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Caroline S. Turner

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ASHE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Lessons from the Field: Cultivating Nurturing Environments in Higher Education

Caroline S. Turner

This article explores how a scholarly learning journey, as a student and faculty member, brings one back to an understanding of the value of knowledge gained in one's home community, and provides insight on how to foster settings for others to cultivate knowledge.

CAROLINE S. TURNER is Professor and Graduate Coordinator for the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program at California State University, Sacramento. Previously, she served as Lincoln Professor of Ethics and Higher Education at Arizona State University and as Professor of Educational Policy & Administration at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her research focuses on diversity, access, equity, and leadership in higher education. This presidential address was delivered on November 21, 2014 at the 39th ASHE annual conference in Washington, DC. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: I am grateful for my family, friends and colleagues who supported me during my ASHE Presidency. Your encouragement and insight along the way meant and continues to mean a lot to me. I especially want to express my sincere thanks to Anne-Marie Núñez for her leadership and partnership as the 2014 ASHE conference program chair. Please address inquiries to Caroline S. Turner, Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program, College of Education, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95819–6079; telephone: (916) 278–3580; email: csturner@saclink.csus.edu.

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by saying that I follow in the footsteps of many who have come before me and many who have been born after me. I want to recognize and dedicate this presidential address to them.

To the former Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Presidents who have lead and nurtured the growth of this organization to where it is now.



Figure 1. ASHE President Photo Collage

To my family.



Figure 2. Caroline Turner's Family Photo Collage

These are my children, parents, nieces and nephews as well as their children. It is for you, the past, present and future generations, that I dedicate these words. You are my strength and inspiration. I am proud to be a part of such a diverse family, representing our country's racial, ethnic, social, sexual, religious, and political differences. Given our differences, we have our moments, but we are family. A family that represents many, many families that, as educators, ASHE members are committed to creating a world that would not only welcome your talents but nurture them and make them grow beyond what you can imagine today.

Graduate students, faculty, and academic administrators have come up to me and said that my work provides validation and support for the work in which they are engaged. Many of my graduate students say that I am the first and only woman of color¹ they have had as a professor and were encouraged to pursue their careers due to my teachings and research. Several scholars of color, now highly respected professors and leaders in higher education, told me that they better understood their experience in academe as a result of reading my publications, such as *A Guest in Someone Else's House: Students of Color on Campus* (Turner, 1994b). These interactions re-energize me when I feel disheartened by persistent inequalities in higher education. Likewise, I am inspired by the insights shared by the many students, faculty, and administrators I have interviewed for my research. Additionally, I enjoy and learn a great deal from interacting and working with colleagues across generations. I was pleasantly surprised to find myself presenting at conferences alongside scholars, such as Rebeca Burciaga and Margaret Sallee, who are the daughters of long-time friends and mentors, Cecilia Burciaga and Joan Sallee. Like their mothers, I view them as my colleagues.

CULTIVATING A MORE HOPEFUL FUTURE

My current work on mentoring across race, ethnicity, and gender underscores the importance of supporting one another, within and across

¹In this article, terms such as "women of color," students of color," "faculty of color," and "people of color" are used to refer to people of African American, American Indian, Asian Pacific American, and Latino origin. In doing so, the author understands that "people of color" do not constitute a monolithic group. The author recognizes that whites are also members of a distinct racial category. And certainly by using the individual racial and ethnic categories no intent is made to imply that all persons so "designated" experience anything in a uniform way. In all cases, when speaking about any racial or ethnic population, the category used does not capture the full cultural dimensions of the people being described. As Padilla (1994) correctly points out, more research is needed to clearly understand intra-group variability. In Green's (1989) words, "we only hope that readers will keep their sights on the challenge and the solutions rather than the vehicle of expression. Language has its limitations, human potential has few" (p. xvii).

our differences, in meaningful ways, whether large or small (Turner, 2012; Turner & González, 2014a, 2014b). In doing so, we all take responsibility for cultivating and actualizing diversity. Much work remains to be done to achieve these goals. Unfortunately, trends indicating unequal educational representation and participation for students, faculty, and administrators of color persist. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, preeminent scholars addressed the topic, *The Elusive Quest for Civil Rights in Education*. Presenters agreed that while there is an increase in the numbers of students of color participating in education, they also provided evidence of persistent inequities related to the continued resistance to the “inclusion of ethnic content” in the curriculum, “disparities in rich and poor children’s access to well-qualified teachers,” the fact that “Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans remain less likely to pursue degrees beyond the baccalaureate,” the growing Black-White wealth gap, and the increasing stratification of higher education, yielding “separate postsecondary pathways for Whites and for [Latinos] and African Americans” (Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2014).

When asked why I continue to pursue my research, given that the needle has moved very little toward inclusion, I answer with the belief that there is no giving up on a commitment for equity, access, and inclusion in higher education. I also point out how inspired I am by the work of scholars who are achieving the seemingly impossible, such as those who founded and teach in the Mathematical and Theoretical Biology Institute (MTBI), recently recognized with a Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, and CompuGirls founder Kimberly A. Scott, who was named in 2014 as a White House Champion of Change. MTBI is recognized for producing mathematicians of color through educational, research and mentorship activities from the undergraduate to the postdoctoral level (Castillo-Chavez & Castillo-Garsow, 2009). CompuGirls is a culturally responsive technology program for adolescent girls from under-resourced school districts (Scott & White, 2013). Tapia and Johnson (2009) underscored that continued “underrepresentation . . . represents a tremendous waste of talent, the scale of which is increasing as minority populations grow” (p. 125). Challenging educational inequities, scholars and policy makers must continue to provide insights into barriers facing, as well as accomplishments made by people of color.

BLENDED KNOWLEDGE: FROM FARM LABOR AND ACADEMIC LABOR

The title of my address is *Lessons from the Field: Cultivating Nurturing Environments in Higher Education*. Currently, I find myself blending the values and knowledge learned from my home community with what I have learned during my almost five decades in higher education, three decades

as a faculty member. During this time, I have encountered various theories related to access and success in higher education. From the perspective of the researchers who developed them, such theories provided insight into individual, interpersonal, organizational, and inter-organizational factors involved in the recruitment, persistence, and advancement of student, faculty, and administrative talent in higher education. In contributing to these theories, I am becoming more and more aware of how my university learning brings me back to an understanding of the value of knowledge gained in my youth. This blended knowledge helps me think about what it means to cultivate nurturing environments in the field of farm labor and in the field of academic labor or higher education.

NEVER LEFT THE FARM: STILL DOING FIELD WORK

I grew up on farm labor camps in California and often say I never left the farm – it is always a part of me². From Hollister High School I was accepted to the University of California at Davis (the farm campus of the University of California system), then on to Stanford University, also known as *The Farm*; I retired from Arizona State University where my office was located in the Farmer Building. I grew up as a Latina/Filipina doing fieldwork, and now, as a qualitative researcher, I find it amusing that I still find myself doing field work.

Memories of life on a farm labor camp, on one hand, are of a beautiful place full of family shared experiences, laughter, lovely landscapes, and hard work.



Figure 3. Caroline with her Mom, Gabriella, taken at a farm labor camp in California circa 1947

²Some discussion of the farm labor experience is derived from Turner, 2012.



Figure 4. Beautiful Landscape View from our Farm Labor Camp



Figure 5. Caroline Turner's father, Jose, working in the fields

It is also a stark place where poverty, illness without the benefit of insurance, and lack of knowledge about educational options can work to constrain one's dreams (Turner, 2012). There are few safety nets or second chances here.



Figure 6. *The Farm Labor Camp*

From my research and college campus experiences, I learned that higher education institutions could also be described in similar terms - beautiful places full of wonderful learning memories, laughter, and lovely landscapes, but they can also be stark, unwelcoming places where lack of economic resources, lack of academic knowledge and a lack of understanding of student opportunities within higher education can work to constrain one's horizons.

As in this article, I have always used story in my work. I acknowledge and am buoyed by those researchers who support the narrative approach as legitimate scholarship and encourage its use as important sources of knowledge of the human experience (Armitage, 2002; Burciaga & Navarro, in press; Clark, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Gluck, 2002; Harper, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nash, 2004; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that qualitative research methods are most appropriate for examining the nuances of human behavior in its social context, capturing the complexity of the human experience. In his reflections, Burton Clark (2008) points to the value of context-based research in overcoming the disconnect between researchers and practitioners. Clark tells the researcher to be "wary of the mean and other measures of central tendency that squeeze out the truth of diverse stories" (p. 306). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduce counter storytelling as a useful approach to education research. They define this as a method of telling the stories of people who are often overlooked

in the literature, and as a means by which to examine, critique, and counter “majoritarian stories” composed about people of color (p. 28).

In this manuscript, I illustrate several of my points by providing quotes from interview narratives of those who have contributed to my research and from personal *testimonios* that I have written. Citing the work of Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona (2012), Gutiérrez (2008), and The Latina Feminist Group (2001), Burciaga and Navarro (in press) define *Testimonio* as an “oral tradition practice, [which] privileges and is contingent upon personal and communal experiences as important sources of knowledge in understanding one’s place within political, social and cultural contexts.”

Descriptions of knowledge gained during my years as an undergraduate and graduate student, and as a professor at three universities are highlighted here, followed by how I see this journey as connecting to the knowledge gained from my home community. The spirit of this journey is reflected in this quote from T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding” (1942), “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” I interpret this as seeing familiar landscapes with new eyes, with new perspectives. I could not arrive at this point, however, without going through the journey I share here with you. I think that all of us go on such explorations. What I am emphasizing here is my personal journey and how I connect that journey to where I started.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS: LEARNING ABOUT THE POWER OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF ORGANIZATIONS

In 1963, when I arrived as a freshman at UC Davis, I felt like an alien from another planet. I especially remember hearing one student state that poor people are poor because they are lazy. No one disagreed, but I looked at her and said, in a matter-of-fact, not hostile way, “My family is poor, but my father works from sunup to sundown; he’s not lazy.” She stared at me intently and walked away. There was no verbal response from her or anyone else. No wonder I felt like an alien. I was alien. However, there were those who reached out and helped me to persist on campus. Unfortunately, such extreme cognitive dissonance continues to be documented today (Harper, 2012; Museus, 2014; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

During my undergraduate years in the 1960s, I was unaware of scholars who shared my racial/ethnic background. Furthermore, UC, Davis students who shared a similar profile could be counted on one hand. I learned to be alone. At this time, it was the California Farm Labor Movement (<http://www.ufw.org/>), not lead by scholars but by Mexican and Filipino laborers, and the Civil Rights Movement (<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>) that had an impact on me as I began to awaken to the social and economic injustices that many endured as they toiled in a country

that excluded their equal participation. This realization caused me to stay and complete my bachelor's degree and help others to succeed on campus as well. Upon graduation, I was hired as an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) counselor, supporting the academic progress of the very first cohort of low income, first generation undergraduate students to enter UC Davis. To this day, I am in touch with several who were in that cohort and went on to various positions of leadership.

In the early 1980's, when I was about to begin doctoral studies, I heard Emmy Werner³, a developmental psychologist, describe her longitudinal study on resiliency. Her co-authored book, *Vulnerable but Invincible: A Study of Resilient Children* (Werner & Smith, 1982), examined the ability of children faced with chronic poverty and major stress to grow up to become competent, independent adults. A major protective factor for these children was a strong bond with family and community. As I sat in the audience, I realized she was describing some of my childhood experiences and the strong relationships I had with family, community, and teachers. Resilience theory then, along with the knowledge I gained as an EOP counselor about the importance of positive and respectful social interactions, provided insight into factors contributing to success, despite multiple barriers along one's path. Resilience is described as "a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229). Resilience is one factor contributing to student persistence. Another factor is to intentionally reach out to students. Even though a student may be resilient and motivated, these characteristics alone may not be enough to counter the effects of unwelcoming and often toxic learning environments (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Turner, 1994b). In such environments, institutional responsiveness is crucial for student persistence. I want to tell you a story that underscores the importance of intentional retention strategies, and possibly student-campus fit, particularly for first generation students of color.

My father always wanted us to do whatever we did to the best of our ability. Little did I know that being a good farm laborer in Hollister, California would be critical to my being able to stay at UC Davis. Doing an exceptional job in one arena had unpredictable ramifications for me in a seemingly unrelated future.

At the end of my freshman year, due to a multitude of transition challenges and a debilitating illness which caused me to be hospitalized, I held a passing grade point average, but could not stay as my scholarship money was running out. In fact, I was packing my bags to leave when I heard a knock on the door. There stood a tall man with a beard and a field hat offering me a

³Some discussion of Werner, Goffman, and Kanter is derived from Turner and González, 2014b.

job working on the experimental tomato fields at UCD. He had heard from Dr. Pearson, a colleague in Hollister, that I was in Davis and would be a good worker who was able to tolerate the sun and who would also understand the nature of the work he was doing. It was a miracle! I now had a job and could pay my way through school. I never dreamed as I helped to plant, label, cross pollinate, and harvest squash and melons for a seed company that this would later translate into a job at a critical juncture of my college life. Later, I was to learn that the man at the door was Dr. Charlie Rick, a renowned plant geneticist, who was the foremost authority on tomato genetics.

This experience made me realize what thin threads connect first generation college goers to their campuses. It also exemplifies how a simple intervention might prevent such departures. Later, as I conducted my dissertation research and subsequent research as a faculty member, I observed that these thin threads and critical interventions were documented many times over in the literature (see Cuádriz, 1992; Gándara, 1995; Museus, 2014; Rendón, 1992; Turner, 1994b).

I have been addressing factors contributing to retention, but other factors, such as gatekeepers, present barriers before one can enter. Here is an example of how multiple social identities may shape one's opportunities to enroll in higher education.

When first exploring graduate school options I was discouraged from applying to a business master's program by an admissions officer, who stated that I would not fit. I was a woman, a minority, a single parent, I had a background in the public sector, and I had some but not enough math background. This would make it nearly impossible for me to succeed as others in the program fit another and opposite profile. Although all of this might have been true, it did not occur to him that this might not be an appropriate state of affairs for student enrollment in the program. It was merely accepted as the way things are and should remain. I remember being struck by the many ways I could be defined as not "fitting" and, therefore, not encouraged and, more than likely, not admitted. I was so easily "defined out" rather than "defined in" (Turner, 2002a, p. 74).

In interviews conducted since then, I have heard many similar stories of "defining out." One campus president, the first Mexican American woman in the nation to serve as president of a baccalaureate degree granting college, said this as she described her transition to the presidency: "*People were taking bets on how many months I would last because I was a woman, I was too young, I was too Mexicana*" (Turner, 2007, p. 10). Among her numerous other recognitions, in 2009, Juliet V. Garcia was named by *Time* magazine as one of America's 10 best college presidents (Von Drehle, 2009). As noted in my opening remarks, these "defining out" experiences are further examples of higher education institutions as unwelcoming places which can work to constrain one's horizons.

DOCTORAL STUDENT YEARS

In 1983, I entered a doctoral program at the Stanford University School of Education (SUSE), and was introduced to the work of Erving Goffman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Even though I had not met them, their work influenced me as I tried to understand higher education contexts and the experiences of students, faculty, and administrators of color within them. This research provides critical insight into the power of organizational structure to craft a learning environment that can either raise or dash individual hopes (Goffman, 1961; Kanter, 1977; Turner, 1990).

First, I read an article from a book by Erving Goffman, a professor of anthropology and sociology, titled *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates* (1961). His description of institutionalization as a response by patients/inmates to the bureaucratic structures and processes of Total Institutions, such as mental hospitals and prisons, led me to perceive that, as a graduate student even though not in a Total Institution per se, I was being heavily socialized and shaped by institutional factors inherent in my doctoral education. As prisoners learn how to be prisoners, I was learning how to be a graduate student, shaped by such forces in my doctoral program as departmental policies and rules, the curriculum, the faculty, administrators and my peers. I began to realize that, for example, my learning was shaped by who was and who was not teaching in my program, by who was and who was not a student in my program, by what we were assigned to read and by what we were not assigned to read, and so on. What one *is exposed to* and what one *is not exposed to* shapes our learning. Realizing that I was going through a process, I became both participant and observer. And now I try, as a faculty member, to make students aware that their academic programs are part of a socialization process, not necessarily good or bad, but affecting and shaping their lives. However, students can also be agents of programmatic change. Goffman's research fueled my interest in the study of higher education institutions, their characteristics and how these characteristics affect the experiences of students as well as faculty. Reading the work of Goffman, and more recently Morrison⁴ (2001), provided me with insight on how organizational processes and policies can shape one's thinking.

⁴At the classroom level, Toni Morrison (2001), an endowed professor at Princeton University, remarked on the teaching of values in a university setting:

The university has always taught values, in one way or another . . . Intentional or not, teaching values occurs in the classroom everyday - in the material I ask students to read, in the dialogue that ensues . . . Values are implicit in everything I say, write, and do. And so it should be. We teach values by having them . . . [she argues that the university must] take seriously and rigorously its role as guardian of wider civic freedoms, as interrogator of more and more complex ethical problems, as servant and preserver of deeper democratic practices. (p. 274)

Later, my dissertation chair encouraged me to read the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor of sociology and of organization and management. Her book, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), identified several structural determinants of the low workplace status of women. Briefly, Kanter found that women were typically in positions that had little opportunity for advancement and that carried little power to influence organizational change. She also identified their lack of mentors and allies, and that they, even if promoted, would endure the challenges of those who are tokens. Kanter described how being a minority in a group can affect one's performance due to enhanced visibility and performance pressure. While Kanter's book focused on the experiences of women in a corporation, she did not address the status of women or men of color. However, her findings were compelling and led me to use her theories in my dissertation research on the transfer of Latino students from two to four year colleges in California (Turner, 1988).

On campuses with a higher transfer rate there existed a set of factors described by interviewees as contributors to transfer for Latino students. These factors included: regular communication between counselors at the community college with four-year institution representatives (this phenomenon, I called *it takes two to transfer*); a campus Puente project provided a developmental English class for Latino students to grow and excel (a place where they were not tokens but part of the majority); student clubs, student orientations, and a student run newspaper provided a means of social participation; and instances of individuals reaching out across race and gender to inform Latino students of their educational options. These elements came together, contributing to a campus environment more conducive for Latino student transfer (Turner, 1988; 1990; 1992; 2012).

FACULTY YEARS

After graduate school, I entered the professoriate, where I further examined academic environments for students as well as faculty and administrators. I saw how Kanter's work implied that the more ways in which one differs from the norm, the more social interactions can be negatively affected. I read scholarship which underscored the value of "community cultural wealth" described as "forms of capital drawn on the knowledges Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69), and "funds of knowledge" derived from household knowledge of working class, Mexican communities and used to develop teaching innovations (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González 1992, p. 132). Much of this latter work draws on previous explorations of knowledge creation such as Hill Collins' outsider-within knowledges (1986), Anzaldúa's *mestiza* knowledges (1987) and hook's transgressive knowledges (1994) which value the voices of People of Color, and see the margins as places empowered by

transformative resistance (hooks, 1990; Pizarro, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

From 1987 to 1999, at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, I continued to study undergraduate student experiences, this time within the context of a four-year university. Participants in this study indicated that they, as men and women of color, felt *apart from* rather than *a part of* the student life into which they were being socialized – at best, they felt as though they were guests in someone else’s house (Turner, 1994b). I realized then that this was another way to describe dissonance, a feeling of incongruence or not fitting in. Guests in someone else’s house feel that they can never relax and put their feet up on the table. Guests are not family, whose foibles and mistakes are tolerated. On the contrary, guests must follow the house rules such as keeping out of certain rooms, not touching anything, leaving everything in its place, and guests must always be on their best behavior. Guests have little or no history in the house they occupy. There are no photographs on the wall that reflect their image. Their paraphernalia, paintings, scents, and sounds do not appear in the house. There are many barriers for students who constantly occupy the guest room that keeps them from doing their best work. An American Indian student states:

I didn't need help for academics . . . , but . . . I needed emotional support; an informal get-together place. A place you feel comfortable. You feel a sense of community . . . Seeing another Indian face is real important –making that connection. This is something taken for granted by the white majority [who always see other white faces]. (Turner, 1994b, pp. 361–362)

Comments made by these students and others in this study are reflective of the current work by Museus (2014), whose research describes the creation of culturally engaging campus environments to bolster a sense of belonging for students. The students quoted, nonetheless, were hopeful and made recommendations toward transforming the entire house to include all diverse cultures. As an African-American staff respondent said, “*Too often what occurs is a mending of the exterior, rather than addressing the core issues*” (Turner, 1994b, p. 368). These individuals call on universities to put their houses in order, not just by patching holes and adding rooms, but by renovating them from the inside out so that there is space and permission for all students to claim possession. As noted earlier, several faculty of color, who are now tenured, have indicated to me that this was an important study which helped them, when they were students, realize that they were not alone in their experiences as students of color on campus.

After five years on the tenure track, I had some publications in highly regarded journals but was concerned that this might not be enough for tenure. Then, my partnership with a highly accomplished economist, Samuel L. Myers, Jr., Professor and Chair of the Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations

and Social Justice at University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs, led me to co-conduct a mixed methods study on the status of faculty of color in the Midwest. Our findings, derived from an analysis of large data sets, survey results, and over 60 faculty of color interview narratives, yielded publications which advanced the dialogue on faculty gender and racial/ethnic diversity among scholars and practitioners (Myers & Turner, 2004; Turner, 2002b; Turner & Myers, 2000; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999).

This partnership came about when I invited Dr. Myers to be a guest lecturer in my *Diversity in Higher Education* class (the first such class taught at the University of Minnesota), and he agreed to do so. I came across his name and his work at the Humphrey School by perusing the campus websites. Even though he was not in the College of Education, we found out that we had research interests in common and a respect for each other's research approach. We were both concerned about the continued underrepresentation of faculty of color in higher education and the fact that as professorial rank increased, representation of men and women of color decreased. These trends are demonstrated even today, for example, in the annual demographic reports of full-time faculty published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* (2014).

Dr. Myers negotiated with my Department Chair for some released time and invited me to join a research team composed of cross-disciplinary scholars from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. As an untenured faculty member, this experience taught me the importance of cross race and gender collaboration and mentoring, especially for junior faculty of color. Another message inherent in this experience is that your most productive partnerships may be found outside of one's field and outside of one's department or college. It is important to pursue your interests, and in doing so, scan the horizon and cast a wide net. Being part of a very diverse research team was a turning point in my career, and dissipated much of the loneliness and isolation I felt at the university. Being involved, as an equal partner, in a large, well funded, high profile research project had an important effect on my career trajectory. By the time I was considered for tenure, this work not only brought in funding but led to a contract for a co-authored book, *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success* (2000), as well as co-authored peer reviewed journal publications.

From the book, *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success*, I want to share a statement made by an African American male full professor, a Dean at a major research university, who describes our need to reframe institutional interactions and policies, with regard to the recruitment and retention of faculty of color, to be more nurturing: "We are not succeeding and I think it's because we are still looking at this process [recruitment and retention of faculty of color] as a sorting and weeding, rather than an affirming and building" (Turner & Myers, 2000, p. 88).

Forty-four of the 64 faculty of color interviewed for our study were tenured, and several held department chair or university level academic administration positions. Despite being highly regarded and successful in their careers, these faculty commented on the continuing difficulties they encountered as persons of color in the professoriate. Our interviews with faculty of color revealed that most identified racism and sexism as the primary troubling challenges they face in the academic workplace. Faculty of color described: feeling isolated, their lack of information about tenure and promotion, unsupportive work environments, lack of mentorship, finding their research unvalued, and feeling overburdened with institutional expectations to represent their whole race and/or gender. Even with such challenges, these faculty planned to stay in academia because of their love of teaching and the feeling that they could continue to make a difference. However, they advocated for strategies to level the playing field and neutralize the additional demands placed on them because of their race and/or gender. Unfortunately, the challenges and incentives to stay described by these faculty remain all too familiar in recent publications on the current status of faculty of color (Fries-Britt, Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, Milem, & Howard, 2011; Gonzales, Murakami-Ramalho, & Núñez, 2013; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Núñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012; Turner & González, 2014; Turner, González, & Wong (Lau), 2011; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). The good news is that several of the faculty participating in these studies remain in academe and continue to contribute to, advocate for, and create change (Turner, 2000; 2003).

From 1999 to 2010, at Arizona State University, I continued my research on the workplace experiences of faculty of color. I was also nominated by my Dean and campus Provost for participation in the American Council on Education (ACE) leadership development program. As an ACE Fellow, my interest in the history of women campus presidents emerged from my work with a prominent African American woman president, Dr. Marvalene Hughes. Just as I was interested in and conducted studies on the campus experiences of students and faculty, I was also curious about the factors that led women of color to become campus presidents. This interest resulted in research published in an article titled, *Pathways to the Presidency: Biographical Sketches of Women of Color Firsts* (Turner, 2007). Juliet V. Garcia, Karen G. Swisher, and Rose Y. Tseng are acknowledged as the first, respectively, Mexican American, American Indian, and Asian Pacific/Asian American women to become president of a public, baccalaureate degree-granting college or university in the United States. From interviews with them and observations on their campuses, I was to learn of their strength of character and creative problem-solving skills. Additionally, they cited the importance of the following as critical elements for their success: family support; peer social networks and mentorship; campus administrators who valued their contributions and

perceived their talent; and their own ability to take advantage of structural opportunities, such as interim appointments, within academe to demonstrate their skills and talents. According to Cuádriz (2006), “We know that without structural opportunities, moments of validation are stripped of their transformative force and left to dwell in the realm of memory” (p.104).

As an example of peer support, each president stressed the importance of maintaining close relationships with other women of color to their sense of well being. Garcia describes this phenomenon as *confianza*—a familiarity, a rapport—particularly among women of color. She says, “We can drop a comment about our children or grandchildren into the proceedings at a business meeting of women and no one will think less of us” (Turner, 2007, p. 17).

In 2000, when this study was conducted, only 3 percent of all college and university presidents were women of color (American Council on Education, 2000). In 2012, as with the continued documentation of the underrepresentation of faculty of color noted above, the American Council on Education (ACE) reported that only 4 percent of all presidents are women of color; a 1 percent gain. The ACE study shows that while college campuses have diversified the racial and ethnic makeup of their student bodies, the racial and ethnic composition of college and university presidents has changed very little.

Much of the research on people of color in academe invariably identifies mentoring as critical to their success. The demographics of higher education, with an underrepresentation of men and women of color, point to the importance of examining successful mentoring relationships across difference. In the case of student, faculty, and president experiences described here, while individual factors are important, the role of institutional strategies that promote persistence and the development of individual educational pathways is paramount. Derived from these narratives is the overarching theme of how people can help each other. However, while these examples might have an incidental quality, they are not incidental. Higher education scholars, policy makers, and leaders can take such examples and think about how they can broker institutional opportunities for the betterment of all concerned.

MENTORING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: BUILDING AN INSTITUTIONAL CROSS-DIFFERENCE CONCEPT OF CARE

At California State University, Sacramento, my current work focuses on the importance of cross-race, cross-ethnic, and cross-gender mentoring to diversify academe. Stanley (2014) described this work as helping the reader “experience mentoring relationships in deeper and impactful ways to bridge the gender, social, and cultural divide” (p. x). Unpacking the success of such relationships results in the building of a cross-difference concept of care which has the potential to transform academe. Bozeman and Fenney (2007) concluded that mentoring relationships can satisfy the needs of the

participants rather than existing solely for the benefit of supporting current organizational goals and missions. In their view, mentoring can differ from standard training and socialization processes, which have the benefit of the organization, not necessarily the individual, at their center. In a similar vein, Bernstein, Jacobson, and Russo (2010) deduced that “The goal of mentoring is not simply to teach the system, but also to change the system so that it becomes more flexible and responsive to the needs and pathways of its members—mentors and protégés” (p. 58).

Offering a concrete example of such potential transformation, a long-standing faculty member in the previously noted Mathematical and Theoretical Biology Institute (MTBI), which relies heavily on cross-race, ethnic, gender, and generation mentoring, made the following observation:

. . . there’s also a transformational, even revolutionary goal underlying the whole program which is to change the face and the nature of the scientific endeavor . . . At a more fundamental level by changing who’s involved in it and also by changing the way the research agenda is set. (Turner, 2012, p. 110).

From this perspective, mentoring does not solely focus on the individual or the organization, but has the potential to profoundly transform the organization and the individual’s agency. This point of view relates to the work of O’Meara (2013), who examines how graduate students, even when faced with lack of support or resistance, might create their own reality and strategize toward the achievement of their goals. The result might not always be successful, but, according to O’Meara, “agentic” students “do not deny constraints, but instead acknowledge the reality of a situation and decide to see choices where others see only walls” (p. 3). O’Meara also provides recommendations as to how departments might support the development of graduate student agency, such as being transparent in revealing departmental formal and informal rules. Departments then might determine how they can be responsive to individual needs, especially as they are connected to communities of color, rather than adhering to existing organizational practices. This implies a focus of one’s attention on organizational change rather than on maintaining the status quo, which, over decades, has resulted in the continued underrepresentation of students, faculty, and administrators of color, men and women. Given these circumstances, searching for common ground to work toward is of central importance.

Recently, I was asked to write a *testimonio* titled, *Traversing the Unknown: The Making of a Scholar and Mentor in Higher Education*. My *testimonio* is part of an anthology in which each author shares his/her lived experience of leaving rural homes and extended ethnic families in California to take advantage of educational opportunities on one of the campuses of the University of California system. In completing my chapter, I began blending the

experiences and learning gained in my home of origin with those gained in colleges and universities. While leaving home posed many challenges and created a sense of loneliness in me, doing so also provided opportunities for me to grow in ways never imagined. Reflecting back on the words of Eliot, I have arrived where I started and know this place, my home, for the first time. I realize that so much of what I learned in academe about creating nurturing environments, I already knew. I learned this as part of growing up on a farm labor camp and from the teachings of my parents. I also know that I would not know this had I not gone on the academic journey shared with you in this article.

VALUING HOME KNOWLEDGE

In a sense, I am bringing an agricultural lens to blend farm labor learning and academic labor learning, bringing both to bear on the understanding of the creation of nurturing environments in higher education.

Bloom where you are planted is a phrase which I relate back to my roots in farm labor. Observing the growth of plants taught me that in order to bloom they must be provided with certain critical conditions such as sufficient water and sunlight, fertile soil, and protection from insects and other pests that could destroy them. Barring bleak circumstances, typically, flower buds, fed by nutrients and water traveling up the stem, and sugars produced in leaves during photosynthesis, would bloom. Lacking these, a plant may survive but it will not fully bloom. A dictionary definition of plant cultivation is “the planting, tending, improving of crops or plants; the preparation of ground to promote their growth” (Farlex, 2015). The main purpose of land preparation is to have the soil in optimum physical condition for growing. Cultivation is then the process of fostering the growth of something. Of course, unpredicted disasters such as storms, major temperature fluctuations, for example, can curtail the survival of any field of blossoms; much like how an unpredicted Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, the plight of the undocumented student, the Ferguson tragedy, and student deaths and abductions in Mexico can take our minds off of our scholarly work to address events that remind us of the divided world in which we continue to live and work.

Knowledge and education are key ingredients fostering our understanding of the environment needed for a plant to fully bloom and, similarly, for our understanding of the context in which a learner can bloom and reach his/her full potential. From the world in which I grew up and from the world in which I have built my career, we know that the environment in which you are planted counts.

INTENTIONAL CULTIVATION OF NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS: A CALL TO ACTION

As we are paying attention to the socialization practices of our profession, one must not lose sight of knowledge gained during early life experiences. Our intellectual development from childhood to the present, in our homes, families, and communities of origin, is of great value and must be wholly drawn upon as we move through our higher education student experience and onward. By bringing all of our forms of knowledge to the table, we validate ourselves and our communities of origin, and we can withstand critics who believe that these sources of knowledge have little or no value. It is important to acknowledge who we are in total, because it is who we are that affects our approaches to research, that shapes the types of questions we ask, determines the kinds of issues which interest us, and the ways in which we go about seeking solutions as well as interpreting our findings.

How do we know what is needed? From the simple observance of a very common, but complex process – from **plants that bloom and bear fruit to feed the world**, we can learn what is needed for **learners to bloom and bear/create knowledge to serve the world**. Just as it is critical to monitor plants' growth continuously, it is important for us to get to know and listen to the learners that we serve, so that we can best support them. Now, it is time for all of us to take this knowledge and practice it in our everyday lives. By creating nurturing practices, policies, and programs that help all to bloom where they are planted, we can contribute to the development of individuals who are confident, and, in turn, might help others to bloom where they are planted. Many of these nurturing practices, policies, and programs have been highlighted at previous ASHE conferences and will be highlighted at this and future conferences. For example, we can learn from the outstanding teaching practices shared with us by Anna Neumann in her presidential address (Neumann, 2014) and the success of programs, mentioned previously in this article, such as MTBI and CompuGirls.

I know this is easier said than done because so many of us, in order to succeed, have been socialized for success in what is the status quo; a status quo that has maintained and continues to maintain an opportunity gap as described by Flores (2007) and an educational debt as described by Ladson-Billings (2006) as a combination of historical, moral, socio-political, and economic factors that have disproportionately affected students of color. Ultimately, this lack of opportunity is reflected in the underrepresentation of women and people of color and other marginalized groups in many spaces in academe. So, how do we go about transforming this world in which we are deemed a success? Many of you are challenging from the margins as it is from the margins that these reforms will likely take place (Figueroa & Sánchez, 2008; hooks, 1990; 1994; Turner, 1994a; 2003). hooks urges us not

to surrender our marginality, but to work from it as she states, “It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks, 1990, p. 150).

Other scholars, including Bensimon (2007), Chang (2002), Harper (2009; 2012), Hurtado (2007), Núñez, Murakami, and Cuero (2010), Solorzano and Bernal (2001), St. John, Hu, and Fisher (2010), Teranishi (2010), and Yosso (2005), also provide important insights and examples on maintaining one’s ability to transform the discourse and expand approaches toward the creation of learning environments that nurture all participants. Whatever one’s sphere of influence, all stand to benefit when individuals display acts of kindness and concern for one another within and across group affiliations. In my interviews with individuals (students, faculty, and presidents) who have experienced college success, most describe acts of care which were pivotal in their lives, such as: colleagues who explained processes, formal and informal, by which one can overcome academic challenges; faculty who personally complimented their initial research/teaching/leadership and demonstrated how it could be improved/published/publicized; faculty who pointed out potential career options and steps needed to achieve them; and faculty who arranged for an on campus job so a student could pay for class. Such practices can have life changing results and greatly contribute to building an environment that nurtures human and community potential.

Based on my experience and the study of the status of those underrepresented in higher education, one factor remains clear: lack of specific knowledge does not mean lack of intelligence or the ability to learn and excel. Chances to learn and understand one another do exist, but for real change to take place, individuals must have opportunities to interact with others from different backgrounds and be open to the incorporation of new and unfamiliar ways of thinking. According to Butler (2014), “The more we interact deliberatively with difference, the more we will find similarity.” An important benefit to be gained from conversations across difference is having multiple perspectives on solutions to critical issues (Turner, 2000). “Multiple perspectives, like multiple scientific experiments focused on solving a complex problem, are critical to the production of new knowledge” (Turner, 2012, p. 92).

In his 2014 Brown Lecture, *A Long Shadow: The American Pursuit of Political Justice and Education Equality*, Dr. James Anderson encourages creative engagement across our differences, while questioning whether America’s citizens: “will choose their democratic ideals of equality or will succumb to irrational prejudices. Will higher education become further stratified into private schools serving the wealthy elite and public schools serving a few of the poor? <http://www.aera.net/EventsMeetings/AnnualBrownLectureinEducationResearch/tabid/10210/Default.aspx>

Friends, family, and colleagues, we come together from many backgrounds and perspectives. Engaging in conversations across difference may be difficult and complicated, but they are fundamentally important to schools, higher education campuses, and to organizations such as ASHE, which are experiencing marked demographic change. Families of the future are counting on the contributions of scholars and policy makers, many of whom are in this room, to ensure that their and our futures are not compromised, that we can work together at this conference and at gatherings elsewhere in order to achieve the cultivation of talent of all who inhabit the diverse world in which we live. My challenge to myself and to you is to bring into our conversations those who are missing from the table. If you do not know who is missing, then ask. Asking leads to the intentional cultivation of nurturing environments. Dedicate time to communicate with one another, as dialogues lead to cultivation. Look for the common ground we share, and move toward a concerted effort to support all in their quest to reach their full potential—to bloom where they are planted. Taking responsibility for the cultivation of nurturing environments in higher education bodes for a brighter future.

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