Chapter 83

Identity, Commitment, and Change Agency:
Bedrock for Bridging Theory and Practice in Doctoral Education

Carol A. Kochhar-Bryant
The George Washington University, USA

ABSTRACT

It is becoming almost cliché to assert that doctoral scholars should integrate theory and practice and address critical problems of practice. Less charted territory, however, moves beyond integration of theory and practice to the cultivation of scholars' as committed people who possess a compass of values and vision as they act as catalysts for change in the world of practice. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the kind of cultivation needed to effect the transformation required for doctoral scholars to move beyond translation of theory to practice to the next step of catalyzing change. This chapter explores the intersection of core constructs or strands for creating scholars as change agents – identity, commitment and civic agency. These elements are examined from a theoretical framework, and in context of a case example of a doctoral program that bridges the academy and the community.

INTRODUCTION

It is almost cliché today to assert that doctoral programs should graduate scholarly practitioners who can integrate theory and practice and address critical problems of practice. However, less charted territory involves moving beyond enabling scholar-practitioners to integrate theory and practice-oriented knowledge, to cultivating their capacity to act as catalysts for change in the world of practice. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the intersection of core constructs or strands for creating scholars as catalysts for change: identity, commitment and civic agency. These elements will be examined from a theoretical framework, and within the context of a case example of a professional practice doctoral program that bridges the academy and the community.

CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

'Leadership' is a complex process that remains poorly understood as a construct or as a set of behaviors (Bennis, 2009; DeRue, Ashford & Cotton, 2009), and moreover, there continues to be a confusion in differentiating the constructs of 'leadership' and 'management' (Heifitz, 1994; Kotter, 2013). Several frameworks have emerged for the analysis and study of leadership, including: qualities or traits approach, functional or group approach; leadership as a behavioral category; leadership styles approach; situational approach and contingency models; transformational leadership; and inspirational leadership (Kotter, 2013; Mullins, 2007; Bennis, 2010).

Leadership as a field of study began with a trait-behavior model that emphasized production and efficiency, then evolved to emphasize the power of the single leader (the solitary champion), in which power derived from the charisma and authority of the individual in the position of leadership (Avolio, 2007; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009; Sithole & Mbele, 2008). The post-industrial paradigm reflects globalization and an interconnected world (Bekker, 2010; Rost, 2007), and the interconnections between the academy and its community (Miller, 2014; Reich, 2014). New ways of leading were thought to be required that are principle-centered, express collaboration, moral purposes, and that can *transform followers into leaders* (transformational leadership). Leadership has been redefined as a relational process in which people accomplish change together to benefit the common good (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998; Morgeson, DeRue & Karam, 2010). Leadership now includes concepts of inclusiveness, empowerment, ethics, and purposefulness -- ideas reflected in initiatives such as turn-around schools, community engagement, and partnership between schools and universities.

Scholars concur that the training that educational leaders typically receive in university programs and from their own districts does not adequately prepare them for their roles as leaders of learning (Darling-Hammond, Lapointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2008; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Rost, 2007). Most educational leadership programs are centered on technical preparation and the provision of instruments and tools that are needed for practice (Nissan & Pekarsky, 2009; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). A study of more than 80 percent of superintendents and 69 percent of principals revealed a general consensus that leadership training in schools of education is out of touch with the realities of today's districts and communities, are fragmented, incoherent, and fail to prepare leaders to build communities across diverse stakeholders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen, 2008).

Few initial leadership preparation programs in the U.S. have strong clinical training components linked to academic course work that enable students to learn the full complexity of their jobs and the communities within which they will perform them (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2001; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). Candidate assessment systems do not integrate assessments into deep clinical practice experiences for authentic observation. School leader preparation programs too often operate in silos without engaging system partners, such as school districts, in program design (Fry, O'Neill & Bottoms, 2006).

Contemporary leadership theorists are concerned with distinguishing leadership and management, concurring that leadership is associated with taking an organization into the future, identifying approaching opportunities, and successfully exploiting them. Leadership is about vision, empowerment and producing useful change, innovation, and challenging the status quo, and not about personal charisma or attributes but rather about behavior (Bennis, 2010; Kotter, 2013; DiMattia, 2013).

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