

But I Don't Teach in PK-12:

Cultivating Space for Community and Higher Education Professionals in a PK-12 Dominant EdD Program

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ABSTRACT

This essay reflects the conversational nature of CPED's dialogue exchange format, in which we collaboratively explore and respond to shared prompts. We present a discussion to understand how professional students and faculty have worked within our EdD program to relate the content to varied forms of educational practice. Additionally, we asked our students and alumni to consider how they have been informed by the 'social justice in public schooling' emphasis of our EdD program and what challenges or successes they have experienced in implementing what they learned into their professional contexts outside PK-12. Insights from our reflective discussion convey that students are proactively adapting content to their own contexts but would benefit from more guidance to integrate ideas across educational settings. They recognized both faculty and peers as learning resources and felt successful in applying a social justice lens to their fields. This essay concludes with recommendations for EdD programs.

KEYWORDS

professional students, higher education, social justice, curriculum, education doctorate

PROFESSIONALS IN A PK-12 DOMINANT EDD PROGRAM

The problem of practice model developed by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) allows students to consider injustices that are professionally important to them, and through action research, change their own ideas about education (Herr & Anderson, 2005). A focus on a problem of practice, as well as an emphasis on creating educational justice, requires reflective practice no matter the educational setting. Yet, despite the general educational framing of CPED that extends broadly across all educational settings, there is still an underlying association between the doctor of education (EdD) and PK-12 settings stemming from the teacher education academic pathway where the terminal degree is the EdD (Zambo et al., 2015).

While there is a traditional connection to PK-12 (Ma et al., 2018; Shaw et al., 2024), educators outside the compulsory schooling levels also seek doctorates in education (Zambo et al., 2015). Despite their participation, EdD programs are still dominated by a

PK-12 framing (CPED, 2023). Indeed, findings from Ma et al. (2018) highlighted this emphasis with 24 dissertations in practice derived from felt experiences and real-world dilemmas in their PK-12 school settings. Gilham (2019) likewise reported that the majority of their EdD participants not only came from PK-12 professions but also focused their research on problems of practice related to PK-12. It is not uncommon, therefore, to see EdD programs built around a PK-12 dominant curriculum including topics such as "practitioner research, professional development, critical pedagogy, teacher leadership, teaching children in poverty, school change" (Ma et al., 2018, p. 15). Without thoughtful program design (Hajian, 2019; Tran et al., 2024), it is possible that students coming from varied educational professions may struggle to connect, learn, and do meaningful research within a program of study that is too specifically focused on PK-12 schools.

The CPED organization supports EdD professional development for all educators and at each Convening (annual conference) there are some sessions related to making the education doctorate relevant for professionals in other fields,



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particularly those who do not work in PK-12 educational settings. This essay contributes to this work by centering the perspectives of our EdD graduates. Following our dialogue exchange at the 2024 CPED Convening, this essay documents a collaborative discussion amongst our students, alumni, and faculty, to highlight what factors within the EdD experience work – and equally important, do not work – to support learning transfer to all educational contexts (Leberman & McDonald, 2016; Owens et al., 2020). Given the political landscape and legislation with which we are currently grappling (Mangan, 2025), we are also especially interested in learning how our students and graduates have navigated their diverse educational settings to find strategies to carry out the social justice learning they have taken from their EdD program (Kennedy et al., 2018). We wondered how they continued to apply learning taken from, for example, culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogical models (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017) and decolonizing research (Patel, 2015) to their professional practice and daily interactions with colleagues and students in their varied settings.

As we engage in the tenth year of our EdD program, we take a step back to reflect on how we are teaching to meet the diverse professional needs of all our doctoral students in what has historically been a PK-12 dominant program both in terms of enrollment and curriculum. Over time, our cohorts have increasingly included higher education administration professionals (student services, staff, and faculty affairs), higher education faculty (in our case, mostly from the medical professions), and educators from state and federal institutions. Given that our education doctoral program infuses social justice and equity in conversations about educational access, we ask ourselves, how are we designing curricula that take advantage of critical, socially-just research and teaching education literature to create a flexible enough program so that higher education and community education professionals can benefit? Additionally, we ask our students, in what ways have we challenged our higher ed and community professionals to revisit their educational settings and draw parallels between the literature, how it applies to PK-12, and how it may morph into making practical sense in the higher ed and community settings.

Contextualizing the EdD Program

The EdD in Educational Innovation at Augusta University describes itself as a professional degree designed for practitioners who work in varied educational settings including, but not limited to, classroom instruction and administration. Innovation in education requires strong participatory leadership and the creation of collaborative organizations that practice continuous learning. When education professionals integrate theory and practice in a supportive environment, fresh perspectives and high impact responses to educational challenges may be realized. This resonates with principles from the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, a national initiative to improve the strength and caliber of the EdD.

Faculty Perspectives

In a doctoral program focused on educational innovation, imagining what is possible in educational settings is made richer through the inclusion of educators working in various settings within and outside of PK-12 public schools. Although the faculty in this program primarily teach from PK-12 research and theory, many of us have also previously taught or worked in other educational settings such as universities, public libraries, and community or private

educational programs not affiliated with schools. As faculty, we understand the depth and breadth this brings to classroom discussions and projects completed by students, but we are interested in understanding what higher education and community education professionals learn from the critical social justice found in pedagogical and curriculum research in education.

As two EdD faculty who were not trained in colleges of education until our graduate work, we followed a non-traditional pathway to teaching in a college of education. Darla studied French and Political Science as an undergraduate student. She has been formed through her work as a public librarian and thus interested in supporting young people to pursue their own intellectual journeys, to critically question the information that is presented to them, and to engage with ideas for pleasure. The epistemological approaches to learning in these academic and professional fields shaped her philosophy of teaching. This orientation informs her teaching in the EdD program, where she encourages students to interrogate their “why” for teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Rhia instead came to the college of education from a background in teaching world languages across a variety of levels including early childhood education, youth programs, study abroad, and higher education. She became acutely aware of the need to adapt prescribed language curricula to fit the various learning environments whether she was teaching on site in a museum or in a preschool center. Her approach to education quickly developed to be adaptive, with a deliberate effort to tailor content to both the learning environment and the needs of her students. This flexibility extends to the wide range of subjects she teaches, allowing her to transition smoothly into new content areas. While the topics may vary greatly, she often draws upon the same pedagogical approaches regardless of the subject.

EdD Student Perspectives

Our discussion centers on a subset of graduated doctoral students from Augusta University’s EdD program cohorts across nine years. Unlike most of their peers in our EdD program cohorts, these participants held professional positions outside of PK-12 schooling resulting in a need to continually adapt PK-12 focused content to fit their individual educational spaces. Sharon graduated with Cohort 1 and is currently the Vice Chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy at Augusta University. Jocelyn graduated with Cohort 2 and now serves as Assistant Dean of Faculty Affairs at the University of Arizona with an intentional lens on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Sameh completed his doctorate with Cohort 6 and is now an instructional systems specialist for the Cyber Center of Excellence with the Army. Stacy graduated with Cohort 9 and is the Director of Teaching and Learning within the Center for Instructional Innovation at Augusta University. Mark also graduated with Cohort 9 and is the Director of New Student and Family Transitions at Augusta University.

Dialogic Structure

Following scholars who have presented co-constructively through a dialogic format (Moreno et al., 2023; Turner & Allen, 2024) we present a collaborative discussion to capture how each person has worked within our EdD program to relate the content to varied forms of educational practice. Not unlike Burriss and Mayers’ (2024) braided essay, we come together to construct meaning through conversational threads that reflect our collective experiences



surrounding this topic. The following conversation includes two EdD faculty discussing their own experiences with teaching course content to professional students. Additionally, we asked our students and alumni to consider how they have been informed by the 'social justice in public schooling' emphasis of our EdD program and what challenges or successes they have experienced in implementing what they learned into their professional contexts outside PK-12.

This essay reflects the conversational nature of CPED's Dialogue Exchange convening format where critical connections are made through "discussion and dialogue among attendees" (CPED Convening Manual, 2018, p. 7). In this written version that mirrors our panel discussion at the CPED 2024 Convening, we collaboratively explore and respond to shared prompts. Rather than presenting a single voice, we embrace a dialogic structure to highlight how our students' varied perspectives and experiences both overlap and diverge. We situate this essay within a dialogical epistemological perspective (Sullivan, 2012) where we view dialogue as a valid source of knowledge. This essay does not attempt to represent itself as empirical research, instead, we see value in its dialogic structure as a method for extending knowledge in the field.

Conversations of Practice

The conversation that follows is organized around our current and past students' responses to a series of prompts reflecting their experiences with content relevance during their programs. As faculty, we engage with their reflections through our professional lenses to draw connections and discuss implications for practice. Through this format, our discussion naturally developed some conversational threads as we each chimed in. These threads included topics of content transfer and having to take the initiative to adapt the content, shifting one's mindset, learning how to apply educational theory to non-traditional learning spaces, and seeing both faculty and peers as learning resources.

This discussion provides a platform for candid conversation with our graduates and current students to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program of study. In doing so we can learn from our successes and our failures. We hope that this critical discussion will provide a window into the experiences of students across other EdD programs while also holding up a mirror for critical self-reflection.

Rhia: To begin our discussion, Darla and I invite each of you to reflect on your journey through the EdD program. In particular, can you speak to what it's been like navigating this space as a professional coming from outside the traditional PK-12 educational setting?

Finding our Fit

Jocelyn: Initially, it took a semester before I was able to determine my fit into the program. I was the only student in my cohort who worked in faculty affairs in higher education, thus every other classmate of mine worked directly with students in their respective roles. I had to transfer seemingly irrelevant course topics to explore ways to empower my faculty and administrator peers with the knowledge and skills to better serve their students.

I also found ways to think about how I might use the content to inform my future goals. For example, while curriculum theory did not present immediate relevance to my work with college administrators, I transferred the course content to support my goal of becoming a university president. Not only do presidents have to support faculty

and staff, and engage business and community stakeholders at all times, but they must remain attuned to the needs of their students and current educational policies which do drive curriculum. Approaching every course with that end in mind, I was able to lean into the seemingly irrelevant content in a more forward-thinking way.

Stacy: I too had to take a step back and think about how I could fit different elements of the program to fit my professional goals. For me it became easy to focus on teaching in practice by working with and observing excellent faculty -- adopting some of their attitudes, dispositions, practices, towards teaching and scholarship. I have approached it much like an apprenticeship.

Sharon: I agree Stacy, I found the faculty to all be a strength. I was able to learn instructional techniques through observation of a variety of professors; this was helpful to me - to be educated by educators especially since I come from a professional health science background and have no formal educational training.

Sameh: That also helped me rethink how I was teaching, Sharon. Coming from a military profession with a performance-driven, results-oriented culture, I was pushed to reflect on how I approached teaching and learning through the EdD's focus on inquiry, reflection, and learner-centered design.

Sharon: A big takeaway for me was also about shifting my mindset. As a member of the first cohort, where there was only one other higher education member, I felt like the program was not designed for me. On the surface, every course was not applicable. However, by shifting my mindset to take away what I could, I found each course to ultimately provide meaning. I stretched myself to realize that ultimately, whether we're PK-12 or higher education, our shared purpose is 'the student'. This common theme makes all content relevant, if we keep the student as the focus. Understanding where they have come from or where they will go in their journey, is always applicable.

Having to Think Outside the Box

Sameh: That's a good way to put it Sharon—our shared purpose is the learner regardless of what level we are working with. I discovered that the program's emphasis on innovation, leadership, and applied research was highly transferable to the structure and needs of adult learners in defense training environments. However, I had to make intentional adjustments to reinterpret the material through the lens of adult learning, workforce training, and defense objectives. For example, I applied learning theory to enhance cybersecurity training and signal operations instruction. The focus on bridging theory with practice really helped me develop solutions that addressed real-world instructional challenges in high-stakes, mission-critical environments.

Stacy: "Highly transferable" is a good way to put it as long as we think outside the box. For example, I found that 'curriculum and pedagogy' has been quite relevant to providing professional development to my faculty on teaching and learning and curriculum development.

Sharon: I am a faculty member now, and while the EdD was definitively PK-12 focused, it did help me learn principles of educational theory and teaching and learning in a way that was very helpful. It was all new information to improve my own teaching in my higher education context.

Rhia: I find it invigorating to hear how you all have found a way to draw a connection between educational theory and how you approach your jobs. Your responses really resonate with me

because I see content relevance as the undercurrent of curriculum and yet, even with this lens, I have had to really be intentional with how I teach within the EdD. When I first taught the course on pedagogy, I was initially more focused on classroom instruction, which made sense to me as a teacher. However, that first semester, I had a university director of Institutional Board of Review (IRB) as well as a college student admissions professional. Neither of them taught in a classroom and therefore we had to get creative on how to apply theory to their educational spaces. I broadened my instructional examples and challenged my students to play with interesting combinations of pedagogy and profession. Seeing how they combined the IRB with intersectionality or college admissions with a pedagogy of play, spurred me to modify my own approach to teaching in our EdD program. I'm curious to hear more about curricular adaptation and what that looked like in your experiences.

Mark: As soon as you mentioned the pedagogy course, it made me think of my own experiences in that class. I found that course challenging at first because I have limited direct-classroom time as part of my role. However, the professor who taught it challenged me to explore how a public pedagogical lens can easily apply to my studies and my work. I now use this framework and practice in most of the programs I oversee. I'd say this is the basis of my approach to learning in this EdD: I creatively integrate what I take from the classroom and implement in my own practice in college student affairs.

Sameh: That's exactly it Mark! In my case, concepts like culturally responsive pedagogy or formative assessment didn't easily map onto Army training protocols in my case. But creatively reinterpreting these ideas through the lens of adult learning helped me find valuable applications that enhanced both instructional design and mission alignment.

Challenges to Create Connections

Jocelyn: I'll add though that I haven't always felt successful in adapting some content. I found it difficult to translate my seminar in Place-Based Education, which was designed to engage the learner with their environment and incorporate the community as the school, to my work in academic affairs where I worked minimally with students.

Stacy: And honestly, sometimes I feel like I'm starting at ground zero and my PK-12 peers have a leg up on me. Occasionally an assignment will be problematic—not that I can't do it—but that it takes an inordinate amount of time to transfer it to my higher ed context.

Sameh: Good point Stacy, much of the course content and discussions leaned heavily toward PK-12 contexts, which occasionally made it challenging to fully align course assignments with my own work in military education. But the faculty were open to helping me frame assignments and research around my field, and I learned how to adapt theoretical models to my specific context. And I appreciated how the professors consistently encouraged us to adapt assignments to our own work settings.

Sharon: That's true, part of my success came from when faculty demonstrated flexibility and sincere desire to adapt and accommodate it to make it fit. But it was something that had to be shifted, for both students and faculty.

Mark: For me though, the issue has been less about my ability to transfer the material and more of having faculty who come from K-

12 spaces and struggle themselves to adapt course content and expectations to a broader audience.

Stacy: Agreed, I feel that while some faculty make a diligent effort to make the content relevant to ALL students' academic, professional, scholarly, and personal lives, for some it's harder when they are used to teaching within a PK-12 frame.

Sameh: While faculty were supportive of this adaptation, more structured pathways or examples geared toward non-PK-12 practitioners would have further strengthened the program's inclusivity. I would recommend increasing representation and tailored content for those in higher education, government, and industry training roles to enhance accessibility.

Sharon: I agree Sameh, I do think an opportunity for improvement would be for EdD programs to have more of an explicit recognition that individuals are coming from all different aspects of experience, both professionally and personally, and that the degree should serve all people - ironically, this seems to point towards its social justice inception.

Stacy: And it would be interesting from time to time to include a reading directly from higher ed for the PK-12 faculty to grapple with and apply to their context, instead of the other way around.

Rhia: It's so helpful to hear these thoughts for improvement. As to Stacy's point, I just brought in a higher ed faculty panel into a course this last semester with this exact goal in mind, but I've never thought to do this explicitly nor consistently across my courses.

Darla: I always have in my mind that I need to adjust the curriculum or add different readings for students in the room, and I often try to include something that is specific to the setting in which they work. However, I developed examples in my teaching almost exclusively focused on PK-12 settings. Too often I have missed opportunities to expand the notion of education and educational institutions to help students think about learning and teaching more broadly, although a broader view aligns with my background in educational foundations.

Learning through Relationships

Darla: Another question I had was about the relationships you build across different professions and disciplines. Many of you have brought up having so many PK-12 peers in the program. Could you expand more on how that has played into your experiences?

Jocelyn: I appreciated being able to work with colleagues from the PK-12 setting and gaining insider knowledge on the challenges of secondary education students as we prepare to engage them and serve them, academically and programmatically, once they enter college.

Sameh: I have really found the diverse range of professionals impactful to my learning because it has created opportunities to cross-pollinate ideas from higher education, PK-12, government, and corporate sectors.

Stacy: As a faculty development professional with no children, sharing the classroom with PK-12 teachers has given me valuable insight into the context from which our traditional students come. Otherwise, I would be entirely ignorant thereof. The professional diversity of my colleagues helps me in understanding our student population better to better advise/instruct faculty.

Sameh: I'll also add that I feel we bring a necessary perspective to our colleagues. My work in military training helped broaden discussions around learning environments, technology



integration, and organizational change. I learned a lot from my peers, and I believe they benefited from seeing how educational principles play out in a high-stakes, adult-learning context like the military.

Mark: Great point Sameh. And I think the cohort model has helped this interdisciplinary collegiality. I feel very close to my colleagues within my cohort, and feel that through our class discussions, and connections beyond the confines of the classroom, we have created a very open and warm environment for all of us to work and thrive in.

Stacy: Yes, this socialization is key. The cohort system is highly supportive and creates a strong sense of belonging.

Jocelyn: And the cohort model provides ample opportunities for collaborations and support among its diverse groups of students while maintaining highly competitive standards.

Darla: Following the CPED model, we hold high standards around our emphasis on social justice in education, which is often framed through public schooling examples to illustrate theories of justice. How were your learning and work informed by the "social justice in public schooling" emphasis?

Professional Application of Learning

Jocelyn: I'll start off by giving an example from my current position. As a Hispanic Serving Institution Fellow, I was able to apply the lessons I learned in the EdD program around equity and social justice to competently explore what strategic programs had been implemented to not only recruit, but to retain these groups of students, through intentional "serving-ness." In my role, I have leveraged my understanding of how environmental and psychological factors, not to mention ongoing political tensions, all play a significant role in students' well-being from their early schooling experiences to how (or if) they matriculate through their college experience.

Mark: Exactly! The social justice emphasis, that has been embedded in most of our coursework, has helped me and other higher education peers explore the entirety of a student's experience - from K-12 all the way through to their undergraduate studies and beyond. This gives a fuller picture of the student and the systems that impact their educational experiences.

Sharon: Yes, it's this social justice framing of the whole student that directly impacted my role as director of admissions for the health science program that I teach in. It broadened my perspective on understanding various barriers individuals often have that impact their ability to engage in graduate education.

Stacy: I also found relevance in my field of faculty development. The social justice focus increased my ability to contribute to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and training on campus and conduct professional development workshops. It's also impacted my hiring process. Being able to look at the world, society, institutions, and education through a critical lens has been the most transforming aspect of the program.

Jocelyn: Recently, I was reminded of my dissertation that addressed the recruitment and retention of Black students at PWIs, and how, of the common emerging themes that still affect student retention, representation of Black faculty and staff is paramount. At our convocation, I was approached by a student who had been selected to be a student graduation speaker. She thanked me for my mere presence as the only other Black female face she saw at the entire ceremony. The confirmation my smile and presence gave her,

she noted, affirmed her belonging. In a society where the need for representation and a willingness to understand have become even more critical, in every space, that young student's words, as she prepares to take her place in her own classroom, imparting change upon the next generation, impressed upon me that psychological factors remain at play in the psyches of our students, in our systems and in our society.

Sameh: That is a beautiful story that really represents "in real life" the findings from your dissertation. When I first started the program, I had a harder time connecting the dots between my military job and "social justice in public schooling." As I engaged more deeply with the program, I began to understand how social justice and equity manifest in adult learning environments, particularly in technical and defense-related spaces where rank, language, background, and access to learning technologies can significantly affect outcomes.

Translating social justice frameworks into military and government settings comes with limitations. The structure is hierarchical, and equity conversations can be constrained by policy or tradition. To shift conversations from compliance toward inclusive instructional design, I often had to reframe social justice principles using language aligned with mission readiness, access to training, and performance outcomes.

Over time, I've seen how applying these principles improves training engagement and retention creating opportunities for underrepresented service members to gain nationally recognized certifications. That's a direct example of taking a social justice lens and transforming it into real, professional impact beyond the PK-12 setting.

Based on what we all have said, I think we have been fortunate within our various EdD cohorts to understand the broader application of social justice across all our fields even if at first it was introduced through public schooling. We have each found ways to translate it to our own professions in clearly impactful ways.

Implications of the Conversation

The dialogic nature (Sullivan, 2012) of our collaborative discussion produced several overlapping insights that can help instructors make learning and curricular relevance more transparent and impactful. Throughout the conversation, students reflected on how they were proactive and creative in adapting the content to fit their own professional contexts; how they actively shifted their mindsets to understand their professional focus on "the student", regardless of level; how they recognized both faculty and their cohort colleagues as professional and academic resources; and, that they would benefit from more direction from faculty about connecting the content to their contexts. Students' reflections about what ultimately felt like an enriching educational experience, can help us shift some of the cognitive burden to faculty, perhaps creating less discomfort or uncertainty in the early years of the program (Owens et al., 2019).

Finding their Fit

Initially, our EdD professional students raised concerns about finding their fit in the PK-12 curriculum. They struggled to see how the content related to their diverse professions. Finding one's fit in a doctoral program is essential to their success (Baker & Pifer, 2015). Baker and Pifer (2015) applied fit theory to doctoral education emphasizing the need to consider how students see themselves connecting to their doctoral work in terms of vocation, environment,

and culture. In the case of our EdD students, they were each able to find their fit once they shifted their mindset to focus on a purpose that felt relevant to their professions.

One particular perspective shift that provided a concrete connection to most of the learning was the realization that they all have the same shared purpose of ‘the student’. Even for professional students who use different terminology for learners, or who are removed from direct service with students, the institutional purpose of creating environments that ensure learning is still relevant. Nevertheless, students would benefit from an explicit framing of the program with this concept that we are broadly centered on ‘the student’ regardless of level. We recommend that EdD faculty introduce this learner-focused concept from day one of the program so that students can actively begin centering who the learner is in their professional settings. We further recommend that faculty consider approaching their programs and courses through fit theory to consider other ways in which they can support their students to best find their fit (Baker & Pifer, 2015).

Concrete Examples of Transfer Needed

One way that faculty could act on fit theory would be to proactively connect course content and materials for students. Our students had to take initiative to apply the course content to their professional setting. Some students however did not always feel successful in adapting the PK-12 focused content to fit their own fields and would have appreciated more examples from professors on what the content might look like across learning contexts. Learning transfer is a fundamental part of any academic process, yet research confirms that this is often a challenge for students without intentional pedagogical framing (Hajian, 2019; Leberman & McDonald, 2016).

An important takeaway from this conversation is that faculty should expand the kinds of materials and assignments for students from various settings such as medical simulation centers, Department of Defense professional development courses, or IRB offices to help achieve the learning objectives within courses and also strengthen student background knowledge in their professions. We recommend that faculty incorporate learning transfer theories into their instructional practices to best support connections between theory and practice for all students and particularly those working outside PK-12 spaces (Hajian, 2019). EdD faculty may also consider applying a Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1999) frame to group EdD students into learning communities based on their professional areas. Explicitly guiding students to work together to bridge the learning content to their individual practices can help better facilitate transfer.

The suggestion to include higher education readings to expand the knowledge of our PK-12 educators would also deepen the knowledge and background of faculty and encourage us to make connections across educational settings. The specific applications students identified in this conversation document the importance of transferring educational theories and empirical research to teaching and learning in a variety of contexts (Tran et al., 2024; Wahlgren & Aarkrog, 2020). These critiques help us consider how to make the program stronger for subsequent cohorts. We must emphasize to all program instructors that every course should address leadership and curriculum questions across educational settings to help students make the connections more easily and earlier in the program. This in

turn may help them begin to inquire about practices in their own settings and develop their problems of practice.

Seeing Faculty and Students as Resources

Our students raised an important point about the value in moving beyond the content itself to also see their peers and professors as learning sources. Students referenced how much they benefited from hearing about their colleagues’ experiences and professional knowledge as a resource for their own learning from class to class. In this way, the cohort model supported their ability to continually learn from each other. Our above recommendation for embedding learning communities within the cohort system, may further build this mutual learning process. Not only can faculty prompt the learning communities to brainstorm ways to connect and transfer their course content (Hajian, 2019), but they can also use the communities as spaces to share their own knowledge and experiences with each other. Doing so may even support research collaboration as they approach their dissertations (Kennedy et al., 2018).

Some students simultaneously saw their professors as instructional role models and for those in higher education, they engaged in their courses somewhat as scholarly apprenticeships. Baker and Lattuca (2010) referred to this process as an important component of professorial identity development noting “Through interactions with and observations of faculty members and other graduate students, they learn the technical knowledge and skills required for a faculty appointment, as well as norms and behaviors associated with the faculty role (p. 812). While we believe this naturally occurs in all programs, articulating it at the beginning of each program would encourage this process from the outset and perhaps encourage both faculty and students to further share their experiences and strategies.

In addition to emphasizing shared learning within the doctoral program, we recommend including program alumni in this knowledge exchange. Hearing from our alumni within this conversation highlighted their potential impact to help current students better situate their learning with their professional worlds. For example, this conversation revealed that our alumni deeply connected with the social justice topics integrated into their courses, which they described as having a lasting influence on their personal beliefs and professional work. Many of our alumni have become trusted collaborators in projects to make higher educational spaces more welcoming to students who have historically been marginalized within or had limited access to higher education. This leads us to also recommend inviting alumni from various professions to return to speak to new cohorts to provide examples of how they have internalized educational equity and access commitments within their post-graduate work. Continuing to learn with and from them as colleagues and peers is one way that we as faculty improve our practices and create a stronger EdD in Educational Innovation for subsequent cohorts of students.

Conclusion

At the beginning of our second decade of educating students in this program, the faculty are excited to continue to offer pathways to doctoral studies for professional students who plan to remain in their educational roles. We seek a balance between the struggle for students that is productive and necessary for their growth as



scholars, and the unnecessary cognitive burden that impedes their growth or engagement in the program.

This dialogue exchange helped us understand common threads that our students have experienced across the ten years of our program and led us to provide recommendations not only for ourselves, but for the wider EdD faculty community. Our takeaways center on integrating learning transfer and fit theories; helping students recognize their shared purpose across educational professions; broadening the representation of materials and resources; embedding learning communities; engaging alumni as learning partners; and enhancing transparency about how program objectives connect to each EdD student's professional goals. Our reflective conversation also helped us all see the value of what we are doing in this EdD program and its impact on students both in their current study and years after their graduation. Their insights point the way to program improvement, and unexpected existing strengths.

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