Beyond a Definition: Designing and Specifying Dissertation in Practice (DiP) Models

Process and Product
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"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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Authors Note

This document provides a summary of innovative Dissertation in Practice (DiP) models currently being considered or implemented by CPED Phase I institutions (Appendix A: Phase I Membership, 2007-2010). It also provides concise design summary details of the key elements in the DiP. Although the CPED working principles and concept definitions are in common, the developed DiP design model framework grounded in CPED-FIPSE\(^1\) research clearly illustrates that CPED EdD programs are diverse in both program structure and/or capstone product design. Therefore, the presented DiP framework serves as a basis for new developments in DiPs\(^2\) as they occur, and has benefited from extensive comments from colleagues in response to initial consultations.

Faculty, doctoral supervisors and doctoral candidates should view this document as (1) a reference text; (2) an overview of DiP design models; (3) an explanation of key concepts that distinguish the DiP, (4) a catalyst for viewing individual institution’s CPED web pages, and (5) a resource for locating the appropriate contact information for CPED PI’s to address specific questions.

Inevitably, there will be diverse reasons for consulting this document, and we hope that readers find it useful for their need. Therefore, for your benefit, the authors have added Section 4 (frequently asked questions) and Section 5 (resources and publications).

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\(^1\) A $700,000 grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Secondary Education (FiPSE) enable 18 teams of two researchers to travel to 21 CPED institutions to gather data for CPED-FiPSE research study—a mixed methods, multi-case study to document the success of initial efforts to redesign the Education Doctorate (EdD). The 35-member team consisted of faculty from CPED institutions who engaged in the redesign of their own EdD programs and CPED Research Fellows who were current students or recent graduates of EdD programs (CPED Press Release, February, 2012).

\(^2\) CPED-FiPSE researchers asked individual students and a Student Focus Group in all Phase 1 institutions to describe their dissertation in practice (CPED-FiPSE Student Protocol & Student Focus Group Protocol, 2012).
Introduction

The doctorate is the highest level of academic qualification and is recognized internationally as an award of academic excellence. As (re) designed EdD programs transition it is, of course, vital that doctoral standards are maintained, and that all programs are perceived as rigorous, consistent, and focused on high expectations. In particular it is important to ensure that the concept of the “contribution to knowledge” is upheld in our assessment processes and practices. For an EdD, rigor should be measured by the degree of impact the doctoral research generates and sustains for individuals and society. It is also important that the results are pragmatic and contain rich meaning for professional practice locally and broadly. The aim being that the practitioner becomes a scholar with the intent to develop generative knowledge that has immediate impact and promotes sustainable change.

The capstone product of (re) designed EdD programs commonly known within CPED as the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is conceptualized as a scholarly document that demonstrates a student’s ability to conduct research on a problem within a local context. Murphy (2014) criticizes the lack of a common definition of a DiP and expresses concern regarding the purpose, relevance, and impact of a DiP arguing that without clear operational definitions, research remains opaque. Archbald suggests that the EdD DiP should have a distinctive format that demonstrates “developmental efficacy” and “community benefit”, as well as the preservation of “intellectual stewardship” by demonstrating intellectual and methodological rigor.

The aim of this document is to address the above concerns by:

- Developing a DiP model framework;
- Defining model elements with reference to DiP literature exemplified by Phase 1 CPED institution; and
- Summarizing the process for each identified DiP model to encourage quality products.

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3 Taylor & Sanders, 2014
4 Storey, Caskey, Dolan, Hesbol, Marshal & Maughan, 2014
5 Bridges & Hallinger, 1995
6 Shulman, 2010
7 Dawson & Kumar, 2014
8 Keynote Speech, CPED Spring Convening, Denver, Colorado, 2014
9 Archbald, 2008, p. 704
Section 1

Foundational Nomenclature and Definitions

1. Guiding Principles and Design Concepts

1.1. Vision
To transform the EdD (referred to as a Professional Practice Doctorate within the CPED Consortium) into the degree of choice for preparing the next generation of education practitioners. Especially, to assist those who will generate new knowledge and scholarship about educational practice (or related policies), and will have responsibility for stewarding the education profession. In addition, to redesigning all aspects of EdD programs including: curriculum, assessments, admissions, research methodology, committee makeup, capstone project (dissertation, portfolio, etc.).

1.2. Mission
To improve the efficacy and reliability of the professional doctorate in education for the advanced preparation of school practitioners, clinical faculty, academic leaders, professional staff for the nation’s schools, through strategic transformations grounded in colleges and the learning organizations that support academic leaders.

To this end, the Consortium does not offer a prescription for professional practice preparation programs, however the grounding of programs on CPED working principles is encouraged to ensure program consistency and rigor. We honor the local context of the school of education as well as those constituents who are served by CPED member programs.

1.3. Goal
[To] collaboratively redesign the EdD and to make it a stronger and more relevant degree for the advanced preparation for school practitioners and clinical faculty, academic leaders and professional staff for the nation’s schools and colleges and the learning organizations that supports them.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10}Perry, J., 2012.
Graduate Scholarly Practitioners:

- Merge practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice;
- Use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice;
- Disseminate their work in multiple ways; and
- Resolve problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals;\(^\text{11}\)

### 2. Working Principles for Program Design

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.

6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice.

*Developed by the CPED Consortium, October 2009\(^\text{12}\)*

\(^1\text{1}\) [http://cpedinitiative.org/design-concept-definitions](http://cpedinitiative.org/design-concept-definitions)

\(^1\text{2}\) [http://cpedinitiative.org/definition-and-working-principles-edd-program-design](http://cpedinitiative.org/definition-and-working-principles-edd-program-design)
3. Key Components of Program Design

A definition is the foundation of a common language for scholars and practitioners. For the purpose of the DiP design framework (Table 1) the following CPED program design definitions are used:

3.1 Inquiry as Practice (IaP)

The process of posing significant questions that focus on complex problems of practice. This is the act of the candidate intentionally treating their workplace as a place for investigation.\(^{13}\) At the center of IaP is the ability to use data to understand the effects of innovation. As such, IaP requires the ability to gather, organize, judge, aggregate, and analyze situations, literature, and data with a critical lens.

Central to developing IaP is the task of asking the right questions at the right time, and in the right place. Getting the question right ripples into and impacts the entire research inquiry—theoretical framework, research methodology (e.g., action research, case study, phenomenology, ethnography, etc.), data gathering methods, data analysis, and the implications for practice. A well-crafted research question is specific and precise and takes into account the plethora of variables.

3.2 A Problem of Practice (PoP)

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.\(^{14}\)

PoPs that are recognized by broad swaths of the field hold promise that the DiP might contribute to larger scale impact.

3.3 The Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

A scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Cochran-Smith, Lytle, 1999
\(^{14}\) http://cpedinitiative.org/design-concept-definitions
\(^{15}\) Revised definition, CPED 2014
Section 2

Design Elements

1. Framing of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

The DiP as described by CPED, is a culminating capstone project; different from the traditional five-chapter dissertation, that demonstrates understanding of core professional knowledge and the application of this knowledge to PoPs.\textsuperscript{16} The DiP enables a program candidate\textsuperscript{17} to draw together the state of the art in professional practice, with relevant academic theory applied to the solution of work-based problems; with a resulting change within the workplace\textsuperscript{18} recognizing that real-world problems inhabit a space, which is dynamic, multi-faceted and complex.\textsuperscript{19} Program candidates have to develop agility unique to the setting of a professional doctorate, in that while researching, they do not cease to practice, and while practicing, they do not cease to research. As such, what happens in the landscape of practice inevitably impacts on the development endeavor. Thus, the DiP is not merely an end product but rather an outcome of the EdD process emphasizing scholarly practitioner knowledge, experience, and reflection.

The emphasis on process characterizes Professional Practice Doctorates replicating the experience of practitioners in the field. The DiP is not a “finished” outcome when the candidate graduates but a beginning of an active and ongoing process of individual professional development and improvement and organizational impact and change. This interactive relationship is reflected in the growing number of programs that are developing innovative DiP models. Non-traditional formats are supported by Shulman\textsuperscript{20} who suggests that the DiP has great merit as a series of shorter, more varied performances, and not a marathon (traditional dissertation format). Therefore, he suggests that the DiP move from the traditional capstone experience and adopt an approach that demonstrates and communicates the candidate’s multifaceted abilities, skills, and talents over a variety of performance tasks, similar to what is

\textsuperscript{16} Perry & Imig, 2008
\textsuperscript{17} Throughout this document we refer to doctoral candidates rather than doctoral students. The consensus is that this is the most suitable term to use, even though in some institutions a distinction is made between 'student' and candidate' depending on whether the individual has successfully completed some kind of transfer of status stage.
\textsuperscript{18} Maxwell, 2003
\textsuperscript{19} Fulton, Kuitt, Sanders, Smith, 2012
\textsuperscript{20} Shulman, 2010
practiced in other fields, such as chemistry, psychology, and economics. The epistemological basis for this is ‘Mode 2’ knowledge\(^{21}\)—knowledge generated which impacts practice.

As we gathered information from Phase 1 institutions we found that occasionally confusions arose when distinguishing DiP model/methods/methodology. We were guided by Harding (1987), method refers to techniques for gathering empirical evidence; methodology is the theory of knowledge and the interpretive framework that guides the DiP.

We found that Phase 1 institutions are pushing their program candidates to explore and explicate their assumptions about knowledge, practice and inquiry and how these shape and inform their practice and research in/on practice.\(^{22}\) In some institutions the nature of the DiP is continuing to evolve as non-traditional DiP models are explored.

Current identified characteristics of the DiP is that it must be a form that manifestly serves functions of the doctorate (i.e. stewardship of doctoral values; rigorous in the creation of new practitioner knowledge; demonstrates ability to conceptualize, define, analyze, and frame a problem in practice that warrants academic rigor to find solutions; demonstrates ability to translate analytical data into normative solutions; and systematic). Additionally, DiPs must bridge that gap between academe and practice, through a design that manifestly serves functions of stakeholders (i.e., rigorous in the creation of new practitioner knowledge; value to a wide community; and represents craftsmanship).

Models proposed in the literature include analytical papers (usually three), case studies, client-based structures, clinical portfolios of assessments, collaborative (clustered in teams or groups), film and video production, portfolios, problem-based investigations, position papers (thematic/problem based), projects designed to address specific client needs, research manuscripts submitted for publication, practitioner handbooks, and the use of social media.

\(^{21}\) Gibbons et al. 1994
\(^{22}\) Harding, S. (1987)
Figure 1: An Alternative Approach for the Professional Practices DiP

Roles
- Expert professional practitioner
- DiP committee or team expert in applied research methods, and professional practice
- Transition from expert professional practitioner to scholarly practitioner

Process
- Candidate collaborates with supervisor (DiP committee/team) and stakeholders (if possible) on identified problem of practice, methodology, and process

Outcome
- DiP committee/team continue collaborative partnership
- Candidate disseminates DiP product

Figure 2: A Model for Professional Practices DiP

Stage 1
- Candidate in partnership with the field selects a problem or issue relevant to professional practice.

Stage 2
- Candidate working with DiP committee/team selects an approach (method) to address the problem.

Stage 3
- Candidate must be prepared to change or expand both the type of methods and the issues/questions dealt with during the DiP process.

Stage 4
- Product(s) that document the process and the outcomes.

23 Figure 1. Adapted from “An alternative approach for the professional practice dissertation” by J. Willis, D. Inman, & R. Valenti, 2010, Completing a Professional Practice Dissertation: A Guide for Doctoral Students and Faculty
24 Figure 2. Adapted from “A model for a professional practice dissertation” by J. Willis, D. Inman, & R. Valenti, 2010, Completing a Professional Practice Dissertation: A Guide for Doctoral Students and Faculty
Underpinning the final outcome of the DiP is the process model. Currently three process models are evident among CPED Phase 1 institutions: (1) individual inquiry; (2) collaborative inquiry in a group or team; and (3) a hybrid model which combines an individual inquiry, a collaborative thematic secondary analysis, and either individual or collaboratively designed white paper. The three processes embrace a partnership or mentorship with practitioners in the field with the intent of the final product addressing a complex problem of practice.

2. Framing of the Problem of Practice (PoP)

A key part of the CPED philosophy is the principle that programs emphasize the need for students to address a PoP in the DiP or similar capstone projects. Defining and using appropriate language to articulate a PoP is challenging, but doing so is critical to prepare candidates to complete a DiP and lead change.

Rather than framing a problem around a “gap in the existing scholarly literature,” as the case for PhD candidates, EdD candidates frame problems in situ—from within the elusive and moving “gap between the existing and preferred organizational state (the ‘goal’ state).”

Given the variety of perspectives, opinions, and beliefs within a situation, this task is complex. Professionals intending to improve policy, or organizational effectiveness do so in the midst of a plethora of input from co-workers, colleagues, community members, and leadership. What contributes to the complexity of defining a PoP are the competing perspectives and interests of affected participants.

Problems framed from within real-time social settings are subject to multiple forms of ambiguity. Early interpretations of an organizational problem may shift and “change over time as new information is received and people alter their perceptions.” Stringer explained that in the process of exploration and analysis of a problem at hand, the involvement of people with varying beliefs, perceptions, values, routines, and rules can make problem solving a complex and sticky process. The cultures and entrenched systems have often been maintained throughout personal

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25 Crow, 2013  
26 Creswell, 2013, p. 133  
27 Archbald, 2014, p. 2  
28 Choo, 2006, p. 54  
29 Stringer, 2007, p. 67
and organizational history. Because of the nature of change and myopic misguided interpretations inherent in real-time problems the candidate may need to visit them not only once, but revisit them several times to ensure proper identification of the problem rather than a symptom. Archbald\textsuperscript{30} claims that problems in organizations are nuanced with various shades of meaning and interpretations. He explains, “Leaders in organizations often face ‘ill-structured’ problems.” They are multifaceted and “lack ready solutions (p. 1).” For this reason, problems for professional practice researchers tend to remain open-ended and solved incrementally.\textsuperscript{31}

The benefit of practitioners conducting inquiry where they are intimately familiar with the environment—where tacit knowledge guides their craft—are the deeper perspectives they provide. In familiar spaces inquirers are fluid in their professional skills and can think on the fly and navigate their organization without giving much conscious thought to routine tasks (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This allows them to be more mindful about the nuances of an alleged problem. This insider perspective may help them examine on a deeper level the validity of the problem, and determine its authenticity, relevance, and reseachability.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Framing a PoP is a four-stage process}. First, determine the authenticity of the problem; a matter of self-awareness. Second, determine the relevance of the PoP; a matter of other awareness. Third, determine if the problem deserves a scholarly inquiry—whether it is reseachable; a matter of an awareness of the broader extant conversation (e.g., academic and professional publications). Finally, with heightened awareness of self, others, and the broader professional and academic conversation, articulate the PoP in meaningful and direct language.

\textbf{Stage 1: Is the problem authentic?}

Our ability to become agents of change, act with integrity, and become worthy stewards of practice\textsuperscript{33} depends largely on (a) how we see what we believe to be a problem, and, most importantly, how we perceive ourselves in the problem situation (including our motivations, cultural awareness, dominant behavioral patterns, and attitudes), (b) how we perceive others

\textsuperscript{30} Archbald, 2014
\textsuperscript{31} Lloyd, 1994
\textsuperscript{32} The following resources should be used as a starting point to explore various theories and approaches for investigating and framing a PoP. (Archbald, 2014; Anderson, 2012; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Choo, 2006; Clark & Fujimoto, 2008; Langley, G.J., Moen, R.D., Nolan, K.M., Nolan, T.W., Norman, C.L., & Provost, L.P., 2009; Lloyd, 1978; Schön, 1983; Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts & Kleiner, 1994; Stringer, 2007).
\textsuperscript{33} Walker et al., 2008
associated with, or impacted by, the problem, and (c) how we interpret the problem based on these two points.

Exploring the authenticity of a problem begins with questioning one’s personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and motivations about the situation with a willingness to accept potential misguidance about the perceived problem. Mistakes and surprises can be camouflaged by personal biases, judgments, and interpretations. Comparing our personal attitudes and abilities with those of relevant peers and questioning our assumptions, motives, beliefs and values is a way to strengthen our ability to determine authenticity and articulate it clearly. This process may be what Argyris taught as knowing in action. Schön teaches that ongoing self-reflection heightens one’s sensibilities and awareness of how people interact, react with one another, and the culture of “how things get done around here.” Knowing in action, according to Schön, suggests “not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about doing something while doing it.”

We should be cautious, however, of the warning by Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorn, that too much self-reflection, or self-consciousness, may result in less spontaneity of actions and behaviors, and “therefore less effective practice.” So too, Silverman advises against romanticism, which he claims is culturally defined and applies particularly when researchers seek to understand the experiences of others, usually those who are marginalized. Because experience is inseparably linked to self, and people are by nature emotional beings, too much time self-evaluating may result in emotionality. As important as it is to acknowledge and express authentic emotions, when uncontrolled they may skew perspectives, which may change the interpretation of the problem. The effects may domino into data gathering, analysis, and the nature of potential impact. Clearly a balance is needed between self-awareness and self-paralyzing overdone scrutiny. Either distracts from an accurate awareness of oneself in the situation and the ability to diagnose challenges to determine authenticity.

34 Archbald, 2014, p. 3
35 Bridges & Hallinger, 1997
36 Copland, 2003
37 Argyris, 1993
38 Schön, 1983, p. 54
39 Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorn, 2004, p. 58
40 Silverman, 2001
After a period of self-reflection the next necessity for ensuring problem authenticity is listening to stakeholders, and clients as to how they see things. Discuss the differences between the current and preferred conditions, why they exist, and make some inferences about cause. Sometimes problems are culturally defined, and, as a result, may unwittingly be missed because the researcher is caught up in the culture.

A third necessity for determining the authenticity of a problem is to be aware of the emotional drama of a situation; standing strong on personal opinions. Pushing hard on problems related to hegemony and more systemic issues may shut down the conversation, and cause a misdiagnosis of the problem. Feelings of threat might undermine the research inquiry.

Finally, there is a problem with focusing intently on a problem. Unintended consequences of zeroing in on a problem to intently is the inability to see the problem clearly, which may result in blame and accusations, which may ultimately lead to more of the same problem that is trying to be resolved (see Appendix B for an example). This begs the question: if the problem were resolved who would be helped? If the problem were not resolved, what would become the new focus? When an inquirer becomes self-aware at this level, they may begin to more accurately determine the problem’s relevance.

**Stage 2: Is the problem relevant?**

While the PoP may be deemed authentic, it may not yet warrant systematic scholarly IaP. The PoP must mean something to someone and, by addressing the PoP, it must result in a positive impact within an organization, institution, or community. This is what makes a PoP relevant. Relevance is determined by the needs of (a) immediate stakeholders, and (b) others that may be indirectly affect by the proposed changes.

a. Because EdD candidates define a problem of practice in situ, and are surrounded by diverse perspectives, including deep emotions, the candidate must listen closely to develop clarity about stakeholder’s objectives and what they want to achieve. Rigorous and relevant research considers all perspectives, which requires the candidate to suspend judgment while considering the views of others. Argyris\(^{41}\) encourages the researcher to “not only listen for information they are seeking,” because it may cause them to “ignore important ideas that the

\[^{41}\text{Argyris, 1993, p. 83}\]
respondents are communicating.” Argyris goes on to explain that by listening a researcher may notice how well the stakeholders “encourage inquiry into their views, and how amenable their views are to testing.”

b. To become an instrument of change and generate new practitioner and scholarly knowledge requires a deepening sense of the needs of those affected by the problem, and how authoritative sources may have already addressed it. Unpacking the problem by providing evidence from practice, and documentation from literature of its relevance is the beginning of rigor for a professional practitioner attempting to persuade and affect change.

c. A desire to know the real-ness and relevance of the problem requires an authentic listening ear. Authentic listening avoids feigned affection, but builds trust with a real intent to hear what they have to say. Bolman and Deal\(^42\) emphasize both what to listen for—a person’s aspirations and goals, —and how to listen—with personal warmth and openness. The positive environment of authentic listening, therefore, helps candidates avoid and assuage potential conflict and build consensus among those concerned with the situation. Authentic listening underpins the vitality of any research paradigm, but for professional practitioner researcher with a goal toward making positive impact, the process of listening is an act of selfless desire to become alive to the objectives of immediate stakeholders.

Listening is a creative force and allows the candidate to help stakeholders clarify needs and expectations and strip away superfluous emotional baggage that may be associated with the problem ultimately leading to honest and necessarily difficult discussions, otherwise thought of as crucial conversations\(^43\). When change is necessary, but a suggested change is not welcome, some emotions may halt the conversation. A dominant voice may deflect the conversation away from one issue to another. Silverman\(^44\) states, “Authenticity is attached to personal experience,” and because we may assume each personal experience is authentic, the interpretations of each should be respected and perceptions should be managed. Sensitive

\(^{42}\) Bolman and Deal, 2008, p. 331
\(^{43}\) Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002
\(^{44}\) Silverman, 2013, p. 471
situations call for sensitive listening to all perspectives, which, if properly managed, leads to clarity and the ability to determine the relevance of the problem.

**Stage 3: Is the problem researchable?**

The “researchableness” of the PoP is dependent on extant conversations within both the profession and the academe. The potential for knowledge accumulation across the field may be greater if PoPs are held in common. Identified PoPs may have been addressed in varying degrees and published in academic literature and/or other professional outlets. The candidate must make the determination whether or not to enter the conversation and add their particular perspective.

a. Engage in conversations with other professionals and consult recent literature from industry experts. Because “solutions to PoP issues are not always neatly confined within the boundaries of one theory\(^{45}\) or location, and the PoP may be framed from multiple perspectives, it is necessary to develop awareness of the larger conversation.

b. Consult the literature. Becoming familiar with the approach of scholars and the theories that describe human phenomena in question. As candidates understand the immediate scholarly conversation around the PoP, and becoming assimilated into the knowledge base, they will gain confidence in the researchability of the problem and hope for a reasonable solution as they build upon theoretical knowledge and develop instructive and important generative knowledge.

**Stage 4: Articulate the problem**

When a candidate has clear self-awareness, an awareness of the needs of others, and can see the PoP in context of the larger conversation, they can begin to articulate the PoP. This stage requires an understanding of timing, vision, and the particular zeitgeist of the situation under investigation. Articulating the PoP, or writing the story of the unsettled situation concisely and clearly, requires deep understanding of the language and the culture, which includes: assumptions, attitudes, ethics, gender, and geographic locations. Knowing the language of the

\(^{45}\) Willis, Inman, & Valenti, 2010, p. 71
culture, along with norms and the assumptions will position the candidate to frame an authentic, relevant, and researchable PoP.

a. Become immersed in the language of the existing culture, including differences due to geographical location, ethnic demographics or any number of factors.

b. Envision what “better” would look like if the problem were eliminated. Candidates can lead change and motivate others when they can articulate the vision of what could be. Archbald claims, “It is harder to lead improvement if you cannot articulate what ‘better’ is”. 46

c. Study theoretical knowledge and become emerged in the scholarly literature, there is a temptation to articulate the problem in theoretical language. Do not be hoodwinked into believing that sophisticated and complicated Greek-speak and academic-ese is the preferred language for professional practitioners. The methods by which we know things (epistemology), and the values we attribute to our knowledge (axiology), and our relationships with other beings (ontology) may be, and should be written in terms our professional colleagues can readily understand.

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46 Archbald (2014), p. 35
Figure 3: Stages to framing a Problem of Practice

- **Stage 1**
  - **Determine authenticity**: Self-reflection. How do we see ourselves and others in context of the problem situation? Carefully consider personal limitations and biases.

- **Stage 2**
  - **Determine relevance**: Establish a need for a solution. Describe differences between the current and preferred conditions? Clarify real-time issues with stakeholders, colleagues, clients, mentors, and other experts.

- **Stage 3**
  - **Determine researchability**: Contextualize the problem in the broader conversation--in the academic literature and other professional publications.

- **Stage 4**
  - **Articulate the problem**: Understand deeply the culture, language, and assumptions of the situation under investigation.
Section 3

Dissertation in Practice Models

1. Design Models in Brief

An overview of the DiP models is provided below in Table 1 as a reference. In the table, a brief description is given of the process of completing a DiP and the overall product, or result of the research. Further guidance regarding an institution’s DiP design model can be found on the CPED website and by contacting the institution’s PI. Where interpretation was necessary, the authors consulted with the appropriate institution PIs as well as the research and practitioner literature on each design model.

In many Professional Practices Doctoral programs candidates are expected to publish articles in professional journals or other industry specific outlets. Each dissertation format, and the dissertation development process, serves different purposes based on the intended audience and the candidate’s goals. Dawson and Kumar\textsuperscript{47} investigated a number of professional practice doctoral process components and found that the capstone product takes many forms. They provided a list of what a professional practice dissertation “might” look like:

- resemble traditional dissertations (New California State, University\textsuperscript{48})
- emphasize a particular stance toward inquiry such as social justice (Duquesne University\textsuperscript{49})
- involve completing pieces of the dissertation throughout a program (Duquesne University)
- promote particular research genres such as program evaluation or policy analysis (Illinois State University\textsuperscript{50})
- promote a particular method such as action research or practitioner inquiry (Wetzel & Ewbanks, 2013)
- encompass a team activity with students making individual and collaborative

\textsuperscript{47} Dawson and Kumar. 2011
\textsuperscript{48} Auerbach, S., 2011
\textsuperscript{49} Dissertation in Practice Guidelines, 2012. Duquesne University
\textsuperscript{50} Illinois State University http://cpedinitiative.org/files/Illinois%20State%20University%20
contributions to a final document (Kentucky Community and Technology College system)

- revolve around a common theme explored by most students (USC, Marsh & Dembo, 2009)
- involve a team-based evaluation conducted for actual clients (Virginia Commonwealth University)

Considering these various processes toward a DiP we again emphasize that a professional practice dissertation is not intended to generate theoretical knowledge, but is to discover ways to enhance or impact immediate practice—change a policy or improve a procedure. 51

Dissertation formats found amongst Phase 1 CPED cadre include:

- 5-Chapter independent and original dissertation: addressing a gap in the literature, hypothesis testing or heuristic descriptions of human phenomena. The advancement or development of a theory.
- 3-Article/Manuscript dissertation: Manuscripts addressing similar overall themes.
- Professional Portfolio
- 5-Chapter group and original dissertation: addressing professional problems of practice

Each dissertation may follow a particular process that influences how data will be gathered and used. Common among most CPED-affiliate institutions is the idea that they conducted their inquiry among a Community of Practice (CoP) in a Laboratory of Practice 52(LoP). There is some crossover among the processes of each university. The processes found among this particular cadre include:

1. Original and independent data gathering and analysis: data is gathered and analyzed by a single candidate.

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51 Willis, et al., 2010
52 University of Central Florida EdD Education program
2. Interdisciplinary: Original and collaborative data gathering and analysis—performed in teams. Stakeholders may also participate in data collection, but not analysis

3. Thematic Dissertation: Original and collaborative data gathering based on a common theme and related PoP.

4. Client based: (data gathered under the aegis of an institution, school, college, community, or business). Stakeholders may also be involved in data collection and analysis.

5. Action research: data is gathered through iterative cycles of investigating a PoP by looking closely at the PoP (observing), reflecting on what is observed, planning a strategy for improvement, and acting and then repeating the cycle (Stringer, 2007).

6. Fieldwork—onsite visits
### DiPs in Phase 1 Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>DiP/Capstone</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Product/Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Arizona State University | 5-chapter    | Action Research/mixed methods: The culmination of several iterative cycles of inquiry into a particular PoP.  
|                         |              | Addresses authentic PoP within candidate’s immediate workplace Laboratory of Practice (LoP). | Graduates to become scholarly practitioners  
|                         |              |                                                                          | A report of the consequences of a particular educational intervention.  
|                         |              |                                                                          | An outcome is the development of a scholarly practitioners who can lead change and improve the practices of their workplace.  
|                         |              |                                                                          | Generate new ideas and innovation in their immediate practice (change policy, fill gaps in literature, produce generative knowledge). |
| California State Fresno | 5-chapter    | Action or Applied Research within a specified laboratory of practice (LoP)  
|                         |              | Embedded fieldwork—onsite visits.  
|                         |              | Case studies | Program theme: Changing Leaders to Lead Change  
|                         |              |                                                                          | Results of sufficient merit to be published in refereed journals or to form the basis of a book or monograph  
|                         |              |                                                                          | Scholarly practitioner who affect positive change in the education enterprise.  
|                         |              |                                                                          | Implications for future research: Depth of research enables other scholars to build on it in subsequent work |
| Duquesne University     | 5-chapter, (individual) | Research performed in candidate’s LoP—onsite visits.  
|                         |              | Inquiry focuses on a PoP addressing issues of social justice. | Action plan intended to yield generative impact on educational leadership and educational improvement. |
| Lynn University         | Options:      | Incorporates change by embracing researched problem-solving practices, program design and development while utilizing new technologies.  
|                         | 3-article - manuscript | Problem-based instruction through field studies.  
|                         | 5-chapter | Hybrid course delivery  
|                         | Videos     | Laboratories of practice: real situations  
|                         | iBooks     | Four overarching themes:  
|                         | Shared projects | Leadership  
|                         |            | Accountability  
|                         |            | Equity & Diversity (A&D)  
|                         |            | Learning and Instruction | 5-Chapter  
|                         |            | Filled gap in literature, produced theoretical knowledge  
|                         |            | Implication for future research  
|                         | 3-Article: | Produce generative knowledge  
|                         |            | Generated thematically related original article-length manuscripts  
|                         |            | 2 manuscripts fully accepted for publication in journals meeting specified criteria (see: [www.slu.edu/x19951.eml?site=mobile](http://www.slu.edu/x19951.eml?site=mobile)) | |

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53 The information in this matrix was drawn primarily from the CPED website: [http://cpedinitiative.org-consortium-members](http://cpedinitiative.org-consortium-members), and by communication with university PIs through email and/or telephone conversations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Option:</th>
<th>Test solutions to a challenge in educational practice. Ask questions: 1. What is going on here 2. What happens when I, we, or they do…? Working with stakeholders.</th>
<th>Policy.</th>
<th>An improvement vision and performance goals for the school district.</th>
<th>A cost benefit analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
<td>5-chapter</td>
<td>(Internship is 6- semesters. It is a professional capstone project (it could be 4-5 years) wherein candidates meet with professional in their field. They tie in goals of the organization as an exemplar of the learning experience. This may also be turned into a dissertation):</td>
<td>Review of an educational issue ranging from federal involvement in public education to accountability and standards.</td>
<td>Addresses significant programs that involve sizeable budget expenditures and affects a substantial number of people, which results in improved direction for specified stakeholders.</td>
<td>Accepted evaluation models, methods, and practices are applied improving student learning and achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Florida</td>
<td>EdD in Educational Leadership-Executive Track: 5-chapter Individual</td>
<td>Cohort model</td>
<td>Direct impact on policy and practice</td>
<td>Outline specific implementation suggestions for improved practice</td>
<td>Publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PoP developed through gap analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Proposes both general implications and future scholarship that follows from work already completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coursework and field experience relates to complex PoP</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performed in authentic professional environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIP is completed in a team of the student, faculty, and mentor/client.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct scholarly practitioner who can impact policy and practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Developed leaders with improved administrative skills and capabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Built networks with the larger community</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed independent and original theoretical and generative Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DiP presented to both faculty and mentor/client (stakeholders).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed independent and original theoretical and generative Knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| University of Colorado-Denver | Options:  
- 5-chapter  
- 3-article manuscript  
- E-Dissertation  
Within the same medium of prose the candidate might portray the research using different genres, select different research question or use a different conceptual lens to view the problem of practice. | Scholarly practitioners who can lead positive change as a result of the program.  
Professionals with an eye for educational equity, particularly for urban environments.  
Those focused on helping curriculum and policy to become equitable for people of differing backgrounds.  
Candidate become excellent communicators with the use of graphics, prose, video and audio to show the degree of mastery expected of a scholar practitioner. Such variety of medium facilitates research presentations to be made to different audiences (including stakeholders) on the same research project.  
Publications are encouraged, but not required. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| University of Houston | K-12 Administration:  
Doctoral Thesis |  
- Action Research  
- Laboratories of practice to support research and thesis process  
- Writing laboratories to support labs of practice  
- Comprehensive examinations is TX State Superintendency Exam | Practitioners who can…  
- Identify and develop professional leadership identity through ongoing reflection  
- Develop and implement vision for establishing rich teaching and learning environments with input form stakeholders  
- Frame, analyze, and innovatively resolve educational dilemmas  
- Implement a continuous cycle of inquiry based on reflection and collaboration that includes authentic data collection, analysis, and dissemination. |
| Health Sciences Educators:  
5-chapter |  
- Laboratory of Practice (LoP) experiences working with university committee members and at least one committee member from the student’s home institution.  
- Identifies areas of need and root causes related to identified institutional issues.  
- Improve medical education at the institutions represented in cohorts. | Practitioners who can demonstrate skills at:  
- Performing logical analysis of organizational problems;  
- Reviewing extant literature  
- Creating innovative solutions for identified problems  
- Revising training of new practitioners or remediation training for existing practitioners  
- Revising policies where needed  
- Leading institutions to identify problems of practice rapidly | Practitioners who can demonstrate:  
- Understanding of action plans, logic models, UDL, and Evidence-Based Best Practices  
- New knowledge and/or processes to meet the |
| Special Populations:  
Doctoral Thesis (4-5 chapters are most) |  
- Action and applied research (mixed-methods is most typical)  
- Research design and analytic techniques are threaded throughout the program | | |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Specializations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| University of Nebraska - Lincoln | 5 or more chapter (traditional—may incorporate video) | Deliberately connected to practice.  
Inquiry oriented  
Cross-disciplinary and cross-emphasis coursework  
Collaboration, debate and dialogue across scholar/practitioner  
Concretely consider nature of learners, learning, teaching from multiple perspectives within concrete realities from various settings | Able to confront, consider, and articulate complex realities and challenges facing schools, colleges, and communities.  
Able to conceptualize and developed innovative and novel ways to address challenges in educational reform.  
Educate for diversity, inform and impact social justice, and effect positive change  
Cultivate community of learning professionals  
Build professional connections and sustain and nurture educator well-being  
Demonstrate expertise in area of emphasis |
| University of Connecticut | 5-chapter | Applied and action research.  
Fieldwork with stakeholders and mentors  
Problem-based (self-generated PoP)  
Cross case analysis enables candidates to integrate and synthesize theoretical frameworks  
Findings from research studies, and case study data into a comprehensive conceptual model on systemic school reform. | Scholars include a chapter developed as a white paper intended to impact practice.  
Improve policy  
Fill a gap in literature  
Produce generative knowledge  
Partner with stakeholders to empower others to improve leadership and teaching. |
| University of Kentucky | 5-chapter (option: individual or group dissertation) | Applied action research in a cohort model  
Students work together (perform data collection and analysis) as teams.  
Network with academic professionals in mentoring relationships  
Projects:  
Independently completed, but closely interrelated, projects (3). Projects are embedded within coursework and distributed across three years of the program. They focus on a PoP within the organization with which the candidate is affiliated. | Scholarly practitioners who better understand the multiplicity of roles in a learning organization.  
A document, or series of manuscripts addressing multiple issues in a single organization.|

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54 Blankenship, P.D., Mayo, T., Bolt, W., Stephenson, L., 2012
| University of Louisville | Individual or Group research Communities of practice: work with regional and statewide community—agencies and initiatives to address PoP. | • A member of each group produces one publishable manuscript that aligns or incorporates with the other manuscripts of group members.  
• Executive summary for stakeholders |
| University of Maryland | 5-chapter  
- Authentic cases wherein students address various challenges they may face in their practice and individual lives.  
- Organizational Analysis  
- Systems thinking  
- Teams use primary and secondary sources of data for addressing a PoP | • Use knowledge to change in educational policy and practice.  
• Develop students into scholarly practitioners with a repertoire of analytical skills. |
| University of Missouri-Columbia | Dissertation in Practice (not 5-chapters) defined as practitioner-focused. Includes white paper, program evaluation report, or others.  
- Critical lenses include:  
  - Leadership theory and practice  
  - Organization analysis  
  - Educational policy  
  - Learning content and context  
  - Curriculum is thematic, integrated, problem-based, and team-oriented.  
  - Policy analysis  
  - Action research to address a PoP  
  Individual and original research  
  Research conducted locally to improve practice in the student’s LoP. | • Scholars who are effective, thoughtful, and reflective practitioners.  
• Competent in identifying and solving complex problems of practice in educational settings.  
• Knowledge of foundational theories and perspectives in leadership theory and practice, organizational analysis and educational policy.  
• Tools necessary to transfer knowledge into practice.  
• Responsive to issues of social justice  
• Supportive of organizational change, and/or influence policy decisions. |
| University of Oklahoma | Dissertation has no designated number of chapters  
- Dissertation process options:  
  - Thematic  
  - Problem-based  
  - Program evaluation with in-depth review of the literature related to the change model  
  Research performed among district level community—within candidate’s professional practice (LoP).  
  - Ethnography and structured case studies. Outlining how they reduce the data so their work may be replicated.  
  - Integrate language from common set of longitudinal data from public schools in adjacent school districts.  
  - Data is used in coursework to integrate into candidate’s practice and establish uniform language. | • To develop practitioner-scholars who are professionals who can integrate technical knowledge (theory and research), and professional knowledge from their own and other’s practices and do so in context of their practice. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Southern California</th>
<th>University of Vermont</th>
<th>Virginia Commonwealth University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-chapter (Thematic)</td>
<td>Optional:</td>
<td>3-article – manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-based research</td>
<td>In process:</td>
<td>Individual Learning Portfolio/Professional Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative group work on related topics, or with the same database</td>
<td>Applied research program (action research)—pre-intervention-post</td>
<td>Blended individually and collaboratively produced writing projects. Each manuscript contains the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes are organized around field-based issues or problems</td>
<td>Cohort model</td>
<td>a. a common research agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-based research with colleagues in field</td>
<td>Open to professionals in Pre-K-12, higher education, healthcare, law enforcement, and social services.</td>
<td>b. a common inquiry statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students conduct Gap Analysis to work with districts</td>
<td>Ethnography (Me-search)</td>
<td>c. integrated research tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unifying feature candidates together such that they can be mentored as a group.</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. a common report format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practitioners assume the role of consultant.</td>
<td>To develop leaders who are deeply committed to social justice and inclusion and with expertise, skills, and courage to move in this direction</td>
<td>e. the same advisory chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although much work is performed in groups, each produces his or her own, original, unique dissertation. This results in practitioner scholars who are leaders of change in their respective professional practices.</td>
<td>School transformation and teacher education improvement</td>
<td>f. similar statements in each dissertation about its being a companion to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN)</td>
<td>Publications in practitioner-scholar journals</td>
<td>Scholarly practitioner who work collaboratively. The outcomes are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved organizational performance.</td>
<td>Team portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Team project includes individual components and at least one collaboratively written piece reflecting a synthesis of the group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manuscript-based companion dissertation consists of three chapters presented in the same order: (a) team collaboratively written technical report, (b) individual research report that contributed to the technical report and that can be used for dissemination as a conference paper or journal article, and (c) individual scholarly essay regarding some aspect of her or his doctoral education experience and future career plans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: DiPs in Phase 1 Institutions
Conclusions

While we acknowledge that program design is a complex endeavor, we admit that more importantly it is never completed. Constant evaluations and adaptations are essential to maintaining a rigorous and relevant program. Nevertheless, extensive progress has been made since 2007 when CPED Phase 1 institutions first engaged in dialogue focused on the Dissertation in Practice. Table 1 (DiPs in Phase 1 institutions) suggests that some Phase 1 programs are challenging the conventional process and traditional dissertation product particularly in terms of appropriateness in demonstrating research capability and outcomes in order to prepare “educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession” (CPED Consortium, October 2009).

As institutions wrestle with how program outcomes might be evidenced we suggest that this document which complies with FIPSE’s requirement to “disseminate…best practices for the design and implementation of professional practice degrees” (CPED website) may be a useful resource. Consortium members must continue to address the inherent intellectual structures within its domain ensuring that a program’s capstone product(s) is contextually appropriate to the professional practitioner and the community they serve.

So serve communities better we encourage practitioners to examine PoPs within their sphere of influence. In this process they recognize how their work may immediately impact a larger system. The robust approach to the DiP as proposed by CPED ensures generative, actionable, and knowledge that garners immediate impact on practice.

Among the benefits of a DiP is the potential for collaborative research with both practitioners and academics. A PoP might support the practice of professionals performing research in clusters rather than in isolation as experienced by traditional academia-bound graduate students. Professional practitioner-researchers do not work in a vacuum—without the collaboration of colleagues, clients, or community members. Boundaries are crossed in every direction when working in what Shulman\(^{55}\) refers to as a “laboratory of practice”; the laboratory being the place

\(^{55}\) Shulman, 2007
of practice where experiments are conducted and tested then analyzed and operationalized\textsuperscript{56}. In practice the immediate impact of the study is felt not by a single person, but by a community. Results intend to improve practice, which means change from the current to the preferred state.\textsuperscript{57} This paper will not address this topic in more detail at this time, but it is worthy of further discussion.

\textsuperscript{56} Inaugural CPED convening, held at the Carnegie Foundation in June 2007 that CPED institutions were first introduced to Shulman’s (2007) conceptual vision of a professional practitioner’s “Laboratory of Practice (LoP),” typically set within their own organization where they would have multiple opportunities to explore how the theory and research covered in their coursework plays out in practice. Shulman outlined the imperative for the education profession to develop its LoP.

\textsuperscript{57} Archbald, 2014
Section 4

References & Additional Resources


The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing organizational performance.


CA.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: PHASE I, CPED Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>CPED Focus Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State Fresno</td>
<td>Public/multi campus</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duquesne University</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn University</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Illinois University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn State University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Teacher Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Teacher &amp; School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College of William &amp; Mary</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School, Teacher, &amp; Organization Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Florida</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Colorado-Denver</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Connecticut</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership &amp; Organization Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Florida</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Educational Leadership-Executive track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Houston</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public School, Teacher, &amp; Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Organizational Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Louisville</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership &amp; School, Teacher, and Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Organizational Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri-Columbia</td>
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<td>School Leadership</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Nebraska-Lincoln</td>
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<td>School &amp; Teacher Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oklahoma</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Southern California</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>School, Teacher, &amp; Organization Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Vermont</td>
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<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Commonwealth University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech University</td>
<td>Public/Multi campus</td>
<td>School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State University</td>
<td>Public/multi-campus</td>
<td>Teacher &amp; Organizational Leadership</td>
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</tbody>
</table>