

Doctoral Research in Educational Leadership: Expectations for Those Thinking About An Advanced Degree

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Abstract

The tallest hurdle in completing a doctoral degree is the dissertation, which continues to be the primary capstone experience for the degree. Dissertation research is a mystery to many considering an advanced degree and can be intimidating to those who are unfamiliar with the nature of universities and doctoral research. In this report, the author removes some of the mystery by reviewing criteria applied by faculty in major universities and reporting the results of a questionnaire administered to faculty in Virginia. Both process and product criteria applied to doctoral research by the respondents in the study are reported.

Key Words

Dissertations, Education, Leadership

Graduate-student research comprises a large portion of the research completed in educational leadership. Most of this research is done as dissertations. In 2011-2012, 3857 students received either an EdD or PhD degree in some area of PK-12 educational leadership (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). About two-thirds (63.4%) of the recipients were women; about a third (36.6%) were men. In Virginia, 565 doctoral students completed degrees in 2012-2013 (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, n. d.). Nearly 70% (69.9%) were women; a little less than 30% (29.6%) were men (The gender of three graduates was not recorded.).

Most education degrees culminate with a dissertation, which is the largest stumbling block to completion of the degree. Comparatively, passing courses is easy. The dissertation, however, is a major piece of semi-independent research requiring persistence, knowledge of the subject, skill in planning and conducting research, and finesse in interpersonal relations.

Upon completion of the research, a report is prepared as a dissertation and is reviewed by a committee comprised of university faculty and, sometimes, practitioners, all of whom have been through the process for their own dissertations or through the review of the dissertations of others. What do they look for when they review these dissertations? What criteria do they apply? What standards guide their evaluations?

In this paper I review standards for measuring the quality of doctoral research by some major universities and report criteria that faculty from across Virginia believe to be

“essential (critical or indispensable)” in assessing the quality of that research. These criteria may be useful to faculty in educational leadership programs and to school practitioners as they attempt to assess, interpret, and apply research in their teaching and administrative roles. The criteria may be of interest, as well, to those who plan on pursuing the doctorate in educational leadership.

A Review of Standards for Dissertation Research

Standards for dissertation research vary by institution, faculty chair, and committee composition. Graduate schools across universities promulgate criteria for evaluating dissertations. Faculty chairs have their own views on what comprises an acceptable dissertation. And, committee members hold their own standards, which may differ from those of the faculty chair. In the end, the quality of dissertation research is assessed by the votes of the committee members and chair.

Passing or failing is largely a political decision. As is well known, those decisions are overwhelmingly positive (de-Miguel, 2010). There are few failures at the defense stage of the dissertation, regardless of the quality of the work. Despite this fact, there are standards that are promulgated by universities to maintain an acceptable level of dissertation quality and to guide dissertation advisors and committees. As with any policy or regulation, effectiveness of standards is determined by application and enforcement at the point where action is taken.

The dissertation standards of five top-rated (U. S. News and World Reports, 2014) programs in education policy were reviewed. These programs are at Stanford, Harvard, the University of Wisconsin--Madison, Vanderbilt

(Peabody), and Teachers College, Columbia. Each has process and product standards that are applied to maintain the quality of dissertation research.

Process standards involve how the dissertation is produced and evaluated. Product standards are applied to the quality of the content of the dissertation.

Standards from other notable universities in the United States and internationally were reviewed to supplement those of the United States. There are some similarities and many differences, with the international universities tending to be more conscious of averting the potential effects of friendships and political behavior of chairs and committee members.

Process standards for dissertation research

Process standards include selecting dissertation chairs and committee members, constituting dissertation committees, openly sharing the work of doctoral students with the full academic community, separating the dissertation advisor from the summative evaluation process, requiring external reviewers, and conducting multiple levels of evaluation.

Selecting dissertation chairs and committee members

Chairs and members are selected in various ways across universities. In all cases, chairs and members must meet the requirements of the governing bodies of the university.

At Stanford, the chair and committee represent the university, school, or department and verify that the standards of these bodies have been met (Stanford University, n. d.^a). Chairs of dissertation reading committees must be members of the Academic Council Professoriate, which consists of tenure-line and non-tenure-line teaching faculty at all ranks, non-tenure-line research faculty at all ranks, and senior fellows at policy centers and institutes. A co-advisor, who is a member of the Academic Council Professoriate, is required when an emeritus Academic Council member (after two years in emeritus status), a non-Academic Council member, or a former Academic Council member is appointed as chair. The co-advisor assures that someone directly connected to the department represents the student (Stanford University, n. d.^a).

At the University of Wisconsin—Madison (2013), dissertation review committees have two parts: a reading committee of three members and an oral examination committee of five members. At least three of the five members on the oral examination committee must be from the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. At least four members of the committee must have Graduate Faculty status at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. At least one member of the oral examining committee must be from outside the student's department (University of Wisconsin—Madison, 2013).

Vanderbilt's three-year EdD program in the Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations has a capstone project rather than a dissertation (Vanderbilt University, 2015^b). The capstone project is designed with a partner organization that has an interest in making a change or implementing a program. Past partners are the Montgomery County, Maryland,

Public Schools and the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. The project is guided by the EdD faculty of the Peabody Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations. No standards for assigning faculty to supervise the students, other than the interests and competence of the faculty, were found on the Vanderbilt website.

Constituting doctoral committees

At Stanford University (n. d.^a), dissertation reading committees have a minimum of three and not more than five members, including the chair. One member must be from the student's department; the remaining members are appointed from the Academic Council Professoriate, from emeritus members of the Council, or from non-Academic Council members with special competence in some aspect of the dissertation. Only one of the three readers may be a non-Academic Council member. If more than three readers (but not more than five) are on the committee, a majority must be Academic Council or emeritus Academic Council members (Stanford University, n. d.^a).

At the University of Wisconsin—Madison (2013), chairs and co-chairs of dissertation committees must be members of the graduate faculty. Graduate faculty members are those with the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or instructor in any graduate degree-granting department in the university. Retirees and others who leave the university hold graduate-faculty status for one year. Thereafter, they may serve as co-chairs or other non-graduate faculty members on committees.

Information on how doctoral committees are constituted at George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University was not readily available. Committees that guide the capstone project appear to be constituted around faculty competence and interests.

At Teachers College, Columbia, doctoral committees have two (or more) members: a sponsor, usually the student's major advisor, and one or more other faculty members (Teachers College, Columbia, 2014). Any member of Teachers College with professional rank may serve on committees. Oral examination committees are comprised of two (or more) members and at least one other external examiner selected by the Office of Doctoral Studies. The oral examination committee is chaired by someone other than the student's sponsor.

Openly sharing dissertation work of doctoral students

Milestone examinations during the development and defense of a dissertation may or may not be public events, open to all faculty and practitioners. These events may be advertised widely throughout the academic and practice arenas. Invitations may be issued to individuals who may have an interest in the topic. No requirement for openly sharing or advertising the dissertation or defense was found for Stanford University, the University of Wisconsin--Madison, or George Peabody College at Vanderbilt University. The University of Oxford in Great Britain opens PhD examinations to all faculty members who may attend if they are in academic dress. The examination is published in the *University Gazette*, the official university newspaper (University of Oxford, 2014). Harvard Graduate School of Education requires a public airing of the capstone projects of its students in its Doctor of Education Leadership program (Leddy, 2014).

Separating dissertation advisor from summative evaluation process

A potential conflict of interest occurs when the dissertation advisor and advisory committee are the evaluators of the dissertation. Failure of the dissertation to meet acceptable criteria is a failure of the student, the dissertation advisor, and the dissertation committee. It is unlikely that the dissertation advisor and committee will evaluate the work of the student negatively. To avoid this conflict of interest, some institutions require that the chair or at least one member of the final defense examining committee is an impartial outsider. This is the case at Syracuse University, where the chair of the six-member oral defense committee is appointed by the Graduate School from faculty in other departments (Syracuse University, 2011).

Requiring external reviewers

Stanford University appoints an outside chair to its five-member oral defense committees. The chair is selected from faculty in other departments recommended by the student's department (Stanford University, n. d.^b). In both cases, the chair's responsibility as a voting member is to assure that departmental and graduate school rules and policies governing doctoral study are followed and to protect the academic integrity of the examination and dissertation. At the University of Wisconsin—Madison, one member of the examining committee must be from outside the student's department (University of Wisconsin—Madison, 2014). At the University of Oxford, there are two examiners, both appointed from recommendations submitted by the student and his or her supervisor. One is internal to the student's department, and the other is external to the department. The advisor may attend the *viva voce* (oral defense) (University of Oxford, 2014).

Conducting multiple levels of evaluation

Three levels of evaluation are proposed by de-Miguel (2010) to increase the quality of dissertations: pre-public review by peers, committee review in a public setting, and post-acceptance review by the field. The pre-public review by peers occurs when the student distributes his or her work to peers in the field for review and comment on the quality of the content. These reviews, much like the reviews for refereed articles in journals, may be used to make revisions in the dissertation prior to submission of the document to a committee for review in a public setting. The official committee review is publicly advertised and open for attendance by anyone in the academic or general community. The post-acceptance evaluation occurs when the degree recipient publishes the work through whatever channels and receives feedback on the effect of the work on the development of theory, research, or practice. Although de-Miguel wrote about the process in Spain, his work is applicable to any cultural setting. His three levels of evaluation, if taken seriously, have the potential for improving the quality of doctoral dissertations in any field. The three levels of evaluation, as a whole, were not found at the institutions reviewed for this paper.

Product standards for dissertation research

Product standards run from extremely general to quite specific across the universities reviewed. For example, at the most general level, Stanford makes this statement:

The doctoral dissertation is expected to be an original contribution to scholarship or scientific knowledge, to exemplify the highest standards of the discipline, and to be of lasting value to the intellectual community. (Stanford University, n. d.^a, Rationale, para. 1)

At a slightly more specific level, the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Peabody College at Vanderbilt University make the following statements:

The PhD degree is a research degree and is granted on evidence of general proficiency, distinctive attainment in a special field, and particularly on ability for independent investigation as demonstrated in a dissertation presenting original research or creative scholarship with a high degree of literary skill. (University of Wisconsin—Madison, 2014, Degrees, Minors, Certificates section, para. 5)

Peabody believes the capstone, rather than the traditional dissertation, brings to bear the analytic abilities, professional understanding, contextual knowledge and teamwork skills that are accrued throughout the EdD program, and more closely mirror the challenges of contemporary education practice. (Vanderbilt University, 2015^a, EdD Capstone Experience section, para. 1)

At the most specific level, the Penn Graduate School of Education has the following standards for EdD dissertations:

1. The topic is stated clearly and relevant background literature reviewed and evaluated.
2. The research question(s) are stated clearly.
3. The contribution and importance of the research question(s) with respect to relevant literature, theory, policy, and/or practice are articulated in a convincing manner.
4. The research plan and methods are appropriate and adequate to study the research question(s) posed, and are explicitly described.
5. The research plan and methods are implemented effectively.
6. The research produced trustworthy evidence that bears on the research question(s).
7. The conclusions follow convincingly from the evidence and its interpretation.
8. The dissertation manuscript is coherent, well structured, clearly written and is in accordance with the specifications of a standard style manual regarding grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.
9. With appropriate revisions, the dissertation is of sufficient quality to be publishable in an academic or practice-oriented journal that is peer reviewed. (Penn Graduate School of Education, 2015, Standards for the Dissertation section, para. 1)

Standards of Quality for Doctoral Research Recommended by Professors of Educational Leadership in Virginia

A survey of 75 faculty members in educational leadership programs in 13 Virginia colleges and universities was conducted. All of the Virginia doctoral-granting institutions were included, and some institutions with faculty

known to have served on doctoral committees were added. Twenty-eight faculty members responded, and 21 responses were useable.

Description of respondents

Four questions were asked about the experience of respondents in education and in supervising dissertation students or serving on dissertation committees. The data are in Table 1.

Table 1

Experience of Respondents in Educational Settings and in Supervising Dissertations, N=21

	Years of experience in public or private education	Years of experience in colleges or universities	Number of dissertations chaired	Number of dissertation committee memberships
<i>M</i>	24.52	15.24	28.10	41.24
Median	27	12	15	30
<i>SD</i>	11.69	11.57	36.79	48.88
Min	4	3	0	0
Max	43	46	140	200

Respondents had much experience in the practice of education. The median for years of experience in public schools, private schools, or other positions associated with education, such as a consultant, was 27 years. The median for years of experience in higher education was 12. The variance is large for both experience groups, with a standard deviation of over 11 years.

The respondents ranged widely in the number of dissertations chaired (0 to 140) and the number of dissertation committees on which they served (0 to 200). The medians of

15 and 30, respectively, for these two variables, indicate that the distribution is heavy on the lower end.

Some faculty members who have been in higher education for many years have served as chair or a member on large numbers of dissertation committees. The Pearson correlation coefficient between years in higher education and number of dissertations chaired was .944. The correlation between years in higher education and the number of committees was .841. Such correlations are to be expected in research-oriented institutions, where faculty

members in earlier years were hired in educational leadership with fewer years of PK-12 experience and a direct interest in research or university teaching. In more recent years, experienced school leaders who may have retired from the PK-12 system have joined the faculties in school administration.

Data collection

Qualtrics survey software was used to distribute a five-item questionnaire. The primary item was “Please write THREE criteria

(you may write more if your wish) that you believe are ESSENTIAL (CRITICAL OR INDISPENSABLE) in assessing the quality of doctoral dissertations IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP.”

The other four questions requested information on years of experience in universities and public schools and the number of dissertations chaired and committees on which the respondent served. The data are reported here without disaggregation by experience.

Data analysis and findings

The Maykut and Morehouse (1994) constant comparative method was applied in the analysis of the data. Raw data matrices were prepared to summarize the data within categories and subcategories of criteria.

Four large categories of criteria were identified in the data. These were labeled:

1. conditionals,
2. conceptual adequacy,
3. technical adequacy, and
4. advisement adequacy.

Conditionals were statements by respondents about the nature of the dissertation or dissertation research that may affect the criteria that they proposed. Conceptual adequacy contained criteria on the purpose, grounding, and value of a study. Technical adequacy contained criteria on the research methods and presentation of the dissertation. Advisement adequacy had statements about the competence of the advisor. The numbers appearing at the ends of quotations are the identification numbers assigned to the respondents.

Category of criteria #1: conditionals

Respondents made several observations about the nature of doctoral degrees and the research associated with those degrees. Distinctions were made between EdD and PhD degrees, masters’ degrees and doctoral degrees, and degrees with capstone projects and degrees with traditional dissertations. Qualifications about the nature of doctoral research were presented by two respondents:

Distinctions in degrees and related dissertations

Distinctions were made between the EdD and the PhD and the nature of the research appropriate for each. One respondent defined the difference between the EdD and the PhD

when he or she wrote, “Does the dissertation address a significant problem of practice (EdD) or a significant theoretical/methodological issue (PhD)?” (11). Another was concerned that doctoral work was something more than that required for the master’s degree (14). A third had chaired two capstone projects, but made no distinction in criteria for evaluating capstone projects and dissertations. The criteria presented by this respondent could be applied to either capstone projects or traditional dissertations. This person wrote, “Well organized and understand[s] the interconnection of the various chapter[s] of the dissertation” (7).

Qualifications on the nature of doctoral research

Respondents were concerned that the expectations for dissertation research should be reasonable, yet they expected high-quality, verifiable work. One wrote that the dissertation was the first, last, and only piece of research that most EdD students would do (1). This same respondent asserted that dissertation research was semi-independent work and that the quality of the work was the responsibility of the student, the faculty chair, and the committee (1). A second respondent raised the specter of potential misbehavior. Did the student actually do the work? His or her criterion was, “Presentation of data that assures the reader that the work has been done and leads to findings that would be apparent to the reader of those findings, based on the presented data” (9).

Category of criteria #2: conceptual adequacy

There were four sub-categories of conceptual adequacy in the data: originality, grounding, value, and generalizability.

Originality

Originality implies that the dissertation topic is novel; that the student has conceptualized an educational problem in a new, creative, and interesting way; or that the methods of collecting and analyzing data have the potential to contribute to the field in ways that have not been used by prior researchers. Although originality is identified by some universities (for example, Stanford University, n. d.^a, and the University of Wisconsin—Madison, 2013) as a criterion for evaluating the quality of doctoral student research, only one of the respondents listed originality as a criterion. This person thought that the dissertation should offer “something new that augments what is already known” (4).

Grounding

Grounding is situating the dissertation clearly within the area of leadership, basing the dissertation on a framework or on research questions that have been carefully derived from the literature or from practice, and identifying a clear purpose for the work. Grounding had more criteria (18 criteria) than any other subcategory in the conceptual-adequacy category. This is apparently a critical area when faculty members review dissertations.

A focus on leadership. Respondents expected students in educational leadership to do research on leadership. Two of the respondents specifically listed “educational leadership” (3, 26) as the

focus of the dissertation, but another respondent was willing to accept studies that examined leadership more broadly. This respondent wrote, “The study has a component that clearly connects to leadership at some level” (2).

A problem, research questions, or conceptual framework derived from literature or practice. Respondents expected the student to do a thorough review of the literature and create a problem statement, research questions, or a conceptual framework from that review. This theme came through strongly in the criteria. Respondents used such phrases as “a comprehensive review” (2), “conceptual framework or other chain of logic to the topic” (9), “research questions tied in with a conceptual framework” (10), “a thorough awareness of the extant literature” (11), “[a] command of the literature” (18), and “grounding in existing research” (28). It is clear that dissertation chairs and committee members would not look kindly on a dissertation that did not explicitly connect the research questions, the problem statement, the purpose, and the conceptual framework to the research and theory within the field of study. One person wanted the problem studied to be grounded in practice and the research literature (8).

A clear purpose. Anyone who begins a dissertation should have a clear end in mind. The purpose of the work should be clear to the student, and the student should be able to articulate that purpose to his chair, committee, or anyone else who may ask. Purpose is often confused by students with the “what” of their studies. Purpose is about the “why” of their studies. The student must state explicitly “why” he or she is doing the work. Clarity of purpose was offered as a criterion by one of the respondents (15).

Value of the research

Value of the research was the second largest component of conceptual adequacy. Thirteen respondents listed criteria related to the value of the dissertation. They thought that value rested in the extent to which the dissertation might lead to further studies (3); contribute to the development or extension of theory (4); contribute to the field (8, 14, 28) by solving a problem (14), addressing a research need or issue (6, 14, 18), improving practice, generally (4, 11, 18, 19), or improving practice for the individual, specifically (8); or addressing a methodological issue (PhD) (11). One respondent added the general qualifier that the dissertation should have “substance” (20).

Generalizability

Generalizability is a criterion for large scale studies in which samples are taken from a population and statistical techniques are applied to determine whether inferences can be made from the sample statistics to the population parameters. Generalizability is not an applicable criterion in most small-scale, qualitative studies. Only one respondent listed generalizability as a criterion. This respondent expected the dissertation to have “implications beyond the local school division” (3). These implications could be what is meant by “transferability” (Colorado State University, (1993-2014). Transferability exists when the findings of a study that is conducted in one setting are applied to or “transferred” to another setting with similar

characteristics. For example, findings in a study of a fifth-grade classroom in School A in City A are applied to a fifth-grade classroom in School B in City B. The conditions of the two settings may be similar enough for some transfer of findings to be possible.

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Category of criteria #3: technical adequacy

Technical adequacy had two components: methods adequacy and presentation adequacy. Methods adequacy was the larger of the two and is concerned with whether the overall design and the specific scientific process applied in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data are sufficient to answer the research questions and achieve the purpose(s) of the study. Presentation adequacy is concerned with how well the report of the study is written and shared with the community of scholars and practitioners who may be interested in the findings.

Methods adequacy

Methods adequacy had four subcategories: clarity and alignment of research questions, an overall design that is expected to provide data to answer the research questions, trustworthiness in the findings, and alignment across the design components.

Clarity and alignment of the research questions. Respondents expected dissertations to have “clearly defined research questions” (2) that “emanate from the conceptual framework” (13), and are aligned with “a methodology that promises to answer the questions” (2).

An overall design that is expected to provide data to answer the research questions. The overall design of the dissertation research was a critical area of concern for the respondents. Eleven respondents provided criteria for assessing the quality of the design. They thought the design should be “appropriate for the research problem” (8, 17, 19, 24), “aligned to the research questions” (13), “replicable” (9), “clearly stated and rigorously followed” (26), and “defensible” (28).

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is the idea that a reader can rely on what the author reports as the results of the study. It is the reader’s assessment of the “truthfulness” and “dependability” of the researcher and his or her findings. One respondent focused directly on trustworthiness by writing “the research [is] carried out in a trustworthy fashion” (4). Another wrote, “[a]

presentation of data that assures the reader that the work has been done and leads to findings that would be apparent to the reader of those findings, based on the presented data” (9). The idea that the methods should have “rigor” ran through several of the criteria. “Quality—the study was well done from a technical standpoint” (4), “sound methodology” (17), “scholarship” (12), “intellectual rigor” (12), “conducted competently ...” (8), and “reflect[s] ...the difference between high-quality and non-rigorous research” (11) were included in the list of criteria. The respondents were concerned that methods were valid (14), the data were appropriately interpreted (17), the findings were appropriately summarized (24) and answered the research questions (26), and the conclusions were appropriately drawn from the findings (24).

Alignment of elements of dissertation. This is the idea that the purpose, research questions, conceptual framework with related literature, population and samples, data collection methods, data analysis methods, findings, and conclusions should be consistent. All of these parts of a dissertation should have the same focus. One respondent focused squarely on this idea when he or she listed “alignment across the entire dissertation” (17) as a criterion.

Presentation adequacy

Presentation adequacy is concerned with how the final report of the dissertation is constructed and presented to the research and practice communities. Dissertation writers should know that the report of their work remains on the World Wide Web for eternity; thus, it must be carefully prepared to avoid embarrassment to their chairs, committee members, and, above all, themselves. Six respondents listed criteria for assessing the presentation of the report. Two listed the “quality of writing” (6, 19) as a criterion. The others wrote that the study should be “well-constructed and easy to follow” (15), and the writing should be “clear” (10, 12), “logical” (10), “organized” (10), and “effective” (20).

Category of criteria #4: advisement adequacy

One respondent addressed the qualifications of the dissertation advisor. Those qualifications were classified into content (conceptual) competence, research (technical) competence, dissertation (process) competence, and personal competence. The respondent thought that an advisor should demonstrate content competence by “currently teaching classes in educational leadership” (7). They should demonstrate research competence by being able to “assist graduate students ... [with] data collection strategies” (7) and by “hav[ing] some working knowledge of research” or by constructing dissertation committees with “at least one member who is strong in statistical design and data analysis” (7). Chairs should demonstrate dissertation-process competence by showing that they “understand the interconnection of the various chapter[s]of the dissertation” (7). Finally, they must demonstrate personal competence by being “well organized” (7).

Conclusions

The first, and primary, conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that faculty members across Virginia believe that there are criteria

that should be applied to the assessment of doctoral dissertations in education. Further, these criteria are associated with the conceptual, technical, and advisory adequacy of

the dissertation. In their minds, conceptual adequacy is concerned with the originality, grounding, generalizability, and value of the dissertation. Technical adequacy is concerned with the methods applied in doing the study and the literary skills with which the study is presented to the public. Advisory adequacy is associated with the competence of the chair of the dissertation committee.

A second conclusion is that the adequacy of advisement should be assessed with criteria that focus on the content, research, dissertation-process, and personal competence of the advisor. This conclusion is based on the responses of only one person; however, this person has raised a major issue in the evaluation of dissertations. The quality of a dissertation is dependent upon the quality of the inputs, and one of the critical inputs is the quality of the advisement received by the student.

A third conclusion is that the doctorate in educational leadership is in somewhat of a muddle. Some respondents made clear that a distinction should be made between the EdD and the PhD, between the master's degree and the doctorate, and between dissertations and capstone projects. The criteria reported by nearly all respondents are appropriate for the traditional research dissertation and may not be appropriate for the variety of dissertation types that are being developed in educational leadership.

Discussion of the Findings

Doctoral research in educational leadership appears to be stuck in the past. The Carnegie Foundation has been promoting reform in doctoral programs with its Carnegie Initiative

on the Doctorate (CID) since 2001 (Golde, Walker, & Associates, 2006).

Educational leadership is one of the areas targeted for reform, and one of the reforms is to reconstruct the preparation of leaders at the doctoral level. Reconstruction would focus attention on preparing educators for practice.

Preparation for practice would include a capstone project rather than a traditional dissertation. A few institutions (Harvard and Peabody College at Vanderbilt for two) have moved in this direction. Most, however, continue to use the traditional methods of preparation, including a research-based dissertation, in their programs. To date, the Carnegie initiative seems to be ignored by or not visible to most faculties in educational leadership. The result is the continuation of the past, and the questions asked and the criteria presented in this brief piece of research in Virginia reflect this orientation.

The fact that capstone projects were raised by one person in this study shows a small crack in the monolithic approach to doctoral education. That small crack may be a sign that university faculty should begin a serious discussion of the nature of doctoral education in educational leadership and the processes that we use to stimulate and further that education.

The result of these discussions may be a reconstruction of how we do our work and what we ask of our students. This does not mean that we must have uniform programs.

What it does mean is that we must have “thoughtful” programs for preparing our school

leaders at the doctoral level. With respect to criteria for assessing the quality of doctoral research, it means that we should have multiple sets of criteria, depending upon the nature of that research. For those school leaders contemplating taking an advanced degree in educational leadership, the findings of this study have several implications.

First, they should anticipate some turmoil as university faculties come to grips with the nature of doctoral education and research.

Second, they should do some thinking about the kind of advanced education they want and pursue a seat in those universities that have programs that match their preferences.

Third, those practitioners who enter the university following employment in the schools should express their views and exert their influence in departments of educational leadership to bring change in how educational leaders are prepared and how the research in educational leadership is conducted.

Author Biography

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