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4-9-2021

Turnaround Agent Shares Lessons in COE Podcast

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University Park, IL,
April
09,
2021

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When Educator and Author Sandy Womack says, “Education provides choices, chances, and opportunities,” he is speaking from experience drawn from a childhood upended by constant moves and a career rooted in transformation.

Dr. Womack spoke with [Governors State University](#) Professor Amy Vujaklija, Dr. Amy, and Director of Educator Preparation Joi Patterson, Dr. Joi, for an upcoming episode of their [“Teaching and Learning: Theory versus Practice”](#) podcast.

A pioneer in the field of education and a 30-year veteran in Ohio’s public schools, Womack blazed a trail as a turnaround agent, reforming and remodeling urban schools from a state of academic emergency to effective ranking in a short time.

With a persistent achievement gap between Black, white, and Latino students, despite reforms, Womack's input and experience are invaluable. He touches on the subjects in his books "Creating Successful Urban Schools: The Urban Educators Month By Month Guide to School Improvement" and "Even the Best Plans Go Astray."

April's podcast conversation draws on the experiences and lessons in the books and a variety of subjects that are crucial to the field of education. When Patterson inquired about the growing teacher shortage in America, Womack reflected how the pandemic had changed opinions on the profession.

"The one good thing that came from COVID-19 is parents have begun to respect teachers a lot more. It's hard to raise your own kids, let alone someone else's," he said.

In the podcast, Womack—who became a principal at the young age of 29—discusses the rare accomplishment.

He was named principal at an elementary school in school improvement year eight, which had been receiving intensive support. If its performance didn't improve, the school would close, the principal and half the staff would be removed.

When Womack became principal, he changed the school starting with the culture, moving the ranking from "academic emergency" to "school of choice status," increasing the reading and math performance levels by over 60 percentage points, according to his Urban School Education [website](#).

"We went from an F on the scale to a 79.9 percent," Womack recalled.

The road to author and educator was not a predictable one for Womack, who shared stories about his personal history and his father and uncles' incarceration.

"Penitentiary was an occupational hazard for them," he said.

Pulling from his own history, driven by his infectious passion, and sustained by the relationships he builds, Womack engages Drs. Patterson and Vujaklija with colorful, plain-spoken advice for anyone connected to or interested in the field of education.

"It's not how you start," Womack states. "It's how you finish."

The "Teaching and Learning: Theory versus Practice" podcast series, with production assistance from the [Center for Community Media](#) (CCM) at GSU, covers topics from homeschooling to bilingual education, each with a different guest speaker drawn from administrators, teachers, authors, alumni, and educator preparation providers every week. Despite the different subject matter and variety of guests, Dr. Vujaklija and Dr. Patterson find the common thread that ties all the episodes together is an exploration of identity and diversity.

[Listen to the episode featuring Womack on April 16.](#)