best, it came at a cost of a tradition, community, and identity. Therefore, this is another example of the clash between the professional and the community.

In terms of place, Mrs. Lowe has been alienated from the white schools. She did feel that she was as an integral part of the white school systems. So her sense of place is determined not only by geography, but also of race. Her comment "You go to school to improve your race" is a very different notion from that given by the white teachers. Mrs. Lowe has a place in a positive sense in that she is defined by her membership in the black community. In a negative sense, she is defined by the boundary between the black and the white community. Therefore, Mrs. Lowe defines herself not only by place, but by race. The fact that Mrs. Lowe did not directly state these point is indicative of a boundary that exists between her and myself. However, I believe that the interpretation that was just mentioned is in the interview, and is a reasonable interpretation, although it required "reading between the lines" to obtain this analysis. This also points to the inherent differences between the interviews and the interpretations of the interviews.

At Ridge-Westfield School, Mrs. Lowe, following and working with her sister, Julia, as both principal and teacher, though she had limited resources, experienced

47

limited personal control of the school. The fact that Julia taught she went to high school speaks to the quality of the school. "We had no secretary, I had to do all of the reports." Through her creativity and influence upon the local black school committee, the white committee of Westfield School, and the Surry County Board of Education, she, her sister and other parents were able to get bus service, a lunchroom, and ultimately not only saved the school from being moved, but saw a new modern facility built on the site.

Because her older sister Julia was eager to let Mrs. Lowe assume responsibility and combined with her regular "A" certificate, she quickly became the school principal while also teaching. It was during her tenure and largely through her efforts that a lunchroom and bus service were begun.

She had to struggle with a hierarchy of men and therefore she had to extend the conversation. I spoke recently with a principal who related the first time that Mrs. Lowe attended the monthly principal meetings with the superintendent about 1963, many years after she had become principal of Ridge-Westfield.

An example of how Mrs. Lowe coped with powerlessness was in her instructions to the black students as the systems were about to be integrated. "Don't let them call you 'nigger'." Mrs. Lowe was

48

actually teaching the children how to deal with alienation.

Mrs. Lowe came from a family that was largely self-sufficient. Members of the family assisted each other in their work and achieving their life goals. Mrs. Lowe sees her nieces, nephews, and indeed, her former students as her extended family whom she serves not only in many cases as a surrogate mother, but as a role model in the sense that she came from a modest background, but was able to gain an education and assist others to do the same. "They need a role model. I wish that in every school they could have at least one black teacher. That would make a difference in their conduct, in the way the kids strive to do their work. If they think that they are not going to become anything, if they think they are not going to get a teaching position, they might not think that if they could see just one black teacher."

Mrs. Lowe feels not only personal pride in seeing her own family achieve successfully, but other members of the community as well. "Out of LaShene's class at Ridge-Westfield [Class of 1970], every one of them finished college except one who married and now she is going back to Surry Community College. The class was not that big, there were only about fifteen of them, but they did it."

44

She noted the loss of Westfield School as the loss of a meeting place for the community. However, her statements concerning the close of Ridge-Westfield School imply an even greater social loss. This was a different community from the Westfield Community addressed by the other teachers; this is the black community. It is important to note, however, that she is making the same point. "It was sad. It was a sad time, because we realized that we were losing something. We would probably be losing our culture and our identity and everything. We would not be able to have as big a say in our school as we had been having over our kids." Mrs. Lowe regretted not only the lost identity for the students, but the alienation felt by their parents, "The parents didn't attend the PTA meetings the way they did when they were at their own school. They didn't come to see about their children or how they were doing. Only a few of the parents came to see about their kids. Those were those whose kids had started out as first-graders at Westfield. But those who had had children at Ridge-Westfield School never really felt that they were a part of the school. They felt as though they were outsiders."

The paradox of community is the fact that being inclusive also makes it exclusive. Mrs. Lowe recognizes that even though she has lived largely outside the white community of Westfield, her role as an educator allowed

her to cross the racial boundary to a great extent. Her final comment on the school closing concerns the loss to both communities and is both poignant and inclusive.

"Closing a school down like that is almost like losing a member of the family because it has become so close to the people. That is the second school I have lost."
