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To CRT (in your Dissertation) or not CRT? That is the Question!

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ABSTRACT

Recently the notion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) has come under fire by those with a limited knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings surrounding the intersection of education, law, and race in American society. To support those students eager to incorporate CRT as a framework within their research, the authors analyzed the dissertations of students receiving Education Doctorates (EdD). The researchers set out to determine how EdD students used CRT, how they framed problems of practice (POP), how they operationalized CRT, and to understand how those former students interrogated their findings in the pursuit of truth. The authors intend for this work to expand the knowledge base on CRT and inform scholarly practitioners on how to operationalize CRT to create sustainable change in the American education system.

KEYWORDS

Critical Race Theory, Education Doctorate, applied research, CPED

PURPOSE

Recently the discipline of Critical Race Theory (CRT) has endured a withering attack by American citizens who are only tangentially familiar with the framework of CRT. In the years from 2021–2023 numerous U.S. states banned the teaching of Critical Race Theory or intend to propose legislation against CRT (Alexander, 2023; Sawchuk, 2021). Emanating from the malicious attacks directed towards CRT in educational settings and the preparation of educational leaders in Education Doctorate (EdD) programs, this study sought to understand how CRT was used as a theoretical framework in educational doctorate programs and in the professional spaces in which EdD students worked. As we noted, with the controversy around CRT continuing to intensify, we began to wonder how and how often EdD candidates used CRT to frame their understanding of the problems encountered in their professional settings. Additionally, we sought to understand to what extent EdD candidates employed applied research methodologies alongside CRT in their dissertation studies to go beyond general investigations of these problems and to address them in ways that changed their leadership practices in the long run.

Specifically, we asked: To what extent do EdD students (who are most often educational professionals that remain in practice while studying) use or operationalize CRT and applied research with their dissertations? In addition to crafting our guiding research question, we also made a strategic decision to initially focus solely on dissertation abstracts. Because so many abstracts (2,000+ bound from the years 2010-2022) fit our initial search criteria, we made the decision to initially examine dissertation abstracts. Focusing on dissertation abstracts in our initial data analysis phase allowed us to access a more linear set of data as opposed to examining complete dissertations in their entirety. While we realize that focusing solely on abstracts is a limitation in our study at this early juncture of our work, we also felt that examining entire dissertations in our initial data observation would be a cumbersome enterprise and not an efficient usage of time considering the number of EdD students who used CRT as a theoretical framework. In our initial review, we sought to examine the inclusion of CRT in the content of dissertation abstracts. This initial review, focusing on content rather than quality in terms of student abstracts led to the creation of this study. For the more holistic version of our study, we intend to examine the complete dissertations of our remaining data set after the abstract data has been narrowed based upon our search criteria. Therefore, armed with a guiding question and a streamlined data set, we set out to better understand our research question. However, as we began our data analysis, preliminary findings gave us pause as our early findings were very much unexpected or anticipated. As a result, we dug deeper into these early findings to help shape our larger study. The purpose of this article is to report on our early findings.

Here, it is important to note we use the terms scholarly practitioner (defined below), graduates, and EdD students/candidates interchangeably throughout this study. These terms all apply to the students who remain in practice while pursuing a professional practice education doctorate and describe the various stages they will hold during the doctoral experience. In addition,

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these terms seek to underscore the EdD journey– from professional practitioner, to student, to graduate, to scholarly practitioner who brings back into practice the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to impact and improve educational experiences. Understanding this distinction early in this study may help to ease navigation and understanding of this work.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory, for the purposes of this paper, was framed from the viewpoints of the late legal scholar, Derrick Bell who introduced the framework. Bell (1995) framed Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a separate and distinctive branch from the field of Critical Legal Theory. Differing from Critical Legal Theory, Critical Race Theory allowed for a deeper, more focused, nuanced interrogation of the intersection of race and aspects of American society. Areas such as economic, legal, or social issues for example (or for the purposes of this paper, the American education system) were key elements for examination. At the core of CRT are the notions that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement were muted, that race is an artificial concept often used to marginalize and oppress people of color, and the law and the legal system is inherently flawed and biased (Taylor, 1998). Noted CRT scholar Jamel K. Donnor (2021) stated CRT is "an intellectual movement that originated in legal academia during the 1970s" [as] "an amalgamation of critical perspectives" (p. 262) which interrogate the notions of race and racial power in America. CRT as posited by Bell and other scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence, Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Tate, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams (Taylor, 1998) explores the tenets of a) race operating as a social construct, b) the permanence of racism, c) the idea of interest convergence, d) the intersectional nature of the theory itself, and e) the use of counternarratives to spotlight under-researched experiences and viewpoints. As we thought about scholarly practitioners who graduated from EdD programs, we reflected upon these tenets which only increased our curiosity about how these tenets were used (or applied) in EdD student dissertations.

In addition to examining the abstracts for the tenets of CRT, our analysis investigated the application of CRT in each dissertation examined. For us, we understood and appreciated the practical, applied nature of the EdD doctorate. As a field that seeks to produce scholarly practitioners, we felt the practical nature, the applied grounding, and the actual "do something with" aspect of the EdD doctoral journey was essential to the student learning experience. Consequently, a key concept of our analysis of EdD dissertations was the active engagement of CRT in the EdD dissertation. To meet our examination criteria, a student had to do more than mention CRT in their abstract. Rather, they had to show, define, or present how they operationalized, how they used, and how they brought to life CRT in their dissertation study.

We focused on the dissertation experience because it is the culminating experience of doctoral programs that do not require licensure exams (e.g., Law, Medicine). Historically, the dissertation has been defined as an "elaborate thesis [or] rigorous test of intellectual mettle" (Loss, 2015, p. 3). In professional programs specifically, a dissertation is an endeavor that "investigates a particular professional topic or existing problem" (Colwill, 2012, p. 13). In either sense, a dissertation is a culminating experience that ensures the student has mastered a body of knowledge and set of skills. The dissertation experience, therefore, is a high-impact educational practice in which students "devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks" (Kuh, 2008, p. 1) such as problem definition, empirical investigation, etc. As a professional doctorate, the EdD dissertation experience provides the opportunity to support students in learning high impact leadership practices such as applying research and inquiry to change educational practice. Further, by integrating CRT as a lens for the research process, students may build an equity-minded skill set for framing and solving the problems of practice they encounter beyond the dissertation experience. In our larger study, we set out to determine how former education doctorate students used CRT in their dissertation work, how they framed and addressed problems of practice in their studies, how they utilized applied research in their dissertation study, and how these students (now graduates) have been able to elicit sustainable, high impact leadership practices as a result of their doctoral experience.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Framework

As faculty in EdD programs that are both members of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), we view the dissertation process through the CPED Framework. The CPED Framework includes a set of guiding principles and design-concepts that (re)design the EdD program of study to prepare graduates to become *scholarly practitioners*, or leaders who "use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice" and "disseminate their work in multiple ways" (CPED, 2010, para. 1). As noted in this definition, the CPED Framework centralizes equity and justice in defining all components of the framework. For example, principle one states EdD programs are "framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice" (CPED, 2009, para. 1). Additionally, CPED principle three states EdD candidates are taught "to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships" (CPED, 2009, para. 1). As part of the development of CPED-influenced EdD programs, these three design-concepts help shape the dissertation process. First, students engage in work focused on a *problem of practice* defined as a "persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes" (CPED, 2010, para. 6). Next, student investigations are done through a process of *inquiry as practice* which is "the process of posing significant questions that focus on complex problems of practice; using data to understand the effects of innovation; and gathering, organizing, judging, aggregating, and analyzing situations, literature, and data with a critical lens" (CPED, 2010, para. 3). The result of applying inquiry as practice to a problem of practice is a *dissertation in practice (DiP)*, or a "scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice" (CPED, 2010, para. 4). These three definitions bring together the notions of professional practice, localized problems, critical lenses, and impact or change which result in preparing leaders with the skills to apply research to practice as a means of improvement. Often, such dissertations in practice employ critical theories that reframe persistent, yet complex problems found in educational practice and engage in applied

research methods (e.g., action research, improvement science, evaluation) to ameliorate these problems.

While no two CPED EdD programs are the same in their design of courses or dissertation process, many are guided by this Framework which stresses equity and applied research. Therefore, we chose to narrow our inquiry to dissertations produced in CPED member EdD programs. Our aim was to understand how (and how often) CRT and applied research methods were utilized together to frame and address problems of practice and how the dissertation process helped shape leadership skill development capable of improving educational practices.

Scholarly Practitioner

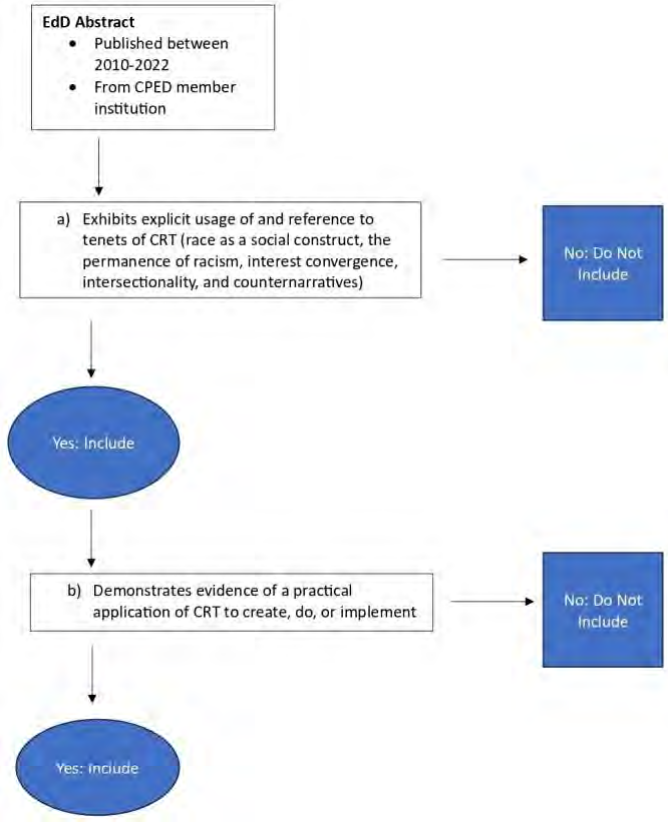
Scholarly practitioners are boundary spanners. They sit between the world of educational practice and the world of academia. In this role, they are charged with deciphering literature and communicating it to stakeholders (Hochbein & Perry, 2013). They may find themselves in situations where they must "advocate for their stakeholders and organizations" (Perry 2015, p. 4) using empirical evidence. And they must be able to apply literature and theory in the design of practical solutions to solve problems of practice (Archbald, 2008; Perry, 2015; Shulman et al., 2006; Willis et al., 2010). The skills of a scholarly practitioner are often learned in EdD programs where students "learn to see important questions in the world of practice, frame those questions in terms of rigorous inquiry, answer those questions by generating and analyzing data, share what they have learned with other stakeholders, and directly apply what they have learned in settings of practice" (Golde, 2013, p. 145). The learning process for becoming scholarly practitioners is different from the learning process in other, more traditional doctoral programs, however. Piantanida and colleagues (2019) described this process as one of meaning making where learning is experiential, relational, situated, recursive, deliberative, and discursive. Following these authors' thinking, we sought a deeper understanding of the learning process by which scholarly practitioners embark upon learning CRT and the process upon which they make CRT operational, in an effort to make meaning of how equitable educational spaces can be created and sustained…by any means necessary.

METHODS

To address our research question, we looked at EdD dissertation abstracts across CPED member EdD programs. In looking at the EdD dissertation abstracts, we first had to decide how we would review the abstracts. Moving beyond the dividing of research tasks, we engaged in substantive dialogue around what we expected a CRT grounded, operationalized, problem of practice-based, applied research dissertation would, should, or could look like. These conversations allowed us to establish our baseline for reviewing the EdD dissertations that we hoped to find. What follows is our framework of a CRT grounded, operationalized, applied research dissertation.

At the very onset, we examined dissertation abstracts that prominently mentioned employing CRT as a theoretical framework. CRT, as defined above by Donner (2021) "challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993). Consequently, as an initial screening criteria, all abstracts had to exhibit an explicit usage of and reference to CRT. However, for us, a mere mention of the concept of CRT was not enough for a dissertation abstract to be included in our final data set. More to the point, we sought to not only see the tenets of CRT (race as a social construct, the permanence of racism, interest convergence, intersectionality, and counternarratives) referenced in the abstracts, but also, we looked for evidence of a practical application of CRT in the study and not simply a theoretical description and application of CRT in the abstracts. To explain, in examining the abstracts provided we first reviewed all selected abstracts that referenced CRT. We then looked at each to see how CRT was employed. Abstracts that met our framework (see Figure 1 below) used CRT to create something, to do something, or implement a program grounded in CRT (e.g., a hip hop music experience, a study hall/tutorial program for Division 1 college-bound athletes, or a support group for women in higher education). The creation of these programs, integrated with the specific tenets of CRT, met our definition of operationalization regarding the concept of CRT. In short, we wanted to see that students had done something with CRT, in addition to elaborating upon it theoretically.

Figure 1. Framework for Determining Inclusion of Abstracts



Data Sample

We began this study from an inquisitive space seeking to find out how pervasive the use of CRT was in EdD dissertations. To facilitate a deeper understanding of this question, we conducted a simple keyword search using the Google search engine, focusing on

the words “Critical Race Theory (CRT)” and “dissertation” (January 12, 2022). Our initial search yielded over 2,500 dissertations. The high volume of the CRT themed dissertations validated our contention that many students used CRT as their theoretical framework or used CRT to craft a framework from which to view the findings of their dissertations. However, even bounding the time frame to the period from 1990-2022 still yielded over 2000 dissertations. In an attempt to narrow down our data sample, we reached out to a colleague at ProQuest to see if they could further refine our CRT based dissertation search. Using the same time span and thematic parameters, the ProQuest search yielded 1,759 dissertations. Further refining our search criteria to include the term “Education Doctorates” / EdDs and further narrowing our search by bounding the time period from years 2010-2022, we then found a total of 508 dissertations that utilized “CRT”, were from the years of 2010-2022, and were “Education Doctorates.” Seeking to further narrow the data pool we were working with; we conducted another level of narrowing and sought to only look at dissertations from CPED member institutions. This additional search criteria led us to the final number of 247 dissertations reviewed for this study.

Analysis and Findings

Both authors read and coded the 247 abstracts (one author read 123 and the other author read 124 before switching to read the other author’s portion) to ensure inter-rater reliability. A first round of coding (Saldaña, 2013) focused on whether abstracts demonstrated *sensemaking* (or the need for the student/leader to understand how exactly race is central to the problems they face), *advocacy*, (or giving voice to the those who are marginalized by local politics and policy) and *critical thinking* (teaching student/leader to think critically about race and privilege). In this initial round of analysis, the authors looked for evidence of the presence of CRT tenets in the abstracts. In our first round of coding, we used the following basic coding structure; an abstract received a “1” if the abstract “used CRT”, a “2” if the abstract “used CRT AND applied it to practice”, and a “3” if the abstract “used CRT and did NOT apply it to practice.” This first round reduced the number of abstracts from 247 to five, further narrowing our sample. A second round of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013) utilizing these five abstracts focused on the use of CRT in applicable, actionable, and sustainable ways in practice—all five demonstrated this aspect. At this point of our data analysis, we acknowledged more than five abstracts may have included the tenets of CRT, and more than five abstracts may have used CRT in applicable, actionable, and sustainable ways; however, only five abstracts met both of the criteria we were interested in discovering. The importance of this discovery is discussed below where we reflect on how students are taught to craft abstracts as this point holds significant importance for the scholarly practitioners we teach and for the faculty that guide them on the dissertation journey.

From the initial two rounds of coding, a set of themes emerged. These themes highlight an EdD student/graduate’s (scholarly practitioner) understanding and application of CRT for the improvement of practice. These themes will guide the next two steps of the larger research project (discussed below). However, we found it necessary to stop and reflect on these initial findings given the wide gap between 247 initial abstracts and five final abstracts that met our framework. Below we describe these themes and identify the questions that have arisen relevant to our larger research and to the teaching of CRT in EdD programs.

The first theme that emerged was–*Educational practitioners embark upon and travel through doctoral journeys without a clear understanding about how they will apply their learning, specifically CRT, to their practice.* To explain, reflecting on the 242 dissertation abstracts that did not meet our selection criteria: all referenced CRT in some aspect. We did not differentiate between abstracts using one CRT tenet or three CRT tenets (or more tenets; these numbers are for example only). We did, however, select dissertation abstracts that referenced the CRT tenet(s) and operationalized them. We would like to elaborate on this latter point and propose a deeper analysis of these findings. In short, it was apparent the scholarly practitioners in these EdD programs understood CRT as a theoretical framework; but maybe forgot, were not told, or did not care to operationalize the application aspect of the EdD degree. The lack of application stops short of CPED’s definition for scholarly practitioners and the first guiding principle of program design, both of which center equity and justice and the application of theory to practice for change. Further, it was unclear if the doctoral program specifically explained how and why EdD work would be applied or should reflect applied learning. The absence of this knowledge further diminishes the applicability of CRT to address a problem of practice or in professional practices post-graduation. Reflecting upon the definition of scholarly practitioner and the aim of EdD programs to prepare practitioners with applied research skills, we noted only five of 247 provided clear examples of our criteria. That is, we found most of the abstracts (242) used traditional methodologies that were exploratory in nature such as critical narrative inquiry, interpretive phenomenology, case study, and generic qualitative methods. Much like the traditional five-chapter dissertation, these 242 students’ work were focused more on building and advancing knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than on applying research and inquiry to improve educational practice in a particular setting. Though we did find a handful of abstracts that mentioned action research, the authors did not clearly indicate if an action or what action was taken as part of the research process or any results of an intervention employed.

We specifically chose to look at CPED member graduates and employ the CPED Framework to guide our study because we wanted to see how CRT and research methods were being applied together in actionable ways to prepare students/graduates to “use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice” as the CPED definition of scholarly practitioner explains (CPED, 2010, para. 1). Often the abstracts would identify a problem of practice (a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in their work) rather than a traditional gap in the literature. However, when addressing their problems, the authors chose traditional inquiry to deepen learning about the phenomenon rather than choosing inquiry as practice as described by CPED to have an impact on the problem. Reflections on this theme led us to additional questions such as: Are EdD programs truly providing the skills, knowledge, and dispositions for graduates to become scholarly practitioners? If not, where is the disconnect? Are students learning to apply CRT and inquiry to improve their practice settings even after the dissertation is completed?

The second theme that emerged was–*Educational practitioners are not being taught the tenets of CRT in ways that are deep, meaningful, and applicable.* While many of the 242 abstracts not selected for our final study did reference CRT in some way, most of the abstracts did not demonstrate a clear understanding of CRT or its tenets. The difference between referencing CRT and employing a

deeper understanding of CRT was striking. To explain, an abstract would reference storytelling as a CRT tenet, which is true. However, any discussion of findings in the abstract did not distinguish between the scholarly practitioner simply interviewing the participant or allowing the participant to engage in storytelling as an action that practiced some form of advocacy or offering a narrative that was counter to the dominant narrative. A keen understanding of CRT and a keen understanding of the actionable nature of an EdD dissertation most often were not seen. Another example of the 242 dissertation abstracts we reviewed, demonstrated the scholarly practitioner employed CRT to understand the problem of practice female students of color face in advanced programs of study in high school spaces. The scholarly practitioner interviewed the students and conducted an analysis of the narratives offered; but, we asked, to do what? How was the data gained operationalized? How was the data used to do something to make these female students of color lives (or those to come after them) better? These questions highlight the missing operationalization piece we sought to find in the abstracts, one essential aspect we felt supported the differentiation between the PhD and the EdD.

We also noted CRT was often listed as part of a conceptual lens to frame the particular study. For example, we observed scholarly practitioners often simply stated the importance of race as a construct in their research; but the ability or the opportunity to truly interrogate and synthesize the importance of race as it applied to their problems of practice or to the issues they sought to address was often missed. This discrepancy led us to wonder if there was backlash to the student's use of race and CRT, either at their institution or at their workplace (or wherever they conducted their study). Did external factors limit the scholarly practitioners' depth of engagement with the concepts of race and CRT? As a result, we were led to believe CRT was not a meaningful component of the study nor applied appropriately. That is, we did not see CRT being operationalized in the study as we have outlined above. This was most strikingly noted when one student of the five graduates interviewed for the larger study when asked "why did you chose CRT as a framework" responded "because my chair told me I was doing a CRT dissertation. And to be honest, I was ready to be done". This finding raised additional questions such as: Are EdD faculty prepared to teach CRT? Are students provided the space to deeply learn, process, and apply CRT? Is CRT a buzzword being tossed into EdD studies to gain recognition?

The third theme that emerged was–Only five dissertations fit the coding criteria, *offered examples of the application of CRT to practice, and demonstrated the transformation to become a scholarly practitioner who leads for the improvement of those who are marginalized.* Based on our criteria for this study, we found it interesting that only five dissertation abstracts demonstrated the definition of a scholarly practitioner. We compared these five abstracts to the CPED definition of dissertation in practice (DiP) which reads a DiP is a "scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice" (CPED, 2010, para. 5) and to the tenets of CRT to guide our understanding of how this exercise prepared these five students to become scholarly practitioners. In examining the use of CRT in the abstract, we looked for language that clearly described the theory and demonstrated CRT tenets were employed to frame the problem of practice and to analyze the findings. Examples included: "Using critical race theory… can be an effective approach to teaching students," "Operationalizing CRT as a framework for this study," and "CRT was used to explore…" The remainder of abstracts tended to mention CRT as a theoretical framework but did not indicate how the theory was used in the study. For example, these abstracts noted, "The framework of CRT provided the lens through which to analyze resulting data," "Interview results were analyzed through the theoretical lens of CRT," or "CRT is used as a conceptual framework." The distinction between these two types of abstracts (operationalizing CRT versus employing CRT as a lens) might seem minor at first glance, but in actuality it shows a gap between understanding CRT as a theory and using it to impact change.

Next, we examined the design of the study for types of methodologies used, actions taken, or the implications of results listed in the abstracts to determine if the methods were applied methods and if the results indicated action taken on the problem of practice. Examples included: participants "engaged in a one-day workshop," "undergraduate students facilitated a [minority student] meet up club," and "findings informed organizational change efforts to build inclusive communities." The research methodologies these five studies employed included some sort of intervention where the author implemented and investigated an idea in their workplace (i.e., a workshop) and gathered data on the impact of that intervention through qualitative means. Because the abstracts included in our clearly met our criteria, we began to wonder if the student's skills and abilities were related to their EdD programs or to their professional experiences. Therefore, this finding raised additional questions such as: Were these authors already good leaders to begin with? How did the EdD experience with exposure to CRT, scholarship, and inquiry impact their leadership post-EdD?

Finally, an observation that perhaps has led to these findings and was significant to our learning was focused on *the writing of abstracts*. We found the majority of the abstracts we read were not effectively written and perhaps this led to our misunderstanding of the use of CRT and the study designs. For example, we surprisingly found that some abstracts had not been updated from what was written during the proposal phase, meaning we were reading the proposal abstract (e.g., I will study; I will recruit participants). We found others were overly filled with literature and lacking in substance about the proposed study design offering the reader more of a mini-literature review than an intriguing insight as to what would follow. We also found unclear terms to describe the data used or the methods applied making it difficult to determine if the author had done a case study or a narrative analysis. Finally, we saw varied lengths and little structure to support the reader in understanding and identifying what the dissertation was about, what was done, and what the results were.

This wide variety of abstract writing led us to wonder: Are EdD students being taught how to properly write an abstract, one that is reflective of their study and inclusive of the necessary components that support the reader's understanding? According to Tullu (2019), "The 'abstract' needs to be simple, specific, clear, unbiased, honest, concise, precise, stand-alone, complete, scholarly, (preferably) structured, and should not be misrepresentative" (p. S12). In other words, the abstract should be what the American Psychology Association (APA) Publication Manual 7th Edition (2020) explained as "a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the paper" which is often the "first contact" with the research and often determines if one will read the piece (p. 73). In this space of 250 words, scholarly practitioners are asked to provide coherent and concise language about their studies. Seeing that we found the majority of abstracts did not clearly provide an understanding of the

study, then we wondered if students were not properly being taught to communicate with various audiences the work that they have done or if they had been given the scholarly tools of APA writing relative to abstract construction.

Next Steps

The themes and questions generated from this early analysis guides the next two aspects of our larger research project. We have used these preliminary findings to develop a set of interview questions that allow us to conduct a deeper exploration into the experiences of the five dissertation authors. Currently, the researchers have found and interviewed four of the five authors and are analyzing these data. The aim of these interviews is to gain a more nuanced understanding of how these former students:

- were taught or learned about CRT and how to apply it theoretically,
- applied CRT to frame their applied research studies, and
- have transferred the theoretical aspects of CRT and their applied dissertations into practical and continued application in their chosen vocation (namely K-20 leadership).

Our goals for the next iterations of the study are to develop individual cases for each of the four authors. We will then conduct a cross-case analysis seeking to produce additional findings that can support the teaching of CRT in EdD programs.

SIGNIFICANCE

In a time when CRT remains both critical and threatened, we initially anticipated the research results from both our early findings and our larger study would support students and faculty engaged in EdD programs in learning how to use CRT in the dissertation experience. In particular, we hope these preliminary findings stress the importance of combining CRT with applied research methodologies to support educational leaders in building better practices for addressing equity issues in their educational settings beyond their EdD programs. In these early findings, we hope to shed light on the complicated nature of introducing CRT into professional practice doctoral programs, particularly if the intent is to help marginalized populations. We seek to share findings with EdD faculty / colleagues about the need for providing clear, practical applications of CRT in educational spaces. We believe these findings may better enable scholarly practitioners and the faculty who guide these students, to employ the tools necessary to withstand the attack under which CRT has found itself in an effort to truly create equitable and sustainable leadership environments.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study examined the intersection of K-20 educational leadership, CRT, and the dissertation experience as a means to understand how CRT scholarly work translates into applied work in practice among EdD graduates. Initially, we sought to simply understand the usage of CRT and its application in EdD dissertations in the context of the blistering and unwarranted attack CRT finds itself facing. However, our analysis led to us uncovering findings that will help us shape our work with scholarly practitioners and our programs in general. For example, while often the abstract may be considered by some an afterthought, especially after having penned a more substantive dissertation in practice; from our vantage point, we saw an even greater importance on helping students craft an effective abstract. After all, the abstract was for us and was for many readers of our students' research, the first glimpse of the work; the *front porch* if you will for the remainder of the work. And as such, this first glimpse needs to showcase the scholarly practitioner's work effectively and accurately rather than come across as an afterthought. In addition, this preliminary study has caused us to reflect on program design and how theoretical frames are presented to students, and even more so this work has allowed us to reflect upon how we would provide students with an understanding of what the EdD journey could be and what it should entail. It is our hope that this exploratory study will provide you space to reflect upon practices as you operate either as faculty supporting scholarly practitioners or as a scholarly practitioner yourself. Abstracts have tremendous value as does the framework of CRT; it is our hope this study spurs both scholarly thought and discussion as you seek to infuse actionable outcomes and sustainable change in the American education system. We must tell our own story; if not us—then who?

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