

Educational Leaders with Doctorates Giving Back for Social Justice

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Abstract

Park (2007) argues doctoral education needs to be debated and proposed a framework for dialogue. Most research explores students while in their programs rather than after completion. Also, few perspectives come from women of color. I wish to share this qualitative narrative research study and engage in dialogue on motivation to complete and use a doctorate in the community successfully. The major finding that arose from data collected and analyzed was that each of the Native American Indian, Asian American, and African American educational leaders with a doctorate in an education discipline used their knowledge and skills for leadership activities, such as role modeling, mentoring, and creativity, to “give back” to their cultural communities. Nussbaum’s (1997, 2010) “narrative imagination” provides a lens of human capital versus economic capital with an older educational leader’s motivation to provide wisdom (Hudson, 1991) with the highest level of education in hand (Universities Scotland, 2007).

Keywords: doctoral education, educational leadership, narrative imagination, women of color, community education, social justice, volunteerism.

Educational Leaders with Doctorates Giving Back for Social Justice

U.S. graduate schools have been criticized since the first was created at Johns Hopkins University to prepare elite male students as scholars and researchers. Because of the many societal changes and the need for advancing education, dialogue focusing on the doctorate degree began in earnest during the late 20th century. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) argued that graduate education “enjoys enormous prestige and yet is relatively unexamined and not carefully monitored” (p. xv) and being “far from any ideal state” (p. 1). In the early 21st century within the United States Nyquist and Woodford (2000) wrote about “revisioning” the Ph.D. while Nettles and Millett (2006) noted that under consideration were a number of “contentious issues for our country’s diverse doctoral students” (p. 3). Some issues identified were a student’s educational background, including capabilities and preparation; support or lack of support from the variety of relationships between students and faculty, advisors, and mentors; financial support; and concerns of attrition and time to degree, with Lovitts (2001) writing about the latter.

Doctoral education dominated international interest in the first decade of the 21st century. In production of report variety, the United States produced approximately ten, the England fourteen, Scotland five, and various European institutions and organizations a few. One of the major United Kingdom reports is “Redefining the Doctorate” by Park (2007) that argues for a debate on doctoral education. Other recent report examples include Purcell, Elias, and Tzanakou (2008), who studied doctoral career pathways, skills, and training from the early careers of UK doctoral graduates. Also, Hunt, Jagger, Metcalfe, and Pollard (2010) reported numerous case studies highlighting the impact of researcher development, research outcomes, supervisors, employability, grant income, submission rates, and researcher experience. Additionally, Hooley, Kulej, Edwards, and Mahoney (2009) researched concerns about part-time graduate student experiences, while Sakya (2007) reported on participant experiences for which the Dorothy Hodgkin Postgraduate (Scheme) provided student reflections on doctoral study awards. Currently, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the National Academy of Education (NAEd) are studying doctoral education in college of education disciplines (2008). Each report points to numerous challenges to attaining, assessing, and valuing the doctorate.

Problem

Gender equity and access to learning for women has long been another topic of concern in higher education participation research. According to Giele (1978), “In 1974-75 the proportion of doctorates awarded to women rose to a new high of 21 percent” (p. 247). Women achieving doctorate degrees expanded steadily beginning in the 1960s and continuing to the end of the 20th century (Thurgood, Golladay, & Hill, 2006). According to a National Science Foundation’s special report, “almost 43% of all doctorates awarded to women between 1920 and 1999 were awarded in the 1990s” (Thurgood et al., 2006, p. 16). Women earned 1,042 doctorates in 1960 and in 1999, 17,493 doctorates were awarded to women (Thurgood et al., 2006). Today, (mostly White) women in the United States earn more than half of the doctorates awarded; however women of color still earn the least number of doctorate degrees (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2009).

Regardless of the interest, reports, and studies on doctoral education worldwide, little is known about achieving a doctorate from a college of education curriculum program from the perspective of those individuals who are not in the majority (National Opinion Research Center Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2009; Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, 2005a). Additionally, the bulk of the studies on doctoral education analyzed students while in their programs, while virtually no studies gathered data on individuals after graduation. Indeed, many doctorate holders become lost to programs and alumni associations, and from career databases (Hunt, Jagger, Metcalfe, & Pollard, 2010). With large research institutions and universities creating agendas and initiatives for graduate enrollment because few individuals get accepted into or stay in academe, it is important to learn the stories of women who earn a doctorate and how they apply the degree in their communities. An urgent need exists to develop better pathways to access higher education for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (Hughes, 2011) and diverse races and ethnicities (Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, 2005a) as each has much to offer.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of the larger qualitative narrative research study was to learn about the experiences of women of color who, in middle adulthood, had pursued a doctorate degree successfully, and how they applied the doctorate in the community. The intention of this paper is to take the opportunity to discuss doctoral education and educative experiences with an international community. In addition to presenting this research, I hope to create a space to grapple with the challenges and the opportunities for improving the community and higher education with the doctorate degree. Role modeling and mentoring are two areas of leadership excellence in which to have conversations. The significance of this study is that doctoral education is of transnational interest for improvement on many levels. By better understanding motivation, challenges, support, and utilization in an international community, educators can better understand the value of higher education.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative research was examined through the lens of philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum's (1997) concept of the "narrative imagination," which she argues is needed to improve democratic societies. The ability to empathize with individuals and societies unique from us is an ideal upon which this research study was framed. Nussbaum (2010) believes that seeking a global economy without thought to individuals at the lower ends of civilization continues to be a problem for a truly democratic society. She further articulates that the university/college system in America has a foundation of liberal arts that is deeply in jeopardy, particularly in economic downturns where the arts and humanities are the first areas to be cut.

A democracy needs to highly educate its citizens for more than just economic reasons. The variety of doctorate degrees and access to the highest levels of knowledge attainment can help those individuals and communities most in need of assistance in reaching their own levels of success. According to Bynner and Egerton (2000) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, p. 130), there should be "a reminder that the impact of PhD study, like undergraduate study, has elements of social and community value beyond personal and social economic impact" (as cited in Purcell,

Elias, Lyonette, & Tzanakou, 2010, p. 30). I designed this larger study on the framework of educational programs existing to provide educators who help communities with their problems. I argue that the value added from educational leaders with doctorates is through the work of transforming communities. Further, it is through the development of Nussbaum's idea of narrative imagination and human capability that the major finding for one of the research questions in this study is analyzed and considered for open dialogue at this conference.

Research Design

This qualitative narrative research (Creswell, 2005) questioned the process by which women of color in middle adulthood applied their knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from their education doctoral programs. Merriam (1998) stated, "The key concern in understanding the phenomenon of interest is from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's" (p. 6). Qualitative research "focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, [and] the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive" (p. 8) with words rather than pictures and numbers. Narrative research is a form of qualitative research that has been used in many studies of education, particularly those questioning teachers about their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Creswell (2005) said, "Narrative researchers explore an educational problem by understanding the experiences of an individual. These stories provided the raw data for analysis as the participants retell the story based on narrative elements" (p. 477).

Population/Sample

Five Native American, four Asian American, and five Black/African American women were purposefully sampled through the snowball technique. Eight participants held Ph.D. education degrees in Curriculum and Instruction; Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology; Educational Leadership and Policy Studies; Educational Leadership; Educational Policy and Management with a specialization in Higher Education Administration; Educational Leadership and Human Services; and Psychological and Social Foundations, from colleges of education throughout the United States. Six participants held Ed.D. degrees in Adult Education and Human Resource Development; Educational Leadership; Teacher Education; Educational Leadership and Policy Studies; Curriculum Instruction; and Administration and Supervision with Educational Evaluation and Curriculum and Instruction, from colleges of education throughout the United States. Every graduate wrote a research dissertation. All participants were awarded an education doctorate degree from a public college or university, with the exception of one individual who received her degree from a private university. Moreover, one participant obtained a degree from an "online" university. The women were located in five states: Washington, North Dakota, Kansas, New York, and Florida. Six individuals were employed as full-time faculty members in a variety of public and private institutional departments. Two women were educational consultants or liaisons. Twelve participants were working in several capacities in leadership and teaching positions at tribal affiliations, secondary language learner institutions, governmental agencies, and higher education institutions.

Data Collection

The life story interview (Atkinson, 1998) was the primary method of data collection. One in-depth, formal face-to-face individual interview lasted 90-180 minutes. The Interview Guide was constructed to gain the participants' stories using questions based on a chronology of past-to-present-to-future informal and formal education and learning experiences. The main objective of the life story interview is "to have the storyteller elaborate on what did happen – with how they felt and perhaps still feel about a life event or circumstance" (p. 59). According to Atkinson, this field research method of utilizing this interview approach to seek the voice and spirit within the whole narrative is built on a respect for the storyteller as well as their experience, and opens the opportunity *to step into another human being's life world* (emphasis added), an idea which Nussbaum (1997, 2010) has championed. The life story interview provided a structure to allow researcher sensitivity to first-person narratives. Simply stated, Atkinson's approach is in the story, the telling of the story, and the meaning of the story because "More important in the life story interview than formality, or appearing scientific, is the ability to be humane, empathic, sensitive, and understanding" (p. 28).

In addition to collecting documents such as their CV and dissertation, two pre- and post-interview Reflective Narrative Guides (RNG's) also were collected. The RNGs helped elicit stories in order to get a complete picture of the participants' experiences. The intent of the first RNG was to begin building rapport with the volunteering participants as well as to begin gathering data. The second RNG was created to finalize the closure process; gain further understanding on specific research questions; and gather any final approved transcripts, documents, or possible missed responses within the data. As Creswell (2005) pointed out, collaboration between researcher and participant is crucial to the success of the narrative research study.

Data Analysis

Once all data was collected, analysis with Atlas-ti 5.0 software began. Creswell (2005) believed, "The identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences" (p. 482). As an added layer of analysis beyond narratives and thematic matrices, the researcher found it necessary to create another picture of the data. Thus, Inspiration 8 concept mapping software was used to help re-create, further understand, and re-story the women's learning in order to create the write-up. In addition to triangulation, the themes that emerged across- and in-group indicated a further level of trustworthiness. Although the results cannot be generalized due to the small sample size, others may be able to determine the trustworthiness of this work by the reliability of the narrative research design by hearing the "authentic voice" of the women's stories in the research study as well as through the narrative imagination. Atkinson argued (1998), "no set of formal procedures for determining narrative validity existed for the process itself is highly subjective. What matters most, perhaps, is that the life story is able to be deemed trustworthy" (p. 60).

Findings and Discussion

Barbara Bush (n.d.) believed "giving frees us from the familiar territory of our own needs by opening our mind to the unexplained worlds occupied by the needs of others" (Learning to Give). The idea of culturally "giving back" emerged as a major theme responding to the

question: How is the doctorate applied in the community? The educators had used their training to fill in the societal gaps that existed in the community. Each woman became aware of her own motivation for education, the numerous barriers, and the support systems that enhanced her journey, and each mentored, role modeled, created, and participated in “giving back” as a trained leader. In a recent study on the “first ever” report on post-doctoral graduates three years out of a doctoral program, Hunt et al. (2010) discovered educational researchers “making a difference” with their contributions to the workplace and to society.

Two research participants speak about community.

Fermina (Asian American - Philippines):

Now that I’ve completed my Ph.D., I use it in the community. It is part of my family training. My husband and I have in common a love for community work. We have worked for many years with Youth Leaders of Promise. The founder of Youth Leaders of Promise became a very close friend of ours. So my husband and I put together the curriculum for the program, and then the founder also asked us to teach it with him. So we taught these kids from very diverse backgrounds from age 13-19. We have had children of prostitutes to children of a big company’s president. All faiths and religions are represented. We would take them out into a place outside of the city; we talked, and we taught them about how to live in a multicultural society and be the shapers and molders of society. So we taught them about justice education, and we also taught them about social skills, study skills, and life skills. My husband and I do an excellent job in doing consulting work on multicultural education and diversity issues. The combination of our different voices is very strong.

Leilah (Asian-American - Vietnamese):

By discovering from my research, and also just having those face-to-face conversations with these women in my study, and learning first-hand about some of their struggles I got more involved with the community work. I did a lot of volunteering for translation. Or whenever I can, I help serve as their voice, so to speak, because sometimes they have these problems or these difficulties, but they don’t have any advocate for them to take them and say, ‘Hey this is where you go to appeal, or this is not right, and you deserve to do this and this.’ I take them through the steps, go with them, and give them that voice.

As these women shared their giving back to community, it became clear that they also gained valuable learning experiences about the “struggles” of others. Each also gained an opportunity to help others provide their “voice” to problems. The Native American and Black/African American women also had similar stories of opportunities.

Leadership and Volunteerism

According to the “Wellbeing Scotland” report (Universities Scotland, 2007):

On average populations with a higher proportion of people with higher education qualifications also have higher proportions of people that volunteer. The correlations vary in strength across the type of voluntary activity; particularly strong correlations are evident in voluntary activity for environmental, political, human rights and cultural groups (p. 4).

This statement appears to be true based on the findings of this study. All of the women in this study had volunteered innumerable hours of their leadership expertise, knowledge, and abilities in the community.

Although many forms of leadership and theories of leadership exist in the literature, the most pertinent leadership models for these women are the models of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and ethical leadership (Schein, 1985). Greenleaf believed that servant leadership begins with the servant role first rather than the leader role. Schein's model of ethical leadership offers the concept of role modeling. Bennis (1994) thought that leadership began with awareness and managing of one's self before leading others.

Many recent models of leadership seem to go hand-in-hand in the literature, particularly when focused on communities of diverse individuals who are underrepresented in many levels of education role modeling and mentoring. Indeed, these two aspects of leadership emerged side-by-side in this study – in the stories of the early formal and informal learning experiences and then later in graduate studies and work in the community upon receiving the degree.

Latte (Asian American - Japanese) shared her desire to volunteer in the community:

I do volunteer my time at public schools. I'll come in and talk about Japan. I'll share my artifacts that I have. Also this university has a program where every May, they take some students to Japan as a cultural exchange, and I give workshops to the students who are going. I share what minimum you should know so their cultural shock will be less. So I do that completely as a volunteer.

Carmen (African American) best sums up the aspiration of giving back to the community:

My job is community based so it is being in the community. As I meet people I am focused on how I can help them to advance whether it is from a professional point of view or a personal point of view. I have found that a lot of people end up speaking to me about their personal life for whatever reason. I feel that my interaction with them will help them to develop their potential and really come into the purpose for their lives. So as I am interacting in the community my enthusiasm is geared toward helping. I listen to them and try to understand, but I am focused on what it is that I can do to help them to grow as individuals.

The themes of cultural development and expansion of knowledge and skill development in various communities within the United States emerged time and again with all 14 women in the study. A deep energizing motivation materialized throughout the women's reflections on

their actions, such as performing the empathetic skills of listening and understanding the learning challenges and desires of others.

Role Modeling

Role modeling according to Schein (1985) is leading by example. Moberg (2000) asked questions about the benefits of role modeling. More than one question focused on the benefits of role modeling as being learning and inspiration. Deal and Kennedy (2000) suggested another concept that is evident in Schein's model, namely, the "hero" leader. The concept of the hero, or in this case heroine, on her journey is a good one to consider for the leaders in this study as each provided us with a glimpse into her community work. A metaphor was conceptualized and conveyed on each of the heroine's journey. The metaphors were envisioning: climbing stairs, sailing a ship, or running a race.

On role modeling, Leilah (Asian American - Vietnamese) said:

I want to be a role model for a younger generation especially Vietnamese or minority women. I want to tell them that there's going to be obstacles, there's going to be barriers, but if they set their mind on a goal, on an objective, and work toward it, with determination, and with support, with a will, they will get there.

Colleen (Native American - Navajo) conveyed:

As I was finishing my dissertation, I wanted to play some sort of a role model to Native college students who were doing a summer internship. I thought these kids are going to be so homesick, let's get them over for fry bread, give them stew, and let me see what I can do to be a role model to them. I use my personal experiences and role modeling responsibilities to persuade the 'next generation' to 'climb the ladder of education.'

Role modeling was a conscious decision on the part of the majority of the women and had long been a part of their cultural belief that something should be done to help others. Most of the women said several times that this was, in fact, a responsibility. Their numerous learning experiences both in and out of educational institutions became a part of their awareness of self. Usually these were responsibilities and decisions that were learned in childhood rather than through the doctoral programs.

Mentoring

Mentoring, on the other hand, has been described as providing wise counsel or guiding others on their particular journeys. In fact, Zaleznik (1977) argued a one-on-one mentoring relationship "stands the best chance of drawing out the leadership qualities of a person with potential" (as cited in Razik & Swanson, 1995, p. 64). In a review of the literature of women of color who had earned doctorate degrees, mentoring was noted as positively and negatively affecting women in their pursuit and completion of this degree. Dissertation research studies with diverse sample populations showed that the lack of mentors and quality mentoring programs may have contributed to the high attrition rates for doctoral candidates (Clarida, 1997;

Dixon-Reeves, 2003; Garcia, 1999; Garvey, 1999; Hanna, 2005; Manuelito-Kervleit, 2005). Burg (2010) believed, “the mentoring research literature includes a paucity of formal studies in the arena of graduate education” (Abstract). Menter, Hulme, Elliott, and Lewin (2010) said, “systematic mentoring is a key feature of effective support for new and early career stage teachers. Effective mentoring requires investment in mentor selection, preparation and support” (p. 26).

Until recently, very little mentoring literature has focused on diverse cultures. However, Lazarus, Ritter, and Ambrose (2001) advised that female graduate students of color who are discriminated against by academic departments, professors, and advisers may “consciously or unconsciously, believe that women of color do not belong in the academy” (p. 16). A recommendation was made for the women to be “well-versed in written departmental requirements so as to offset the tougher standards that will be leveled at them” (p. 16). Also, Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) focused specifically on mentoring in the preparation of graduate researchers of color. The authors argued that schools of graduate education in the United States continue to be challenged in attracting and retaining students of color. They stated that effective mentoring within a department may improve the graduate school experience of multicultural students and better position them for success in their postdoctoral careers. Furthermore, they say that in order to be an effective mentor, a faculty member must cultivate understanding the experiences of students from various cultural backgrounds in spite of the societal dynamics involving race and ethnicity.

Colleen (Native American – Navajo) discussed her motivation to learn about mentoring and become a good mentor:

A leadership training program was started through a three year grant to try to get a new cadre of Indian leaders to start to head up the administrative ladder. I was selected to be a mentor; I took my mentoring seriously. I read about what I could be doing, and how you can go awry with mentoring, making someone a clone. A mentor can do some pretty unethical things if not careful. I want to be the best mentor I can be. So I read up on mentoring. Then I started giving lectures at the leadership conferences about mentoring, negative mentoring. Pretty soon I’m mentoring all these other women by reaching out.

Liu Shun (Asian American - Chinese) shared that:

Most of the stuff that I do in terms of community work has to do with students and scholars of color, other Asian American women in particular, and just sort of mentoring and supporting. Part of the reason I am so busy at this conference is because I agreed to a whole lot of mentoring sessions, feeling compelled to say, “yes.”

Usually in reflections on leadership responsibilities to the community, role modeling and mentoring usually were intertwined in the same sentence. While role modeling was being developed, understanding better mentoring techniques also were learned through practice. Mentoring, like role modeling, was motivated by a deep “compelling” desire to help other students of color who need support from higher education scholars who had persevered and completed their higher education dreams.

Transformational Educational Leaders and Learners Transforming Society

The women in this study could be considered “transformative teachers” (Menter, Hulme, Elliott, & Lewin, 2010, p. 24) in the classroom of the community. According to Universities Scotland, “Higher education is the prime agent of transformation in advanced economies” (p. 16). Cochran-Smith (2004) and Zeichner (2009) believe those who advocate teaching as a transformative activity will suggest that some challenge to the *status quo* not only is to be expected but is a necessary part of bringing about a more just education system, where inequalities in society begin to be addressed and where progressive social change can be stimulated (as cited by Menter et al., 2010, p. 24).

Hudson (1991) analyzed mentoring in the older developmental stages. His view was that older people wish to serve by sharing their experiences with another generation so as “to make a difference in the world around them” (p. 174). Also, Daloz (1986) related mentoring, adult development, and learning as forms of transforming learning. Daloz believed education is a “transformational journey” (p. 16) and indicated that educational mentors have the primary duty of providing an ear to hear the stories.

Implications

This research provides strong support for narrative inquiry as an integral component of examining the higher learning experiences of older women with an educational doctorate. Life story perspective is most appropriate for studying women of color with doctorates because so few stories exist on adult women’s learning, particularly women of color. We need to better understand the full spectrum of a learned woman’s life. By virtue of the type and number of reports being produced internationally and the number of institutions worldwide providing postgraduate education, knowledge of the life experiences of students who graduated from doctoral or other graduate programs is critical.

Schon’s (1983) concept of reflection-on-action provides a good theory in which to view the value of this narrative research method. Educators with doctorate degrees are very busy juggling their time. The participants in this study valued having “taken time out of busy schedules” to speak about their learning journeys. Here the interviews and the reflections on the interview process showed clear acknowledgement that this type of research is valuable both for speaker and listener. Educators should be willing to collect and create reflective narrative journals sharing these learning and teaching experiences with one another particularly when reforming policies and practices.

Conclusion

Because research reports on women of minority groups who have completed their doctorate are few the purpose of this research study was to learn about the experiences of women of color who, in middle adulthood, had pursued and completed a doctorate degree successfully and about how they applied the doctorate in the community. Like the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation reports (2005a,b), I found that women of color from diverse races and

ethnicities have much to offer their communities. While others have argued generally that better access to graduate education helps communities, this study has shown specifically how a few African American, Native American, and Asian American women between 40 and 63 are “giving back.” By having a desire to transfer learning and becoming role models and mentors in the community, these women become capable leaders for social justice. These research stories provide a glimpse into the contribution of volunteerism to the cultural community. As the women in this study have shown, educational leaders with doctorates can help achieve societal equity, be transformed, and become transformers in the process rather than being seen negatively as being a part of the “Ivory Tower” (Boyer, 1996). Boyer said academe was just a “place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation’s most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems” (p. 14) (as cited in Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000, p. 459). Diverse women of color are working toward problem-solving through their scholarly pursuits and leadership activities: giving a voice to the voiceless and becoming social justice advocates. This positive research and future positivistic studies that convey real educational stories of generosity provides for a healthy society. By presenting this research, I hope to open a dialogue with international knowledge providers in order to collect and share knowledge and skills. Graduate students, educational leaders, and policy makers wishing to create an international grassroots effort to hear the voices of experience will add to the numerous data reports that recommend more research studies from the voices of diverse perspectives. The intent of this year’s 55th World Assembly, in part, is to provide a venue to discuss leadership, social justice, and creativity of educational leaders. This study connects very well with this intent.

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