


Chapter 2

Fit for Purpose: Conceptual Design for the EdD Program

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ABSTRACT

Using an illustrative case study, this chapter explores the two-year design process of a practice-based Doctor of Education degree program in an online university. Emerging from the continuous improvement lens, the redesign process centered around the examination of the purpose of the degree in the context of meeting the educational needs of practitioners in the field. Principally, this program redesign led to greater differentiation between the practitioner-based EdD degree and the PhD to provide students with distinct options for meeting their personal and professional goals.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the design thinking of the practice-based Doctor of Education (EdD) degree program in the context of degree purpose and how this process informed the differentiation, development, and revision of this doctoral degree program for one institution. Using an illustrative case study approach (Epler, 2019), this investigation provides an examination as to how these intersections informed the revision of the EdD degree and how this work prompted institutional conversations about applied doctoral degrees. The case study focuses on the experiences of one university, accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), that underwent an intensive two-year process intended to revise its EdD program. The School of Education (SOE) at the University developed a program geared toward the scholar-practitioner-leader through an objective examination of the former program through the lens of purpose, with assistance from the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) (2019) framework, using a backward design approach for the program development and redesign. By way of context, the University uses a 100% online instructional model tailored toward a diverse, working adult student population. The University serves over 11,000 students in total. Specifically, the SOE student body includes approximately 3,500, with over 50% of students enrolled in the EdD program, making the EdD degree the largest program in the School.

There has always been tension in the education community about the differences and similarities between the EdD and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in education degrees and which students would benefit from which programs (Hochbein & Perry, 2013; Robinson, 2018). Some institutions have gone the direction of eliminating their EdD in favor of the PhD because the PhD has a reputation for being a more rigorous and superior degree (Killham et al., 2018). However, national and international efforts are also underway by organizations such as the CPED to make this distinction between the PhD and EdD clearer and retool EdD programs to more effectively support inquiry as practice (Throne, 2012; Throne & Walters, 2019).

For many seeking doctoral degrees in the field of education, the EdD degree may be a better match than the PhD. Nonetheless, students must be convinced the degree will help them attain their personal and professional goals while overcoming the idea of the EdD as “less than” the PhD (Perry, 2013). Demand continues for doctoral-level degrees in the field of education attested by the more than doubling of the number of doctoral-level degrees awarded (PhD and EdD combined) in the United States between 2000 and 2018 (Snyder et al., 2019, Table 324.10).

The EdD is a practitioner-focused degree intended to prepare candidates as scholar-practitioner-leaders who utilize research for complex problem-solving within their scope of practice. In contrast, the PhD in education is to prepare researchers

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