

## **Three Women's Educational Doctoral Program Experiences: A Case Study of Performances and Journeys**

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### **Abstract**

Three academic women joined to write this piece to explore individual doctoral program experiences and to establish common understandings. They collectively analyzed their experiences using the conceptual approach of doctoral program performances and journeys. This case study shares their experiences within the conceptual approach through emerging themes. The common understandings developed herein about doctoral education based on these themes are also shared. The broader contributions of the three women's work are two-fold. First, the entire case study provides a way to view, discuss, and consider women's doctoral education pluralistically. Secondly, perhaps readers of this piece will recognize that individual and common understandings with others are a way to develop professional knowledge as academics. Further, readers of this piece might be able to relate more deeply to their own and others' unique doctoral program experiences through the lens of performances or journeys. Some of these connections might be based on the overarching framework, while others might be specific to the shared women's experiences.

**Keywords:** *Case Study; doctoral experiences; program performances*

### **Introduction**

Three women embarking on the world of academia at different points in their lives happened to cross paths at a common institution. Working in a College of Education, they decided to form a group to discuss doctoral education. As beginning academics, they focused on their recent common experiences as doctoral students, their experiences as professional women, and presented questions related to working with their own doctoral students. Initial conversations explored typical doctoral educational experiences, such as coursework completion, comprehensive exams, conference presentations, publications, and dissertation defenses. As these women's conversations and relationships deepened, discussing these typical doctoral program components did not allow the women to truly understand each other's unique individual experiences (Grover, 2007). For instance, two of the women took a qualitative research course from the same professor. For one of the women

the course was not an influential class. Yet, for another of the women it was significant in her program experiences. The reasons for these differences were difficult to discuss and understand without delving further into their individual experiences. For this reason, they conducted a study exploring their individual experiences in doctoral education. The following case study account of this work holds broader contributions for the women involved as well as for their colleagues, doctoral students, and administrators working within doctoral education. The authors hope that after reading this piece readers will be able to relate more deeply to their own and others' unique doctoral program experiences. These relational understandings should enhance academics, doctoral students, and administrators present and future work in doctoral education.

### Context

The professional interests of the group lie in mathematics and literacy education; however, all of the members hold a common curriculum and instruction doctorate foundation. Presently, the three participating women work at a large land-grant research university located in an Appalachian state. Throughout this piece the use of the names Stella, Elise, and Madelyn provide anonymity to the shared personal experiences. Stella and Elise completed their 2008 doctoral work in mathematics education at a common university, while Madelyn completed her work in literacy education at a different institution during the same timeframe. All three women work as beginning academics in their respective areas of interest; however, they have recently begun having difficulty understanding how to provide high quality doctoral experiences for their students. Each realizes that their own doctoral experiences were unique, but they want to search for common experiences in order to better understand their own present and future students' experiences.

This study uses a single case study of a cohort of the three women. The study is subjective in nature because the participants are also the researchers (Creswell, 1998). Thus, their individual perspectives, experiences, and meaning making (Kor-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009) are heavily ingrained in the emerging themes and discussion. Within this piece doctoral program experiences are referred to as *program journeys* or *performances*. Experiences that are *journeys* refer to those that combine learning and teaching. However, if no learning or growth occurs, then these experiences are simply referred to as *performances*.

Ultimately, the purpose of this work is for the women to find ways to express and discuss their doctoral program experiences that provide depth and breadth to the importance of the individual in doctoral programs. Additionally, the common understandings that were developed based on these conversations provided a second purpose, which is further expressed through two guiding questions:

1. How are the authors' shared experiences expressed as program performances, program performances intertwined with journeys, and personal journeys?
2. What common understandings about doctoral education did the authors discover?

The sampling strategies are homogenous (Creswell, 1998) within one cohort of women, all of whom work in academia. Although the women are in different programs and areas of emphasis, their commonalities within the field of education make the group homogenous. The data sources are observations, meeting notes, conversations, and written narratives from group meetings. Their discussions both written and oral based on the described data sources advanced a small number of themes that guide the analysis of the case study data and writing (Creswell, 1998).

## **Influence of the Literature**

Turning to the literature, two areas of doctoral education research influence this case study. The first area of literature focuses on the broad aspects of institutions and programs that contribute to doctoral students' successes within and among universities and disciplines. Further, these broad aspects of programs are often explored through discipline-specific doctoral program elements, such as coursework, dissertations, and mentoring. The research also explores each of these elements by looking at specific features, such as mentoring during the dissertation process. The second area of doctoral education research focuses on the individual nature of doctoral students' experiences.

### **Broad aspects of institutions and programs**

*The PhD Completion Project*, by the Council of Graduate Schools identifies key influential aspects of institutions and programs that influence students completion of doctoral programs. Aspects include the student selection process, student mentoring programs, financial support, program environment, and program processes and procedures (The Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Golde, 2000; Golde, 1998; Herzig, 2002). Ultimately the research shows that these various aspects of institutions and programs affect doctoral students' successful program completion (The Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Golde, 2000; Herzig, 2002).

### ***Specific doctoral program elements***

Specific doctoral program elements also influence students' successful graduation rates. For instance, studies have shown that the level of guidance programs provide to aid students in navigating program elements, such as course work, qualifying examinations, candidacy, and the dissertation process (Earl-Novell, 2006; Erdem & Ozen, 2003; Grover, 2007; Ray, 2007) affects overall student attrition rates (Grover, 2007). Further, the Carnegie studies reported in the book, *The Formation of Scholars*, the results of a five-year study done by the Carnegie Foundation looking at doctoral education in six fields (chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics, and neuroscience). Similar to other research the results offer a set of generalizations for successful program elements across disciplines including; purposeful curriculum design; recognizing the special role of students' learning communities; and concerted approaches to mentoring, advising, and faculty role modeling (Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin-Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008).

Specific to purposeful curriculum design, the literature suggests that doctoral education curriculum should focus more on practically preparing students for professional practice (Shulman, 2010). To summarize this area of doctoral education research, doctoral students' graduation success rates can be affected by program elements being more purposefully designed to focus on the practices of scholarship (problem framing, question development, research design), teaching (large, small, and individual settings), supervision and mentoring (modeling and coaching), and service (Shulman, 2010). Doctoral students experiences with this purposefully designed curriculum will further be affected by the previously mentioned institutional and program aspects, including, for example, financial assistance and program processes and procedures.

### **Individual Influences**

A second area of doctoral education research has a focus on the individual nature of doctoral program experiences (Lee, 2009; Brailsford, 2010; Grover, 2007). Students' individual experiences are affected by different doctoral students' motivations (Brailsford, 2010), life factors (Lee, 2009), and

interpersonal relationships (Brailsford, 2010; Mainhard, van der Rigst, & van Tartwijk, 2009). These individual factors all shape students' experiences and, ultimately, their successful program completion.

### **Motivation**

Doctoral students often have career, personal, and inter-personal motivations for embarking on and successfully completing doctoral education (Brailsford, 2010). In the area of career motivation, individual aspirations and/or changes in career circumstances, such as the loss of a job, often inspire people to enter into doctoral programs. Further, personal motivations, such as giving back to the community through scholarship, provide the catalyst for some doctoral students' success (Brailsford, 2010). The influence of friends, family, colleagues, and academics provides additional motivation for doctoral students' successes through support and advice (Brailsford, 2010). Ultimately, the research shows that these individual motivations for pursuing doctoral education affect student success by either inspiring or deterring individuals to successfully complete doctoral programs.

### **Individual factors and interpersonal relationships**

Other research indicates that a doctoral student's unique traits, such as self-discipline and positive academic self-concept (Lee, 2009), also impact overall success. Also, interpersonal relationships, particularly in the area of mentoring, enhance the benefits of individuals' motivations and life factors on students' success. Researchers have found that some of the most successful doctoral students had mentors who not only provided guidance but also the freedom and autonomy they needed to grow as scholars (Ray, 2007).

### **Issue**

Based on the literature above, the women began to discuss what was more influential in doctoral students' successful program completion. Successful program completion means not just graduating but includes significant growth through learning. Was it the broad program and institutional aspects; the program elements with designated features, such as a focused curriculum on professional practices; or was it the individual students' motivations, life factors, and interpersonal relationships? Interestingly, the women's conversations emphasized the importance of the individual experience within doctoral education. However, rather than offering definitive answers, research in this area often leaves readers to speculate about the motives, life factors, and interpersonal relationships that lead to doctoral students' success. Thus, this studies focus is on finding ways to further capture and understand the individual nature of doctoral program experiences.

### **Conceptual Approach**

The conceptual approach for this work draws from theoretical perspectives offered within the field of education based on the work of Elliot Eisner (1994) and William Ayers (2001). In his book on school programs, *The Educational Imagination*, Elliot Eisner speaks of teaching and learning in two ways. First, Elliot Eisner views teaching as a "variety of acts performed by individuals" (p. 158) with the intention of promoting learning. Similarly, William Ayer conceptualizes this view of teaching as "mainly instruction, partly performing" (p. 4) in his book *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. These acts performed by teachers include lectures, demonstrations, discussions, advising, etc. (Eisner,1994). Similarly, doctoral students' experiences within programs can be considered as a "variety of acts performed by individuals" (p. 158) with the intention of learning. Typically, doctoral students attend classes, have discussions with professors and peers, conduct research, and have teaching experiences within their educational doctorate programs. Within this piece, these acts performed by doctoral students are considered *doctoral program performances*.

The second way Eisner conceptualizes teaching and learning is radically different. This conceptualization regards teaching as a form of achievement directly related to learning (Eisner,1994). In other words, if a student does not learn anything, then no teaching has actually occurred. For example, if a student attends a lecture and does not learn from that experience, then teaching has not occurred. Ayers ties this notion of teaching with learning by defining teaching as being able to “counsel, organize, assess, guide, goad, show, manage, model, coach, discipline, prod, preach, persuade, proselytize, listen, interact, and inspire” (p. 4). Further, Ayers states the following: “teaching is more than transmitting skills; it is a living act, and involves perseverance and value, obligation and choice, trust and care, commitment and justification” (p. 4). All of these facets of teaching define it directly in terms of students’ learning. Similarly, if doctoral students are going to be successful in learning in their doctoral programs as they attend classes, work with professors and peers, conduct research, and have teaching experiences, these actions must move beyond performances and become experiences in which teaching and learning are connected. Within this piece, these types of experiences (i.e., those that combine learning and teaching) are referred to as *journeys*. However, if no learning or growth occurs, then these experiences are simply referred to as performances.

### **Findings/Results**

**How are the authors’ shared experiences expressed through the conceptual approach of program performances, program performance intertwined into journeys, and personal journeys?**

#### **Program performances**

For all three women, the process of completing a doctoral degree program involved a significant number of performances. All three participants’ program experiences included performances organized through three emerging themes: coursework completion, relationships with professors, and graduate assistantships.

#### ***Performance coursework completion***

All three women remember completing the necessary courses based on the requirements of their doctoral programs. The course requirements were similar: a large number of course credits comprised of research-methodology courses, theory courses, and courses in the area of their degree (i.e. Curriculum & Instruction, Literacy, Mathematics Education). Importantly, the reasons for course performances varied for each woman. For instance, timing caused Stella’s experience in a qualitative research course to be a performance rather than a journey. She took the qualitative research course early in her program and while she was eight months pregnant. The majority of the other students in the class were at the end of the doctoral programs and writing dissertations. Stella recalls, “I was not working on my dissertation and was tired of all the dissertation-specific questions.” Despite the fact that Stella’s dissertation was qualitative, she notes:

*The qualitative course I took in my doctoral program had limited impact on my understandings of qualitative research. I didn’t get a broad philosophical view of qualitative research because I wasn’t at the right point in my personal and professional life when I took the course. Honestly, my most vivid memory from the course was how uncomfortable the chairs were considering I was eight months pregnant.*

Thus, Stella’s performance was based on both personal and professional timing in her life.

Elise performed during a Curriculum Theory course in her doctoral program. She had never taken a course in the education department and was not familiar with the typical foundational curriculum

verbiage. She found herself lost in the language rather than engaged with the content, as her mathematical background experiences had not prepared her for the academic vocabulary. Therefore she focused on trying to sound like her classmates during discussions. Elise recalls,

*Coming from a pure mathematics background, I found great difficulty adapting to my first education classes...I was used to a mathematics world where I knew the lingo and language in those classes. I was shocked at the new language that I didn't understand in these education classes. I was not yet prepared to perform the way my classmates could, using the right lingo and knowing exactly what the professor wanted to hear.*

Her experience became a performance that was "intimidating and stifling," and she ended up dropping the course.

Madelyn experienced a course performance that also had to do with a stifling classroom environment. The stifling environment made her feel as if her ability to make meaningful contributions to the course discussions was compromised. She remembers,

*In one particular class, I remember how I felt that my voice was silenced. This was difficult and made the class more of a performance to check off my list, as I felt that I had no room for growth due to the fact that my ideas were not recognized or valued in the class. This did not allow me to engage and learn from the exchange of ideas present in a classroom, effectively forcing me into a performance rather than a journey.*

For varying reasons, all three participants performed in doctoral program courses. Perhaps if there were different time frames, instructors, students, or general conditions, these course experiences would not have been performances but would have been transformed into journeys. Another emerging program performance theme was the women's development of relationships with professors within their doctoral education programs.

### ***Performance relationships with professors***

Research has shown that relationships with professors can be incredibly valuable to doctoral experiences (Lee, 2009). However, Elise and Stella established relationships with professors as program performances. Elise recounted elements of necessity, location, and luck as catalysts for establishing a relationship with her advisor:

*Acquiring my advisor/major professor was a result of necessity, location, and luck. When I started the Curriculum and Instruction degree program in the Education Department, I was assigned an advisor specializing in math education. However, this person left for another job after my first semester, and I was never officially reassigned to another advisor. A mathematics education focused professor was never hired, so I found it difficult to talk with anyone concerning my specific needs. A year passed, I was considering taking a certain class. I wandered into a new professor's office who happened to be the instructor to ask him about the class. He asked about my advisor and plan of study. Once I told him I had none, he said he would help me and be my advisor. I had no idea what his specialization was, if our research interests were similar, or even if our personalities would mesh well, but I felt as if I had no choice and welcomed anyone interested in helping me.*

The relationship never became a true mentoring relationship, primarily because her advisor did not focus on mathematics education.

Similarly, Stella remembers her first meeting with an assigned advisor:

*I can remember waiting nervously in a conference room to meet my assigned advisor. I had visions of working together. Unfortunately, the first words out of the advisor's mouth were "welcome to literacy" to which I responded, "but I am a mathematics*

*teacher." She remained my advisor for the next year, but our areas of interest and connection to a specific discipline were not present.*

Madelyn experienced performances establishing relationships with professors early in her program as she searched for any job that would grant her a tuition waiver. Madelyn noted,

*I worked for an Educational Psychology professor for two years before I received an assistantship in my own department. While we had a very positive relationship, my work with her did not at all affect my doctoral studies, as it was quite outside my area. It did not matter to me that my job had nothing to do with my actual interests; I simply wanted the income, meager though it was, and a tuition waiver.*

Often these established relationships with professors were associated with the third subtheme within program performances, graduate assistantship performances.

### **Performance graduate assistantships**

All three women were graduate assistants during their doctoral studies. Commonly, they helped in the research and teaching process for professors in their respective areas. This included technical support, creating posters, coding data, locating articles, searching for internet resources, and grading papers. These tasks often felt like lengthy performances since they were not couched in each woman's specific research interests. Madelyn recalls planning a conference, completing travel forms, doing mass mailings, running websites, completing literature reviews for other discipline areas, and performing general administrative duties. Without hesitation, she refers to these activities as "distinct performances for me. I learned valuable skills, but I did not engage with the information in any meaningful way."

Similarly Stella remembers,

*My graduate assistantship consisted of working with a Science educator on research that was meant to integrate mathematics and science. Unfortunately, my knowledge and abilities in mathematics education were not at a good point for trying to integrate science and mathematics through research. The work was made up of frustrating and time consuming projects focused on Science education.*

Madelyn's initial work on her dissertation research felt like a performance. She recalls,

*Because my husband completed his PhD a year before me, we moved for his new job, and I conducted my dissertation research in our new location. This made for a difficult dissertation process, as I was removed from my graduate school support network and lived 15 hours away from my advisor, committee, and friends. Completing my dissertation was, thus, a very lonely and difficult process. In many ways, it felt like a performance, as I went through the motions alone to finish the project.*

All three of the participants' doctoral program experiences resulted in program performances. Yet, as the group's conversations deepened, they realized that many of the performances became something more influential, ultimately intertwining with elements of journeys.

### **Program performance to journeys**

The intertwining of classroom experiences, relationships with professors, and graduate assistantship performances frequently became elements of the women's personal journeys. During their doctoral program experiences, the three women were affected in their personal and professional lives as they completed program performances in the areas of coursework completion, relationships with professors, and graduate assistantships. Each woman experienced personal defining moments that

changed them, within their performances, which then became part of their individual personal journeys.

Madelyn's silence in the classroom setting resulted in classroom performances. However, this performance ultimately turned into an educational journey. Madelyn recalled this first sociology class morphing into a significant journey:

*Battling insecurities, I challenged myself not only with new ideas but by engaging in material and with scholars outside of my field. This was extremely difficult as I struggled to learn new vocabulary and concepts and to engage with them at an acceptable doctoral level. This experience not only expanded my knowledge but also my confidence as a scholar. I went on to take numerous other sociology courses and was able to feel like an equal participant.*

Ultimately, Stella's relationship with her second and final advisor—initially formed as a necessary program performance—turned into one of the most significant and valuable relationships established in her doctoral program. She remembers,

*There was one point in the dissertation process at which my advisor came into my office and said to just send what I had—without worrying about it being perfect. Feeling comfortable enough to send what I had already completed for feedback without worrying about it determining his respect or lack of for me but rather simply becoming a part of the process was life changing. Continuously throughout my life, I have defined and redefined myself based on others' opinions of my work. Often these opinions were expressed through grades. My advisor is probably one of the first and only people who didn't feel judgmental within my doctoral program. There was a sense of respect that permeated our interactions. This relationship was an essential element in my personal growth and journey within my doctoral program.*

Similarly, Madelyn's performance through isolated dissertation research ultimately resulted in a journey for her. She states,

*Once I was finished, it felt more like a journey, as I realized that I was uniquely prepared for academic life as my dissertation was solely my work...virtually no one else influenced it at all. I ended up being very proud of my work and myself for completing my dissertation alone even though the process was very difficult.*

Considering the entire doctoral education process, all three participants started their doctoral studies as performances, which ultimately became personal journeys; however, none of them anticipated the depth of change from journeying through a doctoral program.

### **Personal journeys**

Ultimately all three participants changed professionally and/or personally based on personal doctoral program journeys. Madelyn recalled many small journeys that moved her "outside her academic comfort zone," expanding her knowledge and confidence as a scholar, which, in turn, "added up to a large change over time." In another way, Stella experienced a transformative experience intertwining her professional and personal experiences through the process of her dissertation. The dissertation process under her advisor fundamentally altered her worldview in many ways, including her values relating to education, politics, identity, and spirituality. " Similarly, Elise said, "The classes I took altered my view of educational systems in general but also changed the way I viewed mathematics and how to best teach mathematical concepts. My research significantly transformed my view and understanding of my students."



The women's professional and personal dissertation experiences return us to the individual nature of doctoral student experiences. Further, the individually based catalyst of journeys is exemplified through Stella's attempt to articulate the reason for her dissertation journey:

*Why that happened is hard to exactly articulate. I know it had to do with the respect of my advisor, the ability to choose my own dissertation and pathway, the confidence of taking ownership of the dissertation process and really having a topic close to my heart, the desire to be a better person that fundamentally intertwines with notions of education, and a deep-rooted love for education.*

For Elise, this growth is explicitly expressed through her professional experiences,

*The classes I took altered my view of educational systems in general, but also changed the way I viewed mathematics, and how to best teach mathematical concepts. My research focused on student attitudes toward mathematics and significantly transformed my view and understanding of my students. I understand students in a completely different way after conducting interviews. I truly gained a deep understanding of their points of view.*

Similarly, Madelyn notes that,

*Each of these (and other) small journeys greatly affected me though none of them were individually earth shattering alone. Rather, together these experiences produced a gradual change by the time I completed my dissertation process. Through my doctoral program and specifically the dissertation process, I developed a great appreciation and understanding of the many differences in people and viewpoints in the world. My thoughts and viewpoints were broadened and softened as I experienced others lives and developed as a scholar and researcher.*

The women's experiences within the conceptual approach of program performances, program performance intertwined into journeys, and personal journeys through the emerging themes were shared. Common understandings developed herein about doctoral education based on these themes are now also shared.

### **What common understandings about doctoral education did the authors discover?**

#### **Common Understandings**

Two common understandings develop through this project. The first relates to dualisms within education. Dualisms allow the women to explain their doctoral education experiences in pluralistic terms. More specifically, the women find that doctoral education experiences can be both performances and journeys. The literature on doctoral education shows broad institutional and program factors and elements and individual experiences affect student success. Rather than questioning which is more influential individuals need to develop a pluralistic view of doctoral experiences. In particular, a comment Stella made captures this notion well: "I feel like we all understand that doctoral programs are not static and that the individual experience is so important. At the same time, it is okay to talk about specific program components and the impact they have on our future students' experiences. These discussions capture for me the complex and multilayered nature of doctoral education." A pluralistic view allows deeper understandings of both individual and common experiences, which allow the women to work at fostering supportive environments for their present and future doctoral students.

The second common understanding relates to how the women develop these pluralistic perceptions of doctoral education. As the women share experiences, they found commonalities within the utilized conceptual framework and emerging themes. Additionally, each of the women share at least one

program performance experience that later became a personal journey. Finally, each of the women had the common experience of personal journeys throughout their doctoral experiences. These commonalities were true even though each of the women had unique individual experiences. The ability to understand both their individual experience and the common nature of their experiences allow the women to build professional knowledge through shared understandings. The important common understanding that the women learned is that these connections are built through the thoughtful exploration of individual experiences and by connecting to colleagues, students, and researchers. For the women in this piece it happened through using the conceptual framework of program performances and journeys. Whether through this conceptualization or others, people need to find ways to understand each other's personal experiences to build professional knowledge in relation to doctoral education. Ruth Behar speaks to the necessity of women understanding other women through conversation and the sharing of experiences stating: "I believed that if every woman could tell her life story and be heard, we could change the world, I still believe it. I still believe it now" (Behar, 2003, p xix).

### **Practical Implications**

The significance and broader contributions of this work are two-fold. First, the framework of program performances and journeys captures the dual nature of doctoral education, both individual and common performances and journeys. This offers pathways for both faculty and doctoral students to develop a deeper awareness about the individual and common experiences of doctoral students. This awareness is important because this dual nature of doctoral education is often difficult to articulate and discuss. Typically, research will focus on one or the other rather than on both. In fact, the women involved in this research started the project by focusing on the individual nature of doctoral education. It was only through their common understandings that they discover the importance of looking at doctoral education pluralistically. Potential conversations for future researchers can include those that relate to broad institutional and program aspects, specific doctoral program elements, and features of these program elements that contribute to doctoral students' success. Additional questions relate to the more personal aspects of doctoral education, perhaps influential individual experiences. Future research could include an exploration of the impact of this framework on allowing understandings that have deep, breadth and are pluralistic in nature.

Secondly, this piece highlights that professional knowledge based on this dualistic view of doctoral education is built through understanding individual experiences, while also connecting experiences with colleagues, students, and researchers (Cochran, Smith, & Lytle, 1999). The three women found common understandings using this framework. Perhaps readers of this piece may also be able to make connections with this framework. Perhaps readers' individual experiences relate to the three women's experiences and the resulting common understandings within the framework. If this is the case, a reader would be able to expand their own understandings as a result. On the other hand, maybe readers of this piece do not relate to the women's experiences but recognize that in order to develop their own individual and common understandings about doctoral education they need to connect and understand with others. Ultimately the point is that developing common understandings with others is a way to develop professional knowledge as academics. Future research could explore other pathways to understanding individual and common experiences in the development of professional knowledge. Additionally, further exploration of what this professional knowledge is would be of interest to the field. For example, researchers could explore the development of this professional knowledge among both new and seasoned academics.

The women plan on continuing to meet as professionals. The group hopes to expand to include doctoral students and colleagues from other universities. A mix of gender, age, years of experience,

and locations will add depth and breadth to these conversations. It is through these continued connections and understandings that the dual nature of doctoral programs and the importance of understanding our own and others experiences will be explored. This is critical because the authors feel these ideas are the root of improving doctoral program experiences.

### Conclusions

Three academic women joined to write this piece to explore individual doctoral program experiences and to establish common understandings. They collectively analyzed their experiences using the conceptual approach of doctoral program performances and journeys. This case study shares the women's experiences within the conceptual approach through emerging themes. The common understandings developed herein about doctoral education based on these themes are also shared. The broader contributions of the three women's work are three-fold. First, the entire case study provides a way to view, discuss, and consider doctoral education pluralistically. Secondly, perhaps readers of this piece will recognize that individual and common understandings with others are a way to develop professional knowledge as academics. Further, readers of this piece might be able to relate more deeply to their own and others' unique doctoral program experiences through the lens of performances or journeys. Some of these connections might be based on the overarching framework, while others might be specific to the shared women's experiences.

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