

# EDUCATIONAL LEADERS WITH DOCTORATES GIVING BACK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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# PROBLEM

Gender equity and access to learning for women has long been another topic of concern in higher education participation research.

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.

# PURPOSE

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.

# 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.

Sample: 14 (Native American Indian, Asian American, Black/African American) 40-63 (Ph.D. and Ed.D across U.S.)

Data Collection: In-depth interviews, reflective narrative guides, CV, and doctoral dissertation (thesis).

Data analysis: Atlas-ti 5.0 software, thematic matrices, Inspiration 8.0 software ; triangulated data; no generalization can be made; however, findings deemed “trustworthy.”

# FINDINGS

The idea of culturally “giving back” emerged as a major theme in response 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.

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. (Fermina, Asian American)

# FINDINGS

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). participated in “giving back” as a trained leader.

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.

# LEADERSHIP

Although many forms of leadership and theories of leadership exist in the literature, the most pertinent leadership models for these women (in this study) 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.

# LEADERSHIP MODEL/APPLIED

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.

# 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.

# COLLEEN (NATIVE AMERICAN) (NAVAJO)

Colleen said:

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.'

# 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.

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).

# MENTORING

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).

Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) stated 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.

# TRANSFORMATIONAL

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).

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.

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

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).

# SHARING

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.

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 55<sup>th</sup> 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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