

## Developing Scholar Activists: The Role of the EdD

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### ABSTRACT

A qualitative descriptive approach was followed in the research, starting with a theoretical conceptualization of scholar activism within doctoral education as a basis for further inquiry. Seventeen doctoral candidates described how they conceptualized and applied the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate's (CPED) Framework for the Emerging EdD Activist to their experiences in an online program. Study respondents gave accounts of growing confidence to engage in active, vocal advocacy, which they attributed to their new knowledge and understandings gained through participation in the program. However, for some mid-career students, increased vocal advocacy in the workplace was perceived as endangering career prospects. The data draw attention to the complexity of the professional learning process, calling into question the current input-output model of activism. Further research is necessary to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between a developing scholar-activist and the impact of the EdD and precisely how that can be measured. The findings from this study have implications for program developers and doctoral students wishing to become scholar-activists and agents of change.

### KEYWORDS

activism, action research, advocacy, EdD, graduate programs, impact, praxis, professional doctorate, scholar activism, scholar-activist

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

"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).

The first iteration of the Framework for the Emerging EdD Activist (Becton et al., 2020) was developed by faculty at the University of South Carolina through the feedback of more than one hundred participants of the October 2020 Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) convening (Becton et al., 2020; Becton & Jeffries, 2021). A single profile and a multi-profile model of an EdD activist are incorporated into the framework. This paper applies the single and multi-profile model of an emerging EdD activist to doctoral candidates from an EdD program which, while not an institutional member of CPED, was developed around CPED Design Concepts and Working Principles (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2010).

Since early CPED convenings in 2007, the institutional

knowledge and professional capacity of CPED has percolated to non-institutional members as faculty transition to new positions. Programs that are CPED influenced have drawn together under a shared vision to intentionally make the Education Doctorate (EdD) significant to practice. Program graduates are uniquely able to bridge theory and practice while simultaneously producing significant research and scholarship in the field (Normore, 2008). The graduate's role as a bona fide agent of change was first considered by CPED members a decade ago at the California State University-Fresno, June 2012 convening when two critical questions relating to the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) were discussed. First, what, if any, action pieces have been identified? Second, what generative impact will this work have on practice, policy, and future research?

The paper begins with a theoretical conceptualization of a scholar-activist before discussing the *EdD Activist Profile* (Becton et al., 2020). The reviewed literature considers the development of graduate activism in education, communication, law, and counseling psychology. The findings of a small-scale study investigating a particular population in education—doctoral candidates from an online EdD program and the application of the EdD activist model as the primary criteria in the data analysis are described. Finally, the commentary concludes with a discussion of an emerging EdD activist's single and multi-profile model.



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## A THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF A SCHOLAR ACTIVIST

A process view of scholar activism can be traced back to the Greek words *λόγιος ακηβιστής* which means to be educated and to take action to achieve a goal – and implies that learned people can be scholar-activists (Wiktionary, n.d.). Such a process-oriented view resonates with Farnum's (2016) definition of scholar-activists or *school activists* who actively work across multiple academic disciplines and engage in the communities they work with in order to address power inequities and make a difference. However, varying literature has treated this concept differently (Ramasubramanian & Sousa, 2021). For example, Brooks and Miles (2008) define an activist as a person who has adopted a social justice stance and is prepared to "deconstruct political, social, and economic inequity" (p.108).

Environmental scientists (2004) identified the primary characteristic of an activist as "persistent." Atypical of the wider population, an activist has a stronger than average stomach for conflict and confrontation and possesses the following characteristics:

- mistrust agency information
- unwavering idealists
- have a strong penchant for looking for and seeing problems, injustices, or danger
- are often ready to research and seek expert help
- have specific skills or knowledge
- possess powerful tools for making themselves heard
- are passionately immersed in an issue (Journal of Environmental Science, 2004)

A supplementary characteristic highlighted by Frey (2009) and emphasized by Dempsey et al. (2011) is the need for a scholar-activist to have a strong understanding of research and theory supporting the stance being taken.

Researchers in the field of social work have found that a range of background characteristics, including gender, race, age, prior political experiences, and prior community activism, could affect the activism of social work students (Boehm & Cohen, 2013; Epstein, 2011).

In the field of communication, Ramasubramanian and Sousa (2021) developed a conceptual framework for theorizing scholar-activism consisting of nine key dimensions: community-driven, social justice-oriented, action-oriented, grounded in the co-creation of knowledge, interdisciplinary, requires long-term involvement, challenges the status quo, driven by intrinsic motivation, and blurs the boundaries of scholarship.

## EDD ACTIVIST PROFILE MODEL

The single and multi-profile EdD activist model developed by Becton et al. (2020) consists of four themes: Coalition Builder, Vocal Risktaker, Visionary Leader, and Social Justice Champion (See Table 1). These four themes were identified as embodied in EdD students due to being embedded in a CPED influenced EdD program.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One of the challenges in synthesizing the existing scholarship is that the literature is sporadic. Only recently has the relationship

Table 1. EdD Activist Profile Model

Themes	Characteristics
<i>Coalition Builder</i>	Inspires and focuses on bringing people together for a common cause. Possesses the ability to galvanize forces and build consensus within an organization.
<i>Vocal Risk-taker</i>	Gives voice to critical issues and topics and 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.
<i>Visionary Leader</i>	Engages in critical reflection to solve authentic problems, exhibiting the kind of vision that is a necessary precursor for organizational change.
<i>Social Justice Champion</i>	Identifies the inequities and injustices that may go unnoticed in a particular work environment. Continually focuses on equity and fairness. Desire to make a difference.

*Note: 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.*

between EdD graduate programs, social justice, and activism been explored. Previously, the focus was on student activism (frequently on campus) and was not considered a legitimate avenue for leadership development; it was thought to be disruptive and viewed as a detraction from student learning and engagement (Chambers & Phelps, 1994). This negative view of student activism has declined as scholars began to assert that activism contributes to civic engagement and leadership development (Biddix, 2014; Biddix et al., 2009; Kezar & Maxey, 2014).

To take on the role of scholar-activist, there must first be developed "a heightened and critical awareness of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization" (Brooks & Miles, 2008, p.107). This proclivity can be taught overtly in educational programs and praxis though not enough is known as to how the experiences of EdD students affect their role as scholar-activists.

Burnard et al. (2018) argue that professional practice doctorates should develop new practices that activate change and provide "a clear pathway for active policy participation, policy action, and policy change" (p.36). They further argue that participation in professional learning communities engages with activism to shape action and impact. Essential to the success of this approach is the need for synergy and equality between involved agencies.

A qualitative study by Martin et al. (2021) focused on aspects of an EdD program that impacted agency and activism, explicitly highlighting EdD graduate activism in underrepresented communities. Three open-ended questions were asked of 6 participants, and three themes were identified: relationships with faculty and cohort mattered; instructional scaffolding was vital; and how lived experiences cultivated a sense of belonging and collectivism.

Miller et al. (2021) applied the following 12 considerations for supporting activism within EdD programs to a STEM EdD:

- EdD programs
  - vocal opportunities for addressing inequity in institutions, policies, methodological approaches,
  - mentoring/supporting students and graduates scholarly and practitioner inquiry activities



- Coursework
  - specific to social justice, multicultural education, and/or leadership
  - related to or involving the community
  - related to research and/or dissertation in practice
  - embedded in overall course design
- Dissertation
  - social justice-related focus
  - inclusion of student's career and professional goals
  - considerations relative to the research and writing of the dissertation
  - considerations for dissertation defense or final presentation
  - defined dissertation process
  - supported dissertation process

After analyzing course curriculum content and delivery, findings suggest that the program empowers program graduates as STEM activists. While course readings and action research coursework focus on equity and social justice, of particular interest is the role and impact of problem-based learning (PBL) courses which take the learning experiences and social justice work directly to K-12 students (Miller et al., 2021).

EdD programs are not unique in focusing on the role of the program in the development of graduate activists. Victorson and Doninger (2001), from the field of counseling psychology, argue the need for structured social activism training to be included in the graduate programs curricula for participants to understand the political forces and events that affect lives. They propose that a social activism component be integrated into the program that focuses on the following:

- defining social activism
- reviewing the history of social activism within psychology
- studying prominent activists who have organized movements of social change
- providing basic education on participatory action research (PAR)
- teaching the logistics of engaging in social activism initiatives (Victorson & Doninger, 2001)

From the legal field, Yamada (2016) identifies the importance of intellectual activism, which is defined as "both a philosophy and a practice for engaging in scholarship relevant to real-world problems and challenges, putting its prescriptions into action, and learning from the process and results of implementation," (p.127) and draws upon the following attributes, skills, and values:

- A commitment to changing the law, legal profession, and legal systems for the public interest.
- A commitment to being responsibly bold and to thinking and doing in intellectually creative ways while avoiding qualities of recklessness or hubris.
- Respect for the conventions of scholarship, with the ability to write, research, analyze, and assess in an intellectually honest mode.
- An understanding of how scholarly analyses translate into prescriptions for change.

- Comprehension of how legal systems, policy-making bodies, and stakeholders operate and interact practically.
- Appreciation for the central role of political and bureaucratic stakeholders in lawmaking.
- A willingness to work with scholars, practitioners, policymakers, the media, and the public rather than limiting one's circle of influence (Yamada, 2016, p.175).

In the legal context, intellectual activism involves conducting and publishing original research and analysis and then applying that work to reforming and improving the law, legal systems, and the legal profession. The process of intellectual activism starts with a foundational writing project that identifies a legal or policy problem and then investigates reality by conducting thorough research and analysis. It concludes with a proposed policy change or structural reform.

The literature highlighted from the fields of education, clinical and social psychology, social work, and law highlights the activist's imperative to be bold, scholarly, and critical to address social injustice and to recognize and use the power program graduates now possess to impact equity as agents of change.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Paulo Freire's (1972, 1985) theories of critical consciousness, dialogue, and praxis and Giddens's (1979) concept of human action with the intent to change power dynamics frame this paper as they characterize EdD programs and the development of a scholar-activist.

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

Freire (1998) argued that education cannot be neutral but demands that the educator address issues of values and belief. Through critical instruction rather than banking teaching and learning, students become aware of the inequalities and oppression surrounding them, guiding them to critical consciousness. Further, education should help students become self-empowered in recognizing their potential to be active agents of change (Freire, 1972). Furthermore, through dialogue, the learner can engage in a critical analysis of reality and, in turn, work with others to act against oppression. However, Freire (1972) believed that dialogue and critical consciousness only go so far in addressing injustices.

Consequently, Freire connected critical consciousness with praxis, the union of theory (insight), reflection, and action (ibid), arguing that without praxis, or reflection in tandem with action, an individual cannot become aware of the structures of oppression and transform these structures. Freire (1972, 1985) refers to activism as action without reflection; however, in the current paper, activism denotes what Freire (1972, 1985) calls praxis, or the combination of reflection and action. The concepts of critical consciousness, dialogue, and reflection are embedded in the Laboratory of Active Praxis.

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

Giddens (1979) described the concept of human action with the overt intent to change power dynamics in education and other political spaces as an agency. This concept of agency can be seen as complementary to the notion of an activist in that an agent of change challenges established ways of thinking and behaving. As

**Table 2. Curriculum, Laboratory of Active Practice and Self-Empowerment & Activism: An Assessment Framework**

Scale: 5 = exceeds expectations and serves as role model for others; 4 = exceeds expectations; 3 = meets expectations; 2 = approaches expectations for needs further development; 1 = needs considerable development and additional support

SOCIAL JUSTICE		
PHASE	Laboratory of Active Practice (theory/reflection/action)	Self-Empowerment & Activism
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is self-motivated, inspired, and committed.</li> <li>Conscious of their own identity as activists &amp; change agents.</li> <li>Interested in redrawing or expanding the boundaries of practice &amp; policy.</li> <li>Critical orientation &amp; questions current practices &amp; one's own beliefs.</li> <li>Reflects on value commitments &amp; how they guide one's actions.</li> <li>Views cultural &amp; linguistic diversity as an asset.</li> <li>Can move freely between different ways of seeing &amp; understanding reality.</li> <li>Can use different perspectives to examine complex situations.</li> <li>Expresses own values &amp; talents &amp; actualizes identity as a skilled professional.</li> <li>Defines &amp; reflects on personal &amp; professional transformations that contribute to identity as a change agent and commitment to a more significant community impact.</li> <li>Possesses resilience.</li> <li>Committed to implementing the vision developed as a scholar-practitioner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates fluency in research-based &amp; experiential knowledge &amp; can maneuver between the theoretical &amp; the practical worlds.</li> <li>Make sound, defensible, research-based judgments regarding how current practices can be undertaken more effectively &amp; efficiently.</li> <li>Constructs a theory of change grounded in theory &amp; an understanding of the history of previous interventions into the problem in the past.</li> <li>Demonstrates interest in &amp; capacity to design innovative solutions to address the problems of policy and practice.</li> <li>Demonstrates skill in using data to understand the effects of innovation.</li> <li>Can operate in complex situations to translate ideas into reality.</li> <li>Chooses among alternative courses of action &amp; accepts responsibility.</li> </ul>

**Note:** Adapted from Kochhar-Bryant (2017), its framework highlights the symbiotic relationship between the curriculum's vision and values and the developing activist and leader with a strong identity for change.

activists or agents of change, they enable the transformation of policy/organization/structure.

The third and final frame of reference is the first section of Kochhar-Bryant's (2017) three-section socialization framework (curriculum, practice, dissertation) for assessing the development of doctoral candidates, as shown in Table 2. This table is a helpful tool for reviewing the doctoral candidate's progress within the program on the journey to leading active change.

**METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative descriptive approach was followed, as this methodological approach allows the researcher to interpret the data intersubjectively (Merriam, 2008). The particular organizational leadership doctoral program (EdD) for this study is delivered entirely online. Respondents match the profile Perry and Abruzz (2020) identified as working professionals with a solid professional identity, actively on a career path, and situated in their specialist practice.

CPED's Scholar Activist Framework was used as a basis for further inquiry. An email was sent to two EdD classes (24 doctoral candidates) during Spring 2021 by the administrator of the EdD program, inviting students to freely express their thoughts in response to two open-ended questions in Microsoft form. The form remained open for three weeks, and three invitations were sent.

Seventeen responses were received (70.8%) (See Table 3). Of the respondents, 14 (82%) were females, 3 (18%) were males, four were Black (24%), two (12%) were Hispanic, and eleven (65%) were White.

A team of two researchers analyzed 17 responses to two open-ended questions:

Q1. How has your experience in the EdD program impacted your ability to "speak up" and be proactive for a cause?

**Table 3. Demographic Profile**

Demographic Characteristics	n	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	14	82%
Male	3	18%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>		
Asian	0	0%
Black	4	24%
Hispanic	2	12%
White	11	65%

Q2. On reflection, do you fit into one or more of the following categories? (Respondees reviewed the EdD scholar-activist profile)

Questions were designed to elicit rich, descriptive data on participants' experiences and perceptions of scholar activism. Respondent anonymity is ensured through the use of an assigned code number. The data were analyzed using inductive analysis, and the major emerging threads were reported. Each response highlights the individualized nature of doctoral education, but there were also definite emerging themes on how the 17 respondents conceptualized scholar activism in doctoral education. The study does not aim to generalize but explores the complexity of conceptualizing scholar activism in doctoral education.

All responses were manually transcribed and coded for keywords. During the process, emerging codes were compared with previous codes and amended if necessary to capture process and understanding. Identified codes from the 17 interviews were transferred and displayed on sticky notes. This facilitated seeing relationships between codes within participant responses. Codes were then grouped under headings.



Further rearranging was done until the researchers agreed that the categories and codes best reflected the participants' responses. This step was followed by recoding to create a master code list (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Next, researchers reached a consensus around seven emergent themes, and quotations were assigned from coded excerpts to each theme. Finally, findings were mapped against the proposed EdD activist profile model (See Tables 4 and 5). Authenticity and trustworthiness were strengthened through the researchers discussing their biases, assumptions, and reliance on verbatim quotes.

## RESULTS

While all respondents received were those students in an online EdD program at one university, their unique experiences and backgrounds impacted the word choice used to describe and interpret their relationship to specific scholar-activist themes. We offer representative quotes and examples to substantiate our findings.

Table 4. Keyword Analysis

Number of Student Responses (n) 17		
Keywords & Emergent Themes	No. of Mentions	% of student mentions (based on n)
vocal	16	94%
active	7	41%
engage(ment)	4	24%
vision	2	12%
challenge	3	18%
confident/confidence	3	18%
*advocacy/advocate	9	53%
<b>Activist Environment</b>		
Professional	9	52.9%
Community	5	29%

Being vocal (94%) and active on identified personal and individual pertinent issues (41%) was expressed often and deemed highly important to the respondents.

- I often speak my mind, and my professional role requires me to engage in more advocacy, so my risk-taking has a tangible purpose (Student 1).
- My ability to speak up and be proactive for the cause of gender equality has been strengthened because of my doctoral program. As I progressed in my studies for my dissertation topic, I found myself compelled to speak up (Student 9).
- Based on my program learnings, I have become increasingly confident at work and can now speak up when I see an injustice. I feel that I have the knowledge to solve real problems of practice (Student 3).

Active (41%), engagement (24%), and advocacy (53%) were vital aspects for respondents in making a connection between scholarly activism and EdD program influence. Respondents stated:

- (As a vocal-risk taker) I am now an advocate for female pastors and church leaders (Student 9).
- I continually use my voice to speak up for my students' rights and advocate for their benefit concerning policies, resources,

and program implementation... these behaviors are not new, but I am increasingly confident (Student 10).

- My role as social justice champion requires I advocate for the student. These students need a champion, and with some assistance from a concerned adult, many of their societal and educational deficiencies can be reversed gradually, and sometimes totally... I am compelled to publicly share success stories (Student 4).
- Considering I am now leading two projects at work, one of which puts me in a strong leadership position, 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 (Student 13).

Vision (12%), challenge (18%), and/or confidence (18%) were found to be used in conjunction with other keywords and provided additional support in identifying and linking scholarly activist themes. Examples of such included:

- I have felt more confident speaking up and being proactive for a cause (Student 2).
- 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 have a stronger voice at the leadership table (Student 14).
- As a visionary leader, I look for ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness in my organization and communicate my ideas (Student 8).

When self-applying the EdD activist profile (See Table 5), respondents overwhelmingly perceived themselves as coalition builders (71%) and social justice champions (71%). However, identifying as a vocal risk taker in practice is challenging, as student one pointed out:

- It is also my job to oversee all communications emanating from the organization and monitor what is being said about us on social media. This makes it extremely difficult for me to be the "Vocal Risk-taker" I would love to be. Once I resign from this position, I look forward to exercising my voice in an unrestricted manner and advocating for the marginalized and powerless on a much grander scale.

Student 4 identified themselves as a vocal risk-taker and social justice champion:

- I have most definitely been challenged throughout the program ... 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 genuinely believe that my school will find levels of success directly due to my participation in the program.

Student 5 stated:

- I speak out via the podcasts I create to challenge the system and present perspectives not often heard.

Student 3 pointed out that "while I am a vocal risk taker, these activities seem to be within the framework of the other themes and not separate."

**Table 5. EdD Student Self Application of the Scholar Activist Profile Mapped with the EdD Activist Profile**

EdD Activist Profile			
<b>1. Coalition Builder - 71%</b>	<b>Application</b>	<b>2. Vocal Risk Taker - 53%</b>	<b>Application</b>
Inspires and focuses on bringing people together for a common cause.	Advocate-53%	Gives voice to critical issues and topics and possesses the courage necessary for activism.	Vocal-94%
Possesses the ability to galvanize forces and build consensus within an organization.	Confident-18%	Juggles competing political, social, and economic forces.	Active-41%
		Increasingly confident in resisting the dominant discourses to advocate for societal's marginalized and powerless.	Confident-18%
<b>3. Visionary Leader - 59%</b>	<b>Application</b>	<b>4. Social Justice Champion - 71%</b>	<b>Application</b>
Engages in critical reflection to solve authentic problems, exhibiting the kind of vision that is a necessary precursor for organizational change.	Engagement-24%	Identifies the inequities and injustices that may go unnoticed in a particular work environment.	Advocate-53%
	Vision-12%	Continually focuses on equity and fairness. Desire to make a difference.	Challenge-18%

In considering the quadrants of the EdD activist profile, Student 11 responded:

- My work in the program has greatly assisted in helping me focus and leverage my Visionary Leader and Coalition Builder practices, specifically in change management. However, the program helped me find new resolve as a leader committed to identifying, addressing, and supporting staff through the process of confronting the challenges of a diverse student population that struggles with the impacts of poverty at home and school. Vocal Risk-Taker and Social Justice Champion have been challenged and improved because of work through this program.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Consistent with the findings of Dodd and Mizrahi (2017), this study demonstrates that for almost all doctoral students (94%) participation in the EdD program has resulted in increased confidence in being vocal and speaking out on issues of concern. However, findings are complex in that 94% of respondees identified as vocal but only 53% of participants identified as vocal risk takers. Some respondents highlighted that as mid-career professional practitioners speaking out and being vocal in their place of practice can be challenging, as in some cases, it may jeopardize their jobs. As Student 1 pointed out, the program enables participants to hone their activism skills, which could be put into practice later when they feel more secure in their careers.

The environment in which most doctoral candidates practiced activism was primarily associated with the type of keywords used to define activist behaviors. Keywords such as voicing, vocal, or active were associated mainly with activism in the professional (job) setting; meanwhile, words such as engagement and challenge were associated with participants that practiced activism in the community setting. Dodd and Mizrahi (2017) utilize macro and micro terms concerning activism tracks for Master of Social Work (MSW) students. Macro refers to the practice in the social sector acknowledging social problems, while micro practice is more individual focused. In this study, the macro would align with the community setting and the micro with the professional. The terminology used to assess macro versus micro activism with MSW students closely aligns with the participants' response keyword mentions when analyzing activism in the community versus the professional setting. Other keywords to note as a possible

association with activism include intentional, mindful, involved, and champion.

Interestingly, only 59% of respondents perceived themselves as a visionary leader. This needs further research to unpack the rationale for the response. For example, it would be interesting to replicate the study with program graduates rather than current participants.

A prominent theory of action emerging from this study is that the design of EdD programs of study to tightly couple frequent and consistent opportunities to advocate for an individually and strategically chosen issue is a prerequisite to enhancing the capacity for scholar activism. Course deliverables such as a movie, podcast, or poster rather than a paper can sharpen scholar activism skills. When programs act with intentionality and care to support scholar-activists development, an important message is sent to the academy regarding the characteristics of graduating EdD students.

## LIMITATIONS

The patterns that emerged from the data in this study characterize doctoral candidates from one EdD program. Further research is required to compare the outcomes with other professional practice doctoral programs and PhD students.

Confusion over nomenclature is evident from participant responses as activism and advocacy are applied interchangeably. Essentially, advocates work within the system, while activists are seen as working outside the same system (Kelly, 2015).

According to Dodd and Mizrahi (2017), defining and measuring activism is often limited because of differing definitions, actions, and attitudes toward the concept. One question asked of the participants was, "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?" The use of vocabularies such as "speak-up" and "proactive" may have influenced the mentions of such keywords as vocal and active in participant responses.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: PROBLEMATIZING ACTIVISM

Definitions are critical! It would be worthwhile and beneficial for any future analysis to provide participants with definitions of keywords/phrases to ensure complete understanding. The concept of coalitions could differ in a professional setting versus a community



setting. How does the research intend to define a coalition in a professional and/or community setting? Think about how a leader's role influences and/or impacts activism. Participants often referred to their role as a leader interchangeably with an activist.

#### Issue #1

In attempting to clarify the kind of activism one can expect from EdD graduates, it must be first noted that nomenclature impacts the perceived relationship between the program and activism. Second, the nature of the activism will vary across different professional fields.

#### Issue #2

As there are no consistent measures of EdD doctoral student activism, it is challenging to develop a formative conceptualization of scholar activism based on the activity level. Furthermore, there is a need to develop a scholar activism typology.

#### Issue #3

Differentiating between advocacy and activism presented an issue when self-identifying with the Framework for the Emerging EdD Activist. The majority of responders reported that they have a commitment to social action and that they are more likely to make renewed efforts to ensure that their voice is heard due to the increased knowledge and confidence gained while in the program.

#### Issue #4

The data suggest that the doctoral process impacted doctoral candidates' sense of self, leading to altered organizational relations and interactions. As stated, these changes were framed positively and were broadly characterized in terms of enhanced confidence, engagement, and status leading to new capabilities and forms of interaction. Greater boldness, criticality, and ability to question and challenge were also highlighted.

## FINAL TAKEAWAY

This study is unique in that while respondees are diverse in age and lifespan trajectories, their responses share similarities. Engaging in community actions within the academy allows EdD students the opportunities to refine their critical analysis and self-awareness concerning social justice efforts. Further research is recommended to investigate what would account for EdD students' increase in confidence and why some EdD students perceive that expressing their activism in a professional capacity (as opposed to within the academy) may jeopardize their job.

## CONCLUSION

This study throws into sharp relief the complexity of the professional learning process, highlighting the development of individual scholar activism. The application of the EdD Activist Profile does not offer a simple answer to how an EdD program impacts the development of a program activist. The findings from this study suggest that undertaking an EdD grounded on CPED (2021) principles with a 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, 2021, para. 5), sustained instructor mentoring, and frequent opportunities for critical peer dialogue supplement the opportunities for scholar activism integrated into both the program and individual praxis in the doctoral candidates' laboratory of practice.

The results indicate the need to develop consistent measures of EdD doctoral student activism as it is challenging to develop a formative conceptualization of scholar activism based on the activity level without an identified scholar activism typology. This may address the nomenclature confusion between scholar activism and advocacy. The emergence of EdD program graduates as active agents of change may contribute to doctoral program differentiation. 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 scholar-activist.

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