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Introduction

At some point in their career, many teachers—especially beginning teachers—have either said “I quit!” or wished that they could quit teaching and do something else. Most began teaching with high hopes of helping children and having a rewarding career, but soon they became disappointed. In fact, according to a recently published national study, teacher morale is currently at a 20-year all-time low.¹ Decreases in education funding, massive teacher layoffs, pressures to improve standardized test scores, and the disconnect from parents and even from students that many teachers feel have increased the challenges that teachers face. Consequently, being a teacher is tougher than ever—especially in urban and low-income schools—and these circumstances drive many teachers to consider quitting or to actually quit.

Obviously, if you are a teacher who is feeling disappointed, disillusioned, or who has thought about quitting, what you need is a way to stay motivated, encouraged, and to persist, even when circumstances look bleak. *Yes, You Can! Advice for Teachers Who Want a Great Start and a Great Finish With Their Students of Color* will help you do this and will also help you excel at teaching. Although our main goal is to empower beginning teachers, *all* teachers can benefit from the wealth of information in *Yes, You Can!*

This reader-friendly book contains original research based on the Teacher Confidence (TC) Study, which I (Dr. Gail L. Thompson) conducted as well as practical strategies and advice, true stories, professional development exercises, and recommended readings that will empower you. The TC Study will provide you with important feedback from 293 teacher interns, beginning teachers, and veteran teachers regarding a variety of topics, including classroom management; working with students from socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse backgrounds; working with parents; working with struggling students; working with high achievers; and handling racial and ethnic conflicts.

ABOUT THE BOOK'S ORGANIZATION

Each chapter begins with one or more true stories and related exercises for you to complete, followed by chapter highlights, results from the TC Study, additional exercises, practical advice and strategies, and a final professional growth activity. **Part I, Do You Really Love All of Them? Assessing Your Teaching Self-Confidence About Working With Various Types of Students**, is

designed to help you better understand your beliefs about fairness, income, and gender and how these beliefs pertain to effective teaching. In the three chapters in this section, you will learn why self-confidence plays a crucial role in your teaching efficacy, discover the connection between fear and self-confidence, examine what the TC Study participants said about their teaching self-confidence, compare and contrast your beliefs and teaching self-confidence with the study participants' comments and self-ratings, and learn practical strategies to increase your teaching self-confidence.

The three chapters in **Part II, Student Empowerment–Teacher Empowerment: Increasing Your Teaching Self-Confidence and Your Teaching Efficacy**, contain research-based practical instructional strategies that will help you increase your effectiveness with all students but particularly with students of color and struggling students. This section will also help you improve your relations with students of color, strengthen your classroom management skills, and design culturally relevant standards-based lesson plans.

In the three chapters in **Part III, Getting Help From the “Village”: How to Maximize Your Relations With Parents, Colleagues, and School Leaders**, you will learn how to work more effectively with parents (especially parents of color) and non-English-speaking parents. In addition to learning about the benefits of improving your relations with parents, you will learn actual scripts that you can use when you meet with parents. This section will also help you strengthen your relations with your colleagues (especially with colleagues of color) and help you get what you need from school leaders.

The conclusion contains a final story about a beginning teacher and a list of Confidence Boosters.

ABOUT THE BOOK’S TITLE

During his first campaign for president, Barack Obama often told the American public, “Yes, we can! Yes, we can!” On the night that he won the election, he began to chant, “Yes, we can! Yes, we can!” and audience members began to repeat this slogan. That night was momentous, for it marked the first time in U.S. history that a Black person had won the nation’s highest office. It made a country that had a strong racist history look better. It made countless Americans, especially African Americans, feel better. It was a night of hope.

Regardless of how you feel about politics and regardless of your political affiliation, our goal in using *Yes, You Can!* as the title of this book is to provide you with practical strategies, advice, and hope—mainly hope about your ability to become a great educator of *all* students, especially students who have historically been underserved by the U.S. public school system such as African Americans, Latinos, and low-income students. As authors who have a nearly 60-year combined history as K–12 and university educators, we want to inspire you to keep teaching, even when the going gets tough. In addition to helping you to become more confident and persistent, we believe that this book will help the nation’s youth by increasing their chances of having a confident, effective, and well-qualified teacher: you.

NOTES ABOUT THIS BOOK

- In the remainder of this book, we use the term *African American* to refer to all individuals who can be categorized by the racial designation of *Black*.
- All of the stories contained in this book are true. However, in several cases, we have changed the names of the main character or other individuals to protect their identities.
- In some cases, the TC Study results exceed 100 percent because percentages were rounded.