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## Passing on the Torch: From Veterans to Future Educators

**A**t the time of this study, we were three young women new to the early childhood field: Chanelle, a career-changer in search of a profession with purpose; Natasha, a former child development program teacher entering the public school system; and Keisha, a recent undergraduate pursuing a graduate degree. Our research was part of a larger study; it was conducted at the end of, or a year post, our undergraduate degree completions. The purpose of the study was to inform current teaching practice and teacher preparation by listening across decades and examining implications for one's own professional practice via diverse insights from elders' practitioner knowledge. This teacher research offered us a chance to participate in an experiential, broadening research opportunity—to learn directly from accomplished veteran teachers and reflect on our own perspectives as new teachers. The study was instrumental in differentiating capital “R” research vs. narrative inquiry for us. As Natasha reflected in her writing,

Prior to this project my idea of research was data collecting in order to get a large picture of a specific population. I thought we would have questionnaires for the veterans to fill out, or a checklist for them to complete. I was elated we would be interviewing a small group of women to hear their personal stories. I had not conducted any research like this before.

It was our hope that hearing the stories of a group of accomplished educators whom we strived to join one day would offer us insights as we began our own respective journeys in education. We also wished to capture the

stories of accomplished teachers whose voices are not often heard—female veteran teachers of color. Our commitment to document these veterans’ voices was driven by the risk of their stories being lost, and with their stories, their unique experiences and perspectives.

Our first step was to identify the veteran teachers. At various times, we were not sure of our project’s outcome or how collecting the veterans’ stories would come together. We wondered if we could find three candidates who would discuss their journeys in education, and worried they might hold back. Thankfully, the candidates candidly revealed themselves in each interview, expressing their deepest inner thoughts and feelings.

At the start of our study, we had many questions, including:

- What inspired these women to pursue a career in education?
- What prevented these women falling victim to “burnout”?
- Will I meet women who will greatly impact me as a rising educator?
- What qualities do these women possess that I would seek in myself?
- How have these women impacted the community and left a footprint?
- What are the possibilities for upward movement in the field of education for women of color?

What it has meant to us to engage in this project is documented here.

## Review of literature

Our research was shaped by Seidman’s (2006) approach to qualitative interview protocol, as well as life histories and case studies. Through this research experience, we saw how the study of the particular is most often where we can learn about individuals in non-dominant groups or whose experiences have been marginalized. As Cole and Knowles note, life history research “is based on the fundamental assumption about the relationship of the general to the particular, and that the general can best be understood

through analysis of the particular” (2001, 13). As a result, a number of researchers, from a variety of disciplines, have utilized life history research in order to benefit from the particular.

As new teachers interviewing our elders, we gave great consideration to the interviewer/interviewee roles. For the quality of the interviews, we understood the importance of establishing rapport with each veteran. Ultimately, this intergenerational experience was one of the most influential aspects of this research. In her 1994 work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the*

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*Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks writes of an imaginary interview in which she speaks about the work of Paulo Freire and its effect on her own life. Much like we came to view the world of education with a new lens following our time with the veterans, hooks noted how Freire’s work led her to “new ways of thinking” (45). Despite the years that may have separated her and Freire, hooks found immense value in his work, using it to help shape her own pedagogy. Similarly, we found in the veterans’ stories lessons that could easily be applied to situations we were likely to encounter in our own careers in education.

## Methods

Each of us took part in reading, training, learning, and reflecting activities together as a team; prior to this qualitative interview research, we had also all engaged in two semesters of teacher inquiry experience. As noted above, we began our study by identifying the veteran educators to be interviewed. We specifically sought to identify three female fellow minority individuals who had been educators and educational leaders in the Hartford, CT school district for over 20 years.

Each of us was responsible for interviewing one of the veteran teachers; Chanelle interviewed Deveria, Natasha met with Tina, and Keisha interviewed Kathy. We met with each participant for approximately 90 minutes, during which we posed a variety of questions from a detailed interview protocol. We used a qualitative interview protocol informed by Seidman’s (2006) in-depth interviewing methods (see **Appendix**), as well as the methodological influences of life history and case study. These methodologies were utilized as they value the particular rather than the generalized. In November 2012, we also attended NAEYC’s Annual Conference to present our research. During our session, we provided attendees with not only an overview of our project and its outcomes, but also the opportunity to reflect and share on their own journeys as educators.

## The context—Hartford, CT public schools

The context of our work was Hartford, CT, the current site of the greatest achievement gap in the USA. Known as Connecticut’s poorest city, with an average household income in 2000 of \$27,100, nearly 28% of Hartford’s residents live below the poverty line and about half of the city’s residents receive some form of government assistance. In 1989, one woman and her son changed the landscape of Connecticut’s education by bringing a lawsuit of educational inequity through the courts. This lawsuit resulted in the 1996 Connecticut Supreme Court decisions (in *Sheff v. O’Neill*) on civil rights and the right to education that have continued to dictate and inform education in our state, and specifically the greater Hartford area.

## Veteran teachers

After consulting directly with Hartford Public Schools and utilizing our own professional networks, Kathy, Tina (not her real name), and Deveria were selected to participate in our project. Kathy has her master's in elementary education and has been with the Hartford Public School district for 22 years, and is still teaching. Tina has her master's in early childhood education and is a curriculum specialist at an urban child development center, with 23 years as an educator in the Caribbean and Hartford, CT. With over 30 years in the Hartford Public Schools, Deveria is a full-time educator who continues to tutor and coach.

## Data-driven practice—Listening to the veteran teachers' stories

Here, we listen to the data as we sketch our interviewees' experience and highlight their words of wisdom.



### Kathy

**Kathy's history.** Prior to teaching, Kathy's experience was grounded in deep involvement with the children of her community, focusing at first on the arts.

There were times when I would gather up the kids in the neighborhood and bring them over to my house. . . . I had an interest in the arts and took dance lessons for years and drama lessons and came back and experimented with the kids. . . . I started a children's theater and we did some great things for maybe 22, 25 years. I directed the children's theater, on my own, and put together plays and traveled around and performed for civic organizations, and school, and churches. . . . And while doing all of that, I was going to school [college] at night.

**Kathy's impressive early experience with children was recognized by her community, which led to career opportunities for her.**

I was really doing some great things with the children's theater and I had become Hartford's Leader of the Month. A friend of mine had gotten a job in Farmington and she called me and said, 'Would you like to work in Farmington?' I said, 'I wanna WORK! So, yes.' She set up an interview for me, I went out to Farmington and interviewed. Farmington was glad to snatch me up at that time and I got a job, my first teaching job there. I stayed in Farmington for 12 years.

She related how she had been fortunate to work with a nurturing administrator, Dr. Thompson at Simpson-Waverly. This was a public school serving a community facing many challenges—a vast change from Farmington, which is in a wealthy suburb of Hartford. A position in Hartford became

available, and as Kathy always said that she would give back to the community in which she grew up, she took it. Under Dr. Thompson's direction, Simpson-Waverly was designated Blue Ribbon Status in 2003. His departure from the school in 2004 and its subsequent change posed a serious professional challenge for Kathy.

You know, things have changed in Hartford . . . changed drastically and in particular at Simpson-Waverly. We had become Hartford's first Blue Ribbon School, [and we] worked very, very hard under Dr. Thompson. When he retired, I think 14 or 16 teachers went out with him—veteran teachers. It just changed the whole climate of the school and made it very difficult for those of us that were left, as better teachers. They had another principal come in [who] just didn't 'cut the mustard.' There were just problems galore and it went downhill from there. The stress level just got to be too much.

Kathy related that her solution to this untenable situation was to reach out to her former administrator. At such a juncture, many teachers might have walked away from teaching, but Kathy didn't quit—she found a way to stay in education and reach out to children.

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I said to myself, 'You know, I don't have a lot of years left. I want to do three or so more years and if I want to do those and be healthy, I can't stay here. I've got to do something.' So, fortunately for me, Dr. Thompson got a job at Bloomfield as the Superintendent of

Schools. I gave him a call, talked to him and he said, 'We would love to have you.' He's GROOMED me!

**Kathy's legacy.** Kathy's years of teaching have touched the children she's taught and their families deeply. She's found that when you go the extra mile for children and their families, they will return that nurturing to you. It's worth the effort.

There's one group of kids that I stayed in touch with that I had for two years—3rd grade and then went to 4th grade with me—and I'm still in touch with that group of kids, right now, at least half of them.

You begin to realize that you are a teacher leader when you get kids coming back and saying 'I am who I am today because of you.' Kids deserve the right to learn and it is important that we stay on top of things because what we say and do with them can affect their lives forever.

### **Kathy's advice for new teachers.**

The greatest thing I could say to somebody who's going into the business [education] now is to be sure that this is what you want. Make sure you are in the business for the right reasons and you are strong about what you are doing—just make sure that you really want to teach. These kids deserve and need positive role models.

There are a lot of demands placed on today's teachers and it can be quite a strain. You have to be ready for it.

I always try to tell [new teachers], own the kids, when you get them—make them yours, which is what I try to do. These kids spend a lot of time with us, a lot of hours with us, and many of them are very needy, needy, needy. So, you have to always open an ear and listen.

### **Tina**

**Tina's history.** Tina began her career in St. Thomas, where her career choices were limited. She has taught at a number of levels, settling in early childhood education.

I started at age 18 many, many years ago right out of high school. We had very little choice in profession—you're either a teacher, a nurse, or a police officer. If your parents had a little bit of money you may go on to be a lawyer. I chose to become a teacher because I really didn't like nursing and there was no way I was going to be a police officer. So I decided at a very young age even before I went to high school that I was going to be a teacher. I used to teach my brothers and sisters, pretend that I was a teacher and teach them at home; anything that I could find that I could relate to. I would model my teachers at school.

I started off in my neighborhood at the school I went to; my primary school. I got a job there as a pre-train teacher, and I taught there from 1974 until 1977 under the wings of model teachers, about 3.5 years in my neighborhood. I knew the students, I knew the parents; it was a close-knit community. I had no problem communicating with children and parents. I graduated in 1979.

I spent eleven years in St. Thomas because it was such a beautiful place and I bonded with the children and the families. I learned so much I decided to stay on for a little while and it turned out to be eleven years. During those 11 years I taught at about three or four different schools.

**Tina's passion for education was ignited when she was the teacher of unmotivated students at the secondary school level. She decided to meet the children where they were, employing creative methods such as having students other teachers had given up on write and draw their own cartoons.**

These children were like outcasts. They were not encouraged; they were not motivated. I said 'I think these children can make it—these young men and women can make it.'

**When Tina immigrated to the US in 1991, the difference in educational climate was something of a shock. This prompted her to change her focus to early childhood.**

When I went to the high school and saw the kids I could not believe it. It took me a while to realize that the culture was so different from the Caribbean. Children here are provided for—they are privileged to have everything provided for them at school. Yet many of them are not taking advantage of it; they couldn't care less about learning.

[I had] never done early childhood. I was a little intimidated with the high school and the contrast and the culture. I took the position—so here I am, 18 years later. I love the kids, I see hope in the kids and hope in myself. I decided to go back to school.

So that's my life up to this point—it's been in the classroom with kids, since I was 18 to now. I'm almost 56, so that's a long time.

### **Tina's approach to teaching.**

Everything that I do is all about the children. From meeting with adults, talking about issues, coming up with strategies, and coming up with ideas it's all about the children.

Usually at the beginning of the year I spend a couple of weeks getting to know the families. Know where they're from, know what they do, what they celebrate, what they don't celebrate, know everything about them so I know that background experience of where the child is from [and] can understand why a child does certain things in the classroom.

What a child learns in preschool impacts what they learn [in life]. I would like to see children given more experiences to learn and move away from [standardization]. Children are struggling because half of what they are learning is not within their experiences. I would love to see a shift in that, just give children a chance to learn lots of things on their own, to figure things out.

I love the fact that every child is different.

Every child has something to offer. They're wonderful learners. They have different interests; they have free spirits. Sometimes you'll come to work and feel down. But it's never the same. I always try to see the laughter in a child, or see the humor. It gives me satisfaction just to see them smile, and grow from one stage to another.

What I value most in education is that children be offered the experiences they need to succeed. It doesn't matter where they're from—if they're not given the experience they will not succeed. Experiences come from our diversity.

**Children are struggling because half of what they are learning is not within their experiences.**

We all need to teach children because they're from diverse backgrounds and we need to let them understand that everyone is different. It doesn't matter the color of your skin or what you say when you speak, we all belong to one race, one world, one people. It makes it more interesting when we all come together; we all have something to offer because we're different. We should allow children to respect themselves and other people.

**Tina's counseling to new teachers.** Tina's roles as leader and mentor offered motivation. At the same time, she was frank about the obstacles teachers often face.

In the leadership role, I have the opportunity to help those who are beginning teachers. To see my teachers using feedback and implementing ideas in the classroom to benefit children gives me the opportunity to see growth both in teachers and in children.

Teachers are never paid what they deserve. Think about the lives that you're going to touch—when you're old and gone you may have touched a life that is going to impact the world of tomorrow.

There are so many things that can demotivate someone who works in the classroom. One particular thing is children's behavior, challenging behaviors. Children come from diverse backgrounds and sometimes they have problems in school, and sometimes those problems are outside the scope of what teachers can do. Some teachers are not adequately trained to deal with these behaviors, so it becomes overwhelming. I think I can motivate teachers to approach these issues and challenges in a very professional manner, and see them as challenges that they can overcome eventually by using different techniques and strategies.

**Tina offered words of wisdom to draw on for years to come in my professional career.**

Think about growing and getting your knowledge every day because what you learned five years ago may be obsolete today. Keep on learning because ideas change, people change. Join organizations that support education, find out the latest trends in education, find out what other people are doing in education, learn about other cultures and how they educate their children. See the different ways that people learn. The satisfaction comes from within. It comes from watching a child grow and seeing success.





## Deveria

**Deveria's history.** Deveria's interest in early childhood education began with work at her church.

I started out getting interested in education and working with children when I assisted in Sunday School, at my church. [I] developed a love for children, working with them, seeing their progress, seeing how eager they were to learn. After that I decided to go to college and go into education. It's different once you get in that classroom and you're all by your lonesome.

**Deveria stressed that in her professional career, she had to think of how to solve the issues she was presented with.**

I wasn't happy [with the problems] the children were coming to me with in first grade and I kept thinking about it. I [could] keep complaining and be stressed out. When you go to an administrator, you have to have a solution. So, my solution was that I move to kindergarten and see if I could do something to prepare them better for first grade.

If you know deep in your heart the children can learn and you know there's a way to reach out and have them be successful, you have to do it. If you're fighting in yourself . . . you're not going to accomplish anything.

**I wanted [the children] to see that people who live in the same area as you can do something more with life.**

Everybody was wondering 'Well, what is she doing?' But I believe that you have to do, what you have to do. [I said] 'I will do the curriculum.

I guarantee you that they will be a grade level or above, but let me do what I have to do in my classroom.' And that's what I did.

**At one point Deveria was approached by a colleague and offered the chance to move into a more administrative role, which was a dilemma for her.**

[My colleague] said, 'Is it fair that you're just [reaching] those students, those 20 students, every year? Just think about how many more [you'd reach] if you branch out into working with other teachers.' And I thought about it and said, 'No, that's all right, I'll stay with my babies.'

**Her dedication to the classroom was recognized.**

I didn't realize I was going to receive the Milken Family Award back in 1991. That's a national educator award—you never know who's looking at you. It was a great honor to know that educators are respected.

**Deveria is firmly grounded in her Hartford roots.**

I grew up in Hartford and I always wanted to give back. That's where I felt I was needed more. I wanted [the children] to see that people who live in the same area as you can do something more with life. I think that's important for them to see.

**Teaching isn't easy, but Deveria never gave up, even when dealing with a negative environment. She knew how to turn negativity around in order to bring out the best in others.**

Many people don't respect teachers or respect educators. On a scale of 1 to 10, we're probably down there, number 3 unfortunately.

Some people say they love to teach, but in my experience, I wonder if [they] really love children. Some of the things that were said and some of the things that I saw in the classroom. . . . If a teacher does not believe that a student can accomplish or doesn't have high expectations, they can see it, they can smell it, and they'll shut down and become a discipline problem. . . . I find it's very disheartening when everybody gives up on a child, but we haven't searched to see what makes that child or what more we can do to have that child be successful. We have to start where the students are and move from there, and it's our responsibility as educators to do that. . . .

I looked at what successful coaches did, how they brought their teams together to win a championship.

**Deveria's inspiration to others.** Deveria's words revealed her drive and deep love of teaching.

When I see a child with a book and they're reading it, that just lights me up! It says someone has turned them on and once you turn on a child to education, you can't take it away. That's what I tell children! Once you have that knowledge in your head, that's something nobody can take away from you.

It doesn't bother me, if someone likes me. What I want is for you to do your job and do it to the best of your ability.

**Once you turn on a child to education, you can't take it away.**

When you hear people come back and parents and students say, "You made all the difference in the world!" then you know you're doing your job.

Hopefully, I'm making a positive impact on others. I'm constantly wanting to learn more, to see how I can be better at what I'm doing. . . . I want the students to see the value and the importance of working together as a team and knowing that part of their job also is to pass it on to someone else, to the next generation.

## Findings

### Engagement through research as professional grounding

In schools today, there is an incredible focus on the importance of a teacher's effect on student learning, yet these veterans have underscored the significance of teachers attending to the whole student. Our main finding was the striking realization that it takes a certain kind of individual to be called an *educator*. Not every teacher holds the belief that all children can learn. To allow a teacher who fails to stand by this principle to enter a classroom is an insult to those who have devoted their lives to educating children. In addition to believing in all children's abilities for excellence, a great teacher "passes it on" by sharing her knowledge with fellow educators. This is where the teacher begins the journey to become a leader. An effective teacher leader needs to be able to "walk the talk" and have high expectations of other educators. By instilling similar ethics and values in their colleagues, educators can do their part to ensure that children will always have access to an exceptional education.

### Our new understandings

Although the three of us found many things in common, we all had our own unique takeaway findings from our experiences with the veteran teachers.

#### Keisha

My top findings from my interview were that:

- Educators must learn patience.
- A great educator leaves a lasting impression.
- Teaching is not easy, but it is worthwhile.
- You see your students blossom in the middle of the school year and you let them go.

My interview research with a veteran teacher has influenced my practice in several ways. Not all educators are willing to share stories of the tough moments; I was glad Kathy did. I know there will be obstacles along the way to becoming a veteran teacher. I must be patient in order to sustain my practice over decades while remaining passionate about teaching. Never have I thought twice about teaching. I see teaching as a life-changing profession; an opportunity to serve as a life coach to my students. Teachers help shape students into the individuals they are destined to become. Although I am not currently in the classroom, but rather pursuing a graduate degree, my passion for teaching has only increased from my involvement in this project. There will be times when I might have to fight to get things accomplished, but I will always keep in mind that it is not ultimately about me; it is about the students.

Engaging in this project left me with a different vision for my future as a teacher. I've always hoped to be a great and effective teacher, but hearing the participants' stories made me realize that I want to become a veteran teacher who will leave an impact on many students and a lasting impression on their communities. As I listened in on one of the veteran's interviews, I was amazed by what she had accomplished and the depth of her passion for teaching.

People often say that teachers' salaries are hardly substantial, but money has never been my motivation. I want to teach because I adore working with children. Watching young children develop as they learn new skills and strategies is a special phenomenon that I love to witness. This project has further influenced me to pursue my dreams. The participants reminded me that being a teacher is not an easy occupation, but it is a worthy profession. It will be rewarding in several ways: I will assist children in their growth and development; I will commit myself to students who need me both inside and outside the classroom; and I will establish relationships with students that will last for years to come. Impacting the lives of others will be worth it all in the end.

### Natasha

My top findings from this study were that:

- A passionate educator is willing to teach “unmotivated students” when other educators won't take the time.
- An educator should meet and teach children where they are.
- Exposure to diversity is essential to a child's development and education.

This project has given me an enormous amount of hope for my future in education. Hope that at least one of my students will come back to me years from now as a successful individual and tell me that I encouraged him to believe in himself. Hope that I can advocate for each and every one

of my children and be heard. Hope that even when my back is against the wall I will find a way to provide each child with an exceptional and developmentally appropriate education. This research project has allowed me to see a glimpse of myself in the women that

we have interviewed. The passion expressed in their stories mirrors the passion that I have as a beginning teacher. Much like the participants, I see each child as an individual; I know children have the ability to learn as long as I take the time to teach. These veterans have enhanced my desire to continue my journey in education not only as a teacher, but as an educator. My dream

**This research project has allowed me to see a glimpse of myself in the women that we have interviewed.**

From these women, I have learned that in order to make my beliefs a reality I must not only “talk the talk,” but “walk the walk.”

is to teach for several years and then take on an administrative or leadership role in education, where I can positively influence teachers and encourage them to believe in their students’ ability to learn.

As these veterans have taught us, in order to teach a child you must know a child. These women have given me hope that my strong belief in changing the world one child at a time is possible. One thing that I vow to do every day of my teaching career is to give each individual child the best education possible. I believe in each child’s strengths and continuously commit myself to building upon those strengths. From these women, I have

learned that in order to make my beliefs a reality I must not only “talk the talk,” but “walk the walk.”

My childhood and upbringing inspired me to become a teacher. My undergraduate major in early childhood education taught me the key concepts and skills of the field. Student teaching placements

provided me with hands-on practice of the lessons I had learned. However, interviewing these veterans has solidified my beliefs while adding to knowledge gained during four years of undergraduate teacher preparation work. I was truly meant to be a teacher, an educator, and an advocate for children.

This research could not have come at a better time in my life. Working for a year in a nonprofit early childhood center and then transitioning to the public school system has given me varying points of view regarding early childhood education. I now notice that many women of color are not teachers in the nation’s inner city public schools, but rather in the nonprofit sector. An attendee of this project’s presentation at an NAEYC conference stated that she had no women of color in her network to look up to as possible mentors. Why is this?

As I continue my first year in an inner city public school in New Britain, Connecticut, I will remember the words of the veteran teachers. I can still recall the teachers who made me who I am today, and in return I want to be that teacher to my students in the future. A great educator is not in it for recognition or monetary compensation, but rather for the success of the students.

### Chanelle

My top findings from my interview were that:

- Listening and thoughtful questioning facilitate the interview process.
- A great teacher asks “What more can I do?” and takes action!

- A great educator will share her gifts and passion with children and fellow educators.
- An effective teacher leader needs to be able to “walk the talk” and have high expectations of other teachers.

My involvement in this project was fueled by a desire to further investigate a topic of interest that I believed would benefit my professional development as an educator. I was genuinely curious to know how fellow women teachers of color had charted their course in the education field. In hearing their stories, I hoped to find confirmation that I had chosen to pursue the right career path and guidance on how best to meet its challenges. However, I could not rely on familiar methods of data collection, such as observation, checklists, or other curriculum assessment. Rather, I learned how the art of interviewing could be utilized to capture snapshots of teacher’s careers and extract words of wisdom to support young teachers. I discovered that listening and the use of thoughtful questioning created an environment conducive to candid conversation, allowing participants to freely share the ups and downs of their lives as teachers and teacher leaders.

Hearing my interviewee recall her time as a teacher and teacher leader, I found a “road map” for ideals in my own practice. I learned that a great teacher asks, “What more can I do?” and takes action! “If there’s a problem, you just have to continue working at it until you find a solution. Because there is a solution out there,” asserted Deveria, as she reflected on an obstacle that she had encountered when she first started teaching kindergarten.

**She expressed the importance of entering one’s classroom ready to face anything and everything.**

Emphasizing active involvement, my interviewee spoke of never running short of giving your best to your students and your craft. “If you’re not prepared, be prepared to fail,” said

Deveria, as she expressed the importance of entering one’s classroom ready to face anything and everything. I know from listening to her that I can only maintain my credibility as an educator if I am willing to learn and grow, by receiving constructive criticism and seeking out opportunities to further my own professional development.

As I completed my graduate studies at the University of Hartford and prepared to transition into the field as an early childhood educator, I reflected on Deveria’s wise insights on what had sustained her throughout her teaching career. Teachers must possess a passion for educating children based on an inherent love for children. A great educator doesn’t seek out recognition or accolades; rather, she focuses her energies on facilitating the successes of her students. As Deveria reflected, “When you hear comments

from students and parents that you've made a positive impact on their lives, then you're doing your job."

## Implications and conclusions

It is clear that we learned a lot from the veterans. Comparing and contrasting what we shared, we can see that all three of us as young women were impressed with how the veteran teachers responded to a *calling* to work with and for children. After being involved in this project, each of us began our own individual journeys as new teachers. As we transitioned from degree programs out into the early childhood workforce, our practices were affected in different ways by what we learned from the veterans' stories. Chanelle reflects that upon hearing Deveria recollect her years as a teacher leader, she realized that she would be doing a disservice to children if she failed to lend her voice to the larger conversation of fellow educators. Natasha shared that in her first two years of teaching she encountered fellow teachers saying such things as "You're only doing that because you're young—in a few years, you'll get over it." She states that she will not. Her hope is

that instead, in a few years she may change their attitudes and encourage them to follow her, a "young" teacher. Keisha shared that the impact one specific veteran teacher had on her students and community influenced her decision to obtain her master's

degree. The veteran teacher's experience also helped Keisha decide to pursue graduate school prior to beginning work as a full-time teacher in order to devote her whole self to teaching when she was ready.

Each of us, despite being young teachers, shares a desire to go beyond ourselves—we want *to pay it forward*. Chanelle wants to be involved in a professional learning community in order to share with other professionals. Natasha hopes to influence a beginning teacher in 2042 the same way that Tina left a mark on her. Keisha found that hearing the stories of veteran teachers has inspired her to impact others' lives in a positive way; she was influenced by the veterans' passion and the commitment they have made over the past years.

The stories of these women portray a realistic image of the struggles and triumphs that educators face and will face in the future. For these participants, their profession became their lives. Many teachers are bound and constrained by state mandates and district requirements; subsequently,

**Each of us, despite being young teachers, shares a desire to go beyond ourselves—we want to pay it forward.**

their autonomy fades into the background. As a result, their efforts to teach children are directed toward the purpose of data collection rather than facilitating children's love of learning. However, our participants' stories explained how some teachers break through these barriers, fueled simply by their love for educating young children. It is no surprise that many individuals who enter the teaching profession question whether they have chosen the right career path. However, listening to our participants reminded us of why we desired to become teachers. We believe that teachers play a vital role in changing the world, by touching the lives of even just one child.

Each of us was honored to engage in this project. Not only did we have the opportunity to bond with three splendid veteran teachers, we were able to learn a great deal from them as well. Having a role in this research is an experience that will indelibly remain with us as we progress in our development as educators. As we move forward in our careers, this rich professional and research experience prompts preparation and professional development questions. Would it be worthwhile for others to have this experience? If yes, how may other novice teachers have access to it? Can we strive for new teachers to learn from veterans, and do so by engaging in practice-driven research? These are questions we hope other new teachers take up for themselves.

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**Women Veteran Teachers of Color Interview Protocol—Questionnaire**

Versions of these questions have been utilized in earlier research and have been piloted, vetted by a peer debriefer, field tested, and member checked.

Tell me about your life, up to this point, as an educator?

Tell me about your experience as a teacher/teacher leader?

What experience do you have with diversity?

What brought you to an urban school district?

What drew you to this career choice?

Tell me about how you came to be a teacher/teacher leader?

Tell me the people who have motivated you (as supporter or adversary) along the way?

Tell me about when you first became a teacher leader?

Describe for me your work as teacher leader?

How would you identify (label) your work as a teacher leader?

What about your work is most satisfying?

What about your work was least satisfying?

Has this changed over your career? If so, how?

What about being a teacher leader is most important to you?

What about being a teacher leader is least important to you?

Has this changed over your career? If so, how?

What meaning do you make of your work as an educator?

What meaning does this work hold for you?

Has this changed over your career? If so, how?

What has encouraged you to keep going over these decades?

What has discouraged you over these decades?

What do you value in education?

What do you value for children?

In what ways have you been able to integrate what you value into your work?

When have your values had to remain separate from your work?

What has helped to sustain you through this long haul?

What keeps you going now?

What advice and insights would you provide future educators/teachers?