Developing Scholar Activists: The Impact of a Professional Practice Doctorate on Doctoral Graduate Candidates and their Practice

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Nurturing Activism

Activism is defined as "the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change" (Oxford Languages).

A critical activist has been defined as a person who has adopted a social justice stance (Brooks & Miles, 2008) and is prepared to "deconstruct political, social, and economic inequity" (p.108) (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Larson & Ovando, 2001).

Embracing or pursuing activism is not for the faint of heart. It requires a degree of grit and commitment to outcomes that may or may not fully manifest despite the concerted effort (Becton & Jeffries, 2021, p.1).

Do you mistrust agency information?

Are you an idealist?

Do you look for and see problems, injustices or danger and are often ready to research and seek expert help?

Do you have specific skills or knowledge and possess powerful tools for making yourself heard?

Are you passionately immersed in an issue?

Are you an Activist?

Do you take a social justice stance (Brooks & Miles, 2008)?

Theoretical Framework

Paulo Freire (1972; 1985) theories of critical consciousness, dialogue, and praxis

Critical Consciousness+ Dialogue+ Reflection= Laboratory of Active Praxis
Social Injustice

Theoretical Framework

Anthony Giddens (1979) concept of human action with the intent to change power dynamics frame characterizes EdD programs & the development of a scholar-activist.

Laboratory of Active Praxis (theory/reflection/action) = Self-empowerment & Activism
Social Justice

Theoretical Framework

Guiding Principles of Program Design
1. Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice.
2. Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities.
3. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships.
4. Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions.
5. Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry.
6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice.

Source:https://www.cpedinitiative.org/the-framework

Research Design

Collaborative Critical Personal Narrative

Research Questions

Q. Have you noticed a change in your ability to "speak up" and be proactive for a cause as a result of your learnings and experiences in the EdD program?

Guiding Questions

Activist or Advocacy

- What does it mean to be a scholar activist?

- How would you differentiate a scholar activist from an advocate for a cause, for example?

- What are the behaviors of a scholar activist that would differentiate them from scholarly advocac

Program Impact

- Do you associate EdD programs with scholar activism? Explain your response.

- In your experience are there any specific aspects of the EdD program at Franklin Uni   at support the growth of a scholar activist?

Research Methodology

- Purposive sampling methods, recruiting doctoral candidates from Franklin University, organizational leadership EdD program track.

- Collectively created prompts/ guiding questions grounded on the *Framework for the Emerging EdD Activist.*

- Thick descriptive narratives analyzed for emerging themes (Nutley et al., 2007, p. 36).

- Population from the demographic group that Zambo & Isai (2013) describe as typical of those undertaking professional doctorates in that they have 'are mid-career professionals and work full time in their fields' (p.98).

Demographic Characteristics	n	Percentage
Gender		
Female	14	82%
Male	3	18%
Ethnicity/Race		
Asian	0	0
Black	5	29%
Hispanic	1	6%
White	11	65%

Demographic Profile

Active Research-EdD Activist Profile Model

Coalition Builder

Vocal Risk-Taker

Visionary Leader

Social Justice Champion

EdD Activist Model

Themes	Characteristics
Coalition Builder	Inspires and focuses on bringing people together for a common cause. This requires negotiation skills and wherewithal to foster collaboration. Possess the ability to galvanize forces and build consensus within an organization.
Vocal Risk-taker	Gives voice to critical issues and topics and also possesses the courage necessary for activism. Juggles competing political, social, and economic forces. Increasingly confident in resisting the dominant discourses to advocate for societal's marginalized and powerless.
Visionary Leader	Engages in critical reflection to solve authentic problems, exhibiting the kind of vision that is a necessary precursor for organizational change.
Social Justice Champion	Identifies the inequities and injustices that may go unnoticed in a particular work environment. Continually focused on equity and fairness. Desire to make a difference.

Source: Modified from Becton, Y., Bogiages, B., D'Amico, L., Lilly, T., Currin, E., Jeffries, R., & Tamim, S. (2020). An emerging framework for the EdD activist, *Impacting Education Journal*, 5(2), 43-54.

Current Findings

Critical

- Relationships with faculty and peers
- Instructional scaffolding
- DLC/DFA/DSA/cultivate a sense of belonging and collectiveness.
- Diversity of voices challenge both students and faculty to think differently about who creates, produces, and defines knowledge.

Have you noticed a change in your ability to "speak up" and be proactive for a cause as a result of your learnings and experiences in the program

I have noticed that I have felt more confident in speaking up and being proactive for a cause.

I suspect that my education has really helped me to be proactive and my supervisors have seen that which is why I am being asked to lead. So I would answer that I think others are seeing it more than I am truly feeling it yet.

The development of myself has altered relations and interactions within my organization. The program has enabled me to look see relationships I didn't see before.

While I have always been able to speak up, the education I have obtained in the EdD program has taught me how to format my thoughts and create solutions to the issues to the issues I see in the world..

I often speak my mind, and my professional role requires me to engage in more advocacy so my risk taking has a tangible purpose. Though my values will always lead me that way.

I believe that the curriculum in the doctoral program has provided a greater sense of confidence and critical thinking. As a result of my studies, I believe I have a stronger voice at the leadership table.

Each of the four themes are equally important in leadership, but the work of the program has helped push my personal and professional growth forward in taking bold risks to disrupt dysfunction and bring forth an educational experience equal or superior to that found in more advantaged areas and populations. I very genuinely believe that my school will find levels of success directly due to my participation in the program.

I feel I am both a better Coalition Builder and Vocal Risk-taker following my doctoral course education.

I consider myself a coalition builder, vocal risk-taker, and social justice champion. I am skilful at seeing the big picture and recruiting others to get onboard to works towards particular issues.

As I progressed in my studies for my dissertation topic I found myself compelled to speak up and respectfully attempt to persuade others through research rather than anecdotal conversation..

I have noticed a change in my behavior and it fits into two categories, even though I feel that there are fragments of the others in different situations where I have been directly involved , or offered assistance to a former colleague:

Discussion of Research Findings

IDENTIFED ISSUES

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE EMERGING EDD ACTIVIST

Issue 1

- Nomenclature impacts perceived relationship between the EdD program and student activism.
- Professional learning is complex, and causal links are tenuous.

Issue 2

- Differentiating between advocacy and activism.

Issue 3

- The doctoral process impacts EdD doctoral candidate's sense of self, leading to altered relations and interactions within organizations.

Summary & Learnings

- Highlighting the development of individual activism in the professional learning process is complex.

- Application of the *EdD Activist Profile* does not offer a simple answer to the question of how a Professional Practice Doctorate (PPD) program impacts the development of an activist.

- Undertaking an EdD grounded on CPED principles with specific focus on Principle #1 *Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice* (CPED n.d.), requires sustained instructor mentoring, frequent opportunities for critical peer dialogue, and opportunities for scholar activism integrated into both the program and individual praxis i.e. laboratory of practice (LoP).

- Institutions delivering Professional Practice Doctorates (PPD) need to work more closely to identify what kind of doctoral program might lead to such outcomes as this contributes to the doctoral program differentiation i.e., EdD and PhD.

- The perpetual development of the *EdD Activist Profile* incorporated in the *Framework for the Emerging EdD Activist* (Becton et al., 2020) will continue to provide the space to revise and fine-tune the conceptual knowledge that shapes and defines the EdD activist.
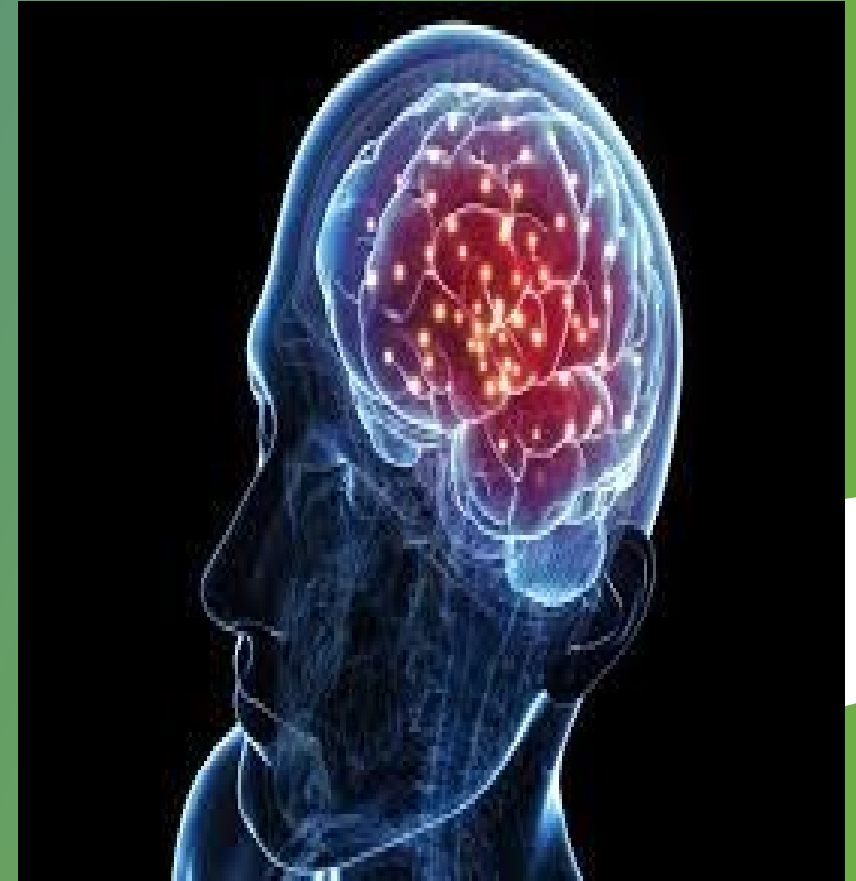
Conclusions

- The application of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate's (CPED) *Framework for the Emerging EdD Activist* tells the story of activism development primarily through instructor/student interaction, student/student interation and through support networks such Doctoral Faculty Advising (DFA), Doctoral Learning Community (DLC), Doctoral Student Association (DSA) which appear to facilitate the development of activism in praxis (LoP).

- Doctoral candidates give accounts of disruption, subversion, and challenges that they attribute to their new knowledge and understandings.

- Data draws attention to the opaque complexity of the professional learning process, calling into question the contemporary input-output model of activism currently proposed.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Further research is necessary to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between a developing scholar activist and the impact of the professional practice doctorate (PPD), specifically how that can be measured.

- Further research is required to understand the relationship between the EdD program, doctoral candidate scholar activism, and behaviour and actions in praxis (LoP).

- The study's methodology should be used in other university settings in order to expand the literature focused on the developmental relationship between the EdD and scholar activism