

# TRANSFORMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEAD TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM LEARNING COMMUNITY

YEAR 3, VIRTUAL SESSION NEWSLETTER



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## GENERAL OVERVIEW

During the virtual session of the Year 3 Learning Community, we focused on strategies for using storytelling to support advocacy and sustainability. This session included a live Q&A from our featured guest expert and scaffolded conversation considering the current challenges and opportunities grantees experience in supporting students while professionalizing the early childhood field.

### LEARNING GOALS

Deepen relationships, expand understanding of using storytelling to support systems and sustainability, and engage in collective brainstorming and support.



## SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

### Q&A

For the virtual session, we welcomed **Seft Hunter, PhD**, who focused on the role of stories in advocacy and organizing. Seft is the director of Black Led Organizing and Power Building at [Community Change Action](#). In this role, Seft leads Community Change's work to build Black organizing infrastructure, challenge and eradicate historically oppressive racialized structures, and build Black political power to change the material conditions on the ground in communities of color across the country.

Seft joined Community Change in July 2019, bringing more than 18 years of diverse professional experience that spans service in the US Air Force, work as a university professor and researcher, and work as a movement leader fighting to improve the lives of people of color in Missouri and Kansas. He previously served as executive director of the Kansas and Missouri-based Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO), a 40-year-old faith-based organizing group working to advance a racial and economic justice strategy. In this role, Seft led his



**SEFT HUNTER, PhD**  
Community Change Action

organization's multistate campaign to protect communities of color from the exploitative practices of predatory lenders. Seft also successfully led his organization's effort to align public health and community organizing, including a multistate research study to map the impact of persistent racial poverty and differences in life expectancy between Black and white communities in Kansas and Missouri.



**WATCH THE  
LIVE Q&A WITH  
SEFT HERE**

**We want to develop our early childhood educators so that they can provide what community members think are important to children. What is the invitation and creation of spaces for people to share in the context of community-based participatory research?**

Consider the underlying factors that either motivate or hinder community participation. Beginning with a broad view, we can gain insight into the obstacles preventing individuals from engaging. It is worth noting that individuals with greater influence often possess the discretion to abstain from participation. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge and address these concerns, aligning the group's aspirations with the participants' reservations. When we declare a space as intentionally designed for fostering community, it is crucial to ensure that the experience is thoughtfully crafted to foster a sense of genuine inclusivity and belongingness.



**Having an agenda or other formalities isn't always conducive to storytelling and relationship building. How do we balance the need for meeting structure and understanding that time is culturally specific?**

At any given point, we are speaking to multiple audiences. Understanding the cultural orientation of the participants is critical. To ensure lasting engagement, we must craft our designs with a focus on fostering meaningful connections. Often, there might be an initial investment required in building relationships to create spaces that genuinely cater to the group's unique needs. Additionally, we must make deliberate facilitation decisions that balance our planned agenda and the dynamic requirements of the gathering.

**When a group has already formed a connection, how do we think about transitioning members in and out of the work?**

Establishing a framework of community agreements and behavioral norms sets a stable foundation, ensuring newcomers encounter a consistent environment. It's advisable for groups to actively contemplate the onboarding process for new members, making it explicit and well-structured. The emphasis should be on designing the space to support the collective rather than individual preferences. This might involve sending pre-meeting emails containing agendas, information about new participants, and defined roles. Your role as an organizer is to get sharp at the invitations with clear expectations rooted in the values and aspirations of the folks we are trying to reach and then create opportunities in the space for folks to act.

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**“You can’t really get anywhere without stories. Stories provide purpose and direction for the work; it is the reason why we exist.”**

**- SEFT HUNTER**

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## STORYTELLING UPDATES

During this session, School Readiness Consulting (SRC) shared an important initiative aimed at enhancing the sustainability of grantees’ work and increasing its visibility on a national scale.

At SRC, we understand storytelling’s vital role in driving positive and sustainable change. Through collective storytelling and dissemination efforts, we are committed to ensuring that the impact of the grant work is preserved and amplified. Building on the [Year 2 report](#), our storytelling activities will focus on drawing a clear connection between the outcomes of the grants and the collective success and impact on the workforce.

### Why Storytelling?

- **Humanizing data.** Storytelling humanizes the data presented in the report by sharing specific anecdotes or examples from the report that illustrate the challenges and successes students face in early childhood education programs. The stories shared can put a face to the statistics, making it easier for stakeholders to connect with the issues and potential solutions.
- **Creating a sense of urgency.** Storytelling can create a sense of urgency and importance. Sharing stories about students facing barriers, or about the impact of aligned coursework, highlights the need for action and change. Storytelling conveys the potential consequences of not addressing these issues, such as the long-term effects on students and the education system.
- **Increasing accessibility.** Storytelling can help paint a vivid picture of what success looks like in early childhood teacher preparation programs and can engage a wider audience, including those who may not be familiar with the intricacies of teacher preparation programs. Storytelling ensures that people from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of expertise can understand and connect with the grantees’ work.

The Year 3 storytelling efforts are intended to highlight grantees’ achievements and build sustainability for their work. Each grantee’s perspective is vital to the early childhood field, and together, we will ensure that members of the learning community have the tools and resources to share their stories with their colleagues, communities, and decision-makers. We are excited to embark on this storytelling journey with the learning community and look forward to working closely to amplify your impact. More details about storytelling supports will be available to grantees this winter in preparation for the in-person learning community session February 5–6, 2024, in Wheeling, Illinois.