

BOOK REVIEW

THE DOCTORAL JOURNEY: EDUCATIONALIST PERSPECTIVES

REVIEWED BY:

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Bradford, Brent (Ed.) (2024). *The Doctoral Journey: Educationalist Perspectives*. Brill. Pages: xviii, 161. Price: \$69 USD (paperback).

The pursuit of a doctoral degree is a monumental academic undertaking, one that demands immense dedication and resilience, especially for educators navigating the complex landscapes of primary, secondary, and higher education. Brent Bradford's collection of narratives, *The Doctoral Journey: Educationalist Perspectives*, offers a powerful lens into this transformative process, revealing the balance between personal trials and professional growth in the quest for a terminal degree. These stories provide a rare glimpse into the lived experiences of doctoral candidates, exposing the challenges they overcome, the motivations that drive them, and the personal transformations they undergo. The reader will gain invaluable insights into the realities of the doctoral journey, making it a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the depths of academic achievement.

In this edited collection, Bradford presents a continuation of their 2021 work, *The Doctoral Journey: International Educationalist Perspectives*, which they refer to as *DOCJ Book 1*, with a new emphasis on addressing the daily challenges, struggles, and triumphs that doctoral students may encounter. This volume marks an

other important advancement in developing literature dedicated to promoting doctoral student success. In essence, the current book communicates how educators undergo transformation, growth, learning and unlearning of oneself, and overall personal development within the doctoral journey. Although each contributing author's pathway, including Bradford's, had its own nuances, the central theme is that these journeys are marked with resilience, determination and optimism.

The purpose of this book is to inspire doctoral students and candidates, and to guide their graduate supervisors. It also seeks to offer guidance to graduate supervisors, equipping them with insights into the experiences and challenges faced by their students throughout the doctoral journey. This collection presents a range of narratives exploring the distinctive experiences of the nine contributing authors. Bradford confesses that a doctoral journey is more like a lattice than a straight line. Unlike a straight line, which suggests a direct and uncomplicated path from start to finish, a lattice represents multiple pathways and intersections that a doctoral student may experience.

Bradford neatly provides a succinct overview for each author, detailing their degree, year of graduation, institution, area of specialization, and dissertation title, thereby offering essential context for readers. The book is structured thoughtfully, incorporating elements such as a dedication section, acknowledgments, illustrations, contributor quotes, and notes, which enhance its overall coherence and accessibility. The chapters are divided into five distinct parts, promoting clarity and facilitating navigation for the audience. The inclusion of a final thoughts section and an afterword provides further reflections on the narratives, enriching the reader's understanding of the complexities of the doctoral journey depicted throughout the collection, leaving the reader with a prompt to self-reflect on their own doctoral journeys.

A significant shortcoming of the collection is its lack of diverse voices and narratives, particularly in terms of global representation. Of the nine contributors, four—Bradford, Hill, Lukie, Raymond, and Toogood—are affiliated with Canadian universities, highlighting a focus on Canadian perspectives. While there is the inclusion of three African contributors—Kortjass, Ngatia, and Mkhize-Mthembu—from Kenya and South Africa, to add some geographic diversity, the work is limited in scope and cannot fully represent the wide range of voices across the African continent. Additionally, while the presence of one American scholar, Van Ingen from Portland, and one European contributor, Romano from Italy, further broadens the collection's reach, these remain isolated cases. The final chapter, written by Australian professor Subban, introduces another perspective from the Southern Hemisphere, though the overall collection still leans heavily toward Western academic discourse. This imbalance suggests that the collection would benefit from a more intentional inclusion of voices from underrepresented regions, cultures, and perspectives, thereby offering a richer exploration of the themes addressed. Notably, there are significant gaps in diversity and inclusion, especially when it comes to Indigenous perspectives and the absence of voices from Asian-Canadian or Asian-American scholars. The omission of

Indigenous viewpoints stands out as a critical oversight. A more diverse global perspective would have enriched the compilation, broadening its appeal and making it more relevant to a wider audience. By narrowing the range of voices and experiences included, the collection risks diminishing its resonance and relevance for readers from various backgrounds and educational contexts. Bradford vaguely addresses the recruitment process, stating that "invitations were sent out to academics interested in learning more about the edited volume and the book series" (Bradford, 2024, p. 6), yet no specific details are provided about which institutions were targeted or the rationale behind the selection of contributors. This lack of transparency further underscores the missed opportunity for greater inclusivity.

The main themes in this collection include the obstacles faced by those in the field of education, such as financial hardships, student-supervisor relationships, research focus areas, professional learning communities, intrinsic motivation, support from family and peers, preparation for the final defence, securing employment after the doctoral degree and overall well-being. Since each contributor has been involved in education as a primary, or secondary school teacher, school principal, and university professor, their narrative provides an authentic glimpse into the uniqueness of the field of education. Moreover, each narrative provides practical advice and strategies to help doctoral students navigate challenges and develop personalized approaches to managing their doctoral journey. The inclusion of actionable tips and strategies for mitigating challenges faced by doctoral students is a significant strength, providing valuable guidance for navigating the complexities of academic life.

Bradford's tone throughout the introductory and concluding sections is reflective and enthusiastic. This tone unifies the collection, emphasizing the shared experiences of the authors while also honouring their unique voices. The emotional resonance of the narratives varies significantly, eliciting responses of empathy, inspiration, and, at times, frustration and sadness. Various authors reveal their most vul-

nerable moments, from losing a mother, to a marriage ending in divorce, to being financially overburdened, to reliving childhood trauma, to the unexpected challenge of changing supervisors three times. The reader becomes deeply immersed in the human experience, swept up in the whirlwind of personal dramas. The accounts of these experiences capture the true challenges faced by doctoral candidates, forging a stronger emotional connection with the reader.

The afterword by Pearl Subban offers a heartwarming and inspirational viewpoint. The doctoral journey is deeply personal, relying on intentional interactions with peers, while also requiring the protection of one's academic space from the outside. Everyone's path is unique; techniques that work for one candidate may not be effective for another (Bradford, 2021). Progress is often enhanced through purposeful and thoughtful engagement with others (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). It is crucial to safeguard the academic environment we inhabit during this journey, highlighting the importance of maintaining focus and establishing clear boundaries throughout the process.

This work is a valuable resource for doctoral students, supervisors, and academic mentors, offering practical insights and fostering discussions on the unique challenges of pursuing a doctoral degree in education. The narratives underscore the essential role of mentorship and professional networks in supporting doctoral students, advocating for the cultivation of these relationships as a means of enhancing student success.

The book highlights shared struggles and the individuality of each doctoral journey, helping readers understand the complexities of balancing academic demands with personal lives, managing student-supervisor relationships, and coping with the ensuing emotional and mental tolls. Ultimately, this collection serves as both a guide and a source of inspiration, stressing that while the journey may be universal, everyone's path is distinct and shaped by their own experiences.

REFERENCES

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- Jairam, D., & Kahl, D. H., Jr. (2012). Navigating the doctoral experience: The role of social support in successful degree completion. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 7, 311-329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1853694>