Promoting Team Leadership Skills in Doctoral Candidates

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Abstract

Doctoral programs can serve as an optimal opportunity for candidates to engage in tasks and activities to transform them and their schools. The paradigm shifts in such preparation involve moving from sitting and getting to making and taking. Most importantly, it requires building leadership skills and styles necessary to bring about desired change in schools. As such they should put key principles and conceptual frameworks to effective practice. Accreditation bodies and professional groups have set forth a philosophical base to create and implement effective programs. Based on such principles and a model of a collaborative effort between two CSU campuses, this article highlights some of the strategies and techniques used in working with cohorts of doctoral programs. Implications for implementing doctoral programs using cohort models are drawn.

Introduction

Doctoral programs are turning points in participants' professional, personal and academic lives. Standards and frameworks provide roadmaps for continual professional learning and advancing practice that are context-bound. While they are not intended to be destinations in these endeavors, they can serve as a threshold for new challenges, opportunities and a wide range of unlimited potentials. Like in any other professional fields such as medicine, healthcare, business and others, standards in education are geared to train and produce professionals to meet the immediate needs of their communities and society at large.

Throughout their experiences in their doctoral programs, candidates engage in various specific and challenging tasks throughout their journey that ultimately broaden their conceptual awareness and hone their professional skills. As such graduating candidates are expected to tackle real-life issues and face the challenges in the institutions that they seek to change.

It is vital that programs are carefully planned and structured to match the expectations of school reform and improvement. The scope and sequence of the program, its goals, implementation and delivery should be keenly linked to the specific contextually-bound variables and conditions. Such aspects as demographics, political dynamics, instructional needs of teachers and leaders and the like should be the basis for such initiatives. In addition, promoting a doctoral culture should be clearly delineated and enhanced.

Accreditation guidelines usually provide a framework that underlies the philosophical underpinnings of how programs should function. Thus various tenets of such programs are closely aligned to specific sets of expectations, benchmarks and standards. At the same time, an ongoing assessment and evaluation system is dictated by accreditation bodies for ensuring respective programs' integrity, quality, continuity, and most importantly, their promising impact on all participants to impart the desired change.

Moreover, professional organizations and groups provide principles and foundations that can enhance such programs. They also provide a forum to share workable approaches, experiences, proven and tested strategies that can be enriching to institutions offering such programs. More importantly, they provide a network of

collaboration among professionals at various levels to bring about the desired outcomes. In fact, one of the key ingredients for any program success in establishing strong foundations is using a process model in which participants collaborate for effective planning and social problem solving (Hood, Logsdon, & Kenner, 1993).

This article explores these issues and provides a case history of the recently created program at one of the California State Universities. First, the context and background of how the program was started will be discussed particularly in relation to the joint initiative between two campuses: California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) and California State University, Fresno (CSUF). Secondly, a framework for program integrity and quality will be provided within the realm of accreditation agencies and professional organizations. In particular, an overview of the WASC and CPED guidelines and principles is presented with connections to various elements of the program. In addition, several tenets of the program will be presented within the cohort model and the professional learning community engagements among participants. Finally, implications for effective approaches to program implementation will be drawn and suggested.

Context and Background: Brief Overview

California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) is located in a unique service area in central California. It offers various degrees and majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, it offers a large number of credential programs and certificates. In education, such programs range from elementary and secondary credentials to school counseling to educational specialists. Various Masters programs are also offered such as curriculum and instruction, counseling, special education, educational administration among others.

Several years ago, the campus hosted a large meeting with key administrators, faculty, and partners to explore the possibility of initiating an educational doctorate program (Ed.D.) to meet the instructional and leadership needs of the PreK-12 community and beyond. The local superintendents and the county office of education personnel, university administrators, deans and faculty met to chart out a vision and roadmap to create a program designed to meet the community needs in the schools. A team approach was used and a large advisory group began the planning process. Participants also explored joint initiatives and other opportunities to ensure a solid start of the program.

This move has largely been driven by a system-wide initiative within the California State University that encourages creating professional doctoral programs and degrees in Educational Leadership to prepare professionals who will bring about the desired change and enhance the California's PreK-20 educational systems. Needless to say, teacher and educator preparation is at the center stage of the CSU core mission; and this initiative is yet another added element to the system's commitment to the training of effective instructional educational leaders.

A major outcome of these efforts was forging a strong partnership with another campus in the region: California State University, Fresno (CSUF) which has had its program underway years earlier. Thus, CSUB has joined efforts with CSUF to become one of the twenty campuses offering educational doctorate programs.

Both institutions are accredited by various state, regional, and national agencies. At the state level, both campuses are accredited by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) which is the rubber stamp of integrity and quality in the preparation of teachers, administrators, counselors, and educational specialists. The various programs at each campus are accredited regionally by Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) commission, and at the national level, by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Conceptual Framework

Apart from the frameworks of accreditation bodies that postulate specific principles, pre-conditions and standards for program integrity, there are other professional groups and organizations that offer blueprints that can be helpful in establishing programs' rigor and effectiveness. Depending on the program and the field at hand, each domain lends itself to a set of layers of standards and expectations that are seen complementary to one another at the core levels. For example, the national guidelines (reflected in the NCATE Standards) for preparing school administrators generally echo their counterparts as outlined at the state level. At the same time, they are consistent with various state and national/international professional associations' principles and propositions. The common thread among the various layers of standards can serve as a solid foundation for creating and implementing programs grounded in workable theories, models, approaches, and universal experiences.

Perhaps one of the most recent influential groups in shaping the educational doctorate programs is the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). An increasingly popular organization, CPED and its principles have become the axiom upon which newly created doctorate in education programs are based. As a major premise of its philosophical stance, CPED has revisited the role of educational doctorate in its operational definition and underlying principles.

According to their website, the CPED group states, "the professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession." The Consortium has also identified six principles that can serve as underlying assumptions for creating a doctoral culture. Accordingly, the professional doctorate in education:

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.

Operationally, the consortium has also provided a series of helpful definitions that can have implications for certain aspects of educational doctorate programs. The proposed *design concept definitions* are intended, according to the CPED website, to serve as , "a set of Working Principles and Design Concepts that provide an architecture that honor local context rather than a prescription for program design." These concepts are summarized in the following table:

Design Concept	*Definition*
Scholarly Practitioner	Scholarly Practitioners blend practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice. They use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice. They disseminate their work in multiple ways, and they have an obligation to resolve problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals.
Signature Pedagogy	Signature Pedagogy is the pervasive set of practices used to prepare scholarly practitioners for all aspects of their professional work: "to think, to perform, and to act with integrity" (Shulman, 2005, p.52). Signature pedagogy includes three dimensions, as articulated by Lee Shulman (2005): 1. Teaching is deliberate, pervasive and persistent. It challenges assumptions, engages in action, and requires ongoing assessment and accountability. 2. Teaching and learning are grounded in theory, research, and in problems of practice. It leads to habits of mind, hand, and heart that can and will be applied to authentic professional settings. 3. Teaching helps students develop a critical and professional stance with a moral and ethical imperative for equity and social justice.
Inquiry as Practice	Inquiry as Practice is the process of posing significant questions that focus on complex problems of practice. By using various research, theories, and professional wisdom, scholarly practitioners design innovative solutions to address the problems of practice. At the center of Inquiry of Practice is the ability to use data to understand the effects of innovation. As such, Inquiry of Practice requires the ability to gather, organize, judge, aggregate, and analyze situations, literature, and data with a critical lens.
Problem of Practice	A Problem of Practice is as 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.
Dissertation in Practice	The Dissertation in Practice is a scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice.

Although these principles, frameworks, and concept definitions are not prescriptive in nature, they certainly can serve as key ingredients to design and implement effective programs in various settings. Taking into account the contextual demands, these

constructs are flexible in nature and allow local institutions to tailor the program to fit the professional needs of participants and their aspirations.

We have recently attended and participated in the latest CPED Consortium conference held last June 2014 in Denver, Colorado. The conference was informative and provided an eye-opening experience to examine our program vis-à-vis others across the state and nation. We have come to the realization that what our candidates are experiencing is in line with the paradigms set forth by the above principles; in addition, the concept definitions are seamlessly integrated in the scope and sequence of the various program requirements ranging from the action research and field based projects, signature assignments throughout the program, to more importantly the dissertations in practice. Our observations also underscored the significant collaborative efforts and partnerships we established with CSUF as a pioneer institution in their program. Such collaboration has been mutually beneficial in promoting a doctoral culture in central California.

Teaming Together to Promote A Doctoral Culture

In order to promote a rich learning/teaching experience in teacher and educational leadership preparation, a joint effort and synergy should be combined for the collective benefit of all involved to accomplish a set of common goals. For example, it is through the collective efforts teachers and educators "have the opportunity for nourishment and professional development" (Suleiman, 1998, p. 4), as they work together to establish and accomplish key objectives (Troen & Boles, 2010). The process can be facilitated by common visions and missions that typically interface, and are used as axioms upon which benchmarks are based.

To create a rich culture of learning and teaching, a comprehensive approach should be used to engage all parties involved at different levels. This approach should be based on paradigm shifts from traditional to constructivist epistemologies and models that cultivate group dynamics and interaction within learning communities (Hung, Tan, & Koh, 2006). This is especially true in designing and implementing graduate and doctoral opportunities in all fields of inquiry using cohort systems. As far as educational leadership is concerned, it is imperative to have a multi-dimensional process with grounded underlying assumptions (as outlined in frameworks and professional standards and principles) as well as a series of interconnected actions and strategies. These involve purposeful and strategic integration of didactic models and opportunities throughout the program's stages within the contextual demands and needs of candidates and schools.

The following is a general summary of the joint program tenets and characteristics that describe how a meaningful doctoral culture can be created:

1. ***Needs assessment and reconnaciance of facts.*** The context of the service area provides a fertile environment for providing an opportunity to examine current issues and challenges facing schools and the community. The need to prepare leaders who undertake school reform initiatives has been critical given the pressure to augment educational outcomes in diverse schools.
2. ***Recruitment of prospective leaders for change and innovation.*** Embedding rigorous admission criteria and evaluating candidates' progress throughout are established early on. This includes carefully establishing multiple layers of

criteria and standards for admission and continuity in the program. Candidates have to demonstrate their readiness and commitment to become change agents by fully meeting admission criteria, adequately maintaining academic progress, and successfully completing their dissertation in practice.

3. ***Building a professional community through the cohort model.*** Cohort models can have promising outcomes in educational avenues. They also allow members to experience the exigency required for maintaining program rigor especially at the initial stages of the doctoral program (Irby, & Miller, 1999). Participants in cohorts, albeit the challenges that might exist (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000), find themselves in a community of learning that requires effective group dynamics and interpersonal communication skills. Throughout the program, candidates develop collaborative skills, share common concerns, reflect on burning issues facing their schools, and engage in a productive discourse to create solutions in the face of challenges at their school sites. Most importantly, they generally develop a professional network as they develop leadership skills by learning with, about, from others as well as about themselves.

4. ***Engaging in actionable research and inquiry.*** Redefining the role of teachers and leaders in schools should revolve around the premise of their active engagement in research and inquiry. The paradigm that defines the candidates' roles as reflective practitioners is based on the notion that educational leaders are action research producers rather than merely research consumers. Ample opportunities are available for candidates to examine the issues facing their schools as they engage in action-oriented projects to solve them. More importantly, action research strategies and cycles are powerful tools for educational leaders who strive to improve schools (Glanz, 2003). Traditional wisdom teaches us that research should not result in reports and publications that end up on library shelves collecting dust; rather, research projects should produce actionable tools for sustainable and constant school renewal and improvement.

5. ***Building on the existing expertise within the PreK-20 community***. This requires inter-departmental and intra-departmental networking and participation. Thus no one should hold monopoly of a program that is intended to serve a wide range of audiences and tackle the huge magnitude of issues affecting schools given the evolving social and ecological forces. Interestingly enough, this shift has been evident in the current program which includes candidates and faculty who reflect the diverse make-up of the school community and demographics. Since effective leading in a culture of change requires building on existing expertise (Fullan, 2007), faculty partnership in the program has become one of the salient defining elements in the initial stages. In addition, co-teaching, coaching, and collaboration among core and affiliate faculty from both campuses and local districts have contributed to promoting intellectual vitality and innovation in the doctoral culture.

6. ***Balancing theory, practice and pedagogy***. This is achieved through a balanced approach in the course and field experience offerings. Since candidates need to be engaged around contextually based knowledge to improve and advance their practice (Perry & Imig, 2008; Shulman, 2005), candidates have access to the field to examine and study pressing issues that pertain to the school realities on regular basis and throughout the program and beyond. Examples such as field-based research, signature pedagogies, grant writing, ethnographic research and others can have promising consequences not only on the candidates' professional and academic growth but also on the school outcomes.

   While the program is in its infancy, there have been significant accomplishments that hold a lot of promise for the future. One of these involves the solid foundation that has been established through the joint collaborative initiative between both campuses through which four cohorts are currently being served. In fact, the vast majority of the first cohort participants have just completed their doctorates; most of these program completers have been promoted to leadership positions at their schools and districts.

   At the more specific level, the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Fresno State (DPELFS), which has provided the impetus for the newly created program at CSUB, integrates a culture of assessment and regularly collects data for program augmentation an enrichment. According to data trends, there are several indicators that provide evidence for the program quality and integrity that include, but not limited to, that fact that 90% of participating candidates complete their program on time; and 60% of students get promoted prior to graduation. In addition, both institutions are CPED members and have active participation in the consortium. Faculty have become more actively engaged in scholarly activities especially in working with candidates on their dissertations in practice.

   Finally, the program faculty and personnel constantly examine data and student feedback to enhance the doctoral culture in both institutions. As such, the culture of assessment has been integrated to continually monitor the program progress and take necessary actions to maintain compliance with professional standards and guidelines.

Summary and Conclusion

   The paradigm shift in school reform and training of education leaders is being addressed by new collaborative initiatives in refining doctoral programs. There are several models that are equally important and justifiable in meeting the unique needs of participants within the local educational and cultural contexts. The parameters within which each program functions are determined by a set of professional standards, frameworks and expectations.   While these are not intended to be rigid guidelines, they can be helpful in ensuring program pace, progress, and quality. Finally, they can establish key indicators about the evolution and direction the program is taking. Once a solid foundation is established, the less acrimonious task of enhancing the doctoral culture is challengingly exciting!

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