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# Looking Back: Reflections on Life as a Doctoral Student

Augustine Kang

As soon as I received my acceptance letter into the EPPL program at William & Mary's School of Education, I told myself, "Get in, get out – get this done as quickly as possible." I was intent on distancing myself from graduate college life and immersing myself completely in my studies...and I did just that. I overloaded on classes, focused on my coursework, and proceeded to find opportunities purely for my own professional self-interest.

However, by the end of the first semester of this self-imposed lifestyle, I caught myself itching for opportunities to talk about education. I wanted to share experiences; I wanted to discuss and debate to see how my ideals and arguments stood against the criticisms of some of the best and brightest. I wanted to do things, to lead projects, and make changes.

For a course assignment, I was assigned to present on a strategy known as Open Space Technology, which I would discover, seemed to parallel the needs of the students at the School of Education. Harrison Owen, a professional consultant, recognized that his audience was often far more engaged during the coffee breaks than during his presentations. They each had their own experiences and expertise and could not wait to share their ideas with others who had common interests and needs. The School of Education needed these "open spaces" to develop more creative ideas based on perspectives that may not traditionally be taken into account.

Our Graduate Education Association has begun to establish these safe sharing venues. Students have organized the first ever School of Education Symposium, and this very journal, *The William and Mary Educational Review*, serves as another "open space" to share and learn. Shells have cracked through the past year and students are emerging with their opinions and ideas. I see it at Thursday Night Sabbaticals, in hallways before and after class, and even during class discussions. We are primed for the emergence of this collaborative environment, which I see as the first step toward building a community of learners and leaders.

The following are several additional things I have learned along my doctoral experience:

- 1) Learning is good; the real value is in the sharing and doing. Share often, but do not forget to listen.
- 2) Bounce ideas off of others as much as possible, especially if they have conflicting ideas. How better to improve ideas than to place yourself in the position to defend your assertions?
- 3) As leaders, give up some power, trust others, and guide them to become better leaders. Really listen and always follow through.
- 4) Get involved in student life. Pay attention to what happens on campus. You will always get left behind if you do not stay current.
- 5) Leave emotions and attitude out of the debates and decision-making processes. We all have a default emotional reaction, but David Wallace once explained that being truly educated means understanding that we have the choice to react the way we want.

## *About the author*

*Augustine Kang is a PhD student in the Education Policy, Planning, and Leadership program, focusing on K-12 Administration.*