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ABSTRACT
                This paper describes a study designed to explore the
learning environments of doctoral and master's degree counselor education
programs. Counselor educators (N=8) from four states were interviewed; four
Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program
(CACREP) programs were represented. The focus of counselor education at the
master's level appears to be congruent with the notion that graduate programs
help students prepare for careers in order to meet the needs of the
marketplace. Courses are generally survey in nature and most of the
curriculum involves the transmission of knowledge from the professor to the
students. Faculty report less contact with master's students than with
doctoral students. The doctoral program prepares students for scholarship,
although most of the research has focused on the success of graduates and not
on the developmental issues of the programs. The influence of CACREP was a
strong element in this study in that all interviewees had experience or
knowledge of accreditation standards. Of particular interest was the
realization from several interviewees that their knowledge was gained
experientially. One could argue that the process of preparing counselor
educators can be transmitted satisfactorily from observing an experienced
counselor. Another argument could be made in light of the study's results,
for establishing and publishing theoretical counselor education models based
on the most important factors in constructing an effective learning
environment. (Contains 1 figure, 1 table, and 32 references.) (JDM)

Running Head: Learning Environment in Doctoral Counselor Education

Factors Affecting the Learning Environment of Doctoral Students in Counselor Education

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Abstract

Researchers used qualitative methods to explore the learning environment in doctoral versus master's degree counselor education programs. Interviews were conducted with eight counselor educators from four states. Four CACREP accredited programs were represented. Identified themes were clustered in six main categories characterizing the learning environment of doctoral level counselor education: the counselor education profession, the university, faculty, curriculum, students, and peers. Suggestions are made for additional research examining the learning environment of doctoral programs in counselor education.

Factors Affecting the Learning Environment of Doctoral Students in Counselor Education

A review of the literature reveals few descriptive studies examining the academic environments of either doctoral or master's level counselor education programs (Boes, Ullery, Miller, & Cobia, 1999; Burnett, 1999; Schmidt, 1999; Smaby, 1998; West, Bubenzer, Brooks, & Hackney, 1995; Zimpher, Cox, West, Bubenzer, & Brooks, 1997). The authors had questions as they assisted in the development of a new doctoral program in counseling. How does a program and faculty make the shift from a master's to doctoral level learning culture? What differentiates doctoral from master's level learning processes? What distinguishes the roles of doctoral and master's level faculty members?

Accreditation and coordinating entities such as the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (CCSACS, 1998), Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 1994), and state higher education coordinating boards have provided general standards for master's and doctoral level graduate education programs. However, few specifics are given distinguishing learning environments in the two degree programs. The researchers wondered if there were additional resources that might increase understanding of these two levels of counselor education. Perhaps experienced doctoral program faculty could be helpful by sharing their perceptions of these two learning environments.

Gordon et al. (1990) described the role of graduate education, in general, as exploring, advancing, and determining the parameters of knowledge in a particular field. Similarly, Hirt and Muffo (1998) asserted that graduate programs are guided more by their professional discipline than by institutional standards. Both the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (1982) and CCSACS (1998) defer to professional disciplines for specific academic graduate standards. The

national accreditation agency responsible for counselor education standards, CACREP (1994), has mandated mission statements in order to provide direction to developing one's program structure and objectives. Master's degree education curriculum has been designed to train counseling students for entry level positions in schools and community agencies. A doctoral level curriculum has been designed to prepare counseling students for advanced professional leadership in teaching, clinical practice, supervision, and scholarship/research (CACREP, 1994; West, 1995; Zimpher, Cox, West, Bubenzer, & Brooks, 1997). CACREP (1994) standards have assumed beginning doctoral students have the equivalency of master's level counselor education competencies.

CACREP (1994) identified eight knowledge areas as a curriculum focus for master's level counselor education: professional identity, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, helping relationships, group work, assessment, and research and program evaluation. Curricular guidelines are based more on a professional degree model emphasizing practice, skills, and training over theory, research, and scholarship (Illinois State Board of Higher Education, 1996; Meyer, 1991). The focus of counselor education at the master's level appears to be congruent with recent views that graduate programs help students prepare for careers in order to meet the needs of the marketplace (Association of American Universities, 1998; Syverson, 1996).

The doctoral educational process has been described by La Pidus (1998) as preparing students for scholarship through various roles and responsibilities. CACREP standards (1994) allow flexibility for program augmentation to meet specific interests or desired specializations for doctoral students. Research has been accepted as central to doctoral study with the student's ability to create, expand, question, test, integrate, organize, and communicate knowledge

considered essential to a successful educational process (CACREP, 1994; Faan, 1994; La Pidus, 1995, 1998; Meyer, 1991). The dissertation has been seen to represent the doctoral student's ability to perform independent research and readiness to begin a lifelong career of leadership and scholarship (CACREP, 1994; Faan, 1992; Meyer, 1991). However, Arnold Goldstein was recently quoted as saying that broad knowledge of theory or research methodologies in doctoral work was not quite as important as having an open attitude and a willingness to welcome and contribute to change (Goldberg, 1998). A number of authors have also discussed the importance of a developmental, socialization, or bonding process that takes place as doctoral students transition to, and are accepted as, professionals in the discipline (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1991; Boes, Ullery, Millner, & Cobia, 1999; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Lipschutz, 1993; Malaney, 1988; Richlin, 1993a; Stein & Weidman, 1989).

Faculty roles in creating a stimulating environment and mentoring doctoral students have long been identified as crucial in successfully educating professional leaders (Baird, 1992; CACREP, 1994; Faan, 1992; Gaffney, 1995; Hartnett, 1976; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Katz, 1976; Lipschutz, 1993; Richlin, 1993b). Richlin (1993b) encouraged faculty and doctoral student collaboration in authoring papers, teaching, and fieldwork. Anderson, Gumport, Rowan, and Schneider (2000) advocated for collegial endeavors that stressed faculty creation of collaborative opportunities for the increasing numbers of part time doctoral students.

A dearth of research focusing on differences in the academic environment of doctoral versus master's level programs necessitated the inclusion of qualitative data obtained through carefully constructed interviews. Hirt and Moffo (1998) declared that most of the research on graduate level education has focused on the success of graduates as opposed to developmental issues of the programs themselves. Malaney (1988) advocated for research on noncognitive

indicators of future performance of graduates, effects of organizational structure, influence of rules and regulations, power and decision making processes in graduate programs, and theories of graduate student development. West, Bubenzer, Brooks, and Hackney (1995) suggested that research into the character of the counselor education doctoral degree might illuminate factors that comprise doctoral preparation.

The present study attempts to help fill this gap by obtaining the views of doctoral level counselor educators concerning the learning environment in doctoral level counselor education programs. Each participant also had experience at the master's level. Themes were sought through data procured from interviews with experienced professionals. Perhaps the results will assist counselor educators to identify learning environment characteristics that enable them to transmit knowledge, practices, values, attitudes, and culture at the doctoral level.

Method

A qualitative design was utilized in this study, with grounded theory methodology selected to explore the academic environment in doctoral versus master's level counselor education programs as perceived by experienced counselor educators. The authors selected an ethnographic interview process to broaden the investigation and enhance the discovery of new understandings. Grounded theory enables researchers to initiate study of an area of professional practice and allow the theory to emerge from the collected data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data is collected systematically, and a constant comparative method is used for analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) characterize the constant comparative method as an ongoing interaction between the collection and the analysis of data. In addition to constant comparisons, the researcher is conceptualizing and questioning data as categories and codes are identified, constructed, merged, or deconstructed. In this study, the purpose of the research method was to maximize discovery

and to identify new and meaningful ways of understanding the seemingly standardized data set forth by CACREP (1994), CCSACS (1998), and state higher education coordinating boards.

Participants

The eight participants identified by the researchers had extensive experience with both master's and doctoral level counselor education programs. Two of the participants were retired after more than 20 years of experience in counselor education. Seven participants had served as department chairs, and five had served as directors of doctoral programs. Interviewees included five males and three females representing four states and four CACREP programs. Criteria for selection included: (a) ten or more years experience in master's and doctoral level training programs in counselor education; (b) doctoral dissertation chair experience; and (c) experience in CACREP accredited programs.

Procedure

Unstructured interviews were used for data collection. Each interviewee was first presented a consent letter describing the nature of the research project. The process was exploratory, informal, and began with an inquiry about the academic or learning environment in doctoral as opposed to master's level counselor education programs. Open ended questions and leads facilitated free flowing conversation. When the interviewer heard what could be regarded as a new theme, the participant was asked to elaborate. The researchers aimed for spontaneity and a relaxed conversational style that might elicit thoughtful or creative responses. Three interviews took place in participants' offices; two were held in participants' homes; one was held in a researcher's office; and one was held in a conference room. One of the out-of-state interviews was conducted by phone. One researcher simultaneously interviewed two

participants, and the two researchers collaboratively interviewed one participant. Standard recording equipment was used for the interviews after which the tapes were transcribed.

A numerical code was constructed to identify individual interviews and page numbers. Manuscripts were then analyzed line by line to identify units of meaning with a line drawn across the page to separate each unit. A descriptive phrase in the text was then highlighted using a color code for each interview. Codes for each phrase were written in the margin along with the numerical code for each manuscript and page number. Manuscripts were then cut along the penciled lines, units of meaning were categorized, and each strip of paper was placed in a large envelope with similar themes.

Categories of themes emerged naturally but were reorganized and reclassified throughout the investigation as themes and categories took on new meanings. Themes were added or deleted as new categories were identified or other categories collapsed or merged. Penciled codes and memos were posted on the outside of each envelope to assist in the deliberations. Two large tables were used to display the contents of each envelope for visual comparison. If a unit of meaning appeared to belong to two different themes, the phrase was copied and placed in both categories. In the final stages, broad categories were identified, as some categories and themes seemed to logically cluster. The manuscripts and the categories were read and reread several times throughout the analysis to reaffirm that the data was congruent with each category. Only themes identified by 50% of the interviewees were used. No new themes emerged after the first six interviews. The first author independently completed the initial analysis before comparing the results with the second author's findings. After discussion and comparison, higher level theme categories remained intact, although minor adjustments were made in subcategories and themes.

Results

Analysis of the interviews resulted in the identification of six main categories of themes in the learning environment of doctoral level counselor education: (a) the counselor education profession, (b) the university, (c) faculty, (d) curriculum, (e) students, and (f) peers. The categories and subcategories are depicted in Table 1 and described in the Results section. Figure 1 visually depicts the main factors influencing the doctoral learning environment. No effort was made to quantify data; instead the focus was on reporting what was discovered in each category including quotes of interviewees to enhance the emerging story of doctoral level academic learning environments. Lastly, a brief summary of the master's degree learning environment is provided.

Doctoral Level Learning Environment

The following categories were identified as most influential in creating the learning environment of doctoral programs in counselor education. All participants referred to these categories.

The Counselor Education Profession. The counselor education profession and accreditation standards (CACREP, 1998) have been major influences on graduate level learning environments according to participants in this study. In fact, the review of the literature and CCSACS (1998) revealed that coordinating boards and regional accrediting associations often defer to professional accreditation entities and suggest institutions use professional standards as a guide in designing academic training programs.

In contrast, the knowledge and skills of doctoral level counselor educators were also seen as an oral tradition passing from one academic generation to the next. For example, "I don't know anyplace where people are formally taught how to teach in a doctoral program...You must

be mentored. It's a culture that's passed on. "You watch it, and then you do it." "It was never taught to me. It happens to everybody. You learn by experience; no one tells you." "There is no manual. No one taught me what I am supposed to be doing." One participant stated, "I learned it from my doctoral advisor and other doctoral faculty members. I learned from these people and then through teaching in the doctoral program, sharing, serving on committees, observing other people, seeing standards set and how things are run. I don't think this is written down. I don't know of any book that I could point to." Judging from the educators in this research project, it would seem that such teaching cannot be precisely "trained for."

University. The University category seems to be composed of two subthemes: administration and program mission. Commitment, understanding, and support of the doctoral program by administration at the university, college, department, and program levels were described as crucial to the learning environment. Financial and emotional support, faculty and student recruitment, and knowledgeable expectations of doctoral faculty were cited as significant factors. Several interviewees described the importance of creative program design when working within administrative confines, and one interviewee advised, "You have to figure out how to do it in spite of the university being the way it is."

Manuscript analysis revealed that the mission of the doctoral program has an impact on learning context. Participants stressed that program structure and the resulting learning environment is highly influenced by the stated purpose of the program, training focus, faculty expertise, student population, student career goals, exclusive/inclusive admissions, and treatment of students. One interviewee concluded his comments by saying, "Our focus is on clinical supervision, research, and teaching; …these are the skills we want to transmit to our students. As faculty, define what your program is going to do." Several interviewees discussed the challenge

of increased numbers of part time students and the importance of structuring the program to elicit strong commitments from students and to provide those important out-of-class experiences so valuable for educating doctoral students.

Faculty. Subthemes for faculty included teaching role, mentoring, commitment, collaborative relationships with students, and teacher-student bonds. In addition to teacher/professor, words used to describe the role of doctoral faculty in the learning process included facilitator, catalyst, consultant, supporter, guide, and helper. One faculty member stated that the professor is "not the source of all information" at the doctoral level, and that students are more self-directed. Much of the teaching and learning was described as individualized and taking place outside the classroom. The role of doctoral level faculty was viewed as being more process than content focused.

Commitment on the part of the faculty to do research and to be available for students was another common theme in the interviews. Supervising research and the writing of dissertations, being available for students when needed, and providing timely feedback requires enormous faculty time and energy. Finally, the obligation for doctoral level faculty to engage in scholarly activity such as conducting research and publishing was identified as requiring additional time and energy.

All interviewees noted the opportunities for mentoring and providing individual attention to doctoral students with most asserting that faculty mentoring was a crucial to a successful doctoral program. "The reality is that if you do not spend time with someone, walking the journey with them, then you are not mentoring. You are giving lip service. The faculty has to be committed to that." "If you will look at the conventions, the leaders that continue to be there, you

will find that 90% of them have that nurturing ability and nurturing experience. And if each of them would be honest, I think they would say, 'I remember that I got this from so and so.'"

Ideally, faculty members ought to have a collaborative relationship with doctoral students and structure experiences that allow students and faculty to develop partnerships to teach, make scholarly presentations, conduct research, write, and participate in other professional activities. Although the individual faculty member was viewed by most as being responsible for setting limits, the doctoral student was definitely seen as approaching a peer level with faculty. "At the doctoral level the faculty looks to this person as more of a fellow professional who is now seeking a higher development of skills. They are treated more like a colleague than a student." "I see more that the relationship with doctoral students is a sort of team effort. There certainly is a teaching component effort. Faculty certainly have things to teach doctoral students. I don't mean that, but I view doctoral students more as partners in that process."

Finally, the close bond that often develops between faculty and doctoral students appeared to be characteristic of programs and quite meaningful to faculty. Participants reported that relationships with doctoral students were personally rewarding. Professors and students seem to spend more time together, get to know each other better, and sometimes maintain contact after degree completion. "The relationship you have with a doctoral student, particularly if you are carrying their dissertation, is one that you go through the fire with them." "When you go through that with someone, you develop a bond that is always there."

Curriculum. The extent and intensity of scholarship was the first identified theme in the curriculum category. The beginning doctoral student was assumed by the participants to have the basic skills and knowledge as taught in a master's degree counselor education program. Students were considered to have focused on content in the past and were now expected to focus on

process, engage in higher order thinking, look at material in different ways, make intellectual connections, raise new questions, expand knowledge, and question their own and others' beliefs and knowledge. Seminars and small class sizes were identified as typical of doctoral programs. Interaction, discussion as opposed to lecture, and integration and application related assignments were mentioned as typical activities. Participants emphasized that there is not a body of information transmitted as in master's programs. "You are finishing a product rather than building a frame." In addition, faculty reported working with small numbers of advisees at the doctoral level.

Of course, research was discussed as a key component for curriculum at the doctoral level. In addition to the dissertation process, research was depicted as being infused throughout the curriculum, in class and through out-of-class experiences. Independent inquiry was expected of doctoral students, and faculty appear to strongly encourage students to become autonomous thinkers.

Flexibility and personalized learning was described by participants as being important in assisting students to develop expertise and specialization. "They need to have a level of professional development that allows them to know, if not in the beginning of the program then soon after, where their professional focus is going to be, their specialty. Your internship will reinforce that, your comprehensive exams will reinforce that, your dissertation. The whole end of the doctorate is about specialization." "The increased amount of independent study frees the student to create their own ideas, their own area of specialty, and accept personal responsibility for their learning."

The experts in the study reported that the residency gives students the opportunity for a unique learning experience that primarily takes place outside the classroom. This opportunity

allows the student to "...interact with professors at a time when they need to test ideas and to find out things from professors that they cannot get in a classroom situation." Experiential learning processes that focus on observation, collaboration, and application in connection with faculty and peers were stressed.

Students. The participants in the study asserted that doctoral students have varied backgrounds and often bring rich work experience, skills, and expertise to the educational process. Faculty spoke of capitalizing on this by having doctoral students share what they know in various formats. Both master's and doctoral students benefit as doctoral students often have work experiences that faculty do not have. In fact, student applicants were reportedly screened for what they could contribute to the learning environment of the program.

Student commitment and motivation to do graduate work were additional significant themes, and interviewees stated that they selected students on the basis of these characteristics. Doctoral students were described as moving away from family, quitting jobs, and spending huge amounts of time and money on their education and dissertations. According to our participants, that kind of sacrifice and intense commitment is unique to doctoral level study and requires similar behaviors on the part of doctoral faculty.

Peers. The relationships formed with other doctoral students were emphasized as an important factor influencing the doctoral learning environment. "Students form their own groups... They bond together informally and support each other mutually through the program." "The doctoral students are more of a group or family." "Students share roles and learning." One interviewee hypothesized that it was easier to develop cohesiveness because the doctoral student learning community is small, voluntary, and shares many common concerns. Research

participants claimed that these relationships facilitated emotional support and interactive learning.

<u>Master's Level Learning Environment</u>

In addition to identifying characteristics of the learning environment of doctoral programs in counselor education, this study also attempted to discover characteristics that distinguish doctoral level from master's level learning environments. Master's level counselor education programs were consistently defined by interviewees as entry-level programs focusing on beginning skills and containing few electives. CACREP (1998) standards provide clear guidelines for specific knowledge areas. "At the master's level you are educating and training them in the way you want." At this stage, there was much exposure to didactic material, and many courses were described as content driven. All the information is generally new, and the student is seen as a "professional in waiting" as compared to beginning doctoral students. "Masters is pretty much you go to class, you take tests, you do field experience, and then you get a degree." Courses are generally survey in nature, and there is a "regurgitation model comprehensive examination" at the end.

The master's level classes, particularly the core classes, involved the transmission of knowledge from the professor to the student. One participant said communication of knowledge was top down or vertical at the master's level. Another told of giving examples and sharing her own professional experiences in teaching and supervision of master's students. At the doctoral level she did less talking and personal sharing and instead facilitated a more interactive talking, sharing among the students. At the master's level, "They look up to you to give them information...pretty much it is here I am, I'm the student, you are going to give me all the knowledge, and I am going to take it and learn it and go away and use it." In one interview, the

professor stated that master's students were more like consumers. In conclusion, the faculty in this project reported less contact with master's students and that boundaries were clearer between faculty and master's level students.

Discussion and Recommendations

This inquiry evolved from the need for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of contextual factors influencing doctoral level counselor education. The results may help articulate philosophical and pedagogical assumptions and provide valuable information to faculty developing new doctoral programs. While this qualitative research focused on discovery and was not directed at drawing conclusions, the results imply directions for future research and exploration. Of particular interest was the realization of several interviewees that their knowledge was gained experientially. It could be argued that the process of preparing counselor educators can be transmitted satisfactorily from observing an experienced counselor educator. There is also a strong argument for establishing and publishing counselor education theoretical models that include factors considered important in constructing an effective learning environment. McAuliffe and Eriksen (2000) have discussed a lack of pedagogical training of college professors and the low priority given to teaching at the college level. These authors find the lack of pedagogy at the doctoral level of counselor education to be a concern and recommend increased attention to this area.

The influence of CACREP (1998) was a strong element in this study as all interviewees had experience or knowledge of accreditation standards. Qualitative and quantitative research on the impact of CACREP accreditation on the educational process of both master's and doctoral students is suggested. Hirt and Moffo (1998) have indicated that past program research has primarily focused on the success of graduates after graduation, rather than on the educational

process itself. The researchers suggest that learning environments in accredited as opposed to non-accredited programs be closely examined.

The relationships that form between both faculty and fellow students seem to be an area for further study. Specifically, the influence of peers on doctoral education is relatively unexplored, as is the impact of what the doctoral students themselves bring to the educational process. Stein's (Stein & Weidman, 1989) conceptual framework for professional socialization can provide a structure for future exploration of socialization factors in counselor education programs.

Not discussed elsewhere in this paper is a developmental thread interspersed throughout the literature, described in terms of transformation, transition, journey, maturing process, and developmental shift. The interview results of this study reinforced a developmental concept with participants stating that doctoral education takes a person from student to peer status with faculty. We agree with West, Bubenzer, Brooks, & Hackney (1998) and Malaney (1988) and recommend additional research on factors influencing doctoral counselor education and suggesting the development of a theory of graduate-level student development. Finally, the use of cohorts was mentioned both positively and negatively in interviews. While no distinct theme emerged, it seems apparent that research might try to clarify the efficacy of the cohort model as a structure for admission and progression through doctoral programs.

Several limitations exist in this study. First, the researchers obtained descriptions of doctoral level learning environments from eight respected and experienced counselor educators, yet the results cannot be said to reflect the perceptions of all educators or the reality in all programs. Further research is needed to determine the accuracy of these results. Second, examining documents such as program handbooks, syllabi, and graduate catalogs might add a

new dimension to this or similar studies. Replication of the study by different researchers could possibly validate several findings and expand the results. We futher recommend exploring doctoral student perceptions of their learning environment through qualitative research conducted at the completion of their studies.

In conclusion, the researchers have used the interview method to explore and enhance the understanding of doctoral education by interviewing eight experienced professors. Key themes in doctoral level learning environments were identified and described with suggestions made for future research. These results may assist others to conduct research on counselor education learning environments.

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Table I

Learning Environment Themes in Doctoral Level Counselor Education Programs: Categories

_____

Categories

    Subcategories

_____

Counselor education profession

    CACREP

    Oral tradition

University

    Administration

    Program mission

Faculty

    Teaching role

    Mentoring

    Commitment

    Collaborative relationship with students

    Teacher student bond

Curriculum

    Extent and intensity of scholarship

    Research

    Specialization

    Residency   (table continues)

Categories	
Subcategories	

Students

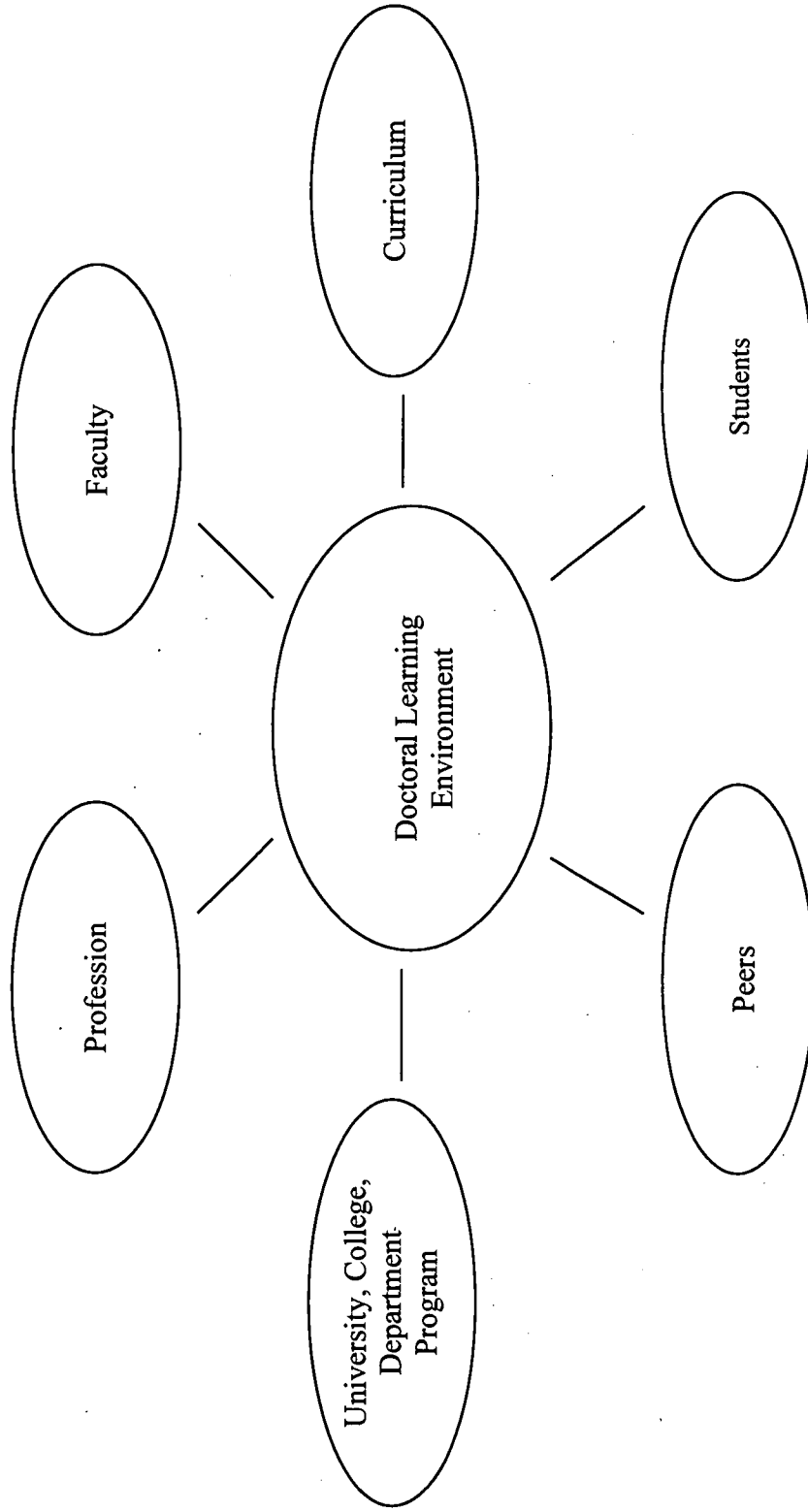   Background and experience

    Commitment and sacrifice

Peers

    Support

    Shared learning

Figure 1

Influences on the Doctoral Learning Environment

26

27

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