Introduction to Impacting Education Themed Issue
Voices from CANDEL: Leading for Equity and the Scholar-Practitioner Journey

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ABSTRACT

Educational leadership doctoral granting programs have been on the rise for the last 25 years. These programs recruit students who work full-time as educational leaders while completing full-time doctoral coursework. Previous research on educational doctoral programs has found that they provide unique access to doctorates in education (EdD) for first generation students and students of color. In addition to access, educational doctoral programs create spaces for these students to improve their leadership skills. This issue leverages and shares the voices of alumni of an educational leadership doctoral program and faculty. This special issue highlights what they have learned from their scholar-practitioner journeys. We organized the contributions into three themes that make visible the leadership and scholar-practitioner journeys of our alums and faculty. Most importantly, our contributors emphasize how their doctorate degrees have impacted their capacity for research to inform their everyday practice, and how their leadership abilities were enhanced by the transformative experiences they had in their program.

KEYWORDS

Leading for Equity, Social Justice, EdD, Scholar-Practitioner

The CANDEL (Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership) program in the School of Education at UC Davis is structured as an accelerated doctoral program for full-time working professionals in varying fields of education. Our students have careers in P-12, institutions of higher education and non-profit settings where they seek to implement changes to their sites steeped in transformative and equity-centered practices. In the first two years of the program, CANDEL cohorts are engaged in rigorous coursework taking place on the weekends. During their third year, students propose a dissertation topic, advance to candidacy, collect data, and typically complete their dissertations within 3-5 years. This seemingly quick program has created a need to revisit our practices to streamline our practices while supporting both student and faculty involvement.

In alignment with CPED goals, CANDEL leadership wanted to distinguish itself from the PhD program that was also being offered at our institution and to expand the role of the scholar-practitioner equity-centered educational leader. CANDEL saw the need in our region for better prepared educational leaders; leaders who were armed with research skills and mid-level leadership experience that would enable these leaders to make lasting transformational changes in their educational settings.

In the last year after the pandemic at both our yearly networking event and at our annual writing retreat alumni asked us to provide guidance on how they could disseminate their findings and engage with other scholar-practitioners. They wanted to continue speaking of their work beyond the dissertation and expand the reach of their research. In addition, the CANDEL Faculty Chair in consultation with the faculty saw the opportunity to highlight the scholarly work of our students and to share their findings and their experiences with the wider educational community. In particular, we saw a gap in research by scholar-practitioners informing the field of educational leadership. When our students looked for research like theirs, it was mostly conducted by people with PhDs. Our alumni are shifting their institutions, yet due to the pandemic and the arduous labor of creating change, we have been unable to document this transformative change. We saw the impact of our alumni as they shifted their institutions and impacted the state of education, therefore we took the opportunity to create this themed issue featuring the voices of our alumni and faculty on how they have navigated the EdD and beyond.

With the 20th anniversary of our own program and with the increased impact of the EdD on the educational landscape, we came up with the idea to create a themed issue showcasing the questions and processes that our own alumni have navigated. This themed issue is designed to promote dialogue on the journey of alums, students, and faculty with problems of practice while navigating their leadership development in the EdD. We invited EdD alums, faculty,

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and students to share the current role of the EdD in shaping the landscape of higher education by addressing the following or related questions:

- How has being in the EdD program shaped their research ideas and questions and the manner in which they conducted their studies/analysis?
- How are institutions of higher education being shaped by the research of educational leaders in EdD programs?
- How might EdD programs support their students better to approach problems of practice in higher education settings?

We invite all of our readers to learn from the alumni and faculty in our program and to engage with similar questions in their own programs.

Three themes emerged from the submissions to create the sections for this themed issue:

- EdD Journey: Navigating students' leadership development
- Impact on Research and the Power of Data
- Leadership for Equity

EdD JOURNEY: NAVIGATING THE STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

This section centers the journey of our students and their reflections on how being in the EdD program shaped their research ideas and the manner in which they conduct their leadership. Contributors connect how their intersecting identities shifted their research and pushed them to seek community in their EdD journey.

Fong-Batkin: *Reflections on the Education Doctorate: A Traditionally Untraditional Journe*

Fong-Batkin explores learnings and reflections on how this journey has changed her and made her acutely aware of the work, school, and family balance that all EdD students learn to manage. She uses the learning of this journey to discuss the challenges for women of color administrators and ends with some suggestions about how to move forward.

Sanders: *The Exigency of Centering Equity in Educational Leadership Development: A Journey Through CANDEL*

Saunders describes how her experience in the program has impacted her work in higher education. She discusses the challenges to her understanding that she encountered from coursework, faculty, and her peers with respect to race, socio-economic impacts, meritocracy, grit, and the assumptions administrators make about students. In this piece, she discusses how these experiences were foundational to her dissertation questions and reflects on how conducting research on university leadership at her home institution gave her an opportunity to develop a shared equity leadership approach. This author too reminds us that equity-focused work in higher education is an ongoing discussion, and essential to addressing the challenges facing our institutions.

Randle, et al.: *The Power of Writing in Community: Being Seen and Supported in an EdD Journey*

The authors of this piece reflect on their journey and identify a key component of the EdD that could support students in their persistence. This essay explores how writing in community for EdD

students can be pivotal in helping them succeed at different points in their journey. They review the literature in this area and then use a case study approach to highlight the ways writing in community is instrumental to students' journeys and enhances students' sense of belonging not just in finishing but in creating life-long networking communities.

Andersen: *Challenging the Notion of the Pipeline Problem in STEM*

Anderson's article is both a reflection and a call to action to institutions that purport to create pathways for women in STEM but who continue to use unsuccessful practices that do not bring about change. This article addresses the lack of research on how STEM recruiting and hiring practices impact if women stay and feel included in their positions. By identifying barriers women face while they are being recruited and integrated into the profession, the author seeks to break down the inequities that limit female career progression and the factors that may lead to women feeling unsure about their career prospects. She ends by discussing ways to practice allyship and practices that will prevent women from being pushed out of their positions by structural barriers.

RESEARCH AND THE POWER OF DATA

In this section, contributors discuss different research methods that have shaped their experience in the EdD. Authors describe how leveraging data as a scholar-practitioner can be used to drive decision making for equity.

Jimenéz-Silva and Lopez: *Centering Equity in Teacher Education Research through Pláticas Con Maestras*

This co-authored piece between faculty and a recent EdD graduate speaks to the powerful nature of the scholar-practitioner's research. These authors present the emerging methodology of "Platicas" and discuss how to implement the methodology in classroom communities. The authors argue that pláticas, as a methodology, honors teachers' experiences and moves the field away from the current trend to deprofessionalize teachers and flattens the hierarchy that has existed too long between educational researchers and teachers. This methodology does not privilege researcher over teacher; instead it acknowledges that researcher and teacher are co-creators of knowledge. This method of collaboration can more effectively center equity in the work that we do in service of our communities.

Reilley: *Qualitative Data in the Driving Seat: Applying Qualitative Methods in High School*

The author considers her learning and unlearnings in the program. She reflects on how high school teachers have grown accustomed to believing that quantitative data is objective and somehow qualitative data is just opinions. The author asserts that by practicing strong research methods and constructing reliable tools for gathering data, schools can learn new things about students and teachers. The author acknowledges that the use of qualitative data requires some shifts in school cultures and mindsets. She is confident that her gains in the program will give her the leadership and research skills to implement the shift.

Young et al.: *Considering the Impact of Standardized Testing on Workforce Diversity*

As the previous two submissions have done, these authors review institutional data, in this case, college admissions data from

both community college and 4-year research institutions to improve equity and student diversity. With refreshed data about test-optional admissions, the authors address the impact of institutional responsiveness to redress persistent equity gaps that impact our state's workforce diversity and hiring challenges. With leadership roles in the community college and the University of California systems and a particular emphasis on workforce development, they reflect on the program's ethos of scholar-practitioner leadership in their practice areas to promote equitable educational and career outcomes.

Lewis: *The Impact of Research and the Power of Data: Leveraging Data as a Scholar Practitioner to Drive Decision Making for Equity!*

Lewis, like Reilley, examines how institutions use data and recognizes the need for a culture shift in the way that these institutions report and gather that data. Lewis shares her work as an admissions and enrollment administrator and how this work intersects with her evolution as a scholar-practitioner. She outlines how she leverages her experience as a scholar-practitioner to challenge institutions to reframe the deficit narratives that they create of marginalized communities. Her piece outlines how the scholar-practioner can use research data to reframe narratives and refocus the discussion to drive decision making for equity.

LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY

This section addresses the question: How has being in the EdD program shaped the authors' research ideas and questions and the manner in which they conducted their school leadership? Contributors in this section focus on how participating in the EdD program expanded and elevated the focus on equity in their leadership.

Rodriguez: *Centering Educational Equity in a Primary Leadership Role*

Rodriguez conducts her leadership in public schools in underserved communities. Her article focuses on her skills as a scholar-practitioner and a school leader who needs to be attuned not just to the numbers and data being generated, but to the stories that these numbers represent. The author's work is done through the interactive process of understanding the priorities of the community, transparency, communicating, and listening while prioritizing health and safety as a means of cariño. Her goal is to have her school community know that the school's priorities are children first, rather than test scores and attendance percentages. The author explains the on-going journey and calls for creative means to empower the young scholars. Her goal is to bridge a gap between site and community so as to authentically celebrate the diversity on the campus.

Velasco Fuentes: *Supporting Latinx First-Generation Professionals*

This author reflects on his personal and academic experiences to conduct qualitative research on the experiences of Latinx first-generation professionals in higher education. He sought to understand how institutional norms influenced staff's self-efficacy and how Latino and Latina professionals experienced them differently. Among the findings was the pervasiveness of professional invalidation and the gendered difference. These critical findings inform how workplace norms contribute negatively to staff's experiences. The author cautions that as higher education institutions continue to work towards better serving Latinx first-generation students; they too must create a work environment that is inclusive for Latinx staff.

Leung: *Equity In Action in Community College Leadership*

Leung also posits that leaders who center equity must explore their own critical consciousness through an equity lens so that they prioritize equity at the forefront while leading, collaborating, and making decisions in their leadership positions. The author argues that the positionality of leaders is also critical and that leaders need to reflect and consider how they use their power to influence their community and amplify the voices of the underrepresented.

All of these authors have reflected deeply and passionately about their experience in the program and have wanted to share with you their experiences and insights into their leadership and how being a scholar-practitioner has enabled them to attack complex organizational and institutional issues with both research and practical skills. We invite you to continue this discussion with us.