Art Education Experiences of Three Asian Women Formally Doctoral Students in the United States

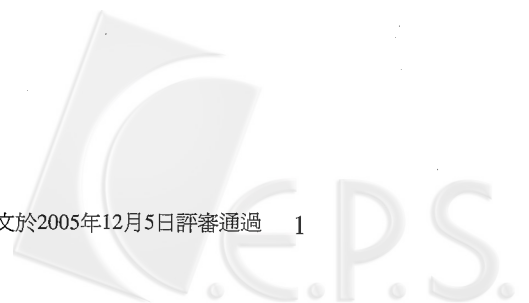# 三位亞洲女性博士生在美國學習藝術教育經驗之研究

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Abstract

Three former Asian women doctoral students in an art education program in the United States were interviewed about their current status, motivation, supportive and hindering factors in their doctoral study, past leadership skills, effect of receiving a doctorate, and future recommendations for those who are seeking to be doctoral students in the future. Categories that resulted from content analysis of the data were aligned with a leadership model developed by Thurber and Zimmerman. Results of this study indicate that for these doctoral students accommodating to both a new culture and an academic culture was challenging. Building self-confidence and becoming successful future art educators, family support, outside acknowledgement of a person's abilities, and learning to become professional scholars were important. It was concluded that carefully planned educational experiences are needed so that fear of failure, desire to have correct answers, and challenging others' ideas in public arenas are addressed early in Asian doctoral students' studies. It also was found that a caring community of American students was not always open to them. In the future the need for doctoral students from Asia to be integrated into a community of caring and become insiders, not outsiders, should be of primary concern.

Keywords: international doctoral students, leadership, feminism, empowerment, community of caring

摘　要

本研究透過訪談的方式，探討三位亞洲女性博士生於美國修讀藝術教育博士學位過程中的現況、動機、正負面影響因素，以及對於未來追隨者的建議。當進行訪談的內容分析時，本研究運用 Thurber 及 Zimmerman 的領導權能模式進行資料分類。研究結果顯示，對研究對象而言，要同時克服文化衝擊及學業壓力，是相當大的考驗；而要建立自信，並成為勝任的藝術教育學者，則家庭支援、外界肯定，以及學習成為學者等是非常重要的因素。此外，研究對象認為，在修讀學位的初期，即應謹慎規劃，以面對可能遭遇之挑戰；研究結果亦顯示，美國本地學生並未對亞洲女性博士生充分展現關懷善意，因此未來應首重將亞洲女性博士生納入美國本地學生的文化圈，使其有「圈內人」的歸屬感。

關鍵字：國際博士生，領導權能，女性主義，賦權，社區關懷

For the past decade, I have collaborated with Frances Thurber at the University of Nebraska-Omaha on a series of studies that focused on developing leadership theory and practice in art education. Our main focus was to educate teachers to become empowered and take a variety of leadership roles in different educational settings (Thurber & Zimmerman, 1996, 1997, 2002; Zimmerman, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2003). As a result of our study of various components of leadership and empowerment, we developed several pedagogical models based on our research and teaching experiences in Nebraska and Indiana.

Developing a Leadership Model

After conducting these studies, Thurber and I created a conceptual model, The Empowerment/Leadership Model for Art Education, that focused on voice and empowerment for in-service art teachers who were mostly white, middle-class women (Thurber & Zimmerman, 1997, 2002). In contemporary feminist literature, *voice* is a popular metaphor for understanding oppression and/or silencing women or giving attention to women's issues in educational and other professional contexts. Feminist writers, who included voice or illusions of voice in their writings (Belenky et al. 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Lewis, 1993; Wizling, 1994), were influential when we developed the leadership model for art education (Thurber & Zimmerman, 1997).

In this model, *private voice* depicts how art teachers may begin to experience personal voice and empowerment when they become reflective practitioners who feel validated when they are valued for their personal and professional experiences as teachers. Self-knowledge and autonomy are key outcomes of this initial process in professional leadership development for teachers. The process of creating a *collaborative voice* with peers and program leaders provides opportunities for each

empowered, teacher to speak and exchange ideas with other empowered educators. This transition moves beyond the level of personal empowerment and autonomy, to increased knowledge of content and pedagogy and to a context where many individuals' professional experiences are validated and possibilities for shared communication and collaborative professional vision are possible. Some leader-teachers are empowered and able to move into an active and public arena and begin to reform education. Then, a *public voice* becomes possible when these teachers become agents for change rather than targets of change in a shifting paradigm of educational reform. Individually or collectively, through sustained critical inquiry, teacher-leaders should actively seek to empower others through their public, ethical, moral, and social actions. Manifestations of these efforts might include products, such as assuming leadership of regional or national organizations, publishing innovative research in one's area of academic expertise, or organizing community efforts for worthwhile educational projects reaching underserved members in their communities.

The Empowerment/Leadership Model for Art Education finally was configured in four stages: (1) in Stage One is found Personal Voice and Reflective Practice that results in self-empowerment, (2) at Stage Two, Collaborative Voice and Collaborative Practice results in empowerment of others, (3) at Stage Three, Interaction of Personal and Collaborative Voices, social action is a likely result, and (4) at Stage Four, Actions and Products of Personal and Professional Empowerment are Manifested through Public Voice and Public Practice. Details about the development and configuration of this model can be found in an article Thurber and I co-authored in 2002 in *Studies in Art Education*.

The Model Applied to Doctoral Students

After this Empowerment/Leadership Model was created, I decided to research a different population than in-service teachers who were the focus of Thurber's and my previous collaborations. I conducted interviews with my past doctoral students to see how the data obtained during these interviews might align with the leadership model's categories. I also was interested obtaining information that might in the future inform my mentoring practices through helping doctoral students' to develop their empowerment and leadership abilities.

I interviewed seven past doctoral students whose dissertations I had directed and who received their doctorates by 1998 (Zimmerman, 2003). All these former students had been employed in an art education position for at least one year after graduation. Included were questions about demographics, current status, motivation, supportive and hindering factors in their doctoral study, leadership skills, and the effect of receiving a doctorate.

The seven doctoral students, who were interviewed between 1999 and 2000, like me were white, middle-class women. In 1998, I did not have any former doctoral students who were men. The seven former students I interviewed at that time had different backgrounds and stories to tell, yet there were many similar themes that resonated in their recollections. I realized that I was hearing stories from a particular group of women who did not represent women's voices from other ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds (Anzaldua, 1990; hooks, 2000a, 2000b).

After this study ended, I had mentored two women doctoral students from Asian countries who completed their doctoral studies in 2000 and a former student from Taiwan who graduated in 1997 and who I was not able to interview for the first study. I wanted to interview these three Asian women in order to understand their

experiences as doctoral students and how they might compare with responses of the first group of seven women doctoral students who I had previously interviewed. According to hooks (2000a), the challenge to contemporary feminism is to be inclusive, not exclusive. She explained that "Most American women, particularly white women, have not decolonized their thinking either in relation to racism, sexism, and class elitism they hold toward less powerful groups of women in this society or the masses of women globally"(p. 45). I thought: Did the Asian women who were doctoral students have similar and/or different experiences than the Western women in the previous study? If so, what were their experiences in relation to their evolving empowerment and leadership abilities?

One of the women in the present study was 36 years old, single, from Taiwan, and now teaching at a teachers college in Taiwan. She was at this institution for six years and is a tenured associate professor. The second woman interviewed was 42 years old, single, and originally from Korea. She taught art in an elementary school for a decade and then returned to Indiana University and completed her doctoral degree. She presently was an assistant professor on a tenure-line at a small, public university in the Midwest, United States. The third woman was 34 years old, married, originally from Taiwan, and was working as a research associate at a large research-oriented university also in the Midwest.

Methodology

Interviews in this study were conducted in 2001 and 2002 and covered the same topics as the study I conducted with my former American doctoral students and were categorized according to components of the Empowerment/Leadership Model I developed with Thurber. Interviewing my former students posed a problem in that there was a possibility they might feel they could not discuss freely, with me as their
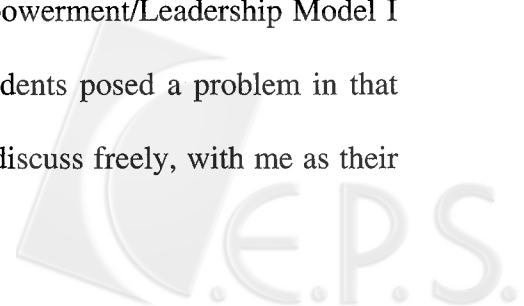
former mentor, issues related to their past participation in the art education program at Indiana University. I considered all women who were interviewed, however, as colleagues and explained that the purpose of the research was to gain information for future doctoral students and therefore they should be candid in their responses. Because no reactions to interview questions can be viewed as completely objective, I trusted their responses offered a high degree of sincerity. It also should be noted that this is a very small sample of Asian doctoral students, who were women and who completed their studies at a specific time and place in the past, and caution should be taken in drawing generalizations for the entire field of art education.

I used content analysis of the data from my interviews and aligned them with larger conceptual categories found in the leadership model that Thurber and I developed. Below are four stages of the model followed by categories in bold type that emerged from content analysis. Next are examples of quotes from the women that are identified through bulleted items followed by their statements in italic type. These quotes exemplify a variety of themes and issues in respect to private practices and public voices experienced by the three Asian women.

STAGE 1— Personal Voice Reflective Practice

Sacrifices often were made in order for all the women to complete their doctoral studies.

• *My parents do not make much money, but they sent me whatever help they could.*

There was a lot of pressure on the international women from their families and themselves .

• *I worried because I wanted to do well and that was pressure I imposed upon myself. I had traveled so far. I certainly was not going to fail.*

• *My parents supported me financially, so I didn't need to worry about money. But on the other hand this was source of stress. Every time I called home, my father asked me, "how are you doing on your dissertation? When will you finish it?*

• *When I was doing my dissertation, I felt a kind of anxiety, over stress.*

Self-empowerment was necessary in all cases where parents were not college graduates and did not understand the academic world or where family circumstances determined a course of action.

• *My parents were not sure I should be going away to Indiana. They were not high school graduates and didn't understand what I was doing.*

In most cases family were supportive when all the women were working on their dissertations.

• *My mother did not have money to help me, but she provided moral support. I did not have a scholarship so I had to save before I could enter the graduate program.*

• *My father was the one who wanted me to go ahead and get a Ph.D. degree.*

• *Every time I had any problem, my husband who was also working on his doctorate, helped me.*

There was a constant struggle for all women when they were doctoral students to keep feeling self-confidant and continue with the doctoral program.

• *In Korea, we did not have education programs so when I came from art school I had no education background and it was very difficult.*

• *Before I came to the United States from Taiwan, I had a different background and at first I was intimidated by the other students' backgrounds.*

• *The first year I was in the US I was too shy to ask the school mates for help when I did not understand things.*

There was a need for three women, when they were doctoral students, to have time to accommodate to their new environment.

• *I really missed my family. All of a sudden I was in a dorm and it was a shock to rely on myself and carry on. Once I made friends I got my old self back. It was a difficult transition.*

• *There is national culture that is different, but it's also the university culture that is different.*

The women profited from having graduate positions that forced them to interact with others.

• *When I had the job as organizer of supplies I had appear to be confident even though I felt intimidated, but I became more confident and learned to speak to people.*

• *I really enjoyed teaching the art methods classes and the students were very positive toward me.*

It was difficult for the three women to keep up with readings when they were in graduate classes.

• *Trying to read and write in a second language and organize ideas was very difficult. I was a slow reader and I had to rewrite my papers many times and have an outside reader check them. This was very time consuming.*

For the three women, there was a need to have the right answers before speaking up in classes and meetings.

• *It was hard, especially in discussion. American students were talking all the time and they didn't even raise their hands to talk. Most of the time we would just sit in the back, not able to join the conversation.*

• *In my culture, women are not expected to speak up at a meeting, usually men speak up.*

• *In Asian culture, we assume every time we say something it had to be right, otherwise others will assume you are not really good. I often wait too long to make sure I am right and someone brings up another topic and I've lost my chance to speak.*

• *I didn't talk in class, because I was not sure what I say was right or wrong.*

For two of the women, learning how to transverse academia and at the same time encounter prejudices in United States was very challenging.

• *Without experience, academic writing was very difficult to read and comprehend.*

• *When I taught a multicultural education course for non-art majors, I was teaching about the idea of crossing cultural boundaries through art. I had a difficult time teaching about this topic to undergraduate students who were from the Midwest and not tolerant.*

• *In the United States the students you are teaching let you know you are different, you are a foreigner.*

Serendipity often played a role in enrolling in the doctoral program and completing the dissertation for these international students.

• *When I finished my master's degree I decided to enroll in the doctoral program, I didn't go to IU to do the doctorate originally.*

For the three women, it was important that people in authority expressed their beliefs in the women's abilities to succeed.

• *I was given trust and that eventually helped me build confidence. I was given the impression I was capable and I took responsibilities. Self- confidence was built and eventually I became a leader.*

Having scholarships and fellowships for all three women, when they were doctoral students, helped build confidence and also allowed time to dwell intensively on course work and the dissertation.

• *When I was in the master's program I got an assistantship. I probably could not have gotten in the doctoral program because of financial problems.*

An important aspect of expressing themselves in written and oral forms, for all the women, was to feel what they had to say was important and worth stating publicly.

• *I kept struggling with if what I had to say was important. I kept thinking nobody wants to hear this.*

• *The whole dissertation is a personal experience; I needed to get in touch with self and that marked a point in helping me to make my thoughts public.*

When the three women were doctoral students they stated they felt overwhelmed by the dissertation writing process.

• *I felt depressed at the beginning of the dissertation writing. I panicked at first.*

Knowing what to do and establishing their own research agendas in face of fear of failing when they were doctoral students was difficult for the three women.

• *I had such a big fear of failing that I had difficulty in the beginning and I was not sure what I was supposed to do. I thought I was the only one feeling this way.*

• *I always thought would I be able to do this? Would it be possible to finish? I had a lot of trouble in the process and was not sure what was the right thing to do.*

Finding a meaningful match between research methodologies and research questions addressed in the dissertation was very important for all three women.

• *My area for research was technology, but I see this as a tool, but emotional knowledge is important too and the two needed to be combined.*

Feminist pedagogy helped empower two of the women to believe in themselves and what they could do.

• *The class I took about gender issues in art education made me feel I could accomplish things I never before thought possible.*

Stage Two — Collaborative Voice / Collaborative Practice

One of the women spoke about the importance of supportive communities and the family-like environment in which she studied and how it contributed to her feelings of being cared for and nurtured.

• *Having friends or other doctoral students in the department was really a great help, it was tremendous.*

Two of the women reported they felt outside the group of American doctoral students.

• *I felt kind of between groups and I was a little lonely. Some of the more experienced doctoral students who were finishing gave me advice.*

• *My support group was my Chinese friends who were not education majors, but they were doing their doctorates. They knew the problems I was having. American students may not have had the same problems and didn't ask me how I was doing on my doctoral work.*

• *The American students interacted socially, but not academically with the international students. We needed to build more of an academic community together with more sharing time.*

One the woman felt allegiances with both American and Asian doctoral students.

• *Since I was in Indiana for about 10 years I felt more in common with the American students. On the other hand I thought I shared part of my experience with the international students in our program.*

Care and attention, all the women felt, were needed to assure success.

• *In addition to family support, my advisor also gave me support and helped me solve*

problems.

Mentoring between a doctoral student and her director for all three women was

an important component of doctoral study and should continue after the student

graduates.

• *Talking to my advisor was helpful. You shared many of own experiences in writing*

and doing research. Now I still ask you form advice and help with my papers.

• *You really helped me. I didn't know in the United States how you say something*

academically and you would go over it with me.

STAGE 3 — Interaction of Personal and Collaborative Voices

Social action was described by all three women not so much by effecting social

change, but in making other people aware of important issues.

• *I initiated and organized the first international research conference in our*

department. We never had a research conference before.

• *Before finishing my dissertation, I would not challenge an American student or*

professor, now I can tell them what I think. I can disagree and explain the way I see

it.

Transformational experiences, mentioned by the women, involved going through

a doctoral program, receiving a degree, and in the process, or after, experiencing

change in some important way.

• *I learned I didn't have to wait to be perfect; when the results turn out, then I can see*

what I need to make-up, or what I can do next to improve.

• *After I finished my degree, I learned to express my own voice and explain why I see*

things in a certain way.

STAGE 4 — Actions and Products of Personal and Professional

Empowerment

Manifested in Public Voice / Private Practice

After receiving the doctorate, the women felt it was important to establish a research agenda for the future.

• *Having to write another dissertation to go for promotion forced me to do research.*

• *Most of the time I do my own art work that takes a lot of time, but now I have to do research as well, so since my art work is collaborative with my students I can do both at once.*

All three women reported that they were publishing articles, writing chapters in books, presenting at state and national conferences, and/or receiving grants.

• *I've published some articles and done a number of presentations, but I'm too busy doing other things to do enough publishing.*

• *I've written a large grant with a group that I initiated and I am in control of the process that includes setting agendas and resolving issues.*

Collaboration and working from the center to effect change, not necessarily having power over others, was mentioned by several women.

• *I know how to develop curricula and everyone appreciates what I can do. I make the program I am working on useful and at the same time scholarly. People who I work with feel connected with each other and we are really making changes.*

Once the women had completed their doctorates and were employed, there was an emphasis on mentoring others to become empowered.

• *When my students were ready to graduate they organized a retreat on their own based on their past experiences in our program.*

- *I've had a much more positive experience now influencing my students after I graduated and received the doctorate.*

Transformation, all the women thought, involved being free to express one's self in public arenas and establish new professional communities.

- *We were forced to give presentations at conferences and I was challenged at first and then became confident speaking in public.*

All three women agreed that there is a need for new doctorates to wait to take leadership roles until they become familiar with their new communities.

- *I am now trying to be comfortable with myself and who I am, and then I can begin to move out to other areas and influence others.*

There was a feeling of inequity among faculty members once the women entered their professions.

- *When I first came to my university, I noticed the overwhelming power of men because I was the first woman who was competitive with them. Professionally, I'm intentionally working harder to impress them that I am very capable.*

- *My faculty members would keep telling me its too difficult to initiate so many new things, you should not put yourself in a chaotic position.*

Unless a project was hierarchical, and did not emphasize cooperative, team-work effort, it often was not viewed by the women as a leadership initiative.

- *I organized activities that were challenging and that male faculty had never done such as organizing outdoor installation art with 240 students participating and organizing an art institute for aboriginal students in which my art education students were teachers.*

Even though all three women had taken leadership roles in their past and present positions, they often did not view themselves as leaders, especially if the leadership positions were in a local arena.

The women, however, reported many leadership positions at local and national levels that they held at the time of the interview. One woman who had been a professor for five years had taken on many leadership roles in her university, such as establishing a retreat for her students to teach aboriginal children and coordinating an international research conference. The other two women had been out in the field only a year and still were establishing their research and leadership agendas, although they were publishing and receiving small grants.

Summary and Conclusions

The last evolving leadership model that Thurber and I developed appears to have application, in respect to leadership, for a group of three of my former Asian women doctoral students. Classifying data according to categories that were related to the model, helped reveal insights that might not otherwise have been apparent. It should be made clear that the women in this study were encouraged to embrace collaborative styles of leadership that I promoted when they were students and I was their mentor. In other contexts, doctoral students may be more inclined to accept hierarchical notions of leadership. Results from this study, therefore, should not be generalized to other art education programs because findings are specific to this particular context. More research in other art education doctoral programs needs to be conducted so that results of this study can be corroborated and/or challenged. Other research with diverse populations of men and women should be undertaken to study what empowerment and leadership mean to people from diverse ethnic, racial, and social classes.
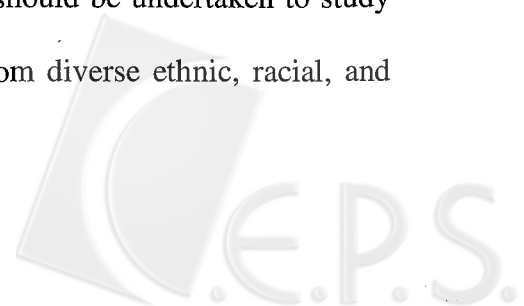
Results of this study do indicate that in order to build self-confidence and become a successful future art educator, it appears that family support, outside acknowledgment of a person's abilities, and learning means of becoming a professional scholar or artist were most important. For the three Asian women doctoral students there was an added challenge of accommodating to both the new culture and to an academic culture. It took more time for them to feel confident to speak up in classes and let their opinions be known than it did for American doctoral students. It is most important in the future that international doctoral students be given time for adjustment and that too much is not expected of them during their first semester on campus. Their fear of failing, after sacrificing so much, both personally and professionally, to come to the United States also should be acknowledged by their university communities. In order to be successful researchers, it is paramount that all novice researchers choose a subject that is meaningful to them and that they have confidence in what they say has power to influence the field of art education.

Building a community of support and creating a family-like environment for the three Asian women who were pursuing their doctoral degrees was an important ingredient in completing a doctoral dissertation and becoming accomplished art educators. A number of authors have written about the need to construct a caring atmosphere of cooperation, collaboration, equality, and support among all members of a community (Hegelsen, 1990; hooks, 2000a, 2000b; Irwin, 1992, 1993, 1995; McCall, 1995; Noddings, 1992). The women in this study echoed these sentiments noting the importance of collaboration so that care was balanced with their abilities to accept scholarly criticism.

For the three women in this study, the community of American doctoral students was not always open to them. They either felt excluded from this community

or twixt and between communities of American and Asian doctoral students. "As educational leaders, many women experience a landscape to which they are truly strangers; a landscape dominated by a culture of privileged, white, male leadership which sets the standards and norms of the education profession"(Gosetti & Rusch, 1995, p. 15). As this present study indicates, these challenges may be different for diverse groups of students. Hart (1995) wrote about the need for carefully planned leadership experiences for women who are first-time leaders. She advocated formal mentor assignments to provide desired role models and stressed that leader-mentors should state their goals and expectations for new leaders and how these relate to a variety of groups including the local community. To Hart's list I would add carefully planned experiences so that international doctoral students are integrated into a community of caring and become insiders, not outsiders, to this process. This means that faculty, staff, and students, at all levels, should be sensitive to challenges all international students face and adapt their teaching and learning strategies to meet these needs.

Formal mentorship programs, studied by Pence (1995), demonstrate successful ways to develop leadership abilities in women and minorities. She found that the most important factors in formal and informal mentor relationships were trust, mutual respect, friendship, commitment of the mentor to assist the person being mentored, and communication and a willingness to share ideas, failures, and successes with each other. In order for international students to become leaders, mentors need to be aware of the necessity of some international students to overcome fear of failure and to realize they do not have to aspire toward perfection, and what they consider right ways to accomplish their goals. Developing risk-taking behaviors and having confidence in one's self in a public arenas should be encouraged for all doctoral

students. Mentorship for me is an ongoing process as I continue to mentor my students after they graduate and in turn my former students mentor their own students as they build communities of support in their new environments. From this study I learned that I should be more aware of the special challenges of my Asian doctoral students and plan activities and programs that address their needs.

Hegelson (1990) researched the strategies of four successful women leaders and how their experiences as women contributed to their leadership styles. Many of these experiences paralleled the recollections of my former doctoral students. She found that women attended to process rather than achieving goals and awards. They also were concerned about how their actions would affect others rather than what would be their personal gain. The Asian women in this study came from cultures where cooperation, rather than individual competition, was valued. This "reaching out not down" (Hegelsen, 1990, p. xx) is a form of leadership that should be fostered so personal, collaborative, and pubic voices of all women and men doctoral students can be heard in an atmosphere of trust and caring while at the same time promoting high professional standards.

In all aspects of applying data to categories in the Empowerment/Leadership Model for Art Education, several issues became apparent for the three Asian women doctoral students in this study. One of these concerns focused on extending amounts of time required for entering the academic world when they were students, especially because they are from a different culture and had different backgrounds from American students. Issues of fear of failure and having the right answers and speaking, and challenging others' ideas in public arenas need to be addressed early in doctoral students' studies. It also is important to focus on collaborating and building relationships especially for international students who often may find themselves

outside the doctoral community. In some instances, when international doctoral students are given opportunities to become integrated into the general doctoral community through teaching and participating in other educational programs, they may experience racism and other forms of prejudice. These concerns need to be addressed by all people who are part of an academic community. These are local issues that have global implications for all doctoral students, their mentors, and other faculty and staff. Having transformational experiences that result in building self-confidence, and networking to effect change through social action is important for all doctoral students to address so that future enterprises and health of the field of art education are assured. As for the longevity of these studies with my former doctoral students, I will, over time, continue to interview former students from these two studies as well as men and women who will be doctoral graduates in the future. It is recommended that other art educators use the model Thurber and I developed for their own research with similar and different populations to discover how empowerment and leadership are pertinent for doctoral students from diverse socio-economic classes and ethnic and racial backgrounds.

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