

Centering Social Justice in EdD Programs

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During the past three decades, scholars dedicated to eliminating power differentials and oppression in society have pinpointed three major trends that have influenced the current educational context in the U.S. First, an increasingly neoliberal, or “corporate,” reform movement has applied market-driven principles to educational systems and structures to privatize, standardize, and deregulate them (Ford, Porfilio, Goldstein, 2015; Henderson & Hursh, 2014; Martin & Strom, 2015). Second, school curriculum has been heavily influenced by an economically-motivated push for “twenty-first century skills” (Silva, 2009) to meet job demands of the knowledge economy (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014). Third, due to a dramatic diversification of U.S. demographics, the number of foreign-language speakers in the last three decades has nearly tripled (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). A parallel increase in English learners has occurred in classrooms (Valdés & Castellón, 2011), which has precipitated challenges for providing linguistically and culturally relevant and responsive schooling (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

These trends are expanding the historically entrenched inequalities on the axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability that have been systematically perpetuated by our educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1973; Erevelles, 2000; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Hernandez & McKenzie, 2008; Milner & Lomotey, 2013; Weiler, 1988). As schools are increasingly segregated by income, skin color, and language (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Jacobs, 2013; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014), one in four U.S. children live in poverty, while almost another 25% of children in the U.S. live dangerously close to the poverty line—indeed, “more children today are likely to live in families barely able to afford their most basic needs” (“Nearly Half of American Children,” 2016). Due to fewer resources provided by the state and federal government and a loss in businesses paying taxes and lowering of poverty values, more and more communities are fighting to keep their public schools from being shuttered (Turner, 2016). Consequently, preparing teachers and leaders to work toward social justice in schools and communities is crucial.

The charge to prepare justice-oriented educators has become even more urgent in the months since the election of Donald Trump and, indeed, the rise of ethno-nationalist politics across the Western world (Strom & Martin, in press). In the months after the election, incidents of racially or ethnically motivated bullying and other acts have risen in classrooms and schoolyards across the country. In a survey of more than 10,000 educators conducted in the weeks following the election by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2017),

90% of educators surveyed reported their school climate had been negatively impacted, and 80% described feelings of heightened anxiety among historically marginalized groups of students. In the same survey, over 2,500 teachers detailed specific incidents involving racially or ethnically charged language, graphics, and assaults, providing comments such as those that follow. One teacher reported, “In over 15 years of teaching high school this is the first year that swastikas are appearing all over school furniture. The day after the election I overheard a student in the hall chanting, ‘White power.’” Another commented, “Students have told me they no longer need Spanish (the subject I teach) since Trump is sending all the Mexicans back.” An Indiana teacher observed, “Boys inappropriately grabbing and touching girls, even after they said no (this never happened until after the election).” Beyond the schoolhouse walls, hate crimes have also continued to rise in recent months. Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated (Biryukov, 2017), synagogues and mosques have received death and bomb threats (Croft, 2017; Levenson & Stapleton, 2017), and racially motivated attacks have occurred, such as one that ended in the death of an Indian man in Kansas after a White man in a bar shot him, shouting, “Go back to your country!” (Doshi, 2017).

Given patterns of widening inequalities and increasingly overt forms of hate infiltrating our schools and communities, we contend that *all* educational preparation programs must be focused on developing leaders who can tackle significant issues of social justice—regardless of setting or student demographic. Only in the last decade have scholars in the field of educational leadership begun attend to issues of social justice (e.g., Bogotch & Shields, 2014; Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2008). As Oplatka (2014) notes in his review of 5 decades of scholarship in the field of educational administration, “Field members have only commenced to evoke some interest in understanding leadership for social justice that is an antitype for the sort of leadership advocated by neoliberal thoughts” (p. 33). However, the construct of “social justice” itself remains a divisive one in education. As Jean Marie, Brooks, and Normore (2009) note, the term has political consequences. Many institutions shy away from using the terminology because it is considered too political. Some have adopted “softer” language of valuing diversity or inclusion, while others have spurned its use outright, such as the National Association of Scholars (NAS), who in 2006 made the following statement regarding teacher preparation programs: “The NAS has had a long-standing concern with the mischief inherent in the use of as ideologically fraught a term as ‘social justice’ in the assessment of students in teacher-training



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programs. The concept is so variable in meaning as necessarily to subject students to the ideological caprices of instructors and programs" (p. 1).

The construct of social justice has also proved quite elusive. Educational researchers have noted the multitude of definitions of social justice (e.g., Bogotch, 2014; Harris, 2014; Shields, 2014) and its under-theorization (Cochran-Smith, 2010). We argue, however, that the multiplicitous definitions of social justice is not a negative, but rather a necessary condition, given that different settings require different conceptualizations to address the particular histories and contexts that have produced particular inequalities (Bogotch, 2014). We maintain that using the term "social justice" in professional doctorate programs focused on education is an important political act that can be made even more powerful by 1) explicitly defining the way the term is conceived in a particular program and articulating the bodies of theoretical literature from which that definition is constructed (Grant & Agosto, 2008); and 2) actively connecting that contextual conceptualization of social justice to the ways it informs action in the doctoral program—from initial program development, to coursework, to student advising, to research methods, and to the dissertation process.

Literature regarding such descriptions of social justice in educational doctorate programs is relatively slim, although scholars are beginning attend to the role of social justice in the EdD. For instance, Coates and Sirakkos (2016), describing the Kutztown University teacher education EdD program, construct a social justice orientation that builds on the notion of "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988) who are empowered classroom change agents. At the University of Missouri, the Educational Leadership EdD program draws on Freirean critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) to develop leaders focused on advocacy, transformation, and emancipation. Students in the EdD program at Fielding University are expected to become "scholar activists" taking on both social and ecological justice issues (DiStefano & Tiner-Sewell, 2016, p. 103), while Northeastern's program adopts a micro-macro perspective that begins with interrogating the relationship between the self and injustice and moves outward to institutions and broader systems (Lohman & Ewell, 2016).

In addition to defining social justice programmatically, we also must examine the ways that we are enacting our understanding of social justice through all dimensions of the program—curriculum, research methodologies, the dissertation, student supports, admissions, and other EdD structures. Few works exist examining the ways that "social justice" is put to work, or operationalized, in facets of EdD programs like these. Those that exist typically focus on the way that their curriculum does or does not prepare leaders to develop social justice orientations or actions (e.g., Hay & Reedy, 2016; Cleaver Simmons & Fellabaum, 2016).

Ensuring EdD coursework is designed to guide students to understand what causes oppression in schools, communities, and other social contexts is imperative. However, there are a myriad of other elements directors and faculty of EdD programs must consider to ensure students become leaders of change and transformation in educational contexts, instead of conformists who unwittingly keep in place the status quo (Strom, Porfilio & Lupinacci, 2016). Specifically, the research methodologies the program supports, and the ways connections are made between those approaches and the ways they might be employed for social justice, should be examined. For instance, many EdD programs have moved toward action-oriented, participatory, practitioner-based forms of inquiry, including

practitioner action research (Herr, Anderson & Nihlen, 2007), critical participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014), youth participatory action research (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), and self-study of professional practices (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009; Porfilio & Strom, 2017). Epistemologically, these methods depart sharply from more traditional methods of research, which are based on the positivist ideals of researcher objectivity and distance that still underscore dominant notions of what constitutes "quality" research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). As such, not only are these methods promising for generating actionable change that responds to particular contexts, but also provides an ethical alternative to positivist models: rather than being a "voice from everywhere... and nowhere" (Barad, 2007, p. 376), researchers are accountable for their own agency in the research process and blur the traditional, power-laden, problematic boundary between researcher/researched (Fine, 1984). However, unless the ways that these approaches break from the norm—and why those breaks matter—are made explicit, it is entirely possible to use these approaches to conduct projects that perpetuate leadership status quos.

Another key programmatic focus is to ensure full-time and part-time faculty are hired who hold knowledge of and commitment to social justice in their teaching, research, and work with stakeholders involved in the program. Not only must faculty possess the critical insight to recognize how traditional forms of research keep in place unbalanced power relationships in schools and in other social contexts, to engage in self-reflexive analysis of how their own subjectively blocks them from understanding why opportunity gaps continue to plague the U.S educational system, and to dream about the prospect of living in a social world free from hate, hostility and oppression (McLaren, 2005), but must also have the courage necessary to teach others that they must be transparent in their commitment to eliminating social inequalities, environmental degradation, over policing, and militarization harming our world and planet (Zinn, 2002). Directors of EdD programs must also be willing to create professional development opportunities for faculty, administrators, students and community members. These learning activities should hold the potential to ensure the program remains aligned with a social justice focus, more students complete their degrees, critical dialogue surrounding teaching and learning and inquiry projects occurs, and cultural work in communities collectively brings awareness to understanding of what causes oppression and what steps must be taken to dismantle it. EdD directors and faculty members must also share their research, instructional designs, coursework, professional development activities, and cultural work in professional venues, such as CPED. Sharing such resources, experiences, and decisions processes with colleagues only enhances the prospect that a social justice become a concept understood by all stakeholders involved in EdD programs, informs developments on EdD programs on a micro-level, and informs action in the doctoral program—from initial program development, to coursework, to student advising, to research methods, to dissertation.

Moreover, faculty and leaders connected with EdD programs must be committed to advocating for program supports for faculty as well as students, which are integral in fostering a culture predicated on scholarly inquiry, collective dialogue and shared-decision making. For example, in many EdD programs, there is a need for faculty to advocate for providing writing support for first-generation college students, who often lack the cultural capital to write in a scholarly



manner. Graduate-level academic writing is not often explicitly taught in doctoral programs, which relegates these all-important practices to a form of hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). Considering that doctoral-level academic language is an extension of the linguistic patterns of dominant White culture, failing to support students of color and others from “non-traditional” backgrounds becomes an important issue of social justice. One possibility includes taking inspiration from sociolinguists and systemic functional linguists (e.g., Schleppegrell, 2004; Derewianka, 2012) and teaching the features of the genres of doctoral level writing (e.g., problem statements, literature reviews, method sections) as an integral part of doctoral education, while simultaneously problematizing and pushing on aspects that have historically excluded marginalized groups. Program directors must also advocate for low student-to-faculty ratios, which are instrumental in ensuring students gain the confidence to share their understanding of complex concepts, experiences engaging inquiry activities, and insights of how power shaped by their personal biographies as well as by the biographies of their peers and instructors. These ideas can be turned into actions, as the manuscripts in this issue show. Next, we describe the contexts of the issue, focusing on two themes: thinking differently and processes of change in EdD programs.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Thinking Differently in Social Justice EdD Programs

The first two pieces in this themed section offer essays describing important shifts and expansions in our understanding of both social justice and leadership in doctoral programs. In his essay, “Addressing 21st Century Challenges in Education: An Ecocritical Conceptual Framework toward an *Ecotistical* Leadership in Education,” John Lupinacci writes about the shift from *egotistical* to *eco-tistical* leadership—that is, a move away from conceptualizing leadership as an autonomous individual at the top of a human hierarchy and instead promoting a view of leadership as part of a larger, ecological network. Lupinacci’s work draws on recent scholarship (e.g., Braidotti, 2013; Strom & Martin, in press) arguing for a deliberate break with Western patterns of “commonsense” thinking that force the world into dualisms (human/nature, self/other, man/woman, teacher/student) and position the human as the reference point for the world. This type of human-centric thinking, as Lupinacci points out, justifies not only widespread human violence and suffering, but also massive destruction to the world around us. Describing the ways that he uses the notion of *eco-tistical* leadership in his pedagogical work—as well as the ways his EdD program focuses on the nexus of social justice and sustainability—Lupinacci offers insights for the development of knowledge and practices for learning to lead *in relation to* others/the world.

In a similar vein, in his article “Four Ways to Expand the Foundation for CPED’s Social Justice Framework,” Four Arrows provides multiple concrete suggestions for moving from hegemonic, human-centric EdD programs to ones that emphasize social, ecological, and economic interrelations. To do so, he offers four key shifts. The first two include expanding notions of social justice to encompass the ecological human-nature continuum and explicitly acknowledging the ways that the knowledge economy is connected to globalization, increasing material inequality, and environmental destruction. He also describes the importance of expanding the

social justice focus beyond the university by explicitly connecting the problems of practice studied in P-16 systems to larger injustices in the world. Finally, Four Arrows argues for a more intense focus on research from the beginning of the doctoral journey through community project-based learning, which would allow students to mediate the hierarchical rigidity of the dissertation while pursuing interdisciplinary approaches to significant educational concerns.

Processes of Change: Becoming More Explicit about Social Justice

In her article, “Developing an Explicit Social Justice Program Design” Deborah Peterson provides important fodder for faculty and program directors of EdD programs who are committed to ensuring CPED principle #1, a focus on “equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice” (CPED, 2009), direct their program’s focus. Specifically, Peterson details how using CPED principle #1 positioned faculty, administration, and staff to develop a resigned EdD program model. The model became EdD faculty and administrators’ guidepost for addressing key social justice concerns, such as improving student retention, ensuring superintendents, directors of curriculum and research, and state and regional educational leaders are equipped to use inquiry to solve problems impacting schools and communities, offering the program to a broader student base and gain new insight on how to best engage local districts as partners. Despite the benefits of using CPED principles to address key concerns related to social justice, the author concludes the essay by capturing some additional concerns that cropped up during the EdD program design and continue to affect the program’s social justice focus. The information is important for those who are committed to addressing social justice concerns in doctoral preparation programs:

The council also identified limitations in our model, most of which related to the potential negative impact junior faculty might experience when supporting doctoral students, the resources required to ensure a quality doctoral program, and the possible influence of small doctoral class sizes on our department staffing budget. Tenured faculty members were primarily worried that if junior faculty focused on the success of doctoral students, they might not conduct their own research and publications to the extent required for tenure. These concerns were legitimate, as our institution commits substantial resources to the success of junior faculty, and their success rate is a source of institutional pride.

In the second essay in this section, “Toward a Social Justice Model for an EdD Program in Higher Education,” Phillis George provides important insight for EdD faculty and administrators who seek to evaluate whether their EdD program’s “goals, curriculum, and pedagogy align with components” “prepares postsecondary administrators for social justice leadership” Specifically, her faculty employed Colleen Capper, George Theoharis, and James Sebastian’s 2006 model in order to evaluate whether its EdD program “uniquely designed to prepare higher education administrators and practitioners to be socially just and equity-minded leaders.” Her faculty’s evaluation was also unique because it “entailed an implementation evaluation of a graduate program in Higher Education Administration.” The faculty found they were successful transforming “the Higher Education Administration doctorate in a legitimate, high-quality, and scholarly manner.” Moreover, she notes faculty found critical value in three core elements associated with the program: “(a) applied pedagogy and capstone dissertation, (b) expanded definition of institutional



stakeholders, and (c) recognition of mutuality in identifying persistent problems of practice." The author provides a clarion call to college and administrative leaders and EdD faculty and program directors to provide resources and work collectively to create initiatives in "higher education regarding the strategic preparation and professional development of social justice leaders for 21st century colleges and universities.

We hope the manuscripts in this volume can serve as a launching point for a larger conversation regarding EdD preparation for educators to move forward social justice agendas in their local contexts. Ultimately, faculty and administrators in EdD programs have the responsibility to engage in both thinking differently, and using that thinking to inform all facets of educator preparation, to create a more just world.

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