

Reflections on the Uses of the Academic Journal in Socialization of the New Scholar

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*Florida Journal of Educational
Administration & Policy*

Winter 2009
Volume 3, Issue 1

The benefits of developing learning communities or communities of practice to optimize the learning experiences of education professionals has been well documented in the recent research literature. Less consideration has been made for the development of academic scholars. This essay considers an existing paradigm within the academy, the academic journal, as a vehicle for the orientation and socialization of new scholars into the social norms and mores of academic research and scholarship. The authors worked with doctoral fellows from their orientation to the scope of work involved with content development through issue publication in order to consider their growing awareness of academic culture.

Keywords: Learning; Community; Practice; Scholarship; Experiential; Academic; Culture; Intervention; Involvement; Development; Adult; Peer.

A Learning Oasis in a Desert of Rigor

In recent years, the effectiveness and relevance of graduate programs in education have come under heavy scrutiny from education scholars and professionals alike. The tenor of this scrutiny, with regard to programs preparing both academic researchers and practitioners, has largely been sourced in the desire for more adequate socialization of individuals toward their respective career environments. In the same capacity as practicing school leaders seek professionals who will be able to directly translate scholarship to practice, on demand, within the rigors of the field; so too do the members of the professoriate seek appropriate individuals to maintain their ranks and carry on the tradition of stewardship of the disciplines.

Such a task of stewardship, however, requires a nuanced understanding of the culture of the academy; an understanding that is not always readily attainable given the conditions

of academic departments, especially in the social sciences, and more so within research intensive institutions. It is these climates that tend to require the fledgling doctoral student, a budding scholar in his or her own right, to be confidently self-directed, as the contravening forces of curricular prescription and faculty research agendas often leave the doctoral student without a clear sense of what it means to be a scholar. There is ample opportunity to glean an understanding of “what to do,” but not so much in the way of knowing “how to be.”

Throughout the process of conceptualizing, planning, and publishing the *Florida Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, the authors maintained an awareness of this journal not only as a communication modality for scholarship in education, but also as a form of identity for the doctoral students within and on the periphery of the Department of Education Administration and Policy. The journal was originally conceived as a creative outlet for doctoral students, who would staff the editorial positions and maintain oversight for the recruitment of manuscript reviewers, solicit manuscripts from a growing base of scholars, conduct an ongoing marketing campaign to grow readership, and build the journal brand. As it turns out, the journal grew into much more than we had originally anticipated.

Throughout this process, the authors sought to consider students’ perceptions of available programmatic opportunities to gain an in-depth understanding of the social mores of scholarship, how effective experiential learning is toward this end, and what effect their participation in a learning community may have on their socialization into the academy.

Learning Within the Community

Student learning communities possess the great potential to connect diverse student experiences and ways of knowing with curricular objectives. A student’s involvement in a learning community can affirm his or her diverse student voice.

Adult learners’ cultural orientation toward freedom of choice and customization of processes to best suit personal needs can be seen as a platform for learning innovation if academic faculty can collaborate to channel this energy in the right direction. The utilization of an iconic paradigm such as the academic journal as a structured learning community can open new doors toward the effective preparation of stewards of the academic disciplines.

Though academic faculty prepare doctoral students for employment in research universities, most employment can actually be found elsewhere in academe and in the private and public sectors beyond the walls of academic institutions. Though students often commence doctoral education because they desire to teach, very little in the doctoral process exists to help these individuals become scholars of teaching and learning. Students do not fully understand the demands that will be made upon them to earn the Ph.D. With existing faculty as models, students develop very traditional aspirations for becoming faculty, exhibiting little awareness of external opportunities for careers and the opportunity, even as academics, to connect their expertise to social need.

The academy currently promotes viewing the process of doctoral education as isolated requirements to complete toward a very specific goal. Experiential learning, however, is a concept that advocates the shift within doctoral education, from learning “how to do”, relative to the process of growing professionally within the academy, to learning

“how to change”, relative to applying the knowledge base toward the reform of social processes.

Doctoral students come to their degree programs with a variety of life and professional experiences. They are unique in their dual role as both consumers of education, as well as co-producers of new scholarship. Communities of practice are social groups engaged in the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. Participation consists of the shared experiences and negotiations that result from social interaction among members within a purposive community. According to this definition, the community of practice can be representative of the community in which doctoral students in education pool their shared experiences and make meaning.

Our duty as leaders within the academy is to address the complex set of needs that current and future adult learners have to fulfill in order to function as multi-dimensional professionals capable of negotiating their way through professions requiring sensitivities toward racial and ethnic diversity, cultural disparity, social justice, and specialized knowledge bases. With regard to knowledge base, higher education has to be able to provide adult learners not only a strong core of knowledge, but also training on how to integrate such knowledge across disciplines, while also being able to specialize within one field. That is to say, graduates have to be able to correlate their area of specialization with a broader array of interrelating fields, while also being able to react to market-driven shifts by expanding their knowledge base and adapting their area of expertise to changing needs.

Learning By Doing

The *Florida Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* is one component of a growing peer-led development network that serves traditional and non-traditional doctoral students alike within the Department of Educational Administration and Policy. Though the journal was originally intended as an opportunity, especially for non-traditional students, to acclimatize to doctoral level scholarship and output, the authors considered it an occasion to redefine an appropriate vehicle for doctoral students to approach the prospect of scholarship within the academy, while building a relevance structure for that scholarship through which they would take full ownership over their educational attainment.

Higher education research institutions are primarily tasked with preparing diverse individuals to enter the world of academic research as scholars able to problematize cultural disparities, social inequity, and issues of individual access to social capital. It is their interdependence as colleagues that can best hone this ability to perceive issues in context and develop inquiry agendas to examine these issues.

The journal is designed to serve as a collaborative and co-productive experience from the outset. Typically, there are between four and eight doctoral students that serve as editorial staff per semester, as the journal is published on a Fall and Spring release schedule. Most students volunteer to staff the journal with the expectation that the experience will only be relevant to the extent that it may fulfill an expectation for an appropriate co-curricular pursuit during their tenure. The authors' perspectives vary

greatly from this assessment: we are sure to clearly communicate to our colleagues from the first orientation meeting that this experience will be entirely contingent upon their input and they should approach the experience as a learning laboratory in which they can express their scholarship and creativity in the form of content development, critique, thematic analysis, and collegial networking.

Most doctoral students with whom we have worked during the tenure of the journal's publication run have been decidedly unfamiliar with this experiential learning approach, one that delivers not only subject matter specific content, but also the cultural indicators so necessary to growing into a scholar accepted within the fold of academe.

A Forum for Diversity

A diverse community is comprised of varying points of view and methods for producing meaning which flow from that diversity. It should be the underlying mission of the institution to train scholars who can create and collaborate within diverse communities. Diverse peer interaction helps to develop future leaders with the values and competencies that enable them to work with diverse groups to address issues critical to a pluralistic dynamic; most individuals have not been prepared to function within a pluralistic society, but have instead lived, worked and studied in homogeneous communities.

Diversity competencies include the ability to understand the perspectives, responses and assumptions of others from different social and cultural contexts; abilities that are produced as a result of gaining knowledge about diverse histories and legacies that have contributed to global interchange. The journal has presented a natural resource for developing peer interactions that promote diversity. The interpolation of diversity competencies within inter-collegial work among journal staff and reviewers and authors created a forum in which a commitment was made to encounter and engage peers with openness, integrity, and mutual respect.

Student stories possess the great potential to connect the diversity of student experiences and ways of knowing with curricular objectives. A student's story affirms his or her diverse student voice. Racial and other diversity barriers are broken down most easily when students are able to acknowledge the universality of experience gleaned from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. When students participate in activities based in an intercultural context, they feel more aligned toward discussing diversity issues with others in the campus community. They are subsequently more likely to have positive interactions with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such a community climate, based on the foundation of critical inquiry and thought, serves to foster beliefs that cultural relations are good on campus and that institutional policies are applied with equanimity across the cultural spectrum.

In contrast, when members of the campus community do not participate in intercultural activities, they do not experience collective improvement in intercultural skills that also result in improved student learning gains. A high institutional commitment to interculturalism can serve to produce greater satisfaction with the learning environment as fewer interpersonal barriers exist between learners especially and there is an increased

propensity toward learning beyond individual comfort zones into which students are most likely to grow complacent.

Challenge and Support

One of the main hindrances we have faced when working to develop an environment or community that can serve to promote student learning outcomes focused on cognitive and non-cognitive student development is faculty-student interaction. Faculty, especially at larger research institutions, are bound by a tenure and promotion system that has the unintended consequence of marginalizing their involvement with students. Faculty are pushed to focus their best efforts outside the classroom and, as a result, students who are anything short of being completely self-directed in their learning tend to suffer for a lack of faculty interaction.

Beyond this, of course, the academy tends to promote learning in a traditional didactic manner and the dissemination of knowledge is a more unidirectional and impersonal process that does not necessarily account for the student's learning style, social context, intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives, nor his or her intentions for educational attainment.

The creation of cognitive dissonance to challenge students' perceptions toward reflective thinking and developmental outcomes involves a considerable commitment on the part of faculty to engage students in a dialectical learning process. Though students' investigation and subsequent resolution of perceived problems can lead to deeper learning experiences, the academy does not often promote this manner of inquiry, but rather promotes the development of subject matter competency that creates a false sense of student expectations for educational attainment that is primarily focused on vocational outcomes.

We believe that faculty approaches to designing curricula in support of students' cognitive/non-cognitive development should mimic the process of research inquiry. The encouragement of learners' diverse interests and the raising of their awareness of complexity in learning through the acknowledgement of problems, issues, and questions critical to the disciplines they are pursuing can make students feel like they are part of a co-productive environment for knowledge development. It is important for doctoral students to take part in a constructivist paradigm for higher education, thus engaging their minds toward a pattern of inquiry that will open new possibilities for thought that promote development through learning.

Doctoral students are self-directed and engage learning with an expectation to take responsibility for their own education. Programs designed for these learners need to accommodate this concept. Based on our observation, program faculty should assume the following about the experience of doctoral students when designing programs, interventions, and curricula: (1) they need to know the reasoning behind the education they attain and why it is immediately necessary to them (2) they need to learn experientially, and (3) they perceive the process of learning as a process of problem-solving.

Reflections on Process

Mentoring & Succession Planning

The process of peer mentoring presents challenge and opportunity simultaneously. As the authors engaged this process as late stage doctoral students working with new scholars entering the program, perhaps even the field, we found that the initial task was to create a safe space and to build trust so that the environment might be construed as a learning opportunity. Though the senior faculty who have served as managing editors for this journal presented opportunities for counsel and encouragement and were engaged in the planning process, we found that faculty beyond the immediate editorial circle were less than enthusiastic regarding the journal's development and progress, much less so with regarding the journal as a means for student development. Some initial considerations ensued:

- The development of an academic journal is not a valued commodity among faculty seeking tenure, as it presents little opportunity for immediate gain and is not assigned high value with regard to scholarly production.
- There are not many structures in place for student development at the doctoral level; though many faculty maintain mentor/apprenticeship relationships with doctoral fellows and the like, and the academic committee is in place to mentor students through their dissertation process, there are not many opportunities other than loosely formed colloquia or research groups that present the new scholar with the ability to gain discreet and nuanced knowledge about the world of academe.

The lack of consistency within the learning community, where, ideally, developing scholars would continue to shepherd new scholars through the process of orientation, made the maintenance of the integrity of the community difficult, as doctoral students were pulled in different directions with regard to course work or fellowship activities. The journal was never validated as a learning activity worthy of inclusion in fellowship or other funded activities. Though the journal commenced with some initial seed funding, discontinuation of such funding necessitated that the editorial staff find free-of-cost alternatives for electronic publishing and hosting of journal content (there was never a funding base that would have supported hard copy publishing and distribution), electronic communication modalities, and marketing.

- The grassroots nature of this journal publishing experience placed the utmost importance on the editorial staff's ability to network with colleagues nationally and internationally to build the journal's credibility via electronic communication campaigns and networking at national meetings and conventions.
- Considering the current environment of ongoing lack of funding sources, this experience serves as an example of how collaborative curricula can be maintained without significant funding.
- A successful journal requires collaboration and time on task to succeed. Given the technological modalities at our disposal, most work around the production of the journal can be accomplished with little to no funds. With that said, however,

human capital remains a necessary cost and the work required to manage a journal does justify funding the students involved.

Author Development

A critical component of the journal publication process, the authors concur that author development is likely the most impactful benefit with regard to doctoral student involvement. This process developed organically during the initial issue publication when it became apparent that, given a fledgling journal that received diverse manuscripts with varying levels of displayed academic rigor, quality control would be necessary, as most all manuscripts were accepted on a conditional basis requiring at least moderate revision in form and content. This presented doctoral students with an excellent opportunity to test and hone their own understanding of research design, various methods, academic style and format, and the veracity and validity of authors' resources.

Even more so, the opportunity to communicate with authors and exchange drafts according to a co-established publication timeline provided doctoral students with insight into the lives, schedules, and conflicts of diverse faculty from, literally, all over the globe. Our process necessitated all aspects of communication with authors be based in constructive critique. Whether a denial of manuscript, conditional acceptance, or interaction during the post-acceptance manuscript development phase, our standard required us to consistently provide our colleagues with the opportunity to practice continuous improvement...a lesson in quality that our student colleagues might not readily receive under other circumstances. As one of our colleagues shared,

“Correspondence with manuscript authors is crucial from start to finish. I try to reflect on what I would like to see when I submit a manuscript. This is why I am pleased that we have from the outset sent our denial letters with our suggested revisions. For new scholars this can be valuable information. It is easy to say no, it is more valuable to say why.”

As We Proceed

As the authors transition through the phase of fledgling scholarship into a somewhat more informed, but still questioning state of being, we leave the experience of the journal and all its accompanying considerations in the hands of individuals with fresh hearts and minds. It is our hope that this journal continues to provide a forum, not only for scholars in the field who seek to publish within a domain that embraces the depth and breadth of all that comprises educational administration and policy, but also for the young scholars who seek to develop their own voices and sensibilities within an arena abundant with opportunity, but often scarce in perspective and direction. The academic journal is a familiar and longstanding fixture within academe and many have argued its worth and lack thereof; however, this journal represents the will of individuals who promoted and maintained its existence for the sake of gleaning value from all aspects of its production. Though it has been a difficult process to build the credibility of this publication and to work toward growing the brand within higher education...we can say, in a rare moment of clarity, that beyond all else, the medium is, in this case the message.