

## **Wipster links to previous interviews with Dr. Nwankwo:**

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*1st interview*

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*2nd interview*

<https://app.wipster.io/Review/CaRyCwDZk3VuF9mez9AMvmK4DuoU72OdBfatmPMhLSIS2AYWNQ>

1. *How was the idea for the Wisdom of the Elders Program conceived?*

### **1<sup>st</sup> interview 02:35—05:45**

Came directly out of VFOA. WOE then became WWG. VFOA is rooted in the idea that there are stories that have been neglected. There are aspects of life, dimensions of our American experience that have been marginalized, not heard, and that providing spaces for individuals to view and engage each other’s autobiographies is a productive space. So VFOA is rooted in that. The WOE was one approach to actuating VFOA’s methodology, which is thinking creatively about how you can help people produce autobiographies and creating innovative ways of engaging autobiographies that will move us as a human race forward together..... Taking that basic idea that there are neglected American voices, that there are neglected voices that need to be heard and amplified and allowing scholarly methodologies to help those grow and flow is what the WWG is.

2. *Please describe the history of the program.*

### **1<sup>st</sup> interview 00:25—01:10**

In 2012, I started the WOE project in Murfreesboro, focused on elders, providing them the opportunity to collect their own histories, their own autobiographies, their community biographies. So we had them take classes for 6 weeks on genealogy, community history, on visual art from a Meherry grant from 2012-2015.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> interview 00:00-00:54**

I.N. starts answering question at 00:25; how workshops were chosen, it’s a community-engaged project; sat down with facilitators, facilitators decided what they thought the community members needed to learn, considering their specialties; as a result, ended up with genealogy, visual art, and community history

3. *Why is the program important, why is it important that the program exist?*

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 24:43—26:48**

Discusses how this is a way to shift the way we think about communities and power. I would not say that we “empower” communities because that replicates a hierarchy that I want the project to destabilize, which is a benevolent hierarchy: “I am helping you, poor thing.” Instead, I want to bring the value and knowledge that exists all around us into the university setting so we are enriching the university, the students with a wider range of knowledge. When I think of diversity and inclusion, I think of justice for African Americans and Native Americans in particular, but I also think about academics not just focusing on canonical figures, us being willing to listen to and engage with perspectives and knowledges that go beyond what we think is important. So I would not say ‘empower,’ I would say provide a space to be recognized and engaged for the power you already have.

4. *What needs does the Wisdom of the Elders program fulfill?*

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 26:50–28:15**

Explains how the give-get model provides an opportunity for engagement. Caring is priority.... I started seeing this name in grant applications, and it was a term for what I was doing already. It described what we were doing already: you come first. The idea is that you come first. Before I start my research, I ask, “what is it that you need? What is that you want? What do you want to get out of this?” we together talk about what we want what we need, we find a middle ground and we move forward with our collaborative project.

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 53:00 – 54:25**

Our work is both community-building and strengthening. It’s building and strengthening two different communities. Strengthening communities already in existence. When we are circulating their stories and gathering their stories, it strengthens them. we are transmitting wisdom and knowledge and skill sets present there and strengthening the fibers of connectivity and durability. It is community-building in that we are circulating the stories and engage more broadly so there’s greater connectivity between that community and other communities.

5. *Please describe the population that the Wisdom of the Elders program targets.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Interview 18:12—19:42**

Many have lived under segregation, grew up under Jim Crow, now they grew up under Jim Crow in agricultural communities and they may say they didn’t care what was going on out there. So it was segregation but it was strong communities that they valued. So as a group overall, black people in the south were marginalized but there is a kind of strength and dignity

and confidence that was developed in these communities that sustains them to this day. We need to know more about that. So one of the questions we need to figure out as a society is how do we continue the passing on of that strength, that resilience, that self-confidence where those communities are no longer there.

6. *What would you say is the mission statement for Wisdom of the Elders?*

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 12:05—14:33**

The fundamental element of the umbrella VFOA and all the projects that come under [WOE] it is the reversal of the traditional academic methodology. Traditional research methodology, particularly qualitative research methodology is that I interview you, I take your story, and go write an article. You may or may not see the article, you may or may not be named in the story, you may or may not be cited as an author. So what I wanted to do through VFOA was reverse that and bring some kind of epistemic justice into academic work and interview-based research. So before I develop an interview guide, I listen to the community, I spend time there. In Panama we did a vision-sharing event before we started. We started “giving” events...”we give, you get, before we begin interviews. So it’s a methodology that is rooted in, “You are important, you matter” not only because of what your story means to me but also because of what your story means to your community and how it benefits your community. So we want to utilize the stories in the community out of which they come even before any academic work is done on them, before analysis is done, so that instead our work leads to various kinds of community programs first.

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 16:40—18:10**

Discusses the desired outcome of a multiplier effect in which a community takes on the project on its own and runs with it, in this case the creation of the African-American Heritage Center of Rutherford County. The community cultivating and nurturing their own stories. Community becoming more visible, seen and valued by those in power.

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 19:44--21:27**

Discusses how we tap into and harness these communities’ sources of strength. segregation didn’t produce strength, it was already there. Because of segregation, the strength surfaced even more...people are able to deal with the hits, they knew how to deal with things, it came from watching and listening and learning from their parents and families each and every day about how you make life, dignity, how you behave in a way that reminds people of your humanity. The way you carry yourself carries you forward.

7. *How did you begin to form connections in Murfreesboro?*

**1<sup>st</sup> interview 31:40—33:11**

You must foreground the project with these relationships and give something before you try to get something out of it. I believe that deeply and firmly. I will not go to a community where there

is no prior contact or previous relationship. Particularly in marginalized communities that is unproductive. People figure out ways to evade and digress and not answer if they don't want to answer, so to make it a productive engagement, foreground the relationship. If you don't do that, you can produce an article or a book, but not something that is ethical or epistemically just.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Interview 33:16 – 34:40**

Building rapport is not enough.

No, it's not. I see you, I value you. Before, during, and after the interview, I care about you. We have a relationship as human beings, and that relationship is primary. This interview is one way we know each other...The relationship is different from rapport. We can sit and talk and marginalized communities will pretend to go along with it but they know their place in the hierarchy.

### **1<sup>st</sup> interview 34:40—36:33**

What is a sufficient amount of time to build the relationship. This is a challenge for funders. The key is to have individuals from that community be the primary people doing the work. Every community that we enter, we have an individual from the community be the program manager or project coordinator, so it requires an investment in the community itself...you might be putting them in a difficult position, so they may not move forward as quickly as you want, they don't want to be seen as a traitor providing a story to outside people. Recognizing experts in the community. Give them the opportunity to do what they need to do to build the relationships necessary to carry out the work.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Interview 08:35-11:30**

Making participants comfortable, being receptive to participating.

Begin with the fact that you as interviewer and the interviewee are human beings first. That connection is primary. You are connecting as humans first. If you start with the project first, that won't work. It's like a pre-packaged product. It may take a long time to get to the deeper level. People have to see that you see them as human beings first and foremost, this is particularly important of marginalized communities. The second thing is, you ask them, 'what is it that you need?'

### **2<sup>nd</sup> interview 11:43-14:13**

How to find community partners. You have to be open to being where people are. Go to events. Meet people. You can't start by collecting research first. Find out what's already going on. Don't enter with the assumption that you are the knight with the white horse and going to save them. [gets into detail about the WOE facilitators]