

Chapter 6

Educational Leaders and the Program Evaluation Dissertation with Logic Model

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains what educational evaluation is, why it makes sense to teach about evaluation (program, policy, and curricular) in educational leadership programs, information about two programs (the University of Rochester and Alabama State University) that have successfully incorporated evaluation dissertations, the components of an evaluation based dissertation that include a logic model, and other items to consider for those who are interested in implementing this type of dissertation into a professional practice doctorate program. Incorporating evaluation into doctoral coursework yields many benefits to students. Initially, it provides a real world based approach for teaching the rigorous research skills required for the eventual completion of a dissertation.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Doctor of Education degree (Ed.D.) is the practical application of the knowledge and skills earned during the program, which can then be used in the field of education. While this terminal degree may have either a research (which overlaps with the Doctorate of Philosophy) or a professional focus (which requires the ability to solve educational problems using existing knowledge) there exists debate about whether the Ed.D. provides practitioners with the scholarly experiences that create value as professionals (Jacobson, 2005; Redden, 2007) or if it contributes to “the danger that we achieve rigorous preparation neither for practice nor for research” (Shulman, Golde, Conklin Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006, p. 26). While there are many solutions that are being bandied about for this dilemma, some educational leadership doctoral programs have embraced the program evaluation dissertation as a means to provide practitioners with research skills that are rigorous and also relevant for those who plan to address problems in the field of education while they serve as practitioners. Drawing upon information

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1624-8.ch006

from two established programs from the University of Rochester and Alabama State University, this chapter describes the procedures involved in educational evaluation and why it makes sense to teach about evaluation (program, policy, and curricular) in educational leadership programs. It also elaborates on the necessary components of an evaluation based dissertation that include a logic model, and other items to consider for those who are interested in implementing this type of dissertation into a professional practice doctorate program.

BACKGROUND

Evaluation and Educational Leadership

Over the last twenty years, the need for evaluations in education have become common place (Kaufman, Guerra, & Platt, 2006) and an area that continues to grow as the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) requires both rigorous standards for educational research and evaluation to be applied to any program that receives federal funding (ESRA, 2002). Program evaluation has become a key tool for determining if educational interventions are effective (Clewell & Campbell, 2008). This has created a situation where school districts are charged with finding suitable program evaluators.

Social science research has always been concerned with social aspects of the human condition. This is also true for those in education. The emphasis that those in education place on educational interventions for school wide and individual student improvement pair nicely with evaluation because “program evaluation represents an adaption of social research methods to the task of studying social interventions so that sound judgments can be drawn about the social problems addressed, and the design, implementation, impact, and efficiency of programs that address those programs” (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 2). Unfortunately, too few P-12 educational professionals are trained in the systematic application of evaluation, which results in experts outside of education being called upon to evaluate educational programs. However, with an ever increasing number of school professionals seeking the Education Doctorate and 397 schools offering this degree (educationdegree.com, n.d.), there is an opportunity to fill this void with individuals who already work in school districts, provided that they receive training in evaluation, while completing their advanced education coursework (Ed.D.). Therefore, adding courses and practical experiences with evaluation to doctoral programs may be a means of rectifying this situation.

Incorporating evaluation into doctoral coursework yields many benefits to students. Initially, it provides a real world based approach for learning the rigorous research skills required for the eventual completion of a dissertation. Evaluation also allows students to consider curriculums, policies, and programs as each of these can be evaluated, which can increase the research options available to students based on their own interests. Evaluations can take one of three forms--a needs assessment, an implementation, or an impact study (Rossi et al., 2004; Shackman, 2008). Each type of evaluation has distinct purposes:

- “Needs assessment studies aim at determining the existence and extent of problems, typically among a segment of the population, such as the elderly. Cost-benefit studies determine whether the results of a program can be justified by its expense (both financial and other)” (Babbie, 2011, p. 8).
- An implementation evaluation is also known as a process evaluation and is “designed to determine whether the program is delivered as intended to the target recipients” (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 431).

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