This chapter introduces the critical domains of culturally relevant leadership learning. The model explores how capacity, identity, and efficacy of student leaders interact with dimensions of campus climate.

Critical Domains of Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning: A Call to Transform Leadership Programs

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Compelling interests for diversity often include the changing demographics of the United States and the world. A glance at the U.S. census tells the story of the increasing racial and ethnic differences in the country. Progressively, the United States has become a multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual society. These ever-increasing differences, fusions, and intersections of identities were the basis for our previous work (Guthrie, Bertrand Jones, Osteen, & Hu, 2013) where we outlined an argument for developing the leader identity and leadership capacity of diverse students. Leader identity is a student's own conceptualization of themselves as leaders, whereas leadership capacity is the learning and practice of leadership skills and behavior (Guthrie et al., 2013). Understanding how students with different identities define and learn about leadership helps educators appreciate the critical connections of leadership and diversity.

Sara Ahmed (2012) points out that the focus on diversity, largely defined as difference, can be a way of “becoming more advantaged, rather than challenging disadvantage” (p. 78). Diversity as a compelling interest for leadership, and ultimately globalization, reinforces the advantaged idea that leadership is the purview of all. As students are prepared to engage with diversity and more diverse students are prepared for pluralistic leadership, higher education institutions, and thus the country, become better positioned for advantage in many ways. At the same time, challenges to disadvantage are ignored or too often deferred in the name of the “greater good.” Unfortunately, conversations on diversity and leadership have rarely
challenged the notion of disadvantage or the ways that power and privilege perpetuate disadvantage for some groups of people. This lack of challenge serves only to reinforce dominant perspectives of leadership and fails to initiate an acceptance of the necessity of diverse people, knowledge, and ideas, thus stagnating social change. The times call for a more complicated, nuanced discussion about marginalized populations, social change, and leadership on college campuses.

The concept of culturally relevant leadership learning (CRLL) is a framework for transforming leadership programs to address the advantages and disadvantages difference creates. This new model incorporates efficacy and contextual dimensions of campus climate into our original ideas of individuals’ capacity and identity to engage in the leadership process. Together, these ideas embody the critical domains of the CRLL model. This model seeks to compel leadership educators to challenge old paradigms of leadership and learning, in order to consider new ways to educate students and develop leaders capable of challenging inequity to create social change.

This chapter provides an overview of the thinking behind our CRLL model. First, we explore culturally relevant pedagogy, then discuss the power of language by distinguishing leader, leadership, leader/leadership development, and leadership learning. Finally, we present the model and its corresponding domains.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The CRLL model is grounded in Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. Defining culture as an “amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief systems,” Ladson-Billings (2014) transformed teacher education by calling on teachers to adopt an assets approach to teaching culturally diverse students (p. 75). This approach is directly linked to Ahmed’s warning that diversity can be manipulated to create disadvantage; Ladson-Billings brings attention to the ways the knowledge, skills, and lived experiences of students of color are treated as deficits instead of assets in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2014) identified three domains that successful teachers operated within their classrooms: academic success, cultural competence, sociopolitical consciousness.

For change to occur in higher education, the interests of institutions, majority students, and underrepresented students must converge. Culturally relevant transformative practice allows educators to attend to the learning experiences of marginalized populations and their experiences of oppression. Specifically, the CRLL model considers the primacy of how racism, sexism, and religious oppression, as well as heterosexism/cisgenderism and classism, advantage and disadvantage all student lives in myriad ways and how failure to address these issues ensures complicity in perpetuating oppression. CRLL acknowledges power in leadership, specifically, the power of language and the power of the institutional
culture/climate to influence students’ identity, capacity, and efficacy to create social change. Thus, CRLL is responsive to inclusion and matters of equity and positions leadership educators to address the complexities of social inequality through leadership learning. Before we explore each domain in the model, we first discuss the importance of language in leadership.

The Importance of Language

In the language of leadership, as in descriptions of self, words and underlying definitions matter. A classic example of how important language is comes from the never-ending debate, “Was Hitler a leader?” (Guthrie et al., 2013). This discussion has taken over many class sessions and workshops. Leadership educators often find themselves in the midst of this debate. However, the question can be answered without quite so much controversy once the question becomes, “How do you define leader and leadership?”

Describing Hitler as a leader indicates one’s belief that a leader is defined through position or influence. However, if someone identified with James MacGregor Burns’ (1978) description of leaders as those who raise the moral capacity of their followers, leader would not be used to define Hitler. The discussion then becomes much more nuanced, productive, and focused on the social and cultural construction of the definition of leader and leadership.

The confusion of the words leader and leadership is a common gap in current scholarship and practice. Conceptual confusion results in carelessly interchanging the language of the behavior (leadership) and the individual (leader). As an interchangeable word, leadership becomes the work of one versus all (Guthrie et al., 2013). Day (2001) helps clarify the definitions of leader and leadership development. He defines leadership development as “expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (p. 582). Whereas leadership development focuses on the group—its interpersonal growth and relationships, leader development focuses on the individual—intrapersonal growth and opportunity to understand the self (Day, 2001). Leader development builds human capital through enhancing an individual’s knowledge, skills, and values. Leadership development builds social capital, the “networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organizational value” (Day, 2001, p. 585).

According to Guthrie and Osteen (2012), leadership learning includes four areas: education, training, development, and engagement. This expands on Roberts and Ullom’s (1989) training, education, and development model to include engagement. Leadership education occurs both in and out of the classroom, involving the broad understanding of leadership knowledge, skills, and values with a longer duration. Leadership training is often shorter in duration and focuses on the acquisition of specific
leadership skills. Reflection and integration of leadership knowledge, skills, and values is how we define leadership development. Leadership engagement is the practice and application of leadership knowledge, skills, and values and how it “shows up” in our daily lives is the focus.

As a social construct, leadership holds various meanings to different people. It is important to understand not only the difference between leader and leadership but also how culturally diverse populations define leadership and align the concept with an activist, collective, and service framework, which is critical in developing CRLL opportunities. The authors in this issue provide both breadth and depth of diverse voices to examine culturally diverse and relevant meanings of leader and leadership.

Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning Domains

CRLL incorporates Ladson-Billings’ (1995) notions of academic success by focusing on students' capacity for leadership: cultural competence becomes students' own identity development and their acknowledgment of others' identities; and sociopolitical consciousness becomes students' efficacy, or their belief in their own capacity, to enact leadership in a variety of settings. Capacity and identity act as doorways into enactment; leadership efficacy leads students into the arena of creating change. Examining efficacy along with the concepts of capacity and identity reconceptualizes our previous model by weaving ways of knowing with interpersonal and intrapersonal development (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The combination of identity, capacity, and efficacy describes a student’s way of understanding self as an agent of change through interpersonal and intrapersonal development.

As a collective set of states, identity, capacity, and efficacy are interconnected and motivate students to engage in the leadership process (Reichard & Walker, 2016). And with the right environmental or contextual factors in place, a reciprocal influential relationship begins. As students engage in leadership, they can enhance their identity, capacity, and efficacy—further motivating more engagement in the leadership process. As seen in Figure 1.1, the two-way arrows in the model seek to depict this reciprocal, dynamic learning and engagement process.

Figure 1.1. Dynamic Interaction Between Individual and Leadership Process
Identity. Identity is our ever-evolving self-portrait. Like the selfies album on your iPhone, it is the ongoing take, retake, and update of who am I. As a socially constructed concept, it is grounded in historical, political, and cultural norms (Jones & Abes, 2013) and results from one’s navigation and meaning making of self, context, and relationships (Abes et al., 2007). In addition to social identities, such as race, class, and gender, leader identity is one of the multiple layers of one’s identity (Hogg, 2001; Lord & Hall, 2005). Leader identity is a student’s own theory about who they are as a leader (Day, Harrison, & Haplin, 2009; Guthrie et al., 2013).

Although multiple dimensions of identity may be identified, described, and studied, they “cannot be fully understood in isolation” (Abes et al., 2007, p. 3). In order to understand the whole self, each of these dimensions is best understood in relation to the other. Therefore, this model creates space for students to understand their leader identity within and through the lenses of their multiple and complex layers of identity. The processes of leader identity and identity development are ongoing, lifelong engagements to understand our selves within the context of our lives. Student development theory assists educators in understanding self and that “leadership development and human development are inextricably linked” (Owen, 2012, p. 18).

Describing leader identity as integral to how we behave and the invisible driving force motivating leadership development, Hall (2004) underscores the importance of identity in leader development. If our goal is student engagement in leadership, the literature is clear we must focus on identity (Guthrie et al., 2013; Owen, 2012). Students’ self-concept influences their engagement in the activity of leadership (Guthrie et al., 2013). Therefore, if leadership educators seek all students’ engagement within leadership processes, they “must also acknowledge the ways leadership identity intersects with other dimensions of identity such as race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and social class” (Owen, 2012, p. 29).

Leader identity is promoted through celebrations, rituals, relationships, mentoring, self-assessment, reflection, and new experiences. Factors leading to its development include how one defines the constructs of leaders and leadership (Kezar, 2000), in addition to environmental context and individual readiness (Day et al., 2009). The leadership identity development (LID) model developed by Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2006) serves as a guide for leadership educators in the development and scaffolding of interventions to enhance students’ identification as someone with the ability to create change.

Although not necessarily a prerequisite to engagement in the activity of leadership, leader identity is a building block that creates meaning and organizes new leadership knowledge. In addition, it motivates students to further engage in the work of learning leadership capacity and developing efficacy. In this dynamic learning process, identity and capacity inform each other (Guthrie et al., 2013; Lord & Hall, 2005).
Capacity. Capacity is the integration of students’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills that collectively reflect their overall ability to behave effectively in the leadership process (Dugan, 2011). The focus on leadership capacities stems from three central beliefs of leadership educators:

that the skills of leadership can and should be learned; that the learning and development of leadership capacities are inextricably intertwined; and that leadership educators can purposefully foster learning environments that help students integrate knowledge, skills, and experiences in meaningful ways. (Owen, 2012, p. 22)

The groundbreaking, comprehensive, student leadership research project, Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) defines leadership capacity as “the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the ability to engage in leadership” (Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013, p. 6). Rosch and Anthony (2012) expand upon this with the language of knowing, as the study of effective leadership practice; being, as the attitudes and inner qualities of leaders; and doing, the practicing of the skills necessary to engage in leadership. The teaching of these knowing, being, and doing capacities is directly connected to learning theory, pedagogical approaches, and developmental readiness (Dugan et al., 2013; Owen, 2012).

MSL research identified four high-impact experiences that build capacity are sociocultural conversations with peers, mentoring relationships, community service, and membership in off-campus organizations (Dugan et al., 2013). Additionally, leadership positions on and off campus and membership in student organizations affect student capacity (Dugan et al., 2013). The impact of each of these experiences, however, differs based on student social identities (Dugan et al., 2013). Once again, the research tells a clear story of how complex layers of identity influence not only how students identify, but also how they learn the capacities of the leadership process. The impact of identity can also be seen in students’ development of leadership efficacy.

Efficacy. Efficacy is the belief of being successful in a specific activity, the belief that you can “organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Specifically, in regard to leadership efficacy, it is “a student's beliefs about his or her abilities to exercise their leadership knowledge and skills in a given situation” (Denzine, 1999, p. 3). It has been shown time and again to enhance one’s engagement in the leadership process (Dugan et al., 2013).

MSL uses the language of leadership self-efficacy (LSE), defining it as “one's internal belief in the likelihood that they will be successful when engaging in leadership” (Dugan et al., 2013, p. 6). MSL data argue that leadership efficacy is just as important as capacity and that the two constructs
build upon and from each other. Leadership self-efficacy not only predicts capacity; it is a “factor in whether or not students actually enact leadership behaviors” (Dugan et al., 2013, p. 20).

Once again reinforcing the importance of connecting the diversity and leadership literature, students’ leadership self-efficacy is “empowered or constrained based on pervasive messages from our social context that create normative assumptions about what leaders should look like and how they should behave. These messages can have particularly adverse effects on students from traditionally marginalized populations” (Dugan et al., 2013, p. 20). Students’ sense of efficacy builds their ability to reject external negative feedback and enhances their motivation to engage in leadership behavior and develop their capacity (Dugan et al., 2013). Sitting in a campus boardroom surrounded by pictures of White men who founded, led, and gave money to the institution, a young Black woman’s leadership self-efficacy grounds her ability to reject the portrait messages reinforcing the narrative that old White men are the only ones with the capacity to lead at her institution.

Efficacy is developed through four developmental sources of influence (Bandura, 1997): enactive mastery experiences (meaningful experience), vicarious experiences (role modeling), verbal persuasion (supports), and physiological and affective states (emotional cues). The LID theory and model demonstrate that these four sources of efficacy development are effective methods of building leadership efficacy and in turn leadership identity (Komives et al., 2009). In addition, positional leadership roles and sociocultural conversations build leadership self-efficacy (Dugan et al., 2013). As the arrows indicate in Figure 1.1, across all three constructs, participation in leadership experiences develops identity, competency, and motivation leading to further pluralistic engagement in leadership experiences (Day et al., 2009).

In our new model, we also acknowledge that engagement must consider the role of campus climate as an important domain of CRLL. As seen in Figure 1.2, these include (a) historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion, (b) compositional diversity, (c) psychological climate, (d) behavioral climate, and (e) organizational/structural aspects (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Milem, Dey, & White, 2004). Institutions create environments that directly affect student growth, development, and learning. Like Hurtado and her associates, we acknowledge that external forces like the government/policy context and sociohistorical context influence the institutional context for leadership engagement. Although institutions do not directly control these contexts, educators can exert positive influence on campus climate in ways that facilitate leadership learning. These domains of CRLL propel leadership educators to consider the importance of students’ experience of broader campus climate and how students engage in the leadership learning context of the campus.
Figure 1.2. Five Domains of Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning

Historical Legacy of Inclusion/Exclusion

Leadership has a history of exclusion when it comes to labeling what people of color or other marginalized populations “do” as leadership. Leadership in these communities has traditionally been labeled service or activism (Guthrie et al., 2013). As a result, perspectives of marginalized groups in leadership scholarship are minimized both from the existing literature and from leadership education. This reveals ways that a hidden, or unintentional, curriculum operates as subtext throughout leadership learning. As a consequence, students from marginalized populations do not see themselves or representatives of their communities as leaders, nor do they read work written by or about their perspectives in the leadership canon.

From an institutional context, the CRLL model requires a full accounting of the historical legacies of inclusion and exclusion at the broader institutional level related to leadership. Who has traditionally participated in leadership learning opportunities on campus? Does this reflect those students who receive leadership “awards” or other recognition for their work? It is simply not enough to acknowledge that these patterns of exclusion

or inclusion exist(ed); leadership educators must then develop intentional ways to respond to such history.

**Compositional Diversity**

Compositional diversity represents the number and proportion of various student populations (Milem et al., 2004). At the core of CRLL, compositional diversity is more than just numbers of underrepresented students. As mentioned earlier, we are particularly interested in the participation of historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, women, and other marginalized student populations. If transforming the ways these students identify with and enact leadership in order to create social change is the goal of CRLL, simply increasing the numbers of students from marginalized groups who receive leadership learning is not enough to ensure this larger goal will be met.

Attention to compositional diversity increases the representation of culturally diverse students, which in turn leads to broader diversity of ideas and opinions, and thus increases the exposure of all students’ to a wider range of perspectives (Milem et al., 2005). As a result of “experiences and information that challenge the accepted ideology and self-definition,” students question their own ways of thinking about leadership and begin to adopt “a new world view” (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997, p. 27). The results of this process help to accomplish the larger goal of leadership for social change. Chang (2003) found statistically significant differences of opinion between racial groups on social and political issues like the death penalty, healthcare, free speech, and the prevalence of discrimination. These differences not only influence who engages in addressing what issues but also shape how those students in particular work in the communities most affected by these issues.

**Psychological Dimension**

The psychological dimension emphasizes individual views of group relations, perceptions of discrimination or conflict, attitudes about difference, and institutional responses to diversity. This dimension also includes students’ cognitive and personal growth. Higher education institutions have numerous opportunities to create environments, inside and outside of the classroom, that promote dissonance and thus growth and development of students. Often, institutions unintentionally create “conflict” experiences for marginalized students. As a result, their experience of “the brick wall” of oppression that Ahmed (2012) describes become juxtaposed with those who have not experienced the wall. Ahmed explains, “To those who do not come up against it, the wall does not appear—the institution is lived and experienced as being open, committed, and diverse” (p. 174).

These dissimilar experiences of the same environment can cause conflict for all. White or other privileged students can respond by discounting
or questioning the validity of marginalized students’ perceptions, creating further discord and mistrust. Thus, leadership educators are called to assess the learning environment for marginalized students and create opportunities that foster acceptance of differing opinions and experiences while encouraging trust.

**Behavioral Dimension**

The behavioral dimension focuses on the interactions between all students and the quality of interaction within culturally diverse groups. Cross-group and intragroup interactions are especially important. Active learning strategies help students engage with culturally diverse others, as well as diverse ideas and information through class discussions, group projects, and peer teaching (Milem et al., 2004).

Given this, one responsibility of leader educators in this domain is equipping all students with the ability to engage across difference—to be reflective of their own experiences and those of others who may not mirror their own, in particular. Educators must be prepared for dissonance as students make sense of experiences that differ greatly from their own and challenges to established beliefs and patterns of thought. Dugan and Velázquez (2015) identify three principles for advancing students’ capacities to engage across difference: (a) sociocultural conversations between and among peers, (b) diversity of leadership education content beyond traditional and dominant narrative, and (c) cultivation of students’ capacities for “critical perspectives and critical self-reflection” (p. 107). Critical practices refer to the questioning of basic assumptions and challenging their applicability to any context. Clarifying these principles help cultivate students’ ability to make meaning of their experiences in leadership learning.

**Organizational/Structural Dimension**

The organizational/structural dimension embodies the “important structures and processes that guide day-to-day ‘business’ of the institution” (Milem et al., 2005, p. 18). These structural aspects of higher education institutions are represented by course curricula, budget allocations to support diverse learning opportunities, admissions practices, hiring practices of diverse faculty and staff, tenure and promotion procedures, and rewards structures. These administrative structural aspects influence student culture, for example, in what types of registered student organizations are represented, and offices to provide opportunities to diverse students. In culturally relevant leadership programs, these structures include the leadership education curriculum, budget allocations, recognition or award practices, and other policies. These components of the program demonstrate (or not) to students that culturally diverse students’ perceptions of the environment, their lived experiences, knowledge, and skills matter. For example, honor
societies that do not consider off-campus leadership or do not consider part-time students for membership send a signal that devalues those experiences.

Leadership educators can demonstrate their commitment to this dimension through such practices as critically examining the composition of students selected to serve as teaching assistants and on program committees. Educators can scrutinize the course reading lists for diverse authors and ideas that represent the breadth of thinking about leadership in a variety of social contexts.

**Conclusion**

Taken together, as seen in Figure 1.3, the domains of the CRLL model create a framework that leadership educators can use to begin transforming their leadership programs, and thus institutions. We would caution educators from assuming that attention to the domains in the model will prevent or provide a response to all resistance encountered. This is simply not the case. However, we can view these experiences as opportunities for transformation in that they produce learning about the barriers that arise while doing this work and about what does and does not work to overcome them (Ahmed, 2012).
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