Engaging the Community Through a Consultancy-Based Group Practicum

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ABSTRACT

Upon discovering inequities and foundational issues with the previous practicum projects completed individually by each EdD student, Frostburg State University transformed its practicum into a consultancy-based group project that students complete remotely. In this revised experience, student teams respond to problems of practice as presented by community partners within diverse educational settings. This article explicates the structure, format, and process of the new practicum experience, describes how it aligns with CPED's guiding principles for program design, and provides rich benefits for EdD students and local educational organizations. We also explain how we have continued to revise the practicum to address challenges that have arisen.

KEYWORDS
EdD practicum, field-based learning opportunities, collaboration, community engagement

Frostburg State University (FSU) launched its EdD in Educational Leadership program in 2012. The program utilizes a cohort model, admitting one cohort of up to 25 students per year, and initially alternated the cohort location between main campus and a satellite campus. Students enroll in one of our four specializations: higher education leadership, PK12 leadership, adult and professional learning facilitation, and leadership in health professions education. We consider the collaborative cohort model to be our signature pedagogy (Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate [CPED], 2021) and incorporate collaborative learning activities throughout the program. Our students are diverse in many ways, including age and stage of career, site of practice, race, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Some of our students are early career, and although they have leadership qualities (e.g., time management, conflict negotiation, ability to inspire, ideation, work toward shared goals), they do not yet hold formal leadership roles within their workplaces. Other students are in positions of senior leadership. About two-thirds of our students work in higher education; the remaining one-third is comprised of individuals in PK12 school systems, nonprofits, and other organizations. Some of our students are in extremely rural contexts, whereas others live and work in urban locales including Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

From the inception of the program, students have been required to complete two practicum experiences. Each practicum is a three-credit course taken at the end of the second year and the beginning of the third year, concurrent with dissertation credits. In its original configuration, the practicum was an individualized experience that was designed and directed by each student. Each student proposed a project within their current workplace to practice the leadership skills learned in the program. They were assessed primarily by a series of reflections, and at the end of the experience, someone from the workplace or site of the practicum signed off to confirm that the goals had been met.

This model, however, was problematic in several ways. First, some students proposed projects that were already within their job descriptions, but the practicum instructor had no mechanism to know whether the project was beyond the tasks in the student's job description. As program faculty, we did not ensure that these projects aligned with our learning outcomes or led to student growth. If they wanted to do a practicum outside of their workplaces, students were limited by their existing networks. Some students had access to senior leaders who were willing to mentor the students through meaningful projects. Other students lacked access to these sorts of mentors or, due to hegemonic power structures, were afraid to ask for an opportunity, leading to inequitable practicum experiences. Additionally, a solo practicum was dissonant with our signature pedagogy, and indeed, our foundational belief that leadership should not be a solo enterprise.

In 2018, a confluence of events led the program faculty to consider the transformation of the existing practicum experience. The inaugural program director retired from the program, and Heather was appointed as the program director. Concurrently, university administration decided that the program should transition to a fully online modality for the upcoming 2020 cohort, which led the faculty to consider thoughtfully how a signature pedagogy of a collaborative cohort could be enacted in a mostly asynchronous online space. The new program director also attended her first CPED convening; our program had been a CPED member since 2014, but we had not engaged in any program redesign to align with CPED's guiding principles for program design. Throughout the convening and afterward, Heather found herself thinking about the fourth principle: that the program "provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions" (CPED, 2021, para. 5). She began to wonder what field-based opportunities our students had and how the practicum might be redesigned to provide these opportunities to students who otherwise might lack them.

FIELD-BASED OPPORTUNITIES IN DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

Although several articles cite the fourth CPED principle, few explicate how they are incorporating or providing "field-based opportunities." For instance, Kochhar-Bryant (2017) mentions "*authentic* field-based settings" (p. 7, emphasis added) but does not explain what constitutes a field-based setting or in what ways a field-based setting is more or less authentic. Most articles seem to assume that the field-based settings are the students' places of work, such as Amrein-Beardsley et al. (2012), who list "workplace-focused research" (p. 99) as a design feature of their program and later refer to this research as "fieldwork" and "action research in the field" (p. 106). Similarly, Buss (2018) conceptualizes the problem of practice as presenting in a practitioner's workplace setting; in describing laboratories of practice, he argues that "students should be afforded opportunities for theory, inquiry, and practice to come together in productive ways in workplace settings" (p. 24).

Our experiences with our students have led us to trouble the conflation of field-based opportunities and workplace settings. First, our students have indicated in focus group data that they are applying what they learn in the program to settings well beyond their workplaces, such as their volunteer roles in community organizations. Second, some of our students have expressed fears of losing their jobs or facing other serious repercussions for engaging in inquiry in their workplaces, as they have shared in class discussions and focus group data; these concerns are heightened for those in contractual or contingent roles. Third, some of our students do not have a consistent workplace; during their time in the program, they may accept a new position, be laid off, or transition into a new role. Fourth, we as faculty generally do not have access to our students' workplaces, limiting our capacity for assessing and intervening.

Literature describing practicum for EdD students is extremely sparse. Boyce (2012) outlines a "supervised practicum at their local worksites" (p. 28); in these practica, students develop and implement action plans to address problems of practice in their workplaces through a solo project, although they do engage in collaborative brainstorming with their cohort. However, she does not clarify how these practica experiences are supervised. Lambrev and Cruz (2021) describe a practicum course in their EdD program situated in students' third semester of the program. In this course, students investigate "a real-world educational practice or program [that is used as the basis as a pilot study for the dissertation and that engages] the theoretical and research-based content learned in the previous semesters" (p. 570). Kochhar-Bryant (2017) provides a brief description of an apprenticeship program in which students apply knowledge and skills acquired during their coursework to a problem of practice through a project that is "designed to be of direct benefit in impacting a school system, organization, governmental agency, or community organization" (p. 7). This program requires "field-based research internships" (p. 9) in which students select and investigate a topic of interest; she then outlines the activities in which the students engage during the internship but does not clarify what the field-based setting is for these activities. We see an opportunity for CPED to engage its member institutions in sustained discussions about the field-based opportunities we offer our students beyond their workplaces at convenings, delegate meetings, and workshop discussions throughout the year.

Our practicum is in line with what Warren et al. (2016) describe as community-engaged scholarship (CES), in which "CES researchers work with school and community partners to design and conduct the research—from identifying questions to disseminating results—in order to produce findings directly relevant to advancing social change agendas" (p. 234). Warren et al. (2016) argue for the need for "respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between partners" and students (p. 237). However, our students' practicum projects expand beyond research to incorporate other skillsets acquired throughout the EdD program, such as strategic planning and policy evaluation.

OUR TRANSFORMED PRACTICUM

As we redesigned the practicum, we knew that we wanted it to provide field-based opportunities for our students to collaborate on problems of practice. We hoped to broaden our students' networks and skillsets while they concurrently did work that really matters in the world. Given that we are the only doctoral program at our university and within an 80-mile radius, we also imagined that the practicum would be an opportunity to challenge misconceptions some local educational leaders had about the EdD and our students, as these educators would see firsthand the strengths and capabilities of our students.

With these goals in mind, we created a consultancy-based group practicum that piloted in the summer of 2020 for our 2018 cohort. Beginning in the fall semester, we share a call for proposals for practicum projects with community partners, including PK12 school systems, institutions of higher education, and nonprofits. In the description, we share CPED guiding principles 3 ("provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships" [CPED, 2021]) and 4 (cited above). We then provide this explanation:

> In the practicum experience, which students complete at the beginning of their third year in the doctoral program, students work in teams as consultants to local educational organizations (which may include nonprofits and other nontraditional educational contexts) to use the skills developed throughout the doctoral program to help meet your needs. For example, our students could help your organization develop and submit a grant proposal, conduct a program or project evaluation, or

collect or apply empirical research to a problem of practice within your organization. Project proposals selected by the EdD program committee will be assigned three- or four-person teams of doctoral students, each of whom can allocate 113 hours to this project over the twelve-week summer session (May 30 to August 18, 2023).

Because our EdD students all work full-time, this project must be able to be completed outside of business hours, and the community partner liaison must be able to meet virtually via videoconference with the team for occasional evening meetings. (FSU, 2022)

We also include the timeline for the practicum projects.

Table 1. Sample Timeline for Practicum Experience

Monday, February 20, 2023	Proposals for Projects Due
Wednesday, March 1, 2023	EdD Committee Selects Projects to be Staffed
Wednesday, March 15, 2023	Students Notified of Prospective Projects
Late March 2023	Final Student Teams Determined
Late April 2023	Initial Meetings with Student Teams, Practicum Faculty Advisor, and Clients (Community Partners) Scheduled
Early June 2023	Memo of Understanding between Clients (Community Partners) and FSU Teams Developed and Signed
Early June 2023	Student Teams Begin Practicum Projects
Mid-August 2023	Students Complete Practicum Projects; Liaisons Submit Evaluations of Project Teams

We then ask the community partners to provide the following information in their proposals:

- Name of educational organization and website link
- Organization's contact person/liaison contact information
- One-paragraph overview of the project on which they would like our students' help
- Preliminary objectives for the project; final objectives will be co-constructed during initial communications between the project team, liaison, and practicum faculty advisor.

In addition to disseminating the call for proposals through mass email, the faculty members in the program listen attentively in discussions with other educational leaders for potential practicum projects and then solicit proposals from those individuals.

After the deadline has passed, the EdD program committee reviews and vets the proposals. In making its selections, the faculty consider the degree to which the proposal aligns with the learning outcomes of the program and the diversity in the proposals selected (in terms of the type of deliverables and the educational organizations).

In a meeting with the cohort, the practicum instructor shares and explains the selected project proposals. The students discuss and ask questions about these projects, and then, over the course of the next week, each student ranks their preferred projects. The program director and practicum instructor form teams to staff each project. Most students are assigned to their first choices, but occasionally, one project's popularity requires some to consequently be assigned to their second choices.

Before the start of the first twelve-week practicum, each student team meets via Microsoft Teams with the course instructor and the representative from the community partner. In these meetings, the goals and deliverables for the practicum project are explained, clarified, and honed. These meetings lay the groundwork for the team and the community partner to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) at the very start of the practicum.

PRACTICUM PROCESS

The instructor schedules a synchronous class session for the entire cohort during the first week of the summer term to assist the students in getting organized and underway in their assigned projects. The synchronous class session is designed to review the structure and content of the course and familiarize the students with key aspects of the client-consultant-instructor relationship. The students are informed that they will be working very closely and independently with their client, typically with only minimal direct involvement of the instructor. Lastly, the student groups are tasked with accomplishing several vital next steps in the group consultancy process within the next week.

First, each group is asked to identify a team lead, who will serve as the single source of contact with the client to facilitate communication, and a scribe, who will take and post notes of the group's internal discussions and post them in the group's assigned channel in the Microsoft Teams site for the Practicum I course. Each team also selects a back-up team lead who can assume responsibility for communicating with the client in the absence of the team lead as occasionally happens due to unforeseen circumstances or planned absences.

Second, the instructor thoroughly reviews the MOU that each group is expected to complete with the assistance of its client. Care is taken to ensure that the students understand that the MOU should contain the project's deliverables and the proposed timeline for completing the project during the twelve-week term. The template for the MOU is provided in the course site, and the client, each student member of the team, and the instructor must all sign the MOU for it to be complete. All involved with the project can access the MOU in the group's Teams channel.

Third, each group is asked to schedule a meeting with its client within one week's time to formally begin the practicum project. The instructor usually attends as well to get a sense of how communication and expectations are developing between the student group and their client at this important early point. During that meeting, the client learns who the team lead is and typically shares additional details about the project and the expected project deliverables, explains the resources that will be provided to assist the group, and answers any questions the group may have.

The groups then begin their projects, knowing that they may reach out to the instructor at any time for guidance or assistance. To date, most groups have worked very independently, interacting regularly with their clients, sometimes on a weekly basis. Notes of internal group discussions and materials provided to the groups by the client are uploaded into the appropriate Teams channel so that the instructor can follow the groups' progress. Early in the class, the students are required to read several articles (e.g., Twomey, 2017; White, 2017) that review projects completed by doctoral student groups at another CPED-member institution to clarify what a group-consultancy project can entail and reaffirm the CPED (2021) Principles.

EVALUATION OF THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

By its nature, the practicum experience is a different kind of course than our doctoral students are used to in that they will be working as consultants and interacting more closely and regularly with the community partner for whom they are consulting than with the course instructor. The practicum course is graded on a pass/non-pass basis, and although the students have a few focused assignments to complete for the instructor, the primary evaluation of their efforts is based on their clients' level of satisfaction with the group's work.

One of the primary means by which the student groups are evaluated in the course is the information the groups and the community partner share in a dedicated team channel in Microsoft Teams throughout the practicum term. Other evaluative means are also utilized to assess how the students are performing both individually and collectively as a working group. At three points in the practicum term, each student is asked to complete a Pulse Check and a Teamwork Evaluation. The Pulse Check solicits their views on how well they think they are working as an individual who is part of a group. The Teamwork Evaluation helps pinpoint possible issues between group members as well as between the group and its community partner. The instructor monitors scores for each student and group and reaches out to individual students and/or groups if their scores indicate potential issues or problems interfering with the completion of the project. Such contacts are made only after the instructor confirms that the individual or team lead desires assistance. In all cases, confidentiality is maintained by the instructor, whose role is to help facilitate the practicum experience for both the students and their community partners, bearing in mind that the nature of the consulting experience may be a new one for some or most of the parties involved.

Midway in the term, the instructor contacts each community partner via email to ask for their sense of how their student group is doing in meeting the project timeline and goals for the project. They follow up on any issues brought to light if the client approves of that course of action.

The students complete several assignments for the practicum class. To equip students with knowledge they may not possess and which may be useful during their practicum experiences, the students are required to create an account on the university's *GrantForward* site; students choose a topic in which they are interested, complete a search using *GrantForward* for relevant grants for which they might apply, and provide evidence of their successful use of *GrantForward* to the instructor. At the conclusion of the term, each student writes a reflection paper on the learning they gained from serving in a consultancy role and the extent to which the practicum experience fulfilled the course learning objectives, which are based on CPED's (2021) Guiding Principles.

The main task completed by each student group is a virtual presentation of the group's findings and recommendations, the products of the consultative work performed by the group, and culminating experience of the first practicum experience. The group's recommendations constitute their proposed solution(s) to the client's problem of practice. Often, the community partner invites key leaders in its home organization to attend the presentation so that they too can learn about the work that has been accomplished by the student consulting team. For instance, the student team might brief an organization's board of directors or, in the case of projects done for Frostburg State University's College of Education, the college dean, associate dean, and the appropriate department chair. Afterward, each team provides a written report of its findings to the community partner and the course instructor, in keeping with the standard protocol and procedure for a consulting project.

TYPES OF PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES

A. Practicum I (2020-2022)

Since the change to the consultancy-based group practicum model was implemented in the summer of 2020, three cohorts of students (39 students total) have completed Practicum I, in which all participants were required to participate as a member of a group. In those three years, the student groups completed 11 practicum projects, each of which represented a problem of practice for a community partner. The purpose and focus of the projects can be classified as follows:

- Research and data analysis (6)
- System and process improvement (3)
- Feasibility study (2)

Some practicum projects have extended into the second practicum term with either a continuation of the original project goal or the addition of a second and related project. More information on Practicum II experiences follows.

Table 2. Detailed Information about Practicum Projects by Summer

Frostburg State University Practicum I Consultancy-Based Group Projects Summers 2020-2022	
Summer 2020	
Project: Analyze program data to determine impact of the FSU University Promoting Awareness of Literacy Skills (PALS) program **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** FSU's University PALS program offered by the College of Education at the University System of Maryland Hagerstown (USMH) campus. **Goal:** The director would like to have a team analyze the data sets to demonstrate how access to learning, books, and support throughout the summer can help decrease the real effects of summer loss in connection to reading levels.
Project: Clarify, refine, and advance client's research agenda on HUB program efficacy **Group:** 3 students	**Community Partner:** FSU's The HUB@USMH and The HUB@Wolfsville (early childhood program to enhance school readiness of students and their parents) **Goal:** The project directors are looking for doctoral students to assist in the project's research agenda that includes: preK and kindergarten readiness, parent understanding of the preK and kindergarten standards, and grant goal achievement.

Project:	Community Partner: FSU's College of Education Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Accreditation Project Team
Conduct focus groups with graduates and employers and analyzing data to determine program strengths and weaknesses **Group:** 3 students	**Goal:** The College of Education accreditation team would like a team to conduct focus groups with recent graduates and employers of our graduates to determine areas of strength and weakness in candidate preparation for their field of study.
Summer 2021	
Project: Conduct focus groups with recent graduates and employers of graduates of the Initial Certification and Advanced MEd certification to determine areas of strength and weakness in candidates' preparation for their field of study **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** FSU's College of Education CAEP Accreditation Project Team **Goal:** The College of Education accreditation team would like a Doctoral Practicum group to continue the work of the previous cohort conducting focus groups with recent graduates and employers of our graduates of the Initial Certification and Advanced MEd certification programs in the summer of 2021 to determine areas of strength and weakness in candidate preparation for their field of study.
Project: Develop strategic marketing plan for the Office of Graduate Services **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** FSU's Office of Graduate Services **Goal:** The Office of Graduate Services needs assistance in designing and developing a marketing strategic plan for the institution's graduate program offerings.
Project: Conduct DEI audit of HGI policies and practices **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** Horizon Goodwill Industries (HGI) Hagerstown, MD **Goals:** Develop an evaluation strategy to include analysis of HGI policies and practices with an equity lens, interviews with HGI staff and Board of Directors to evaluate current experiences with the organization and commitment to engage in this process, and analysis of Goodwill International DEI tool kit and other available resources; utilize data obtained to prepare an action plan for organizational change to center DEI at core of HGI values.
Project: Research feasibility of creating an entrepreneurship incubator to promote growth of small businesses in western Maryland **Group:** 3 students	**Community Partner:** Maryland Small Business Development Center (SBDC) western region, hosted at FSU **Goals:** Study feasibility of SBDC creating an entrepreneurship incubator to promote growth of small businesses in western Maryland; explore funding options through grant funding.
Summer 2022	
Project: Conduct focus groups with recent graduates and employers of graduates of the Initial Certification programs to determine (1) the satisfaction of employers and (2) the satisfaction of completers **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** FSU College of Education CAEP Accreditation Project Team **Goals:** The College of Education accreditation team would like a Doctoral Practicum group to continue the work of the previous cohorts conducting focus groups with employers (principals) of our recent graduates of the Initial Certification programs to determine areas of strength and weakness in candidate preparation for their field of study. The Department of Educational Professions collects survey data from completers and employers 1-year post-graduation and 3 years post-graduation. The focus group data would corroborate the student perception surveys.
Project: Conduct research to determine the feasibility and desirability of a name change for The Greater Cumberland (MD) Foundation **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** The Greater Cumberland Foundation, Cumberland, MD **Goal:** The student team would help the host organization determine whether it would be appropriate for the organization to change its name to one that is more compelling, inclusive, and evocative of the organization's mission, which has evolved over time. The team would consider and present name change options and lay out a process and timeline for the change, if approved, to occur.
Project: Develop a strategic plan for managing all of the different grants administered by Eastern West Virginia Community & Technical College **Group:** 3 students	**Community Partner:** Eastern West Virginia Community & Technical College **Goals:** In creating the strategic plan, develop a timeline grid showing all grants and the reporting dates; Since grants are managed by various departments (Academics, workforce, finance) it would be helpful to have one master record of all grants and the resources required for effective grant management.
Project: Collect, analyze, and present data about young children and families in Allegany County **Group:** 4 students	**Community Partner:** Allegany County (MD) Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) **Goal:** ECAC has conducted surveys of families in its service region and needs the collected data to be tallied, analyzed, summarized, and presented to the council.

The Second Practicum (2020-2022)

During the second practicum experience, students can continue their practicum projects from Practicum I or investigate new community partners for their second practicum experience. It is important to note that the program committee does not identify new practicum experiences for Practicum II; the practicum students must identify and secure their experiences before the semester begins. For students who decide to extend their Practicum I experience, the outline follows the same. However, during the Fall 2022 semester, the Pulse Check was revised to now require students to self-select how course competencies were utilized or develop during their Practicum II experience. The competencies for Practicum II are:

- Acted ethically and professionally during the practicum experience
- Strived for equity in educational opportunities in the practicum experience
- Provided and/or implemented culturally responsive practices in the practicum
- Developed communication and collaboration during the practicum experience
- Integrated both practical and research knowledge that can be linked to systemic and systematic inquiry during the practicum experience.

Students also had the ability to make note of any difficulties during their practicum experience and request an emergency meeting with the instructor. We decided to make the previous changes to the Practicum II experience to reinforce our program's commitment to the CPED (2021) framework and our collective commitment to promoting harmonious human interactions that celebrate our common humanity and foster a campus community where we value and embrace our various socialized identities. As another requirement for competition of the course, practicum students are asked to submit a final reflection on their experience as consultants and provide suggestions based on the five course objectives to remove, continue, or improve the practicum experience. The next section uncovers problems that have been mentioned by students or we have encountered as faculty with the practicum experience.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The new consultancy-based group practicum was piloted during the summer of 2020 as the nation was in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic did not occlude our pilot, it significantly affected the capacity to submit project proposals for some potential community partners because organizations across the institution's service region, as in the nation, were largely operating remotely and some faced personnel shortages. As a result, all projects during the pilot year ended up being directly connected to the institution's College of Education, the home of the EdD program. In retrospect, that was fortuitous because the concept was new and societal conditions were especially challenging. Also, it proved valuable to pilot the concept with known community partners; all three clients were faculty in the Department of Educational Professions, in which the doctoral program also resides.

The pilot program provided compelling evidence of several key problems and issues to be recognized and avoided or at least minimized in the coming years. First, the students in the pilot year

found the twelve-week summer term challenging for completing their projects. Getting the teams organized and holding their initial meetings with their clients took the first several weeks of the term and meant that some teams had issues with completing their project tasks by the time the term ended. To address this problem, the practicum team revised the timeline for the submission and review of project proposals, calling for earlier actions so that student team formation and initial introductions to the community partners and their projects could occur during the spring semester. The student teams could then begin their projects as soon as the summer term commenced. It also served notice to community partners that they needed to have necessary materials ready to share with their student team as soon as the summer term began, because every day mattered.

As the use of the revised practicum model continued into the 2021 and 2022 academic years, the doctoral faculty issued the call for proposals earlier to allow potential clients ample time to consider and submit their project proposals for consideration. Receiving a sufficient number of project proposals to accommodate the size of the student cohort each year has been an annual concern, but it has not been a problem to date. However, we recently have begun to admit two cohorts per year, and additional project proposals will be necessary. Growth also means that the practicums will be offered over the entirety of the academic year, not solely in the summer and fall terms.

The second problem encountered in the pilot year was related to the nature of the problems of practice and the availability of the community partners to fulfill their obligations to work with the student teams in a timely way. In this area, two issues were noted. The first problem presented when the data needed by the student team to evaluate and formulate its recommendations was not made available by the community partner during the timeframe for the project. The student team could only provide a final report on the work that they would have completed had the project rolled out as intended. In a subsequent summer, another project was hindered because its two clients were both off for the summer and not in regular contact with one another. In both instances mentioned above, the practicum instructor quickly learned of the necessity of close work with the community partners, especially at the onset of the projects, to ensure that they are meeting their commitment to the student team. Feedback from the student teams on their progress is thus closely monitored, and if similar problems are mentioned, the instructor connects with the community partner to address the problem.

Entering into the pilot, some faculty and members of the EdD advisory group expressed concerns that some student participants might not pull their weight on the team. This has rarely happened to date but is a third problem. Students have communicated such issues to the instructor. When that has occurred, the instructor contacts the identified student to gently share the concern and to ask, if they agree that it is valid, what steps they will take to rectify the problem. This issue has never lasted for the entirety of a practicum term.

Finally, an issue that became clear during the summer pilot was the need for the instructor to engage with the instructor of the second practicum (held in the upcoming semester) to review progress on the projects that were underway and the likelihood that they would either continue into the second practicum or would be completed that term. In the case of the latter, the second practicum instructor would know to mentor those students wishing to work on a different project. Here, again, lead time has proven helpful to perform necessary

groundwork in advance of the start of the term so that ongoing projects can be continued without delay and new initiatives, whether solo or group activities, can be launched. This effort to coordinate between the first and summer practicums has become a standard operating procedure for the transformed practicum model.

The most significant threat to the sustainability of the transformed practicum project is having a sufficient number of diverse projects for each cohort, especially as our program is experiencing growth in terms of the number of enrolled students. We have only begun to explore possibilities outside of the traditional contexts of PK12 school systems and institutions of higher education, but given our newer specializations in Adult and Professional Learning Facilitation and Leadership in Health Professions Education, we need to build our networks in relevant contexts. We have come to realize that much of the work of attracting practicum proposals is relational, and we are most likely to generate a practicum proposal through individual contact with potential community partners, such as alumni of the program and the well of previous partners, who often connect us to others within their own networks. We have opportunities to create more visuals to share via social media (e.g., a short how-to video explaining the proposal process for a practicum project), to form a practicum advisory board with invested parties beyond program students and faculty, and to develop content regarding the practicum on our website.

CONCLUSIONS

Frostburg State University's EdD program has now used the transformed consultancy-based group practicum approach for its doctoral practicum experience for three years, and it has shown to be an impactful improvement over the previous approach. The advantages to the students are significantly greater, and of special note, the practicum now enables the doctoral program to collaborate with community partners who receive tangible benefits from having the student teams identify solutions to real-world problems of practice.

We have found that the transformed practicum is highly beneficial in providing real-world opportunities for students to operationalize CPED's (2021) guiding principles of promoting social justice, inclusion, and equity in diverse educational contexts. Although CPED's (2021) guiding principles are a primary focus of the doctoral classes and incorporated in course readings, discussions, and assignments, providing students the opportunity to apply their learning into practice within community settings increases its relevance and meaningfulness. A subsequent article is planned that will provide data about the impact of the consultancy-based group practicum. Several former practicum students and community partners will co-author the article with program faculty, and it will provide first-hand narrative accounts that attest to the value and impact of the experience from the student and client perspectives.

Our community partners have also benefited from the new practicum approach in several ways. First, participating organizations have used the student groups to address complex and vexing problems of practice that can advance the sponsoring organization in real ways. Students, at no cost to the community partner except an investment of time to guide the student work, address problems that the organization may have had difficulty doing using its internal resources alone. Working as consultants, the student teams provide solutions that carry great weight because they are objective and credible. It is common for student teams to present their findings and recommendations to organizational boards and leadership groups, which speaks highly of the quality of the work they have completed. We have been pleased to have several of our community partners participate for several years, a testament to the value the program provides to the community. As a bonus, those community partners share their experiences with others in the community, which helps lead to new partnerships through word-of-mouth.

The students also experience many advantages from transformed practicum model. Working in teams as consultants exposes students to a new role and enables them to make professional connections with their community partners. The experiences also permit the students to integrate what they have learned in their formal coursework, especially research, analysis, and problem-solving skills, into the processes used to identify solutions for their clients. The practicum helps students to better understand that their doctoral education has prepared them to improve practice in their professional setting because they have done so in the practicum.

Students also benefit from working in teams in a new way and with a different purpose than they have used previously in their classes. The program faculty feel that the practicum approach foreshadows and helps prepare students for the kind of work that the students are likely to do in their professional world. Also, the use of small groups provides several opportunities for the students to assume leadership roles. Although some of our students are already in formal leadership roles in their career, others are not, and the practicum provides an entrée for some students to assume a professional leadership role for the first time.

Lastly, the new practicum model provides both a capstone and transition experience for the students, coming as it does at the end of their formal coursework and prior to beginning the dissertation process. On many occasions, students have been able to use research methods they are considering using in their dissertation research in the practicum project. This early effort helps students learn how to use the methods and learn firsthand about how to use them most effectively. The practicum, then, helps equip and prepare the students for the dissertation journey.

In summary, the transformed practicum has become a key component of the FSU's EdD program. Each year, program faculty strive to identify ways to make the practicum experience even more beneficial to our students and community partners.

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