

Consultancy Communities of Practice:

The Group Consultancy Project as a Promising Model for Scholarly Practitioner Development

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ABSTRACT

The last two decades have witnessed an ongoing effort to re-design the education doctorate to prepare practitioners to conduct research as a key aspect of their practice. As part of the reform, Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) members have tried to ensure the delivery of a relevant practice-based curriculum that prepares practitioners to respond to local needs. This article examines how one U.S. EdD program uses a practice-based pedagogy, called the Group Consultancy Project, to develop students as scholarly practitioners, that is, educational leaders who conduct research to enact positive societal changes. The analysis draws from final consultancy reports and from the responses of 11 students in three consultancy projects. By examining how students learned within the projects, the study reveals that the consultancy model cultivated communities of practice that moved students from a practice community toward a community of scholars and researchers.

KEYWORDS

scholarly practitioner identity, research skills, communities of practice, education doctorate, consultancy project

INTRODUCTION

Professional practice doctorates have been launched in Australia, the U.K., and the U.S., and mainly serve advanced practitioners who seek to address problems of practice in their professional fields through practitioner inquiry. To respond to this task, education doctorate (EdD) programs affiliated with associations such as the International Association of Practice Doctorates (IAPD) and the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) aim to develop graduates' capacities to conduct inquiries in practical settings rather than answering theoretical questions (McClintock, 2004; Storey et al., 2015). In CPED-affiliated programs, such as the one that is highlighted in this study, graduates are envisioned as scholarly practitioners—educational leaders who use research and theory in collaborative, practice-based, and equity focused empirical ways (Costley & Fulton, 2019). Golde (2013) describes EdD preparation as transformational, while Perry (2016) contends that scholarly practitioner identity encompasses critical and independent thinking in the commitment to serve as an agent of change. In other words, a successful EdD program would result in an ontological change.

The effort to re-design the EdD and make it useful for the needs of the professionals enrolled in them has led to a consensus that the curriculum should engage students in work with immediate practical implications (Boud et al., 2020). A central role is allocated to the use of signature pedagogies, methods of inquiry training used in various professional practice programs (e.g., medicine and law), that place candidates in realistic operational settings with the purpose of socializing them into the norms and identities salient for the particular professional community (Golde, 2007). Signature pedagogies serve

as catalysts for identity development, a “preparation for accomplished and responsible practice in the service of others” (Shulman, 2005, p. 53). Studies have highlighted effective pedagogies that aid in the development of scholarly practitioner identity. For instance, examining leader-scholar communities (Olson & Clark, 2009) and capstone projects (Smrekar & McGraner, 2009) has yielded important lessons for program development. More recent research has examined dissertations in practice (DiP), revealing that while the majority of EdD programs are yet to reconfigure the traditional dissertation to the applied nature of the degree (Costley & Fulton, 2019), DiPs that address issues in students' professional settings enhances graduates' commitment to equity (Kennedy et al., 2019; Zambo et al., 2013).

Despite such growing interest in practice-based pedagogies in EdD programs, there is still a dearth of empirical studies showing how students learn research expertise in their doctoral programs (Dana et al., 2021). In addition, scholars have debated about how best to teach practitioner-research skills in ways that are relevant to the graduates' local contexts and help them move toward becoming scholarly practitioners (Firestone et al., 2019). This study highlights the Group Consultancy Course (hereafter ‘consultancy’) at the University of Hawai'i (UH), to understand how this model may impact students' development toward becoming scholarly practitioners. The study followed an interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam & Grenier, 2019) as a way to document “how people understand and experience their world in a particular point in time and in a particular context” (p. 4).

The consultancy is a three-semester (18-credits) course that situates the learning of students into the social context of the



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community. Student teams provide service to local partners (e.g., public and independent schools, community organizations) by assisting them with solving a real problem of practice. Unlike traditional doctoral learning, structured only in strictly academic spaces (i.e., university classrooms), the consultancy situates the learning of students in both UH and in partners' sites. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the social learning in the consultancy and to consider how the research preparation of students through this learning model may impact their identity development toward acquiring scholarly practitioner aspects. To do so, the study examined the perspectives of students from three consultancy teams (n=11 students) as well as student reflections from final consultancy teams' reports.

The study first describes the UH consultancy project course and then provides an overview of the analytical tools framing the investigation. The findings present student perceptions related to changes in their research practices as the result of their participation in the consultancy. Finally, the study discusses how these changes have led to acquiring new aspects of scholarly-practitioner identity. It concludes with implications for the use of the consultancy model for creating authentic practitioner research experiences to support the transition of students toward becoming scholarly practitioners.

CONTEXT OF STUDY

The University of Hawai'i EdD Program

Established in 2011, the UH EdD program has so far prepared close to 100 graduates representing various educational professions, such as school leaders, community college faculty, and leaders in corporate organizations. Like other EdDs, the program is cohort-based and employs a 64-credit curriculum spread over three years of study. It uses a blended format with Saturday sessions during the regular semesters (fall and spring), one-month summer instruction on campus, and about 50% online asynchronous work. Along with coursework (27 credits), students are required to conduct two research projects—the group consultancy (developed in the first three semesters) and an individual dissertation (completed in the final year). In 2018, the program received the CPED Program of the Year award. The consultancy project was noted as “an exemplar for innovation” (Award letter, June 1, 2018) and contribution to the overall reform in the EdD field.

The Consultancy Course

As stated earlier, the consultancy provides a free advisory service to partner organizations across the state of Hawai'i. In the first semester of each new cohort, the program gathers proposals from local organizations outlining problems of their practice that need to be addressed through research (e.g., to examine ways to strengthen a teacher development program, to evaluate a new Early College model at a local charter school, and to create an evidence-based assessment that is more culturally relevant than the current standardized Hawaii school assessment mandated by the DOE). The program faculty then selects seven to eight proposals, based on merit of proposals and diverse representation of local educational organizations, and assigns them to teams of three to four students depending on their expressed interests. The teams develop the consultancies in Year 1 (summer, fall, and spring) and produce two deliverables—a written report and a presentation to the partner's

organization with recommendations based on the collected evidence. Each group is assigned an advisor (university faculty who serve as a supervisor for the consultancy) and a mentor (an experienced community practitioner) who provide guidance throughout the consultancy process.

The consultancy shares similarities with the final capstone project of Vanderbilt University's EdD (Smrekar & McGraner, 2009). However, in the UH's program, the consultancy is the first applied research training for students entering the program, not the final one. Next, the individuals each develop a separate and unrelated dissertation. The consultancy is intended to provide research learning and an initial introduction to the four main program outcomes:

Educators in professional educational practice will:

1. Work collaboratively to solve problems and implement plans of action.
2. Be able to apply research skills to bring about improvements in practice.
3. Reflect critically and ethically on matters of educational importance.
4. Be able to take a broad, interdisciplinary perspective on a wide variety of educational issues.

To this date, four cohorts have completed 27 consultancies serving various educational partners. Table 1 presents examples of projects and partners.

Table 1. Examples of consultancy projects

Area	Project title and partner
Public K-12 Education	Formative Assessment through the Data Team Process. Hawai'i Department of Education
Public K-12 Charter Schools	Data-Driven Decision Making. Hawai'i Public Charter Schools Network
Independent Schools & Community Groups	A Blueprint for Digital Badge in Land Stewardship. EA Ecoversity Indigenous Research Institute

The present study originated after my program colleagues (advisors and mentors) and I (a former advisor) were informally observing identity changes in students as the result of their experiences in the consultancy course. However, because no systematic evidence existed regarding this observation, this study's purpose was to collect data by examining the perspectives of students regarding research preparation and its link to scholarly-practitioner identity development.

THEORETICAL FRAMINGS

To frame the investigation, this study considers the concept of scholarly practitioner as a key objective for identity development in the education doctorate, especially for programs affiliated with CPED. In addition, given the nature of social learning in the group consultancy, I chose Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice (CoP) theory as a useful tool to investigate individual and professional identity change because it sees learning as “participation in the social world...[and] a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice” (Lave, 1991, p. 65). Participating in a CoP is a process of constructing identity as “we define who we are by ways we experience ourselves through

participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 145). Therefore, exploring the social practice of learning through the perspectives of EdD students allows us to see the process of identity construction, i.e., how students change who they are "and create personal histories of becoming in the context of these communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Reflecting on the education of scholarly practitioners in the EdD, Shulman (2005) also links learning in signature pedagogies with a change in identity: "Signature pedagogies make a difference. They form habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the hand" (p. 59).

The Concept of Scholarly Practitioner

Traditionally, the preparation of professionals has focused on teaching skills and knowledge to build "the capacity to solve technical problems" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 4). Key characteristics of a professional include the ability to use "professional judgement in the face of uncertainty" (Tamir & Wilson, 2005, p. 335) and the capacity to provide service to society (Shulman, 2005). On the other hand, doctoral education has been viewed as having a different purpose – to develop students' identity as scholars of the particular discipline (Austin & McDaniels, 2006).

The term scholarly practitioner has emerged in the field of social sciences to reflect a different model of doctoral preparation that strives to blend the world of practice and academia (Colwill, 2012). Huff and Huff (2001) perceive scholarly practitioners as "boundary spanners" (p. S50) between these two contexts, while McClintock (2004) stresses the importance of professional excellence that is grounded in experiential knowledge. Similarly, CPED (2022) emphasizes the importance of research preparation in its definition of scholarly practitioners as individuals who "blend practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice" (CPED Framework, para 9). Through a mentoring partnership between students and faculty, EdD programs strive to equip graduates with the ability to implement and analyze evidence-based data at the intersection of theory, inquiry, and practice (Firestone et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2010).

Coursework and especially research courses have a central place in the process of identity development through pedagogies that reinforce learning by doing— a method that has been found to strongly influence the socialization of EdD students (Perry & Abruzzo, 2020). There is a relational interdependency of personal values, ethics, and empirical knowledge because a scholarly practitioner identity is developed through "collaborative and relational learning through active exchange within communities of practice and scholarship" (McClintock, 2004, p. 393). Hence, becoming a scholarly practitioner means expanding the personal and professional values that one brings to their learning while growing a commitment to improve humans' lives.

Connected to this view, another set of studies has argued that the purpose of EdD preparation is to create opportunities for identity transformation so that graduates can become stewards of the profession (Golde, 2013). Stewardship in that sense encompasses the ability to create, conserve, and transform knowledge while taking responsibility of the future of the professional field (Hochbein & Perry, 2013). The key vehicle of identity transformation is the dissertation-in-practice—"scholarly endeavour that impacts a complex problem of practice" (Hochbein & Perry, 2013, p. 306). The implication of this view is that the preparation of scholarly practitioners should be guided by deliberate pedagogical approaches. Since the consultancy project explored here presents a novel pedagogy that engages

students with authentic research on a real-world problem of practice, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of how the work that students generate within it may also lead to identity change.

IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION THROUGH COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The social perspective of learning, described above, resembles Wenger (1998) and Lave's (1991) understanding of learning in CoPs. As outlined before, the purpose of the consultancy is to initiate students into the practice of doing practitioner inquiry. Since the focus of this study is on identity change through that practice, it is worth exploring the process of acquiring knowledgeable inquiry skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as a way of becoming a member of the community of research practice that the program is trying to establish. For Lave and Wenger (1991), these are parts of the same process because learning is a means of gaining membership in a sustained CoP, a "social phenomenon constituted in the experienced, lived-in world, through legitimate peripheral participation in ongoing social practice" (Lave, 1991, p. 64).

CoPs are defined as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). Earlier research in the field of higher education has identified diverse CoPs: knowledge networks (Hildreth & Kimble, 2004), tech clubs (Wenger et al., 2002), and tech stewards (Wenger et al., 2009), to name a few. However, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) emphasize that a common feature of all CoPs is the way members shape and strengthen new identities through participation in a "learning trajectory" – a method of learning where students engage creatively with mastering a common domain. In this process, newcomers develop a new identity; they learn by absorbing the CoP's modes of action and meaning. Learning occurs "through mutual engagement [such as conducting research] where meaning in what is learnt is negotiated both inside and outside the community" (Fuller et al., 2005, p. 52), creating epistemic boundaries with the outside, non-member world. Therefore, the three structural elements forming a CoP are domain (a common passion for a real-world problem), community (relationships that support learning) and practice (a shared repertoire of resources, such as ideas, experiences, vocabulary) (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

This view closely aligns with sociological insights of the preparation of scholarly practitioners through learning by doing. Applied to the consultancy, in tackling partners' problems of practice in real-life research situations, students have the opportunity to think together, re-create new knowledge (Dörfler & Ackermann, 2012), and draw on each other's experiences and performance as cues for action (Pyrko et al., 2019).

Given this analytical frame, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How did students perceive their learning in the consultancy course? In particular, how did the consultancy communities of practice influence students' learning of research expertise?
- 2) How did this learning contribute to the development of students' identities as scholarly practitioners? What aspects of scholarly practitioner identity (if any) were identified in the participants' accounts?

METHODS

To maximize variation in a small sample, such as the EdD program that only supports seven to eight projects at a time in the small education landscape of Hawai'i, I chose a sample of three consultancies as representative of the program's partner organizations. Another selection criterion was the expressed desire of student team members to participate in this study.

My experience as faculty advisor of consultancy projects allowed for familiarity with the course. However, I did not supervise the selected projects in an effort to mitigate a potential bias in the research. The study received an institutional ethics approval. The names of partners and projects were substituted with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Each student participant was termed with a letter corresponding to the first letter of the project title.

Participants

Eleven students from the second cohort of the program participated in this project. The study was conducted in the semester following the completion of consultancies, allowing more time for reflection. All students worked full time as school principals and staff, community college faculty, as well as teachers. Below each project is briefly described and assigned a pseudonym to secure anonymity.

Profiles of the Three Consultancies

Project 1: Evaluation of a Teacher Training Program

Project partner was Aloha Voyaging School, a double-hulled sailing canoe school serving as a living classroom. The school's mission was to build a curriculum and canoe experience focused on Polynesian voyaging and navigating, and the school requested help with determining how the teacher training program could be improved. Four students took part in this consultancy and three of them agreed to participate in this study. Students in this team are termed group E.

Project 2: Looping at Mahalo Elementary School

The project partner was a public elementary school that needed help with determining the benefits and drawbacks of looping—a practice of keeping students together with the same teacher for several years. The partner was observing that looping was impacting staff workload and morale at the school. As the results of the project, the school discontinued the practice. All five EdD consultancy members took part in this study (termed group L).

Project 3: Micronesian Charter School

Five EdD students examined the feasibility for establishing a culturally based charter school for children from The Federal States of Micronesia, as requested by four Micronesian non-profit organizations that jointly submitted a consultancy proposal and served as one partner. The EdD team developed a narrative inquiry analyzing parents' stories on culture-based education. Three of the students took part in this study, which was termed group M.

Data Collection

To answer the research questions, I developed a qualitative, open-ended questionnaire within the frames of CoP and scholarly practitioner. First, I reviewed the projects' final reports to develop an

understanding about the selected consultancies. After this initial step, I distributed the questionnaire to the participants with the help of four students who served as points of contact for their respective groups. The questionnaire was anonymous and confidential.

The questions asked the participants to describe their reasons for expressing interest in taking part in the specific consultancy, how students perceived the value of the consultancy model for learning, how (and to what extent) research expertise was achieved, and in what ways (if at all) they perceived themselves as scholarly practitioners at the completion of the course.

Analytic Method

I analyzed the data using both deductive (thematic) and inductive approaches (Miles et al., 2014) having in mind the aspects of scholarly practitioner identity, namely exhibiting the skills to generate and use practitioner research in collaborative, ethical, and culturally relevant ways. First cycle coding included looking for reoccurring patterns. At the second cycle coding stage, I clustered the related codes into larger categories within the theoretical understanding of identity building as a situated learning, paying specific attention to how students described their learning trajectories of becoming full members of the community of research practice. At the final step, I invited the students, who served as points of contact for the participating projects, to review the preliminary data analysis to ensure that I accurately derived the meaning that the participants created about their collaborative learning experiences. Finally, three themes that corresponded to aspects of scholarly practitioner identity developed through the consultancy model: 1) applied research capacities, 2) an equity lens, and 3) reflective practice were identified.

FINDINGS

Applied Research Capacities

While students were novices in the beginning, the consultancy CoPs created a learning trajectory for mastering the common domain of applied research. In the following quotes, the use of "researchers" and "consultants," as new characteristics, strongly exemplifies participants' awareness of learning new inquiry skills: "This gave me good practice to focus on a topic and create applicable and effective survey questions" (L 2), "I now feel skillful as a researcher, interviewer, and data analyst" (L 5), and "At our presentation to the [partner], we were given so much respect as researchers and consultants. It was a new feeling" (M 3). Students created together new epistemic boundaries, which manifested themselves by learning new research-related skills: for example, preparing and submitting "Human Subject Committee applications" (M 1), and "background reading, participation in focus groups, transcription, and writing sections of final report" (E 2).

Furthermore, students underlined the value of collaborative learning. For instance: "When it came to research, we each transcribed one of the focus group interviews and coded as a group" (M 3), and "We all shared the burden of this project equally but capitalized on each other's strengths" (L 1).

Participants saw the most value of this type of learning for providing quality service to the partners:

We established a relationship with each other. We held each other accountable. We had writing sessions where we sat in the



same room to work [...]. We shared meals and made sure we had time to laugh together with each other (E 1).

My recommendation for the next cohort is: Take time to get to know your consultancy team members and your clients – it should not be taken lightly or assumed. We were blessed to have created strong connections that were cultivated at multiple levels. Honesty, trust, and professionalism were important aspects we strived for in work together (M 4).

Having the guidance of faculty advisors and field mentors was seen as crucial for sharpening the research skills: “They challenged us from the beginning and forced us to think as researchers, which I feel is very important” (E 3). Furthermore, students emphasized that advisors helped “deepen our understanding of concepts such as theoretical framework and methodology” (M 2).

Interestingly, the majority of participants felt that building agency in becoming independent researchers was mostly due to the hands-off approach to mentoring that the advisors took:

It was not because they told us what to do; rather they asked clarifying questions to help us go deeper into our thinking and research. They were also there to gently guide without telling us what to do (M 5).

Another participant stated: “Both advisor and mentor [...] really let us struggle through the process and it helped all of us to grow in the process” (E 2).

However, at that point of their EdD journey, students found the most value of the consultancy for building capacities needed in the next doctoral step, the individual dissertation: “This was an extremely helpful process in preparation for the research done for our dissertations. Doing this project as a group provided the support needed for novice researchers like us” (L 2).

Connected to this view are the following comments:

Identifying the focus of the project, narrowing the scope, applying for IRB, working with advisors, collecting data, doing a literature review, and eventually preparing a report and presentation were all components of the group consultancy that are also part of the dissertation process (L 4).

The consultancy [...] allowed us to model the dissertation process with others and to learn/fail together. I have found this to be instrumental in the next phase of the EdD program where I focus on my dissertation (M 3).

An Equity Lens

In addition to applied research capacities, students reported an enhanced commitment to promoting equity, particularly using newly developed research skills to serve historically disadvantaged students and communities. The consultancy was perceived as a focused work that aimed to help students understand persistent inequities and directly engage with advocacy:

We did several client presentation meetings both on O’ahu and [the island of] Hawai’i. Each and every presentation was memorable. I was so encouraged by the interest and enthusiasm of the clients and their constituents. There was so much hope that each of them had for a better future for all Micronesian children (M 1).

Other similar comments highlighted the consultancy as a key step toward developing a genuine interest in enacting positive social changes in the partners’ organizations. For instance, student L1 described the course as “a great way to provide service to our community and free research for our clients.” For other participants, the value of service made all the difference. For instance, “A memorable moment was seeing the emotion of the teachers, knowing how much our work was helping to give them voice in the decision” (L 2) and “We were there in service of our partners and their focus” (E 3).

Furthermore, providing free consultancy services gave the students the opportunity to enhance the scope of engagement with equity issues that were outside of their personal and professional lives, which in turn enhanced their equity perspectives:

As a school leader, I can get so focused on the immediate needs of my school, my students, staff, and community. This project really made me think outside and beyond my small world to see that I have a responsibility to the overall community (E 1).

Students shared that their commitment to equity was influenced by both their experiences within the groups as well as by the life narratives of partners. This was depicted mostly by members of projects “Evaluation of a Teacher Training Program” and “Micronesian Charter School.” Participants from these groups shared that they learned more about educational disadvantage. For some, joining a consultancy with a clear equity focus was aligned with a long-time interest in the situation of Indigenous communities who represent new and historically marginalized Hawai’i populations. For others, choosing these consultancies came with the goal of learning more about a topic with which they were not very familiar. However, for all the students, working with the Micronesian and Native Hawaiian partners had a profound impact on them committing their future work to social justice. This was summed up by one participant:

For many [of us] this journey is extremely personal and enormously significant. We have an opportunity to make an important impact for the students and families who were part of the study as well as all Micronesian students and families who will follow (M 2).

By joining forces with Indigenous individuals to achieve culturally responsive education in the public school system, learning in these teams was tied to the hope that it would be a further step toward making Hawai’i a more equitable space: “It is with humility and honour that we submit our findings. We hope that it may serve as a point of reflection as well as a catalyst for change” (Final report, Micronesian Charter School study). Very often, methodological decisions were made also by applying an equity lens: “From the onset of the study, we understood that our richest data collection would not only come from the literature, but by the actual voices and experiences of Micronesian families” (M 1).

Students from projects 1 and 3 described building a sense of stewardship—a newly developed belonging to the cause of social justice. As one respondent put it, “the topic of study was personally fulfilling and enriching, and I am forever changed” (M 2). Another comment was also indicative of this transformation:

Rewards are knowing that the work we did is being used by the client to secure new grants for their work, and the satisfaction

that their work can continue to serve Native Hawaiian children, informed, in part, by our findings (E 1).

An interesting finding in the data coming from these two teams related to learning about Indigenous protocol in research. This competence was built with the support of Indigenous advisors: “Our faculty advisor is a Chamorro from Guam. She offered invaluable insight and direction” (M 3). A similar observation emerged about sharing food, as an Indigenous etiquette, that became an important research aspect: “We made time to eat together as a group and with our advisors, as sharing food is a part of our cultural practice as Native Hawaiians” (E 2).

Reflective Practice

A key feature of students’ learning was approaching the research with a high level of reflection. Students depicted their engagement in reflective thinking in-action (Schön, 1983) throughout the entire studies as essential in drawing from previous knowledge, looking at the problem from various perspectives, and discovering the unique features of each situation to design a plan of action. For instance, a participant noted:

I had many uncomfortable moments doing different parts of the research: interview - can we diverge from the script?, transcript - what do I leave in?, analysis - how do we know we coded consistently? This means I learned (M 1).

For many of the students, this type of learning resulted in establishing a new sense of belonging to the community of research practice:

I think this project is an essential part of learning to be a researcher in practice. You have to learn to work with a group to solve someone else’s question—this process brings forward issues of positionality and subjectivity and cultivates listening and reflection (M 3).

As the above quote reveals, students drew from each other’s competence as a strong learning tool. Moreover, engaging in reflective conversations (Schön, 1983) with the group members, as well as with advisors and partners, was described by two participants as key in prompting deep reflection: “...advisor and mentor really acted as a resource and asked a lot of questions. It was their questions that forced us to go deeper into the research or help shape our understanding to frame the issue” (M 1), and “As a practitioner, I learned that each team member needs to be humble, positive, a hard-worker, a good communicator, a critical thinker, and a collaborator to get the project completed” (L 4).

DISCUSSION

This study applied a two-fold theoretical lens to learn how making research preparation more practical and including a service component may shape the identity of EdD students. The study extends the discussion of how active participation in research CoPs can be employed as a social learning tool to develop scholarly practitioners. An important new learning that this research brings concerns the application of signature pedagogies that provide community-engaged service as a research methodology instruction that is more closely aligned with the practitioner focus of the EdD degree.

First, the findings confirm the benefits of practice-based education for the development of EdD graduates’ applied-research skills (Firestone et al., 2019; Perry, 2016). For instance, Bengston et al. (2016) examined the use of laboratories of practice in several US EdD programs and found that this model “could result in having more of an impact on the performance of the individual as an education leader than perhaps more traditional, stand-alone research courses” (p. 98). The immersion of students into practice-based dissertations also showed that researching significant problems in students’ workplaces helped them to build an identity as learners and leaders (Storey et al., 2015). Likewise, the consultancy project examined in this study immersed students into authentic life situations and yielded a dual benefit: while it connected the EdD program with the real world (students placed into partners’ environment), it also served its purpose as a research practicum to train students how to systematically tackle contextual research problems, such as those presented by the partners. From the perspective of the CoP frame, the consultancy designed a learning trajectory for students to master the common domain of applied research and become more skillful in addressing authentic problems of practice. For instance, students working with the Aloha Voyaging School conducted a program evaluation. Based on conversations with the client, the EdD team focused on the areas of curriculum, marketing, networking, and funding. Evaluation questions were developed in collaboration with the partner and the consultants then took a mixed-methods approach to gather surveys and interviews with members in each stakeholder group (e.g., teachers, staff, and community organizations). As a result, the EdD team made four main recommendations, including collaborative planning with teachers and strengthening of partnerships with other Indigenous organizations. As we saw in the participants’ accounts, students from this group reported an enhanced knowledge of the process of conducting and writing a literature review to frame the study as well as skills to conduct interviews and focus group and to analyse the data. Similar results were achieved in the other two participant groups. The Looping project team also developed a mixed-method study (a survey with 55 faculty members as well seven focus groups), while the Micronesian group’s study was entirely qualitative, following an approach to apply Indigenous methods in research. As it is evident in the findings, both groups reported an increased level of confidence as researchers (e.g., drafting inquiry questions, coding data, etc.).

While the UH program offers a series of research courses during the summer semesters, intended to supplement the research learning in the consultancy, the participants were clear that engaging in the consultancy project led to growth in applied research capacities. Unlike a conventional research course, students in the consultancy are not given first basic instruction in research methods; rather, they go in the field, negotiate project scope with the partner, and then they determine which research skills they need to learn. With the guidance of mentors and faculty advisors, students spend time in reading and learning the theory behind these research methods, which they apply in practice and when they conduct each step of the research during the project.

A second important implication relates to the value of intertwining research and data-use preparation with a direct service to the community. It is evident from the responses that not only was community-engaged research effective (i.e., it served as a learning trajectory to move students from the peripheral to the center of the CoP of doing research); but it also had a transformative impact on students’ identities as scholarly practitioners who understand the



importance of equity and serving as agents of change. This finding leads to a recommendation that part of the training in the EdD should include research with a direct benefit for communities. As is evident in the data, addressing equity issues in the partners' practices influenced students' confidence as becoming scholarly practitioners who can produce evidence-based knowledge and lead social innovations in their practice. This learning may be useful for practice-based doctoral programs concerned with solving a main problem in the field—namely that education leaders still “have trouble understanding various kinds of evidence” (Firestone et al., 2019, p. 2) – by demonstrating a model of service-focused teams.

Furthermore, understanding how scholarly practitioner identity was built through a collaborative learning with peers invites into the discussion Wenger-Trayner et al.'s (2014) concept of knowledgeability. Knowledgeability is defined as the complex relationships people establish in a landscape of practice that prompts outsiders to recognize the members as experts of knowledge and sources of information. Wenger et al. (2014) argue that building such an identity aspect depends on the level of competence in one or more practices. We saw in this study that the shared repertoire and practice that was established (i.e., reification) led to a recognition (e.g., “we were given so much respect as researchers and consultants;” M 3). This process of learning designed a space for students to explore the role of scholarly practitioners. While students started the project as novices who lacked confidence in doing research, going through this experience helped them realize that they had the capacity to successfully complete a dissertation. This process involved vulnerability and reflection (e.g., “I had many uncomfortable comments doing different parts of the research,” M 1) as students referred to moments that helped them internalize the capacities developed through the consultancy (e.g., “The consultancy [...] allowed us to model the dissertation process,” M 3). Reaching this level of confidence in designing and executing an applied research study reminds of Golde's (2013) developmental trajectory where EdD students “begin to develop dissertation mindfulness and internalize the identity of a scholar” (p. 151).

The study also showed that students felt a higher level of competence not only in the realm of doing research but also in the different consultancy topics that were pertinent to the educational context of Hawai'i (i.e., Micronesian culture-based education, equity, and culturally relevant educational practices). Consistent with Smith's (2008) understanding of practitioner scholarship as “noticing, naming, and reframing” (p. 77) of local issues through reflective engagement with the community, students in this research exhibited both collaborative and personal reflections in creating new knowledge about dealing with their pressing educational issues. The implication of this finding is that the consultancy groupings can be used to help students develop knowledgeability to bridge the gap between research and practice and move towards developing an identity of equity-minded scholarly practitioners. Nurturing applied research skills through the consultancy pedagogy presents a way to shift from traditional methods of research methods instruction (i.e., theory-driven courses) toward a more shared endeavour where students become active agents in their learning.

Moreover, while students' engagement was first motivated by the program requirement of completing the project, an unexpected outcome was their change of perspectives and the emerging of new worldviews. This outcome captures the value of community-engaged scholarship that has the potential to assist practitioners in bringing social justice and professional responsibility way beyond the doctoral

preparation stage (Shulman et al., 2006; Willis et al., 2010). I would argue, based on the findings, that this form of community engagement not only enhances research proficiencies (i.e., the accounts stating that it helps the transition to the individual dissertation); but also advances graduates' competence in problem-solving generally (e.g., students' remarks about the consultancy as “an essential part of learning to be a researcher in practice” and “a relevant and powerful way to gain experience as researchers,” E 2). As underlined by the participants, building trust is essential in this work and requires time. Given the relatively short frame of the project, a recommendation for improving the model may include building more time in initial project activities to allow opportunities for team members and partners to get to know each other, understand partners' needs, and develop trust.

Knowledgeability developed when students worked with the partners to ensure that community voices were implemented in the planning of a new school (the Micronesian study) and when delivering recommendations for solving problems of practice (e.g., Mahalo School decided to stop looping, Aloha Voyaging School was advised to collaborate with relevant local organizations, etc.). Knowledgeability also played a role in the creation of stewardship—students learned about the educational and social disadvantages of minority groups in Hawai'i, used practical wisdom and new knowledge to create evidence to help partners secure grants for culturally-respectful education, and developed a commitment to enact social change. They understood the importance of keeping the community's needs in focus and their responsibilities to connect their future work with the larger community of Hawai'i.

Data showed that advisors played an important role: they helped students move from being novices to being experts in producing evidence-based data. This finding corresponds to similar observations in Vanderbilt's consultancy capstone (Smrekar & McGraner, 2009). Implicitly, this finding is reminiscent of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) notion of legitimate peripheral to full participation. However, it should be noted that in this study, the role of advisors was somewhat limited—while they were, in one way, old-timers, (i.e., research methodologies experts who guided the learners), their knowledge of the consultancies' topics was in itself peripheral. Per students' accounts, advisors and mentors adopted a hands-off mentoring role. This substantiates a recommendation that the mentoring students in practice-based research courses, such as the consultancy, should be uniquely aligned with the needs of adult learners – acquiring the form of reciprocal learning and respect for the practical wisdom that the practitioners bring.

Finally, Wenger's (1998) notion of identity as socially negotiated proved a useful tool for examining the learning dynamics in the consultancies. It is clear that students negotiated their identity as learners while working together as a group and as researchers when delivering consultancy services to the partner. This supports the discussion of Zambo and colleagues (2013) who found that negotiating the identity aspect of a learner in the dissertation may be key to some students' success due to their satisfaction with their learning journey. In the present study, negotiating an identity of learner and researcher was evaluated by the participants as a vital step in developing competence and earning pride in their role as consultants. Furthermore, reflection-in-action (Schön 1983) can serve as a tool for assisting scholarly practitioners in the process of becoming full participants in the research practice.

LIMITATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED: IDENTITY CHANGE IN THE MAKING

One limitation of this work is that it examines identity development at the stage of the consultancy project only and does not follow further changes in the next steps of the doctoral journey. Future research can build on these findings to include a further examination of identity creation in the dissertation project and the overall program. A consideration of impact on partners' practice (i.e., is the consultancy successful in helping the community partners improve their practice?) could further add to the effort of bridging the gap between research and practice in EdD programs' curricula.

Second, this research is not generalizable given the diversity in education doctorate formats in North America, Australia, and the U.K., among others. I acknowledge the diverse contexts of higher education institutions, but one unique characteristic of EdD preparation is the link between research training and real-world professional issues (Perry, 2016). Therefore, I suggest that EdD programs pursue a framework of research coursework that immerses candidates in authentic research-pursuing settings as much as possible, and when possible and applicable for the institution's context, they connect this work with educational issues proposed by members of the local communities.

In sum, examining the social context of developing scholarly practitioner identity through community engagement is valuable, given that the practices of EdD graduates mirror in rich ways their professional knowledge and personal norms. Ultimately, they are also developed at the intersection of these values and the interest of community stakeholders (Shulman, 2005). Engaging and listening to students' voices, therefore, brings individual, professional, and community views closer to our work as university teachers. As one of the UH EdD graduates once wrote, "Professors participating in the program agreed to help develop and implement a practice-based program, but their own academic experience may need to catch up with that reality" (Demirbag, 2015, p. 244). Therefore, as EdD instructors who commit to teach a curriculum that prepares graduates to change the world (Wergin, 2011), learning from our students can help us serve them and our communities better.

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