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This chapter explores the benefits of enhancing doctoral students' abilities to exploit the synergies among their multiple academic identities.

Professional Identity Development Theory and Doctoral Education

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The academic profession is among a limited number of occupations that have attained the professional status associated with comparatively high levels of prestige, monetary rewards, security, and autonomy. Traits that most professions have in common include a specialized body of knowledge that supports the skills needed to practice the profession, a culture sustained by a professional association, an ethical code for professional practice, recognized authority based on exclusive expertise, and an imperative to serve the public responsibly (Greenwood, 1957; Silva, 2000).

Students learn their chosen profession's abstract body of professional knowledge and its associated skills during lengthy degree programs and apprenticeships. Students also observe the behaviors, attitudes, and norms for social interaction prevalent among practitioners of their profession. They interpret their observations in light of their own prior experiences, their goals for the future, and their current sense of who they are and will try on possible professional selves to see how well they fit (Ibarra, 1999). In the process, each student is crafting a sense of identity as a particular type of professional. The period of doctoral preparation is particularly important because although identity is resistant to change, adaptations to one's sense of self are more likely to occur when one is transitioning to a new role (Cast, 2003; Ibarra, 1999). According to Austin and McDaniels (2006), developing an identity as a professional scholar is an essential task for a doctoral student.

In this chapter, I use identity and professionalization theories to explore how doctoral students develop identities as professionals and how their educational contexts shape the nature of their professional identities as integrated or fragmented. I also discuss the implications of integrated or fragmented identities for their future careers as faculty members as well as for the academic profession as a whole.

Identity Theory

Identity is “what it means to be who one is” (Burke, 2003a, p. 1), and individuals’ identities are often associated with labels for social positions or roles. Role labels convey meanings and expectations for behavior that have evolved from countless interactions among people in a social system. In a research university setting, for example, the role labels “sophomore,” “first-year doctoral student,” “teaching assistant,” “postdoc,” “new assistant professor,” “chemist,” and “writing specialist” instantly convey varying sets of expectations for how much time the individuals filling these roles will spend in the library, lab, or office and the number and nature of their interactions with freshmen, doctoral students, or tenured faculty members.

Roles are externally defined by other’s expectations, but individuals define their own identities internally as they accept or reject social role expectations as part of who they are (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Once an individual has accepted and internalized expectations for a role as part of his or her identity, that identity becomes a cognitive framework for interpreting new experiences. For example, a first-year doctoral student who had spent much time and effort negotiating admission to a prestigious biochemistry program and is trying on the possible identity of serious scholar may be more likely to feel her professional identity validated by a professor’s invitation to a research colloquium than by another student’s invitation to a workshop on effective teaching.

Multiple Identities. On the other hand, this doctoral student may face some identity challenges if she began her doctoral program with an already established identity as a dedicated high school biology teacher. People live and work within many social networks. Individuals may have as many identities as the number of groups within which they engage in distinctive roles (Stryker and Burke, 2000). According to Stryker (1968), individuals organize their identities in a hierarchy that affects the likelihood that one identity will be more salient than other identities in any given situation. If the teaching workshop and the research colloquium are on different days, the doctoral student may accept invitations to both activities; her existing teacher identity will be activated at the first event and her emerging research identity at the second.

When two identities with contrasting meanings and expectations are activated at the same time, an individual is likely to experience stress. In our example, the doctoral student might feel stressed if the colloquium and the workshop are scheduled during the same time period. To further explore how individuals cope with identity conflicts, assume that the new doctoral

student receives the invitations to the research colloquium and the teaching workshop during the same informal conversation with faculty and peers after a graduate student orientation event.

According to Stryker's articulation of identity theory, the student will decide in favor of the identity most salient to her (Stryker, 1968; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Salience will be determined by her level of commitment to each identity. Commitment, in turn, is shaped by the extensiveness or number of social connections or role partners one has in relation to an identity and the intensiveness or depth of those relationships with role partners. She may well decide to go to the research colloquium if the teaching role partner extending the workshop invitation is a new student from a humanities program whom she has only just met and the research role partner extending the invitation to the biochemistry colloquium is her academic advisor. But if the person offering the teaching workshop opportunity is an advanced biochemistry student who will be supervising the new student's work as a teaching assistant for the introductory biology course during her first semester, the doctoral student may experience some stress, not only about the immediate decision and her perceptions of the expectations held by each role partner but also because of the meaning her behavior holds for who she is. Her researcher and teacher identities would be in conflict. To favor one identity, she may need to adjust her self-perception of the other identity.

A less stressful scenario involving simultaneous activation of two identities with similar levels of salience and commitment will occur if the identities involve shared meanings. If the doctoral student's goals include conducting research on science learning and her advisor also values scholarly research on teaching, the student's identities will be consistent and mutually reinforcing (Burke, 2003b). Although she will still have to choose between activities because of the time conflict, she may be able to negotiate with her advisor and supervisor to determine which activity will be the best for her integrated professional development.

Negative Impact of Multiple Identities. Too often, however, resolution of identity conflict is not as easy for future faculty—or, indeed, for current faculty—as portrayed in the example just given. Identities as teacher, researcher, participant in institutional governance, and provider of community service are all aspects of being a member of the academic profession. Much research about faculty work assumes that these identities and the activities associated with them are distinct, mutually exclusive, and conflicting (see Braxton, 1996; Colbeck, 1998). Similarly, colleges and universities evaluate faculty members' teaching, research, and service separately (Colbeck, 2002). This expectation that academic identities are distinct and separate has resulted in such problems as stress and reduced commitment to one or more roles.

Identity theory suggests that the current prioritization of research in doctoral programs and faculty careers may actually intensify feelings of time-related pressure and stress. According to Marks (1977), people tend to experience time and energy as scarce if the activities and role partners

associated with their different identities are isolated from each other. This effect is exacerbated when people feel higher levels of commitment to some identities and lower levels of commitment to others. Thus doctoral students who are more highly committed to their researcher identities than teacher identities may resent time they must devote to teaching assistantships. This appears to be the case for many current faculty. Using data from nationwide surveys of U.S. faculty, Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) report that on average, faculty prefer to do research even as they face ever greater expectations to pay more attention to teaching, and the resulting stress may negatively affect their work.

One negative effect particularly relevant to doctoral education would occur if a student who has a high commitment to her identity as a teacher chooses not to subordinate it in order to make herself fit the dominant researcher identity promoted by the faculty in her program. In that case, a potentially excellent and well-rounded future faculty member might select herself out of the market for tenure-track positions in favor of fixed-term teaching-only positions, or she might leave the academy altogether. "When individuals are confronted with a persistent mismatch between identity meanings and perceptions of the social environment, one possibility is simply to exit the role" (Cast, 2003, p. 45n).

Benefits of Multiple Identities. Alternatively, theory and prior research about the positive effects of multiple identities in the work and family realm show how doctoral education can enable future faculty members to manage their several professional role identities successfully and productively (Colbeck, 2007; Marks, 1977; Thoits, 2003). Marks (1977), for example, theorized that individuals who feel high levels of commitment to each of several role identities may gain rather than lose energy as they engage in activities related to two or more of their identities. Furthermore, empirical research has found positive associations between active engagement in both work and family roles and mental well-being, physical health, self-esteem, and resilience in the face of setbacks (see Barnett and Hyde, 2001; Thoits, 2003).

Developing a sense of shared meanings across different identities, whether those identities are invoked within a single group or within intersecting groups (Burke, 2003b), may help doctoral students craft professional identities that integrate their identities as researcher, teacher, and service provider. Such integration may enhance their work efficiency and effectiveness.

Doctoral students' multiple identities may be activated concurrently within a single group. An example would be in a laboratory science research group led by the student's faculty advisor that employs undergraduates supervised by the doctoral student. In this example, the doctoral student's identities as advisee, researcher, and laboratory teacher may come to have similar levels of salience and commitment because they are activated together around the shared purpose of addressing a research problem. This role integration has the potential to reduce time-based conflicts while enhancing teaching effectiveness and scholarly productivity. In a recent qualitative study of role

integration, faculty who perceived synergies among their academic roles found ways to accomplish multiple goals with single activities (Colbeck, 2007). One participant reported that his—and his doctoral students’—publication and grant productivity increased significantly after he added scholarly research about teaching in his discipline to his basic scientific research.

Doctoral students’ multiple identities may also be activated simultaneously when they are in the presence of two groups of persons who do not usually overlap and who have differing sets of expectations for the student. An example of such a situation might involve a doctoral student with a pre-existing identity as a community activist. Because of her role as a respected leader of a community environmental group, she participates in a town-gown meeting involving other community members and university administrators in discussions about how the university might adopt sustainable practices that would initially involve some cost to the university but would enhance quality of life in the surrounding neighborhood. If the doctoral student brings her scholarly expertise to bear on helping the university and community group work toward agreement on a sustainability plan, the student’s identities will reinforce each other (Burke, 2003b). Such role integration is likely to enhance her energy and productivity, especially if she documents and analyzes these efforts in publications that meet scholarly standards in her discipline (O’Meara, 2002).

Professional Work, Integrated Identities

Finding shared meanings and integrating all the professional identities involved in faculty work are important to enhance doctoral students’ productivity, time and energy management, and well-being. But such an integrated understanding of faculty professional work is also important to the academy itself in order to slow the creeping deskilling and deprofessionalization of academic work (Rhoades, 1998). Professions are characterized by autonomy and professional authority, resting on expertise—distinctive bodies of knowledge that aspiring practitioners learn during long periods of specialized training. Professional work is complex and multilayered, and it involves expert judgment to solve nonroutine problems (Abbott, 1988; Scott, 2002). Hence a new faculty member educated to become an integrated professional is able to apply research skills to improve his teaching and his students’ learning; to derive penetrating questions that advance his research agenda from thoughtful communication with students; and to define, analyze, and resolve real-world problems in partnership with interdisciplinary colleagues, students, and community members.

The notion that complicated and distinctive knowledge is embodied in well-educated professionals stands in stark contrast to another common way of managing complex work: bureaucratic division of labor (Scott, 2002). Abbott described the effect of dividing complex (and integrated) professional work into routine and nonroutine elements: “In every case, the eventual result

has been the degradation of what had been professional work to nonprofessional status, sometimes accompanied by the degradation of those who do the work” (1988, pp. 125–126). He argues that division of labor between a “truly professional” group (such as tenured university professors) and a group with lower status and pay (such as fixed-term faculty with primary responsibility for teaching or directors of campus public service centers) undermines the lower-status group and places greater demands on the group who retain higher professional status. Such processes have occurred in medicine over the past few decades (Friedson, 2001) and are already at work in academe.

My concern here is less for the professional status of current and future faculty than for maintaining and enhancing the quality, creativity, effectiveness, and integrity of academic work. Fragmenting research, teaching, community engagement—not just into separate roles but into separate jobs—may enhance administrative flexibility and control, but at the expense of current and future faculty members’ abilities to perceive and exploit connections. Such connections between research, teaching, and community service might enable them to address complex problems in ways that advance personal, economic, social, and public development. Educating doctoral students to find the synergistic connections between their multiple academic identities is a way of “reprofessionalizing” academic work, one student at a time.

Recommendations

Doctoral programs and their faculty should create contexts that encourage students to develop and integrate their professional identities of researcher, teacher, and engaged public scholar. According to Yehudi Elkana, president of the Central European University:

Leaders in the disciplines must understand the critical roles of curricula and pedagogical work in their field and how deeply these functions are affected by the same epistemological understandings that relate to the research role. They must recognize, empirically, that most of those who earn the doctorate will spend far more time teaching and engaging with a variety of publics—in industry, policy, and community settings—than they will at the frontiers of science. Doctoral education must equip students to work in these settings [2006, p. 66].

Prior research has shown that current faculty integrate their research, teaching, and service more than they recognize. For some, the process of discussing their role and identity integration led them to realize how doing so has enhanced their work (Colbeck, 1998; 2007). If current faculty were encouraged to share the evolution and the effects of their professional identity integration with doctoral students, both groups would benefit. Specific classes, workshops, and programs can be designed or revamped to highlight benefits attainable from integrating research, teaching, and service identities.

Faculty and administrators can also foster integration of doctoral students' teaching, research, and service identities by creating cultures in their doctoral programs that elucidate shared meanings across the various aspects of academic work. For example, learning for the purpose of producing knowledge could be advocated as a mission that unifies teaching, research, and service (Lattuca and Colbeck, 2007). With that mission guiding all aspects of doctoral students' professional development, students might be more likely to perceive opportunities to integrate academic identities. For example, when a doctoral student is teaching undergraduates in the classroom, he may see his professional work as helping students develop deep understandings of knowledge they can use inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, the doctoral student may see his research as producing knowledge that can be used to advance theory or application in his discipline.

How doctoral students come to see themselves as professionals has implications far beyond the colleges and universities where they will become employed. These future faculty will become the educators and role models for future attorneys, nurses, business managers, industrial chemists, psychologists, journalists, and practitioners of many other professions who will learn their respective bodies of knowledge while attending degree programs in institutions of higher education. Universities, then, help define the professions (Brint, 1994), and "whatever model of professionalism prevails on campuses shapes the nature of professionalism in all professions" (Klay, Brower, and Williams, 2001, p. 46). Ideally, the students of faculty who are themselves integrated professionals will also learn how to accomplish complex work that requires judgment and skill (Friedson, 1994; Abbott, 1988) and to manage and integrate multiple professional and personal identities successfully.

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