Chapter 2

Full Circle Moments: The Navigation of an Education Journey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reflects an education journey that has shaped the author’s cultural ideologies of education and teaching. Even though the latter part of the author’s education journey is the main focus, the beginning of the journey is also chronicled. Most of the journey that is discussed (in the latter part) took place among culturally different institutions of higher education. The pressures and practical lessons learned pertaining to education and cultural perspectives are discussed and emphasized. How the journey has impacted the author’s thought process and engagement with students is also mentioned, as consideration is given to how different perspectives impact individuals’ interactions with others in the learning process, especially as an educator. Overall, this chapter hopes to inspire women of color who strive to pursue a profession in the field of education by offering motivation through recollection of an educational journey and through mentioned practical implications for teaching.

INTRODUCTION

This book chapter focuses on a journey to academia that has proven to be what some may consider, “full circle”. For the purposes of this chapter, I consider the idiom “full circle” to be considered experiences, developments, and or changes that lead an individual back to an original situation or a complete reversal of the original
position. Throughout this chapter, I will outline a navigation through cultural experiences, and what these intersections have meant for me personally, and what they can mean for those in academics who have similar backgrounds or who have been (or work with students who have been) marginalized, neglected, or made invisible by traditional notions of the role of education. It is important to conceptualize what is meant 'by cultural experiences as the concept of culture is used throughout the chapter and provides a context for this narrative. When I refer to culture it describes the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. Furthermore the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action. Over the last decade or so, the tendency to connect ones cultural experiences to learning experiences gives us a richer picture of the teaching and learning process. It is through these means that we have begun to explore the types of impacts that may be made on learners based on diversities according to gender, religion, language, ethnicity, and much more.

I believe acknowledging your cultural experiences and perspectives is important due to the fact that as you enter the sphere of academics and shape your own thoughts regarding teaching and scholarship, it is important to recognize the perspectives in which you are reflecting on and promoting possibly consciously or unconsciously. Such a perspective is heralded by authors such as Haddix (2008) and is rooted in the thought that we must first reflect on our own cultural and linguistic backgrounds as we recognize how our views of learning may be socially constructed. When I refer to a view or idea being socially constructed, I am referring to a phenomenon that is constructed or developed by society. This in particular is essential for women of color to recognize as multiple identities intersect including race and gender. The contexts I discuss in this chapter are grounded in thoughts regarding cultural identity within education and my own experience as a women of color born to an African American father and West Indian mother —in the United States. However, despite the experiences I share within this chapter, it is my belief that the implications for teaching and learning go beyond my own limited experience.

BACKGROUND

I am aware that many ideas exist about how individuals navigate through cultural experiences specifically, within education. These ideas serve as a platform for this chapter. In the following section, I explore a number of these tenets, illustrating them with examples from my own experiences to demonstrate why having these concepts
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