



Lifting Scholars' Voices: An Analysis of Scholars' Reflections on Mentoring as Support in the Academy

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As a full-time teacher and a part-time master's degree seeking student, I sat slumped down in my seat on the first night of a new semester. I was fatigued, mildly interested in the upcoming course content and weary of learning about teacher leadership on an urban education track from another white, female instructor. The door opened and I sat straight up in my chair. In walked a distinguished, brown-skinned, silver-haired older woman. The way she navigated the room, her style and words, embodied the phenomenal woman described by the poet Dr. Maya Angelou. Dr. Carolyn Hopp would be the second and last African American instructor I encountered during my collegiate journey from undergrad through the doctorate. Her presence opened another realm of who I could be in the field of education.

I am from a tight-knit family that straddled the working- and middle-class. My parents came of age in Alabama during the 1950's and 1960's,

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although my mom spent her early formative years in Los Angeles, California. Both activists in different ways, my mother marched with Dr. King (and got fired as a domestic worker for doing so) while my father worked hard, kept his head down and enlisted in the military upon high school graduation in search of a better life. Their message to me and my sisters was to work harder than your peers and your good work will speak for itself, which they modeled as entrepreneurs. However, in adulthood I learned that hard work was not enough. I was at a disadvantage without professional relationships to guide my development and social capital for access and influence.

Outside of my family, Dr. Hopp would become my first mentor. She verbalized things she saw in me that I did not see in myself and her mentorship has literally changed the trajectory of my academic and professional career. Broadly, Dr. Hopp encouraged me to pursue a doctorate, supported me through the process, helped me to discover and have confidence in my voice and developed my scholarship as my dissertation chair. I witnessed her position and influence in the college protect me and her advocacy elevate me. She seemed to instinctively assess my strengths and weaknesses and provide resources and opportunities for development. Post graduation, we've redefined our relationship; she is still my mentor and champion, but also a collaborator in the work we endeavor to do in the community as colleagues.

As a postdoctoral scholar I directed First Star Central Florida Academy, a college and career preparation program for high school-aged youth in foster care. In this role I was mentored by my supervisor, Dean Pamela Carroll and the Assistant Dean of Research at that time. The effectiveness of these mentoring relationships was predicated on my ability to articulate my needs. Dean Carroll graciously used her professional influence to sustain my work literally (through funding) and figuratively by opening doors and introducing me to potential collaborators. Although the program was in her office, she referred to it as "your project." The autonomy, yet open door policy, she provided felt uncomfortable at times because of my own self-doubt and naivete in academia, but it strengthened my ability to develop and pursue my own ideas. On a personal note, Dean Carroll's attendance at my wedding and interest in my son, who was born during the final year of my postdoc, made room for my intersectionality as a Black female scholar, wife and mother. While learning to balance both has been a challenge, her support encourages me to embrace both my personal and professional roles. During my postdoc, I also learned

with my first male mentor. The Assistant Dean of Research addressed my inexperience by unveiling the hidden curriculum in higher education. He provided mentorship regarding research and grants, helped me flesh out ideas in programing and scholarship, and most importantly, advised me on how to prioritize scholarly activities to establish a competitive edge for future employment in the academy.

While mentoring is a source of support, it is not a complete buffer against the undertones and overt experiences with racism and elitism that are embedded within the culture of the academy. The first professor in my doctoral program dismissed my research agenda of studying the racial achievement gap and performance of Black students in k-12 with a disparaging comment, "it's been around forever and nobody ever solves it, but you can work on it if you want to," and a shoulder shrug as she walked away. I changed my topic and began to struggle with connecting the course content to my lived experiences, at which time the professor suggested that perhaps a doctorate was not for me. In anger, I changed my topic back, did exceedingly well in the course and connected with a mentor who supported my increased research interest in Black education.

I accepted a postdoctoral fellowship with the expectation that I direct a college prep program for youth in foster care and conduct research on its efficacy. It all seemed simple until I found myself in more of an administrative role that overlapped non-profit management, case management and research production requirements. I often felt like my work was significant in that it changed lives but would not lead to professional advancement for me. Postdocs are supposed to lead to faculty appointments, mine did not. At times I felt discouraged for not being on a tenure line, but I also had to acknowledge my desire to use my doctorate practically even if it meant being outside of the academy, temporarily. In addition, I'd been gifted with a beautiful young family that I wasn't willing to compromise. Having a mentor who was my supervisor and lead college administrator was challenging for me. I grappled with my professional work independently and was at times unsure of how to articulate my need for support without the fear of seeming incompetent. Currently, I manage the educational aspect of a significant university initiative aimed at supporting the educational ecosystem, from early childhood through adult education, within the city's first historically Black neighborhood. I have the same mentors, each for different things, and I better know how to manage our relationships.

While my personal experiences were not horrific like some in the literature on Black students, faculty and professionals in higher education, they were an indicator of a larger narrative that we wanted to explore through the production of this book. Dr. Amanda Wilkerson and I recognized that opportunity and advancement were not equally distributed or a result of merit, but rather associated with social and/or professional networks. Moreover, we became increasingly cognizant of network connections to racial, gender and socio-economic dynamics among individuals within the institution. The stories shared in this work demonstrate the intersectionality of scholars' identities as people of color, international students, full-time and part-time students, first- and second-generation students, males and females, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. We too belong in this space that is often white, male and stale.

MENTORING AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

The impetus of this book was to elevate mentoring as a critical source of support for underrepresented scholars in the academy. Through narratives from doctoral students, working scholars and preeminent scholars, the power of mentoring has been elucidated. Overall, the evidence provided suggests that mentoring is both desired and effective in guiding students through the doctoral process and supporting working scholars' advancement through higher education as junior faculty members and administrative professionals. In fact, many authors sought (and are seeking) mentorship and, knowing the power of the process, engaged in mentoring others. Preeminent scholars recognized disparities and inequities in the preparation of underrepresented doctoral students and identified the effects of such on scholars' retention in doctoral programs, securing of jobs after graduation and matriculation through the tenure and promotion process. Given the unequal power and privilege distribution within institutions of higher education, authors provided aspirational and practical advice on mentoring and self-advocacy to effectively support scholars.

In the absence of mentoring, scholars presented issues with program selection, socialization into the academy, vulnerability to toxic departments/programs and retention. With the existence of formal mentoring practices, scholars at all levels benefited from scholarly development, professional socialization and advocacy. Specific elements include:

Scholarly development:

- Demystification of the doctoral process
- Dissertation support
- Teaching
- Career development
- Faculty appointments
- Job search training
- Research productivity
- Role modeling

Professional socialization

- Institutional adjustment
- Networking
- Social capital building

Advocacy

- Validation
- Policy knowledge
- Development of self-advocacy skills
- Mentor's professional influence

The stated topics impact the number of underrepresented scholars who enter and persist through doctoral programs, are hired for faculty and administrative roles and who are successful in those appointments leading to career advancement, tenure and promotion.

MENTORING THROUGH ISOLATION AND TREPIDATION

Much of the literature on mentoring underrepresented doctoral students and junior faculty includes stories of hardships. With optimistic intent we aimed to share stories about how mentoring supported scholarly advancement, particularly in association with the Holmes Scholars Program. However, in highlighting mentoring success stories we encountered descriptions of intense obstacles faced by scholars. Telling their

stories seemed to be cathartic for some, a way to express what they may not have been able to communicate in previous contexts. Such accounts reveal a climate in higher education that is sometimes hostile for underrepresented scholars. The narratives presented here provide evidence of inequity in support for scholars of color and between men and women, as well as for international scholars.

Working scholars were included in this book to provide insight into mentoring practices postdoctorate, as both a mentor and/or a mentee. Our intent was for these narratives to support the career advancement of scholars working in professional roles, along with the attainment of tenure and promotion for junior faculty. Interestingly, authors in this section wrote about being a mentor to others while identifying new sources of support for themselves. This is further evidence of two things, the first puzzling and the second promising. First, is there quality mentoring support for junior faculty and novice university professionals? Second, the narratives indicate that an aspect of mentoring is cyclical. Authors who experienced positive mentoring most often wrote about mentoring others. Mentors drew on previous mentoring experiences, both positive and negative, to actualize their own mentoring identities. As such, increasing mentoring experiences at the beginning of the doctoral pipeline can result in an increased number of faculty members and professionals from underrepresented groups that are available and interested in mentoring.

An understanding of who scholars are and how their various identities impact their academic experiences at the doctoral level and beyond is important for developing effective mentoring structures. Chapter authors described rich experiences prior to their doctoral journey. Foreign-born immigrants and international students bring diverse perspectives, languages and experiences. HBCU graduates described entering programs with high self-confidence having flourished in a familial context that builds self-esteem. Scholars wrote of drawing strength from relationships with family and close friends, who are described as having the ability to help one touch base with reality and remember who you are. Some are first-generation scholars while others walk in a rich legacy of academic pedigree. All are professionals in their field and possess strong practical knowledge. These valuable past experiences bring scholars to the door of the academy, and in conjunction with new encounters, influence their development. Understanding scholars' experiences is critical to developing appropriate supports. Cultural isolation and being a first-

or second-generation student emerged as themes that weigh heavily on scholars' experiences in the academy.

Cultural isolation was discussed in the context of racism, microaggression and stereotype threat. In the most intense cases, scholars recounted the impact of being the only person of color in their program, such as feeling pressure to succeed and prove their ability to compete with white peers; tempering responses as not to fulfill stereotypes in ideas, dialect and disposition, as well as a rejection of tokenism. In addition, academic scrutiny and limited constructive feedback caused scholars of color to perceive that a doctorate was not for them. Students and junior faculty identified challenges in aligning research interests with peers, finding acceptance onto research teams and being unsure of whom to trust. Relatedly, authors referenced the imposter syndrome in multiple contexts and associated with multiple identities (not limited to ethnicity). It exists at each level despite authors' assets, past experiences and practical knowledge. Effective mentors evidenced an understanding of the intersectionality between race, gender and socio-economic status; validated scholars' experiences; reminded them of their potential; supported research ideas; provided guidance on how to communicate through tense situations and reminded scholars to "be visible" and not jeopardize academic opportunities, particularly tenure and promotion.

Being a first- or second-generation college student became evident as a significant part of scholars' identity, serving as source of pride, as well as trepidation. This status contributed to limited knowledge of the academic processes and networks within the academy, as well as financial and emotional challenges. Scholars reported taking less initiative to seek out opportunities due to fear, limited understanding and a false belief that academic success is achieved alone. This characteristic requires a unique skill set in mentors, in that they must recognize scholars' apprehension and be willing to seek out opportunities to mentor.

Since contributing authors range from doctoral students to university administrators, this work highlights characteristics of effective mentors and their practices from both the mentee and mentor perspective. Most often, mentors described themselves as wanting to give back and develop the next generation of scholars; it is a part of their legacy. From the perspective of protégé's, mentors were described as sources of emotional and tangible support. Of chief importance was the mentor's ability to build the scholar's academic capacity, thereby increasing their self-efficacy. Future research on mentor characteristics should consider the

effectiveness of cross-race versus same-race mentoring and cross-gender versus same-gender mentoring. This issue was frequently raised in the text without a definitive conclusion.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In “*Where do we go from here: Chaos or community*,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., outlines why, in 1967, equality was still a dream despite civil rights legislation. He explains that a loose and insufficient collection of legal status is not a strong enough framework to withstand obstruction by segregationists. King adds that prejudice, discrimination and bigotry are interwoven into political, social and economic institutions and that transformation will be deferred unless these influences are challenged. In the same way, sparse diversity and inclusion programs and hiring initiatives by well-meaning university administrators are ineffective to bring about significant progress in diversifying higher education if university departments support the persistence of homogenous people and ideas, and white fragility is secure. A diversified faculty will create and sustain mentoring opportunities, for which there is a current dearth.

After the doctorate it can be hard to sustain relationships with previous mentors. Moreover, institutional and departmental norms complicate mentoring for underrepresented scholars in administrative roles and junior faculty. Limited financial and personnel support, and a lack of established mentoring programs, are often contributing factors.

This work has documented how critical mentoring relationships are for advancing underrepresented scholars through doctoral programs and for tenure and promotion. Through the descriptions of effective mentoring practices and the presentation of numerous frameworks to guide program development, this work offers practical implications to support scholar advancement through mentoring. In addition, the Holmes Scholars Program is offered as an initiative of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education that supports the development of mentoring programs at member institutions. Multiple authors credit the Holmes Scholars Program with providing guidance on scholarly productivity, a national stage to communicate research, leadership experiences, opportunities to collaborate with peers across institutions, and of course mentoring from a faculty advisor at their home institution and potentially renowned faculty across the nation who are a part of the network.

Underrepresented scholars benefit from the presence of faculty members, administrators and other institutional leaders with similar demographic characteristics, who can serve as role models. However, more importantly, scholars are in search of mentors who recognize how their individual identities intersect with the realities of academia and who can support their academic and personal development through the doctoral and career advancement process. In reference to policy, increased advocacy for changes in evaluation processes that occur within school and colleges, as well as hiring practices is paramount. Cluster hiring is a solution that can be more widely practiced. In addition, incentivizing implicit bias training may make faculty more aware of prejudices and predispositions resulting in more equitable practices on search committees.

As Predominantly White Institutions become Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI), mentorship on all levels of the academy must be scrutinized. This book provides insight into barriers experienced by students and faculty as well as interventions by mentors that supported their development. Paralleling King's reflections on equality, I end with the thought that while we cannot resolve issues of mentoring and faculty diversification immediately, we are making choices that will determine our ability to achieve this goal in the future. "We cannot afford to make these choices poorly" (King, 1967, p. 202).

REFERENCE

King, M. L., Jr. (1967). *Where do we go from here: Chaos or community?* New York, NY: Harper & Row.