



To Ed.D. or not to Ed.D.?

Universities are working intentionally to refashion Ed.D. and transform it into a degree that truly serves professional practitioners.

By Jill Alexa Perry

I'm a district assistant superintendent. My school board has told me they won't renew my contract in two years, and they won't promote me to superintendent unless I enroll in a doctorate program now. I literally have no choice. Does anyone really think I want to spend \$60,000 and four years getting a degree when I have kids at home? [For doctoral programs], I have to choose between one of two universities near me. Both have only Ed.D. programs, but, judging by the faculty obtuseness about real schools, will they discuss how to do RTI in a research-based way? Nope. They'd rather debate Habermas and Dewey. Not that there is anything wrong with that, but can they relate it to REAL schools and NCLB? Not if their life depended on it! They act as if their theoretical discussions are an end in themselves. And for that I'll have to pay \$60,000 to keep my job?

If I could get a similar level education to a medical doctor, I'd be pleased. But instead, I'll have to pay \$60,000 for a degree that may not have the same status in a few years and will be taught by people who know nothing about kids, their parents, testing, and classroom management. What I want is a degree that tells people (and especially my board) that I know a thing or two about how to apply research on teaching in our school district. The professors are the weak link because they fantasize about theory more than they help educators do their jobs better.
— Adapted from an anonymous post on Edweek.org

Sound familiar? Educational practitioners are continually faced with the dilemma of getting a doctorate that is little more than a title and a credential to save their jobs. They sacrifice time away from work and family and spend hard-earned money — because part-time students don't qualify for financial aid — to obtain a degree that won't enhance their skills or abilities and, at the very least, may expand their knowledge of research literature. They write dissertations that are heavily research focused and that they struggle to apply to their own practical setting and, as a result, these dissertations are frequently regarded as inferior because they're trying to satisfy too many means to get to the end.

As the writer above suggests, medical education as well as other professional education is much more focused and tailored to the needs of practice. Medical students work in hospitals with doctors to learn the skills necessary to treat patients. Surgeons learn to sew as part of the curriculum. Lawyers practice arguing and debating. Clergy learn to console. Engineers practice design. Students of education — whether they're receiving an Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) or a Doctorate of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D.) — rarely apply theoretical knowledge to practice settings. The result is a disconnect between the experience that a student actually has from what others think they have done. In the end, the student often has spent time and money for a credential that hasn't enhanced his or her practice.

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Time to change the status quo

In 2007, a consortium of 25 schools of education came together to transform doctoral education for practitioners. Twenty-seven more joined in 2010. The goal of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) was to redesign the degree to make it the highest-quality degree for the advanced preparation of school practitioners and clinical faculty, academic leaders, and professional staff for the nation's schools and colleges and the organizations that support them. This grassroots effort, led by faculty and student-practitioners, has resulted in game-changing definitions and designs of professional preparation in education.

The debate

Harvard University has focused a spotlight on the two degrees with its recent decision to retitle its 90-year-old Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) to a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.). The discussion about which degree will best prepare practitioners for the PK-20 field is a debate as old as the Ed.D. itself. Although academics have researched the type of students who pursue each degree, their career ambitions, the number and type of courses taken during their preparation, and the subjects of their dissertations, they still haven't reached a consensus about the distinction between the two degrees. Nor have they clarified a consistent view about the purpose and goals of the education doctorate. Some schools of education have identified the Ed.D. as a research degree, while others define it as a professional degree. The lack of consensus and clarity has resulted in the Ed.D. being referred to as a Ph.D.-lite.

The education doctorate's murky beginnings at Harvard College in 1921 ensured a long struggle to gain legitimacy as a professional degree. Henry Holmes, dean of Harvard's newly established Graduate School of Education, created the degree to "mark [the school's] separation from the faculty of Arts and Sciences" and to "train the [school] leaders" (Powell, 1980, p. 144). However, most of the education faculty came from Arts and Sciences and courses offered mirrored Ph.D. instruction — with statistical and research courses. Dissertations were research heavy as well, though topics tended to be more focused on practical schooling issues.

In 1934, Teachers College's Dean William Fletcher Russell realized that the Ph.D. did not serve the continued education of teachers who would remain in practice. (His father, James Earl Russell, had started the Ph.D. at Teachers College in 1893.) Russell established the Ed.D. in reaction to the Harvard degree and offered coursework "covering issues common to workers in the educational field"

such as "educational administration, guidance, and curriculum and instruction" (Cremin, 1978, pp. 15-16). The final project reports were to cover topics beyond those of the Ph.D. dissertation and often included investigations of curriculum development and administrative and institutional reform issues.

Between 1925 and 1940, many institutions, including the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University, followed Holmes and Russell in establishing schools of education and offering both degrees. Stanford adopted the Ed.D. as a means to gain independence from the graduate faculty of Arts and Sciences and used the degree to prepare university researchers. Berkeley sought to do the same with its Ed.D., but could not gain freedom from Arts and Sciences. In these cases, the Ed.D. competed with research doctorates in the schools of Arts and Sciences that focused on education in areas as diverse as philosophy and economics. That challenged the knowledge base of the doctorate in education.

At the University of Michigan, the Graduate School of Education sought to train practitioners in response to "city, state, and federal officials" who called upon the university to produce more manpower to run schools. (Clifford & Guthrie, 1990, p. 72). The result was an influx of young men pursuing credentials that would help them climb the professional ladder in education and gain increased administrative powers in schools and districts.

By the mid 1900s, the Ed.D. had been assigned many roles — liberator from constraining Arts and Sciences requirements; professional preparation credential; entrance into the ivy halls of academia — by schools and colleges of education that were trying to establish themselves within the university as professional schools. As a result, the Education Doctorate has faced many challenges to becoming the terminal degree that prepares professional practitioners in education. Over the next 80 years, more than 20 academic studies examined the design and outcomes of both the Ed.D. and Ph.D. at many institutions, but never sought to distinguish or clarify the two.

Reframing the debate

After the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate came together in 2007, the consortium spent three years examining the Ed.D. starting with the end in mind — the graduate. The consortium asked this basic question: *What knowledge, skills, and dispositions should professionals working in education possess and be able to use?*

CPED's basic premise has been that education schools need to:

- Differentiate between the outcomes and expectations for doctoral candidates — those who



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choose to become professional practitioners (Ed.D.) and those who want to do research and teach in academic institutions (Ph.D.), and

- Develop preparation programs for those who wish to become leading scholarly practitioners with skills that better align with the needs of PK-20 schools.

Essentially, CPED has taken the debate in another direction with the goal of uniting the Ed.D. with fellow professional degrees such as the M.D. (Doctor of Medicine), the DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice), and the Pharm.D. (Doctor of Pharmacy).

Building on the work of the Council of Graduate School's 2005 Task Force on Professional Preparation, CPED members redefined the Ed.D. to reflect its purpose of preparing practitioners. The new definition states, "The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession."

CPED's definition of the Ed.D. underscores the belief that professional preparation in education requires practical and theoretical preparation to give practitioners the habits of hand, heart, and mind to affect educational practice. That preparation includes the study of problems of practice with both a theoretical and a practical lens. This definition also suggests that intentional preparation will transform current practitioners into "scholarly practitioners," leaders who blend practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice; leaders who use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice; leaders who disseminate their work in multiple ways, and have an obligation to resolve problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals.

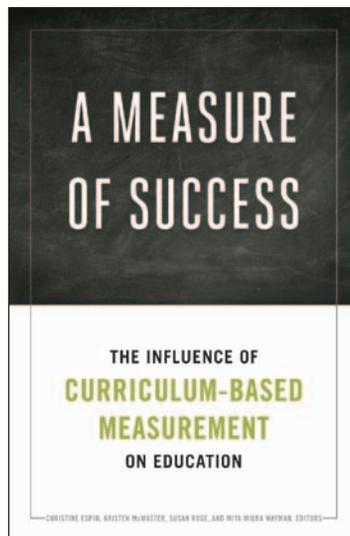
Unlike other professions where preparation is prescriptive, the CPED consortium asserts that professional practice preparation in education must be purposeful as well as fluid. As the needs in PK-20 change, the preparation of leaders at all levels of the field should also change. Further, CPED members agree no one-size-fits-all model of preparation will meet the diverse needs found

throughout the country and the public education system. Instead, CPED identified six principles to guide the design of new Ed.D. programs. These principles state that professional preparation for the education doctorate:

1. Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice;
2. Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities;
3. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships;
4. Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions;
5. Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry; and
6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice.



A new proposed definition of the Ed.D.: "The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession."



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Incorporating these principles in graduate programs should ensure that Ed.D. candidates graduate with a big toolbox to help them address the high-leverage problems facing schools. An example is the dissertation. Many graduates of both Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs nationwide have complained for years about the futility of writing a dissertation that they'll never again use. CPED argues that a "dissertation in practice" should be the culminating experience that demonstrates the scholarly practitioner's ability to solve problems of practice and exhibits the doctoral candidate's ability "to think, to perform, and to act with integrity" (Shulman, 2005). This work should be grounded in practice and it should position graduates to be transformational leaders in their professional career. In other words, the dissertation should be useful and affect practice.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate

CPED has engaged over 50 colleges and schools of education to work together to undertake a critical examination of the doctorate in education through dialogue, experimentation, critical feedback, and evaluation. The intent of the project is to collaboratively redesign the Ed.D. and make it a stronger and more relevant degree for the advanced preparation of school practitioners and clinical faculty, academic leaders, and professional staff for the nation's schools and colleges and the learning organizations that support them.

At the web site, select the CPED Consortium tab to find a page that lists CPED member institutions and descriptions of their doctoral programs.

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<http://cpedinitiative.org>

Implications

What does this all mean in the real and messy world of education? First, a bit of clarification: The anonymous author of the introductory quote was responding to an *Education Week* article that expressed concern for the survival of the Ed.D. after the Harvard Graduate School of Education announced that it would rename its 90-year-old Education Doctorate to a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.). Harvard has not eliminated the Ed.D. Instead, Harvard has created a new program, the Doctorate of Education in Leadership, which is a practitioner-focused Ed.D. Neither degree has been given less importance; rather, they have been categorized so students will receive the correct training for their future career — as a researcher (Ph.D.) or a practitioner (Ed.D.). Harvard's actions are not a precursor to the elimination of the Ed.D. by any means. Rather, the university has strengthened the work done by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate.

Second, Harvard's moves and the work of CPED are for educational practitioners. Schools and colleges of education are increasingly recognizing that their role in improving the U.S. education system is one of preparing leaders who are armed with knowledge, skills, and the moral imperative to be change agents and to affect practice at all levels. This means stronger and more relevant Ed.D. programs. CPED will support this by researching its designs and disseminating its discoveries about program designs and change processes so that all colleges and universities can rethink and redesign their Ed.D. degrees to prepare highly qualified practitioners.

For practitioners who are confused and want a program that provides more than a credential, the Ed.D. is the degree you want. There are existing programs that can provide you with strong skills, knowledge, and experiences that will help you transform practice. These programs come in a variety of forms — executive model, online, hybrid — and are generally highly-focused, three-year programs that respect the time and funds of their students.

When CPED began, the National Research Council noted that some 142 graduate schools of education awarded both the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. with little differentiation between the preparation of future university faculty and researchers and that of leading practitioners. Having two degrees with dual purposes has long perpetuated misconceptions about the quality of doctoral preparation in education and has contributed to the low status of the education profession in comparison to other professions. The CPED consortium has brought together more than 50 of these institutions in an effort to differentiate between the outcomes and expectations for doctoral candidates — those who choose to become professional practitioners (Ed.D.) and can apply theoretical and practical knowledge to solving problems of practice and those who want to do research and teach in academic institutions (Ph.D.). In doing so, the consortium aims to not only improve the status of the profession but also to better address the needs of practitioners who are faced with ever changing schools and diverse needs of children. ■

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