EMPIRICAL STUDY

Ripple Effects: Multifaceted Mentoring of Educational Leadership Doctoral Students

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Ripple Effects: Multifaceted Mentoring of Educational Leadership Doctoral Students

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Abstract

In this article we explore the impact of mentoring on individuals who completed a doctoral program in educational leadership. Participants described the impact and ripple effects of mentoring on degree completion and their work as K-20 leaders to inform policy, shape practice and transform education; they also provided recommendations for infusing mentoring into the doctoral program. Data collected through focus groups and Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) was examined through Social Capital Theory and indicates mentoring for professionals seeking the Ed.D. should be multifaceted, centered on the emancipatory belief in the capacity of each individual, and woven into each program element. This study contributes to mentoring literature and extends knowledge about the unique needs of P-20 educational leaders pursuing the Ed.D. We argue for provision of a multifaceted mentoring program, which draws upon the expertise of members within the program's network (faculty, program graduates and cohort members). Purposeful, proactive and responsive mentorship will meet the individual needs of each student, including candidates from diverse backgrounds and other marginalized populations.

Keywords: Mentoring, Educational Leadership, Doctoral Students, Ripple Effects, Social Capital, Graduates, Cohort, Faculty

Ripple Effects: Multifaceted Mentoring of Educational Leadership Doctoral Students

In 2005 the California legislature passed Senate Bill 724 authorizing the California State University (CSU) system to offer doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership (Ed.D). In a three-year period, P-20 working professionals complete coursework and dissertation research focused on educational issues related to diversity, equity, achievement and opportunity.

CSU Ed.D. programs were implemented in 2007 and are currently provided at 15 of the 23 campuses. The program at CSU Stanislaus began in 2008 and the first cohort of graduates defended their dissertations in 2011. To date, 105 of 125 individuals from eight cohorts have completed the program.

Despite changes in program directors, faculty and curriculum, two core elements have remained constant: purposeful recruitment of a diverse group of leaders and a belief in the capacity of each student to complete the rigorous program. Focused on these commitments and continued improvement, we sought to understand the impact and ripple effects of mentoring, particularly for students of color, in the CSU Stanislaus Ed.D. program.

Ripple Effects

Ripple effects have been defined as a "spreading, pervasive, and usually unintentional effect or influence of an action" (Merriam Webster, 2019). When a "pebble" is tossed into a pond, there is a direct impact followed by a series of ripples, which extend out into the water. Like that pebble, the impact of mentoring on the support and socialization of doctoral students has both intended and unintended effects. To identify and understand the possible ripple effects of mentoring, we conducted a qualitative study with graduates of the Ed.D.

program, using Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) (Emery, Higgins, Chazdon, & Hansen, 2015) to explore the role mentoring may have played in their doctoral experience and the possible ripple effects of that mentoring on their program experience and future leadership development.

Literature Review

Mentoring is a complex construct, influenced by the knowledge, interpersonal skills, and goals of both partners in the mentor-mentee relationship. To frame this study, a review of literature was conducted to define mentoring and to understand what is known about the impact of mentoring and the multifaceted roles played by both faculty and non-faculty mentors in doctoral programs.

Defining Mentoring

Merriam Webster (2019) references the character Mentor from *The Odyssey* in a definition of the term "mentor". In that tale, Mentor serves as a "trusted counselor or guide" charged with supporting the education of Odysseus's son. While guiding students continues to be a mentor's purpose, mentoring is a challenging concept to define because the needs of students can vary so widely (Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010). Additionally, the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship changes as students evolve throughout an educational program, varying by purpose and academic discipline (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Grant, 2012; Lowery, Geesa, & McConnell, 2018).

Consistent within literature is agreement that mentors can support academic achievement through rigorous expectations with coaching, psychosocial encouragement through empathy and high levels of communication, and career support through networking and making "invisible systems" visible (Lowery et al., 2018; Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001).

The Importance of Mentoring

Mentoring promotes socialization into academic institutions and can be instrumental in countering struggles experienced by doctoral students, including becoming overwhelmed, managing time, balancing the pressures of work and family and experiencing isolation during the dissertation phase (Brill, Balcanoff, Land, Gogarty, & Turner, 2014; Waddell-Terry, 2014).

Unlike many students enrolled in Ph.D. programs, Ed.D. candidates work full time as leaders within their professional roles. These individuals are educational leaders who have a strong sense of self and identity within their work; however, they may not have a clear sense of what the identity of a researcher and scholar may be (Chapman, 2017; Hall & Burns, 2009). In addition, many are first generation graduate students who may not understand how to navigate this upper level of the educational system (Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017; Chapman, 2017; Coryell, Wagner, Clark, & Stuessy, 2013; Gay, 2004; Grant, 2012; Rudolph, Castillo, Garcia, Martinez, & Navarro, 2015).

Faculty Mentors

Traditional conceptions of mentoring center on faculty. These roles are described as advising and mentoring interchangeably and often include course advising, developing scholarship and writing skills, networking, and support during dissertation research (Calabrese et al., 2007; Grant, 2012; Hall & Burns, 2009; Mullen, Fish, & Hutinger, 2010; Tenenbaum et al., 2001).

An important consideration when faculty serve as mentors is the power dynamic between mentor and mentee (Mullen et al., 2010). Power relationships differ for traditional and non-traditional students and can be exacerbated in mixed race mentoring partnerships (Grant, 2012; Patton, Harper, & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007). In higher education there are fewer faculty who reflect the diverse student population; therefore, cross-racial mentoring becomes necessary, requiring student and mentor to learn about each other's experiences, including dealing with racism (Johnson-Bailey, 2012; Patton et al., 2003).

Non-Faculty Mentors

Recognizing the diversity of needs within an Ed.D. program, a broader conceptualization of mentoring is needed. Limited research has explored who, beyond faculty, may serve as effective mentors of doctoral students. Some studies have found a form of support comes from networks comprising fellow students as well as family and friends who provide encouragement and time to focus on coursework (Mansfield et al., 2010; Waddell-

Terry, 2014). No studies were found that explored the role of program graduates as mentors in Ed.D. programs.

Social Capital Theory

Social networks are formed on the foundation of relationships and are an integral element within Social Capital Theory (Lin, 2001). Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the advantage acquired through social networks and posited that the cultural and economic standing of an individual depends on the size of the networks to which they belong.

Social Capital Theory has been classified as external (bridging) and internal (bonding) (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital helps individuals to gain access to diverse ideas, perspectives and resources. Bonding social capital can develop within a group working toward shared goals and requires an environment of mutual trust and respect (Emery & Flora, 2006).

Potential Ripple Effects of Mentoring

A review of literature indicates that mentoring provides support and socialization during doctoral studies. These mentor roles have been primarily filled by faculty focused on socialization into the academic institution and advising a student toward degree completion. For the working professionals in an Ed.D. program, mentoring may positively impact the development of a scholar identity and degree completion. Extending from this, mentoring may also provide the positive ripple effects of social-emotional support and social capital

network development; these ripples may sustain students during their doctoral studies and later in their work as scholar-practitioners and educational leaders.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to learn from doctoral program graduates their perceptions of mentorship during the doctoral experience. A further purpose was to generate recommendations regarding mentorship as a support mechanism toward program completion.

Significance of the Study

Learning from the experiences of individuals who completed the doctoral program contributes to existing scholarship, adding knowledge regarding the unique experiences of educational leaders seeking an Ed.D. Understanding the individual and collective experiences of graduates and learning from their recommendations offers potential to improve practice for current and future students. In addition, welcoming graduates to remain connected with the doctoral program community in meaningful ways builds and strengthens the extended networks necessary for shaping policy, improving practice, and deepening the impact of leadership in reforming education.

Research Questions

We sought to understand how graduates of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership describe the impact of mentoring during their doctoral experience and their recommendations for mentoring current and future students.

Methods

Data Sources

The perspectives and insights of program graduates were captured through qualitative research as this approach allows for an understanding of how people interpret and attribute meaning to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit participants from the eight cohorts who completed the doctoral program (n=105). In addition to email invitations to all graduates, personal invitations were extended to those who identify with a race or ethnicity other than White as it was important to ensure data included the experiences of individuals who identify as a person of color. Table 1 describes the demographics of the cohorts and study participants.

Table 1

Educational Leadership (Ed.D.) Program Demographics, Cohorts 1-8

	Cohorts 1-8 Graduates (n=105)	Study Participants (n=13)
Person of Color (Not White or of European parentage)	45%	54%
White	55%	46%
First Generation Student	59%	69%
Female	69%	85%
Male	31%	15%

Data Collection

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is a participatory technique used primarily in community settings (Emery et al., 2015). Using qualitative focus group techniques in conjunction with visual mapping, participants generated data to evaluate mentoring impact. During the research activity, participants reflected upon their experiences individually and collectively. These experiences were then shared and mapped visually, allowing participants to "see" the ripples created by the impact.

Extending traditional qualitative focus group activities, REM involves "researcher-led diagrammatic elicitation, where the researcher draws the diagram during the data collection

process (with the participant's active input) for discussion" (Umoquit, Tso, Varga-Atkins, O'Brien, & Wheeldon, 2013, p. 7). As a data collection activity, mapping engages the participant and the researcher in co-creating data, which can prompt expansion on ideas and shared construction of meaning. Termed "theming and rippling" the group session captures the breadth of reporting impacts from all participants, generates impact themes, and examines ripples once themes are generated" (Chazdon, Emery, Hansen, Higgins, & Sero, 2017, p. 1).

The REM process involved three stages. In stage one, individuals jotted notes in response to questions about their doctoral experience. In stage two, participants shared their experiences with a partner and noted additional ideas to share with the larger group; an audio recorder captured the partner conversations. In stage three, participants re-formed as a focus group, which was videotaped. Transcripts from the audio and video recordings were used for data analysis.
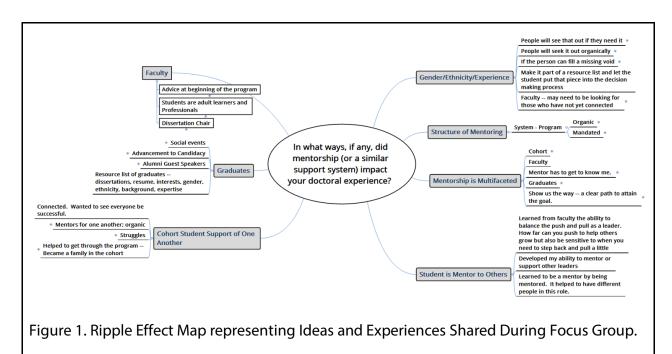
Data Analysis

Immediately following the research activity, the first two authors met to debrief and review the map. The "theming and rippling" generated during construction of the map guided development of initial categories. Over several sessions, the researchers collaboratively engaged in the process of open coding to identify emerging themes. Finally, results were organized and compared to the map generated during the session. Respondent validation was utilized to ensure internal validity of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

A potential limitation is the small sample size and the under-representation of male perspectives. Although multiple research dates were offered, geographic location may have impacted participation. While the Central Valley is perceived by many as a small, rural community, the area extends across six counties and graduates work and live outside of the immediate geographic area.

Findings

Through this research we sought to understand how graduates describe the impact of mentoring and their recommendations for mentoring current and future students. The map created during the REM session provided the core themes reflected in the findings (see Figure 1); analysis and coding of transcripts from the partner and mapping session reinforced these themes.

Figure 1. Ripple Effect Map representing Ideas and Experiences Shared During Focus Group.

Mentoring Impact and Ripples

Two major themes emerged during this study: the structure of mentoring should be organic and mentoring is multifaceted.

Organic structure. An effective learning community is organic and dynamic, constantly changing to meet the needs of individuals as the group collectively works toward meeting desired outcomes. Such a learning community includes four elements: "a servant leader who performs as a guide and nurturer, a shared moral purpose, a sense of trust and respect among all members, and an open environment for collaborative decision making" (Hiatt-Michael, 2001, p. 117).

Participants indicated mentoring was most impactful when it emerged organically rather than from a structured or required program process. They shared that mentoring manifested from a core program belief in students as individuals, as leaders, and as scholars. These ripples of faculty mentorship resonated deeply with multiple participants. A common belief was that professors were committed to helping students build capacity. One participant shared that a faculty member asked her about her goals and what she felt she needed to grow. She expressed the surprise she felt because as a Latina who had experienced low expectations from teachers in the past, she was accustomed to fighting for help:

> I had to think, 'What am I missing to be an expert? I wasn't sure so I outlined what thought an expert did. She helped me to see how I can color in the expert. I needed the practitioner to identify that. I thought to myself, don't let me keep being a

mediocre person. Let me be the best, and if I don't know what that is, then I need for that expert to tell me what my areas of improvement need to be.

Increased self-awareness was a ripple effect of the student being asked what she needed.

Significantly, when prompted to explore the implications of mentors and mentees being matched by shared gender, life experiences or race, graduates of color articulated a distinction between a mentor who is a role model and one who is working to meet your individual needs. Reinforcing the importance of multidimensional mentoring, participants advocated for an organic structure that supports mentoring so individual needs can be met:

I think the mentor should fill a missing void, whatever that is, for the individual. If they need someone to look like them because throughout their experience in education they never had a mentor who is successful that can relate to their possible experience, I think that could be important. But most people look for more than a role model.

This participant went on to explain that she seeks individuals who have had different experiences from her own because she wants to see situations from multiple perspectives. "Finding someone who is too much like me means I may not grow."

From this discussion emerged a recommendation to develop a list of mentors with information that may help a mentee identify potential sources of support (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, a short biography with key life experiences, work history, areas of research interest and expertise). From this resource, a student can connect with those who can meet their unique needs.

When considering the results of this study and research by Gay (2004) and Grant (2012) through Social Capital Theory concepts of Bridging and Bonding, we can see

individuals may benefit from mentors similar to them (bonding) and from those who bring diverse experiences to the relationship (bridging).

Multifaceted mentoring. Within Ed.D. programs, mentoring is often seen as a barrier to retention as it fulfills a need to belong within an academic setting that can feel foreign (Chapman, 2017; Coryell et al., 2013). Through frequent interaction, a positive nature, and being centered on positive concern for another, mentoring, particularly for scholar-practitioners in Ed.D. programs, can provide the socialization needed for academic success (Allen & Eby, 2007; Malin & Hackmann, 2016).

Faculty and dissertation chair. Impactful experiences with faculty and with the dissertation chair were shared by all participants. Key ripple effects included being an inspiration, understanding students, leveraging relationships to hold students accountable and modeling how to mentor others:

> What I learned from faculty is the ability to balance this push or pull as a leader. How far can you push or how much pressure can you apply to a group of people or a person to help them grow and then be able to be sensitive to when you need to take a step back and pull a little bit. For me it did play a role in my development as a leader, and also thinking about my ability to be a mentor to others.

Fellow cohort members. The CSU Stanislaus doctoral program has always included a cohort model with a group of students beginning the program at the same time and taking the same courses together. This cohort system provides a social network that supports bonding among members. Importantly, the diversity within the cohort also provided opportunities to bridge social networks. Participants shared impactful experiences in which

cohort members mentored one another, sharing celebrations, frustrations and support during times of self-doubt:

> In our cohort we mentored each other. There were lots of us that had strengths in certain areas, and we grew from our experience with those people. For example, there may have been some people who were really savvy with technology, so we grew as they taught us. Maybe some people were very personable. Relationships were very easy for those people and we were mentored in that respect. I think it did play a role in my leadership ability, in my experience, and as a mentor to others.

> There were two different times there were people in our cohort who were losing momentum to finish. I went to her place of work. We mapped out a plan to get her back on track for her research. And another gal in my cohort did the same with a gentleman who was in the same place. We helped each other. You just start to feel so protective and committed to, "We are going to get this done. I'm going to help you".

As illustrated in participant experiences, mentorship is impactful and helps adult learners to stay the course throughout a doctoral program. Support systems can help working professionals balance the motivating factors that led them to the program with the realities of seeking an advanced degree (Allen & Eby, 2007; Brill et al., 2014). Mentors provide role models, assurance and acceptance when encountering self-doubt and academic challenges (Waddell-Terry, 2014; West, Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011). Access and intentional

connection to mentors as part of program structure can combat the self-doubt (e.g. "am I the only one feeling this way?" "Why am I doing this?") that can cause some to leave the program.

Graduates. Adding graduates as a source of support expands the social network available for doctoral students. Having completed the doctorate themselves, graduates bring bonding and bridging social capital to the relationship. Participants asserted creating a mentoring relationship between faculty and students, within a cohort model, and extending the network to include program graduates will provide multiple forms of mentoring:

> I think you have a great resource in your graduates. We come from all different areas and have had different journeys and different experiences. I don't think the mentorship should be mandatory. Make more resources available, so the individual who may be struggling can seek out an alumni who has already finished and who is breathing again, who is above the water to say, "This is the way to the land! You will get there!"

Participants uniformly asserted that a multifaceted mentoring program providing sources of support, including faculty, cohort members, and graduates, within an organic structure would increase the impact and ripple effects of mentorship on the academic, psychosocial, and career supports essential to doctoral student success (see Figure 2).
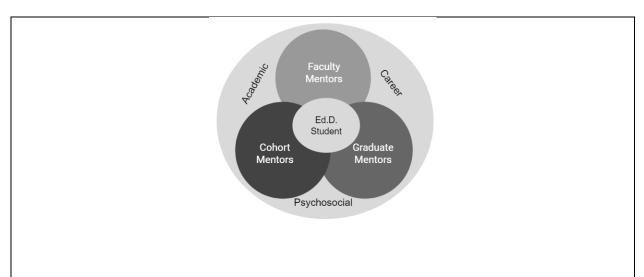
Figure 2. Multifaceted Ed.D. Mentor Network

DISCUSSION

Individuals pursuing an Ed.D. are working professionals who seek to leverage research and knowledge to effect meaningful educational change. Participants emphasized the positive impact and ripple effects of organic mentoring within coursework, within program structures such as the cohort model, and by networking with graduates. Making mentoring mandatory might be counterproductive as it may be perceived as "a burden on the student and something extra added to a long checklist."

Participants also articulated that an impactful element in their doctoral program experience was faculty who believed in their capacity to succeed and were committed to helping them in traditional and non-traditional ways. Recognizing this may not be the experience of all doctoral students, we acknowledge the critical importance of a program which includes purposeful appointment of faculty who operate from a place of deep equity consciousness. To leverage the impact and ripple effects that mentoring can promise, faculty

must authentically enact the belief that ***all*** students are capable of high levels of academic success regardless of race, class, gender, culture, or religion; they must also understand that traditional systems have created barriers to equity that have marginalized individuals and groups and actively work to identify, dismantle and replace inequitable practices with those that proactively create systems that support success for each student (McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006).

While doctoral students may be accomplished educational leaders, they may also experience self-doubt and insecurities and may enter the program wearing a "mask" or engaging in code switching. For example, one participant shared, "I would never ask for help because I don't want to be seen the way some faculty see people of color - always needing help." Given this reality, it is imperative that systems of support are woven throughout the program. Faculty should consciously look for indicators that a student may need support (e.g. engagement changes in class, not working to previous levels) and encourage the student to share concerns with faculty, a fellow student, or a graduate. One participant illustrated the impact of such an action on his experience:

> I was ready to throw in the towel. One day after class the professor told me about a time she considered quitting when her family was struggling. It created an opportunity for me to tell her what was going on with me. Now that I think about it, she probably saw that I was struggling.

In addition to hiring equity conscious faculty members with strong interpersonal skills, training mentors in culturally responsive practices is essential so they do not defer to mentoring practices that continue to reinforce the status quo (Brunsma et al., 2017; Gay, 2004;

Hall & Burns, 2009; Sedlacek et al., 2007). For mentoring to be meaningful, power and agency must be balanced, and mentors must be aware and willing to challenge their assumptions about student needs and the contributions students bring to the program (Hall & Burns, 2009).

Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate educational leadership doctoral programs should support students by developing, infusing and making transparent institutional supports, including mentorship, within all program elements (Patton et al., 2003). Consistent and deeply embedded inclusivity and equity consciousness within each program component, including recruitment, curriculum and climate is needed (Brunsma et al., 2017; Gay, 2004; Johnson-Bailey, 2012).

Furthermore, to increase the diversity, socialization and success of educational leadership doctoral students, development of a mentoring network comprised of program faculty, cohort members, and graduates is recommended. Essential to this network is a program that promotes equity-consciousness, culturally responsive practices, and relationships built on respect and regard for individuals as both contributors and as leaders. Additional research to examine the impact of multifaceted mentorship on doctoral students is needed. In addition, further studies to examine the reciprocal impact of graduate involvement in the doctoral program is warranted.

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