

Chapter 3

Scholarly Praxis at the Edges: Why Responsible Academic Leadership Matters in Developing Faculty Scholarship

Linda Schwartz
Ambrose University, Canada

Christina Belcher
Redeemer University College, Canada

ABSTRACT

This philosophical, comparative content inquiry explores how academic leadership might facilitate an opening for the convergence of scholarly inquiry with a fidelity to concerns that shape the values and experiences of faculty. Three components are explored: academic tradition in higher education (ideological world); the regulatory formation of institution (system world); and the integration of scholarship with personal values in life and work (life world). Tensions emerge at critical moments between what constitutes appropriate scholarly inquiry in a discipline field and the belief systems that form and inform the scholar's worldview. Reflective exploration considers the place of academic leadership in fostering views of tradition, conversation, and scholarship. Issues that seldom arise emerge, providing fresh insight into the practices of academic culture. In conclusion, it is suggested that further research on the need for administrators to provoke grand conversations around their mission and the scholarly tradition is warranted.

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, this may appear to be an unusual chapter for a research handbook; however, the authors maintain that aesthetic and philosophical considerations are a means of reminding administrators that the mission of higher education is to pass on scholarly traditions and accumulated wisdom through dialogic grand conversations (Bakhtin, 1981). The setting in which research occurs and the reasons why scholarship is undertaken cannot be separated from the life of research any more than the scholar can be separated from the call of the research itself.

Much is written about the outcome of research and scholarly endeavors as final work. Little is written about the theory, reflection, and relational nuances that allow a research culture to flourish. The primary

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motivation for this chapter is to examine theoretical and philosophical considerations about faculty scholarship within institutions of higher education. By doing so, this may serve to remind administrators of the need to return to their missions of passing on and enriching the traditions of scholarship through critical inquiry. As grand conversations emerge, resultant engagement and reflection may serve to foster a scholarly tradition which includes incorporating personal values and thoughtful engagement with the world.

The authors have drawn from literature that focuses on what is essential to create the necessary conditions for a flourishing community of scholars across the academy. This will hopefully attune academic leadership to ways of facilitating change that fosters scholarly inquiry in all its forms.

Scholarship in the academy is haunting, lonely work (Derrida, 1994). There is a duality of specters that haunt the academic space: the burden of fidelity to the notion of a scholarly tradition and the tension experienced by the scholar at critical moments of convergence between what constitutes appropriate scholarly inquiry in a discipline field and the belief systems that form and inform the scholar's worldview.

This chapter explores how academic leadership might facilitate an opening for faculty to probe this convergence of scholarly inquiry with a fidelity to those things that shape the values and experience of academics in their daily life and work. The authors examine three components that have the potential for meaningful interface: the notion of academic tradition in higher education (ideological world); the regulatory formation of institution (system world); and the desire to integrate scholarship with personal values in a milieu of relational exchange with the other (life world).

Following the ethnographic narrative work of Dorothy Smith (2002, 2005) that advocates for a stance of listening to the everyday voices that inhabit institutional life, a reflective exploration is conducted of the value of academic leadership that navigates and brings together disparate views of scholarship. This approach addresses issues that are not often emergent in current academic leadership theory, and thus provide fresh insight into the reality of academic culture.

It is critical for academic leaders and administrators who are invested in the success of their institutions to understand why scholars require reflective conversation and the freedom to pursue questions that open spaces for rich and meaningful response to established canon and discourse. Furthermore, to enhance and support faculty in their life and work, it is imperative for leadership in the academy to attend to the means and ends of facilitating scholarship in all its forms.

In this process, the philosophical, reflective, and haunting questions regarding how to foster a love of research beyond systematic theory are raised. The content may not be unusual or surprising on first reflection because academic leaders are already aware of and wrestle with daily tensions concerning faculty life and work, such as the expectation to publish. On further examination, the content may be valuable to consider for what is not usually evident in the life of the academy: the philosophical and reflective goals that engender writing and recording meaningful and scholarly work.

Since no research takes place in a vacuum, it is sensible to begin where the conundrum of research resides, within the setting of the academy.

BACKGROUND

Institutional Worlds and Grand Conversations

The outcome of academic life cannot be separated from scholarship in all of its many forms. Every educational act has a scholarly parallel. Theory informs scholarship and has grounded academic texts

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