"It's not just going to collect dust on a shelf:" Faculty Perceptions of the Applied Dissertation in the New California State University (CSU) Ed.D. Programs Leadership Education from within a Feminist Ethos

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The launch of independent Ed.D. programs in 2007 at campuses of the California State University (CSU) is significant for its large program size and timing amidst national debate on Ed.D. programs. These applied programs for practitioners require a traditional dissertation based on rigorous research that address problems of practice. This qualitative case study explores how CSU doctoral faculty and program directors conceptualize the purpose and nature of the applied dissertation and the professional and institutional factors that shape their views. It is important to document program norms at this critical early stage to guide improvements at these and other new Ed.D. programs and to contribute to the ongoing debate. Interviews and document review revealed mixed evidence, with some programs stressing scholarly rigor similar to a Ph.D. and others advocating a more relevant, practitioner-oriented approach, such as esummaries of dissertations geared toward educators at the research site. Participants agreed, "We are still feeling our way" regarding dissertation expectations, and greater collegial deliberation is needed. State legislation, accreditation requirements, faculty's own doctoral experience, and other factors tend to reinforce the status quo and inhibit the development of applied approaches. Implications for practice include facilitation of faculty dialogue and consensus-building around visions of the applied dissertation within and across Ed.D. programs.

The California State University (CSU) system has recently embarked on a unique initiative in doctoral preparation for PreK-14 administrators: the launch of independent Ed.D. programs at most of its 23 campuses. This initiative is significant for its size, unprecedented involvement of master's-granting institutions, and timing amidst national debate on Ed.D. programs. The CSU could potentially produce hundreds of doctorates annually, significantly increasing the number of new doctorates in the state (California Postsecondary Education Commission [CPEC], 2000). For example, in 2009-2010, the system enrolled more than 500 Ed.D. candidates and anticipated approximately 100 graduates from its first-wave programs (Bissell, 2009). It is

notable that the new CSU doctorate is in educational leadership, a field that continues to see shortages of qualified applicants, especially at top levels; the poor performance of the state's PreK-12 students lends further urgency. The goal of these programs is to produce school and community college leaders who are effective in promoting educational reform and improved student achievement (CSU, 2007).

Although the new programs are prompted by workplace demand and targeted at working administrators with a focus on applied research, they are mandated to have a traditional dissertation. The dissertation is to be based on original, "systematic, rigorous research" and "contribute to an improvement in public P-12 or community college professional practices or policy, generally or in the context of a particular educational institution" (California State University Office of the Chancellor [CSUOC], 2006, p. 6). To what extent does this represent a new direction in the purpose or nature of the dissertation? What exactly do applied dissertations look like? How are campuses negotiating the role of research and the dissertation in programs mainly focused on leadership development?

The direction that the CSU programs take on these issues affects not only their hundreds of faculty and doctoral candidates, but those at competing institutions, as well as practitioners who work with program graduates. It is critical to examine how applied inquiry for educational leaders is developing at this early stage in the CSU programs in order to make mid-course improvements, as well as to anticipate the programs' impact on leadership preparation in California and beyond. The purpose of this study was to describe how faculty conceptualized the applied dissertation in the first wave of CSU Ed.D. programs.

Debates on the Ed.D. and Practitioner Research

As educational institutions and the conditions and policies that affect them become more complex, school administrators have increasingly been expected to promote research-based strategies, data-based decision-making, and collaborative action research. Growing numbers of administrators have sought advanced training in professional doctoral programs, with 50% of superintendents holding Ed.D. degrees in 2006 (Hernandez & Strauss, 2008). Typically, Ed.D. programs require research methods classes and a traditional dissertation, masking differences between the professional (Ed.D.) and academic (Ph.D.) doctorate in education (Shulman, Golde, Conklin Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). What is the role of the applied dissertation meant to be in Ed.D. programs? What types of capstone experiences best serve the field and the needs of administrators in Ed.D. programs?

These issues have been debated in recent years as Ed.D. programs have proliferated around the country and scholars have questioned their mission and quality in comparison with the academic doctorate or Ph.D. (Young, 2006). For example, Murphy (2007), a leading authority on educational leadership, critiques the dominance of

theory-oriented scholars and the norms of academe rather than those of practice in many university-based educational leadership programs. He sees the Ed.D. dissertation as "the most flagrant example of privileging the university culture over the realities of practice" and the needs of school administrators (p. 584). In his view, researching and writing a dissertation is of little use in preparation for advanced leadership positions. Likewise, Levine (2005), known for his controversial critiques of education schools, proposes scrapping the irrelevant Ed.D. for an executive-style degree like an M.B.A. Shulman et al. (2006) believe that master's-level training is insufficient and recommend a rigorous Professional Practice Doctorate (P.P.D.) comparable to an M.D., in which candidates use their practice as a laboratory for "local research" and do embedded assessments rather than a dissertation. The goal for Shulman and colleagues is informing decision-making rather than making an original scholarly contribution: "P.P.D.'s will learn how to conduct applied research and critically read research reports, and will have serious grounding in scholarship," using their workplace as a "clinical setting" or "experimental laboratory" for "local research and evaluations to guide practice" (pp. 29-30). Young's (2006) working model for differentiating Ed.D. from Ph.D. or M.Ed. programs shares a similar goal but still advocates the dissertation. She proposes that the Ed.D. dissertation in preparation for administrative leadership be "well-designed applied research of value for informing educational practice" that "reflects theory or knowledge for

addressing decision-oriented problems in applied settings" (p. 6). This is contrasted to the Ph.D. dissertation in preparation for scholarly careers, which is an original study showing theoretical mastery that is intended to contribute to "disciplinary knowledge." Meanwhile, Herr and Anderson's (2005) guide to action research dissertations offers a hybrid model for combining scholarship with cycles of inquiry, reflection, and action at candidates' own institutions. Some recently designed Ed.D. programs, such as those at Arizona State University and Washington State University, guide students in practitioner-oriented dissertations using action research (Furman , Grogan, Sernak, & Osterman, 2009; Painter, Moore, Zambo, & Buss, 2009).

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), with approximately 20 member colleges/universities, has as one of its areas of focus the exploration of alternative capstone experiences for Ed.D. candidates. These alternatives range from University of Southern California's thematic dissertations, in which a small group of students work with one advisor and each other to study thematically related topics in individual dissertations, to Vanderbilt University's capstone projects, consisting of student team reports on educational problems that are nominated by leaders in the field (Marsh & Dembo, 2009; Smrekar, 2008). Significantly, most CPED institutions offer both Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs in education, in contrast to the California State University system, which offers

only the Ed.D.—thus raising the need for differentiation elsewhere.

The Ed.D. program at the University of Southern California (USC), for example, was deliberately designed to differ from its Ph.D. by equipping students with "cognitive and interpersonal skills" for successful leadership, taking its cue more from the needs of "educational settings rather than academic content" (Marsh & Dembo, 2009, p. 73). Accordingly, research skills were to be used to solve professional problems and "enhance students' professional competences" rather than contribute to the knowledge base (p. 78), and literature was consulted to shed light on the problem rather than to detect gaps that a traditional dissertation could address. Not surprisingly, Marsh and Dembo (2009) point to designing appropriate research courses as the greatest challenge of the USC program to date. "Although we have an applied focus for the inquiry methods courses in our Ed.D. program," they write, "issues remain about the nature and depth of knowledge students must acquire to use inquiry skills effectively in their work environments and to complete their dissertations" (pp. 83-84). This suggests that even in practitioner-oriented Ed.D. programs that are considered innovative and exemplary (Shulman et al., 2006), there is uncertainty about the nature of the applied dissertation.

Similarly, when Young (2006) shared her model differentiating Ed.D. from Ph.D. programs with colleagues at 15 UCEA institutions, the main area of disagreement was regarding research and the Ed.D. The model calls for three Ed.D. research methods courses to provide an "overview" of research, focusing on "data collection skills for action research, program measurement, and program evaluation," while six Ph.D. methods courses would specialize in quantitative or qualitative methods, covering design, analysis, and measurement theory (p. 6). Young did not elaborate on the nature of the disagreement on research for the Ed.D. It would appear that the applied dissertation in Ed.D. programs remains a contested and unresolved issue in the field.

Indeed, there are various factors that complicate efforts to carve out a coherent approach to applied dissertations. Even traditional dissertations in academe have grown out of unspoken norms in the apprenticeship model between chairs and students; faculty are rarely trained in how to guide dissertations (Barnes & Austin, 2008). These norms, in turn, are internalized by faculty with doctorates who teach in Ed.D. programs. A 2005 study of doctoral advising, including in the field of education, found that a key influence on advisors was the example of the institution where they received their doctorates and their personal experience as doctoral students (Barnes & Austin, 2008). This implies a need for programs pursuing uncharted paths, like that of applied dissertations, to have open discussion about faculty assumptions and expectations.

Applied dissertations on problems of practice at programs geared to working professionals raise issues of practitioner research. Research done by administrators at their own institutions

clearly has potential to improve practice and directly address pressing educational problems. It is also more likely to be seen as relevant and useful by Ed.D. candidates, who typically prefer to do studies at their own workplaces (Anderson & Jones, 2000). But such research raises epistemological, ethical, political, and methodological dilemmas (Anderson & Herr, in press; Anderson & Jones, 2000), beyond those of practitioner research by teachers. This greater complexity derives from administrators' vested interest and position of power in the research setting, which could compromise the integrity of the data, as well as the voluntary consent of research participants. "Administrators have barely begun to address the issues that arise around power and politics when they study their own sites," according to Anderson and Herr (1999, p. 19), and Ed.D. research methods courses and dissertation committees are of little help (Anderson & Jones, 2000). While addressing practitioner research dilemmas is beyond the scope of this paper, these issues further complicate how faculty conceptualize applied dissertations.

When state legislatures enter the debate, as they have in California, approaches to the applied dissertation by state institutions are constrained by mandates. The CSU Ed.D. programs had their origins in California Senate Bill 724, passed in 2005, which was further refined in Executive Order 991 and Title 5 regulations from the CSU Chancellor's Office (CO) (Andre-Bechely, 2009), with the input of faculty and external advisory committees. All campuses

were expected to submit plans for launching an Ed.D. program according to the guidelines and timetable set by the CO, as well as the accreditation requirements of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Individual programs and faculty that wished to transform the nature of dissertations in educational leadership had to do so within the expectations of the CO for the traditional dissertation format and of accrediting agencies for evidence of "doctoral culture."

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by conceptual frameworks in the areas of policy implementation and sociocultural theory, which have a common concern with the building of institutional cultures. The launching of doctoral programs in the CSU has challenged a formerly master's-granting institution to create a doctoral culture grounded in rigorous inquiry. This study examined the early stages in this long-term process through faculty conceptions of the dissertation as a key artifact of doctoral culture.

The story of doctorates in leadership education in the CSU is in part a story of how actors at the local level negotiate and make meaning of policy that has been imposed from above by state-level actors in the Legislature and Chancellor's Office. This paper assumes that policy is implemented not only through technical steps in a chain of command but through a process of negotiation and interaction to build consensus around norms. Even under the pressure of system-wide mandates, reform entails a

process of "co-construction," in which local actors interact with broader institutional structures and constraints, mediated by their own school cultures (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 1998). Education policy is, in part, a system or culture built around goals and norms that often go unexamined (Kahne, 1996). Change in education arises not only from political initiatives and technical adjustments, but from creating consensus around the cultural norms of educational organizations (Sirotnick & Oakes, 1990). Just as teachers in changing schools need to grapple with new ideas of school reform and "argue them into their own normative belief systems, to practice the behaviors that go with these values" (Elmore, 2004, p. 82), so, too, CSU faculty need to articulate group norms and practices around the doctorate and the dissertation as departures from business as usual at their institutions. No matter what its design, "policy still has to be negotiated and implemented through interaction" and the agency of educators (Hargreaves, 1985), making policy implementation less linear and predictable. Hall's (1995) transformation of intentions model stresses the change that takes place at each stage of the policy process through relationships among policy actors and sites. How did doctoral faculty build consensus around norms for dissertations? How did the unique institutional culture of each CSU campus and relationships among actors shape the approach to the applied dissertation as part of policy implementation?

Wenger's (1998) notion of "communities of practice" is situated within sociocultural theory of learning through participation. It offers a generative theory of organizational culture that sheds light on how actors put policy into action and how group norms evolve. A community of practice is a "shared history of learning" in which participants continually negotiate the meaning of what they are doing through interaction (p. 86). According to Wenger (1998), "Practices are histories of mutual engagement, negotiation of an enterprise, and development of a shared repertoire" (p. 95). Certain conditions make mutual engagement possible in organizations, like sufficient time to meet and discuss, while others constrain it. Wenger asserts that through joint enterprise, members of communities of practice create "mutual accountability" and "mediate" institutional power (p. 80), in this case, the mandates of the CSU system. Shared repertoire includes activities, routines, tools, symbols, and artifacts, such as dissertations—the more tangible processes and outputs that people, such as doctoral faculty and candidates, do or create together. This repertoire is framed by Wenger (1998) as a "resource" for negotiating meaning, reflecting, in this case, the purpose of doctoral work in educational leadership. How have the CSU doctoral programs built a sense of joint enterprise through the shared repertoire of applied dissertations? To what extent has mutual engagement among faculty promoted a coherent community of practice around the Ed.D., both within and across programs?

Methods

This first phase of a multiple case study examined one aspect of institutional cultural norms in early policy implementation of the CSU Ed.D. initiative: faculty perceptions of the applied dissertation. Specifically, it addressed the following research questions:

- How do program directors and faculty conceive of the purpose, nature, and relevance of the applied dissertation in the first wave of CSU Ed.D. programs in educational leadership?
- What personal, professional, and institutional factors shaped faculty views and program policies on applied dissertations?
- What expectations do programs have about the overall approach to the dissertation, including topic, methodology, scope, and research site/sample?
- What factors facilitate or constrain a more applied approach to the dissertation?

The program sample includes six of the seven first-wave doctoral programs, which were launched in summer or fall, 2007 (henceforth, for the purposes of this paper, the term "first-wave CSU doctoral programs" refers only to these six programs). These programs were chosen because they were farthest along in the dissertation process, compared to newer programs, at the time of data collection in spring,

2009, and have all had joint Ed.D. programs with University of California campuses or other doctoral-granting institutions. (Most joint programs were being phased out as the independent programs were phased in.) Three programs are located in Southern California, one in Central California, and two in Northern California. Each offer three-year, 60-unit, cohort-based Ed.D. programs in PK-12 and community college leadership geared to working professionals, with some variations in focus, structure, and curriculum. For example, one focuses on equity and diversity issues, while another is concerned with critical policy analysis. The programs are referred to in this paper as Campus A, B, C, D, E, and F, in no particular order, to preserve the anonymity of the participants, in keeping with the conventions of qualitative research.

This first phase of the study used a purposeful sample of 13 administrators and faculty from the six programs and one administrator from the CSU Chancellor's Office (CO). Participants included nine doctoral program directors, co-directors, or former directors, and four doctoral faculty, as well as a CO administrator who worked closely with first-wave institutions on program planning. All campus participants were selected because they were or are most directly involved in setting policy for and guiding applied dissertations. The faculty in the sample were referred by the program directors as those most directly involved in teaching research or dissertation support courses and advising dissertations. The sample

included two or three people at five of the campuses and one at a sixth campus. A majority of the 13 campus participants formerly held administrative positions in K-16 institutions (8); specialized in K-12 leadership (9) or postsecondary leadership (4); served as faculty or directors in the previously established joint Ed.D. programs (8); and used mainly qualitative or mixed methods in their own research (8).

The primary method of data collection for this preliminary study was semi-structured telephone interviews of one to two hours each with the participants. Questions centered around their perspectives on the purpose and nature of the Ed.D. dissertation, the meaning of applied research, expectations for the dissertation, and influences on their program's approach. Probes were used to elicit greater detail and depth for richer responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interview data from transcriptions were triangulated with data from a review of doctoral program documents at the six institutions, such as web sites, student handbooks, dissertation guidelines, and dissertation rubrics, as well as CSU system documents, such as Executive Order 991 and Title 5 regulations pursuant to the state legislation.

Data were analyzed with the constant comparative method, first within-case through topical, theoretical, and *en vivo* coding, and then comparatively cross-case to determine broader patterns, emerging themes, and discrepancies (Merriam, 1988). The main emphasis was cross-case analysis, as there were too few participants for each

campus to warrant within-case findings at this time. Member and colleague checks were done to verify understandings and enhance validity (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Due to the limitations of the sample and the fact that programs were only in their second year, findings presented here should be seen as preliminary and suggestive of the broad outlines of the issues discussed, with a focus on the views of program directors rather than doctoral faculty generally. Findings are not meant to be generalized to all CSU doctoral programs but rather to provide insight into building an institutional culture around the applied dissertation. Plans for future research call for surveys of CSU doctoral faculty and students, which should allow for more meaningful within-case analysis and improved study validity.

As faculty in a second-wave CSU doctoral program who has been active in planning and launching the program, I am myself engaged in practitioner research with colleagues at sister institutions for this study. While I am not directly involved in the first-wave programs, I have experienced many of the challenges discussed by participants and, of course, have my own opinions about the applied dissertation. For example, I believe that it is possible for applied dissertations to be meaningful and rigorous in addressing local problem-solving, but I think programs need to be explicit in their expectations and program preparation in order to achieve this goal. I recognize that others may not share this view or level of concern. I monitored my positionality

and the dilemmas I faced in the research process through analytical memos to examine how they shaped my questions and interpretations (Peshkin, 1988).

"It's not just going to sit on the shelf": Views of the Applied Dissertation

Findings suggest that overall, the first-wave programs were adhering closely to the state legislation and system directives regarding the applied dissertation in their second year. All directors pointed to the legislation as a key influence on their program's approach. However, there was variation in approaches that can be linked to individual and institutional factors at each campus, from a more traditional academic orientation to a more applied/practitioner orientation, as we will see. These orientations often hinged on the extent to which faculty saw the Ed.D. as comparable to the Ph.D. and the extent to which they made these assumptions explicit in dissertation guidelines.

Scholarship and Comparisons to the Ph.D. There was general agreement among participants and program documents that the dissertation should be a scholarly work that addresses important problems of educational practice or policy. Most descriptions of the dissertation on program web sites or in student handbooks reflected the language of the Executive Order, dubbing the dissertation an "original" work that uses "rigorous" methods to study a "significant problem," in a traditional five-chapter format. Program documents referred variously to dissertations addressing "practical," "real-world," or "extremely relevant"

problems through the application of "professional knowledge" and the "integration of theory, research, and practice" that leads to "change" or "transformation" in education.

Asked about the purpose of the dissertation, participants spoke in a similar mix of language. On the one hand, all described it as a rigorous work, most saying it should be just as rigorous as a Ph.D. dissertation and two saying that it should demonstrate that graduates knew how to do "credible research." All expected the dissertation to follow scholarly conventions in matters such as academic writing, literature reviews, and data analysis, as well as the dissertation structure and format. On the other hand, most participants did not see its purpose as making an original contribution to scholarship. One director stressed to faculty the difference between academic and professional dissertations. Unlike a Ph.D. dissertation focused on knowledge for knowledge's sake and often testing or refining theory, the purpose of the Ed.D. dissertation, this person and other participants said, was to contribute to *professional* knowledge and practice. For example, they spoke of dissertation findings being "applied locally" to "local problems," "having an impact" on practice and policy, "making a difference" for students, being "meaningful in their [work] setting," and "advancing equity." "It's an opportunity to influence the [educational] enterprise, to speak to leaders within it," said one director. Another called the applied dissertation a "capstone intellectual experience" that "sets the stage for them [candidates] to

take intellectual leadership, not just programmatic leadership, in the field."

Further comparisons to the Ph.D. help to clarify what participants saw as distinctive to the Ed.D. Several faculty across three campuses evoked the image of Ph.D. dissertations that "collect dust on a shelf," while conversely, they envisioned Ed.D. dissertations as living documents of immediate use in local institutions. "The dissertation is meant to contribute back to the community," said one faculty member. "It's not just going to sit on the shelf, but be something that a student could go in, look at what's happening in a school, and [use it] to make a difference in that particular setting." A program director went further, saying that "superintendents, principals, deans, and chancellors will be able to call up [the doctoral program] and say: 'I understand someone did a study on X. We're doing strategic planning now and need to consider those issues. Can we get a copy of that study?'"

Participants agreed that Ed.D. dissertations should exhibit the same rigor in research design and analysis as a traditional Ph.D. dissertation. "There is an urgency for getting students grounded in research" from the start, said one director, and most first-wave programs built in dissertation or research support classes starting in the first year for this purpose—"to keep the end in mind, to develop a research passion," as another director put it. However, only one program, Campus F, featured research prominently in its Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's), focusing on graduates being skilled consumers and producers of research in

half of the outcomes. Campus C SLO's also highlighted candidates doing their own research of "local problems," while other program SLO's referred more generally to "engaging in scientific methods to assess practice," "promoting research and evaluation," and working with data-based decision-making (at Campuses B, A, and E, respectively). Most first-wave program SLO's emphasized aspects of school leadership development rather than readiness to do rigorous original research. This variation in attention to research in the SLO's was roughly reflected in the number of research methods courses in each program (excluding field-based courses that vary in function). Campuses A, C, and F had four or more research-related courses, while Campuses B, D, and E each had three.

Dissertation Guidelines. Some of the programs had specific expectations for dissertations contained in chapter guidelines, checklists, and rubrics, while others were "still feeling our way," that is, in the process of refining policies at the time of the study. As with documents required by the CO and WASC for program approval, program directors often based their dissertation guidelines and rubrics on those of other CSU programs, leading to a certain uniformity in expectations—at least on paper. For example, Campus C developed chapter-by-chapter guidelines, which Campus D then used as a model; a faculty member felt the guidelines would help keep students focused and on task:

> We spent a lot of time trying to come up with a document that

produces transparency [about expectations] and minimizes the time that students are untethered [from the program] . . . We did our best to come up with guidelines that are concrete and student-centered. When I was a student, the [dissertation] expectations were that one size fits all. We knocked ourselves out [in the CSU program] to allow students to take different pathways [in topics, methods] and come out with the same result.

The content of guidelines and rubrics across the six programs did not readily reveal that an applied dissertation was meant to look different from a Ph.D. dissertation. For example, the guidelines typically called for a "comprehensive" review of the literature, clear elaboration of a theoretical framework, and a rigorous analysis of results, including discussion of disconfirming evidence and study limitations. After all, as one director said, "We were told right off that we had to have a traditional dissertation" that could compare favorably with those at the University of California; thus, among the sources they consulted to refine guidelines were web sites of UC and Ivy League doctoral programs. One of the few indications in the guidelines that dissertations might involve practitioner research at students' own institutions were requirements by Campus C and D that students doing qualitative research disclose their bias and discuss their role in the research setting as part of the methods or

concluding chapter. Elsewhere, programs with applied orientations are more explicit; for example, literature reviews in action research Ed.D. dissertations at Arizona State University are expected to document support for the initiative students are pursuing at their site rather than gaps in the literature (Painter et al., 2009).

The above descriptions from documents and interviews suggest a hybrid approach to the dissertation in the CSU that is part traditional and scholarly, part practical and applied—and was somewhat in flux at the time of this study. The Chancellor's Office (2007), in a web site announcing the new programs, portrayed the Ed.D. dissertation as aiming for "high levels of quality and relevance." As one faculty member in this study noted, "balancing rigor and relevance" is a "major challenge," especially within a three-year timeframe for coursework and dissertation completion by full-time professionals. In their second year, first-wave programs were still in the process of establishing what their particular balance of rigor and relevance would look like. "I don't think anyone really knows what an applied dissertation is," one director frankly observed.

"How do you want to change your corner of the world?":
The Nature of Applied Research
The first-wave CSU programs varied in the extent to which they emphasized and prescribed appropriate topics, methods, and settings for dissertation research. These distinctions are important since choices in these matters may represent more or less

applied approaches to the dissertation. Practices that are acceptable and encouraged become part of the norms of the program—indicators of what an applied dissertation is supposed to look like.

Selection of Research Topic, Method, and Site. Participants generally reported that students were free to choose a dissertation topic of their choice—as opposed to fitting in with faculty members' research agendas—and to pursue any research method appropriate to their topic. Topics being developed for CSU dissertations at the time of this study included access to advanced placement classes, the effectiveness of college outreach programs, practices of exemplary teachers of African American students, and the improvement of school services for Southeast Asian immigrant students. Interestingly, none of these examples indicate a clear focus on educational leadership. Despite the curricular emphasis on educational leadership in all CSU Ed.D. programs, only one study participant expressed the view that students should be required to do dissertations on leadership-related topics—suggesting a potential disconnect between program mission and dissertation guidelines or advising.

While in the former joint Ed.D. program at Campus A, students chose topics "because they loved the topic," students in the new independent program chose topics "because they want something to improve in their setting." "With our students, we say, 'Here's the situation you work in; how do you want to change your corner of the world?" according to a director at Campus B, which called students' work sites "laboratories" for learning and research. "What kinds of research tool sets do you need to make your vision happen?'" Likewise, the CO representative stressed that Ed.D. dissertations could take many forms:

> The dissertation provides flexibility within it. Even though the structure is prescribed, there are so many different ways that it can be conducted, different methodologies and issues [to be examined], opportunities to do parallel dissertations—there's a lot of room for candidates to find an approach that will serve them well.

Programs differed in the details regarding what applied research looks like, such as the acceptability of doing a case study at one's own work site or the particular policies in place to support an applied approach.

Participants said that quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods were all acceptable for the applied dissertation, and felt that faculty did not push particular methods. "It's wide open, there is no rule book," said one director, as long as students can make a case for their approach that is grounded in the literature and as long as it is acceptable to the dissertation chair. One program had a methodologist on staff and urged students to use large samples, preexisting data sets, and methods allowing for generalizable results, pointing to the possible prevalence of a quantitative paradigm at that campus. Others pointed out that

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given the three-year timeframe, certain methods were not feasible, such as long-term ethnographic and phenomenological studies. For the same reason, there was not sufficient time to train Ed.D. students for sophisticated experimental or quasi-experimental studies. "If we're honest," said one director, "data collection will be at most six months and in many cases as short as two to six weeks . . . I tell prospective students, this is not the program for longitudinal studies." Another director felt that the tight timeframe made it unrealistic to expect dissertations to be original contributions to scholarship.

A key indicator of a more applied orientation to the dissertation would seem to be formal or informal policies that welcome students doing research at their own institutions, with dissertation topics growing organically from problems students encounter in their work lives. When asked if this was acceptable, some participants responded readily without caveats, or indicated that this was the whole intention of the program. For example, a faculty member at Campus F, said, "That's what we want [students] to do," and a director at Campus C said that case studies of their own site were common. Other participants said research at one's own site was possible but that students would need to meet various criteria to justify it to their chair; these faculty expressed concern about expanding the scope of the study and its generalizability. "My first thought would be, why not [study] all the schools in your district?" said one faculty member. "There may be a reasonable justification for just one site.

I don't want students to cut corners, I want them to do quality research. If you have the opportunity to gather more data [at more sites], take it." At Campuses A, C, and F, some participants' hesitancy about students using their own site for a case study was influenced by the norms for master's theses or projects at those universities. "Our M.A, program has the option of a thesis, generally at your own site; this would have to be ratcheted up considerably to be dissertation quality," observed a Campus A director. Thus, though students were free to choose any significant topic for the dissertation, some topics were seen as too narrowly defined if they pointed to a case study design at one site. On the other hand, some participants felt that the appropriateness of a student's preferred topic, method, or site for dissertation research should be completely at the discretion of the dissertation chair—a matter that becomes complex when chairs are drawn from faculty across departments and there is limited time for cross-campus faculty discussion or orientation.

Practices and Policies for Applied v. Traditional Approaches. Participants from Campus A and Campus B were notable for articulating their vision of applied dissertations at the level of specific program policies and practices, suggesting that they may be more committed to that orientation—or perhaps simply further along in the process of clarifying an applied direction. For example, a director at Campus A said:

The Ed.D. dissertation is more embedded in their [students'] settings and practical problems [than a Ph.D.]. . . First, the students will have a third [dissertation] committee member who is going to come from that [K12 or community college] setting. . . . Second, we encourage them to do the final [dissertation] defense in their setting, as opposed to our conference room . . . which is very action research-y. I think that makes some people nervous and they won't all do that. . . . Third, the students have to produce an executive summary as a component of the dissertation that they would share in their setting, translating the findings for the practitioner. . . .We encourage students to do dissertation research in their own settings so that the site might be improved by their work.

Surprisingly, no other campus participants mentioned the requirement from the CSU Executive Order of dissertation committees having one practitioner member from the K12 or community college sector, in spite of this being what the CO representative called a sign of the university's "commitment" to an applied approach. Only one other participant discussed the option of having a public dissertation defense, as at a school board meeting. At Campus B, students doing dissertation research at their own workplace was the norm, with program documents and participants alike mentioning using their sites as "laboratories" for investigation. The program had set a precedent for this in the joint program with a UC campus, unlike at least one CSU/UC joint program that did not allow students to study their own sites. The Campus B student handbook made an unusually forceful statement about the applied dissertation:

> Typically, the dissertation is an action research project or a program evaluation within a specific education setting. . . . (T)he *implications of results* stand as essential outcomes of all dissertation research . . . demonstrating their [the candidate's] capacity to make a difference in the lives of children.

A faculty member there discussed the importance of teaching students who do practitioner research to reflect on their role and the impact of their positionality on the research, as well as sharing an executive summary with district officials as "another way of seeing if we are having an impact." But there were also divergent views among the faculty at that program, depending on their own professional training and background:

> Some of us in the department are more apt to talk about a practitioner-oriented degree, using your workplace as your laboratory. We hope there are [school] district problems which you will be able to contribute to through some good research. Some [dissertation] chairs don't

like the local flavor and are tying to encourage students to look more broadly. . . . I think it depends on whether or not they are primarily practitioners.

At Campus F, in contrast to A and B, there was more emphasis on the scholarly rather than the applied nature of the Ed.D. dissertation. Two of three Campus F participants discussed the importance of producing research that was generalizable in order to ensure the likelihood of publication. This was seen as demonstrating that students knew how to do "credible research" and that the program was adhering to WASC accreditation standards. As one said:

A lot of students say, "I'm only interested in the problem for my district or my school." But that doesn't really add anything to the field. . . . That's just a snapshot in time. To do it [a study] at one site doesn't tell you anything. . . . That's what I try to emphasize to faculty: if you look at a problem in a narrow context, you won't know if it's generalizable and it won't be publishable.

Some dissertation chairs at Campus F required students to try to publish parts of the dissertation with them in an arrangement that they said was mutually beneficial: the student disseminates their work and the professor has an incentive for advising dissertations (i.e., they gain a publication toward the minimum number required of core doctoral faculty). Two of the items on the dissertation checklist adapted from Creswell's (1994) text, used by both Campus F and Campus B, were: "Is the topic likely to be publishable in a scholarly journal?" and "Does the study (a) fill a void, (b) replicate, (c) extend, or (d) develop new ideas in the scholarly literature?"—both reflective of a more traditional dissertation orientation.

Influences on Dissertation Expectations

What led the first-wave programs to their approaches to the Ed.D. dissertation? Among the most important influences in the views of participants were the legislation and Chancellor Office mandates, faculty background and training, and precedents set in their institution's master's program or joint doctorate program. In addition, the CO representative cited the influence at the system level of faculty and external advisory committees.

State-Level Influences. Most participants said they followed the lead of the state legislation and the Chancellor's Office mandates, especially in initial program planning when timelines were extremely tight; some had since made modifications. First-wave programs were repeatedly told of the need for dissertations to be of "University of California quality" because UC representatives had opposed the legislation and would submit the first wave of graduates to "close scrutiny." Some reported that CSU officials initially stressed that the dissertations be traditional works of scholarship: "there was no way, you weren't going to move outside of that parameter." The push toward traditional dissertations was reinforced by WASC accreditation criteria, which

required programs to provide evidence of a research-based "doctoral culture."

The scholarly approach was constrained, however, by the three-year timeframe for Ed.D. degrees, including dissertation completion, mandated by the legislation. "Less than 12 months to collect and analyze and write up data—that's a breathtakingly short amount of time!" said one director. Others called the timeframe "ridiculous" or noted how it narrowed the scope and complexity of the dissertation in terms of workable research questions and methods. All acknowledged the need for programs to support students in "thinking about the dissertation from day one," as with dissertation support classes or labs starting in the first year—but it was unclear whether this would make the timeframe workable for the type of dissertations that were expected.

Doctoral Faculty Training and Experience. Another key influence on dissertation expectations, as noted in the literature review, was the background and training of doctoral faculty. "A lot of expectations came from our own experiences . . . when we were doctoral students," said a director at Campus C, "so there's a blending of those, of what seemed to make sense and be applicable or not." Several noted a tendency for faculty who had received Ph.D.s at Research I universities to "want to reproduce ourselves." As one director explained, "We all came from different places and none of us wants to give that up." The same person repeatedly told faculty that "this is not your Ph.D." in explaining the practical focus of the professional doctorate, just as another director had to "temper" the

expectations of some R1-oriented colleagues. One participant said that doctoral students themselves had compelled faculty to rethink their way of teaching research and kept them focused on the goal of turning out "practitioner leaders" rather than scholars.

Many study participants felt they needed more faculty discussion to reach a consensus regarding expectations around the applied dissertation; only two programs appeared to have had substantive faculty professional development or discussion on these matters by spring of the second year. There was a sense that directors were preoccupied in the programs' second year with more immediate matters like Qualifying Exams and various logistical, financial, and political challenges of implementing the doctoral programs.

The Legacy of Master's or Joint Ed.D. Programs. Still another factor that shaped approaches to the dissertation was existing programs at the institution, such as master's programs in K12 leadership or postsecondary education or joint Ed.D. programs. Having a strong M.A. program in place "serves as a strong foundational piece for the doctorate," said one director, so programs can avoid simply creating a second M.A. program. Faculty experienced with advising master's theses had a consensus around what was acceptable, said a colleague, and sought a relatively higher level of critical thinking and complexity in doctoral students' research. There should be a "seamless progression" from the master's to the doctorate, with some continuity, but a change in

magnitude. Thus, if single case studies or evaluations were the rule in a master's program, a doctoral program might tend to encourage studies of multiple sites.

The joint doctoral programs were also cited as a foundation that the new Ed.D.s had built on, adding new features such as dissertation support seminars or dissertation rubrics. Generally, however, dissertations in the joint programs were characterized as being more traditional in purpose and approach than those of the new independent programs, with the notable exception of Campus B.

Options for Alternative Approaches . The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), which includes representatives from the CSU programs, mainly influenced views of the dissertation by exposing directors to some alternative approaches and, in the view of the CO representative, "legitimizing" the thematic dissertation. Many participants were enthusiastic about the option of thematic or parallel dissertations done by a small group of students working on related topics, as at USC. As one former administrator noted, the team approach was valuable because it reflected how administrators actually work in the field; another felt Ed.D. students might do their best work under this model. Some participants were cautious, however, commenting that "the jury is still out" on the rigor of alternatives or that "we need to go through a full cycle first" with completed dissertations before making major changes. Participants agreed that over time, the CSU programs would evolve with greater flexibility to

innovate. But one noted that "elite" private institutions like some members of the Carnegie initiative had greater latitude to experiment than did the CSU. As another director said, "We're worried about how WASC will see our program if we're too project-oriented" rather than traditional.

Some programs had engaged faculty and students in substantive discussion on these issues, while others assumed it would be covered in research classes or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects approval process. In the latter case, absent meaningful faculty discussion across departments, it is difficult to see how faculty teaching dissertation seminars or advising individual dissertations would reach a consensus. Several participants expressed keen interest in how their colleagues on other campuses were handling the dilemmas of applied dissertations, and felt it would be helpful to discuss these regularly across the CSU programs.

Analysis and Conclusions

As we have seen, the first-wave CSU doctoral programs were in various stages of building Wenger's (1998) communities of practice around the artifact of an applied dissertation. In how they went about this, each sought a particular balance between rigor and relevance, or traditional and applied approaches. While Campuses A and B showed the clearest evidence of an applied orientation, and Campus F showed a clearly more academic orientation, the other campuses were a mix of approaches or in the process of refining guidelines. Each campus' institutional culture, policies, and

conditions shaped how each program approached the dissertation and how local policy actors co-constructed it with broader policy mandates.

Overall, the programs were still "feeling our way," as some participants said, in creating a distinctive approach to dissertations appropriate to educational leaders. In Wenger's (1998) terms, the community of practice was at the early stages in these programs with group norms not yet fully realized for its shared repertoire, including the dissertation. Most of the programs did not have structures in place or time built into their plans to facilitate mutual engagement or reinforce a sense of joint enterprise among doctoral faculty. Perhaps large, teaching-centered institutions like the CSU with heavy teaching loads and service obligations and large numbers of part-time faculty are difficult contexts in which to cultivate joint enterprise. With the exception of a few program directors who took explicit steps to nurture group norms around the dissertation or doctoral culture, the growth of these communities of practice was largely left to chance in a wait-and-see rather than a proactive stance. For example, several participants did not foresee changing their approach to the dissertation beyond CSU system directives until they had gone through a three-year cycle with their first graduates.

It is possible that the first-wave CSU programs were developing a hybrid model, retaining elements of traditional dissertations while infusing them with some applied elements. They appeared to focus on applied aspects of the dissertation before and after the dissertation was researched and written, rather than as part of the process of doing it. Participants agreed that the purpose of Ed.D. dissertations was to address problems of practice, often within local educational institutions (before), and hoped that that the net impact of such work would be the improvement of educational leadership practice (after). However, dissertation research methods as well as the format and content of the document were conceived as largely traditional. Thus, if pursuing a hybrid dissertation model, it was more by default rather than by design.

This study suggests factors and dynamics that may tend to facilitate or constrain an applied approach to the dissertation in CSU Ed.D. programs. Facilitating factors moving first-wave programs toward a more applied approach were the commitment to "making a difference" with local institutions and communities; CSU mandates, such as the requirement of a K-14 practitioner on each dissertation committee; the priorities of more practitioner-oriented faculty; the three-year timeframe ruling out a more scholarly, in-depth approach, and student pressures or preferences. This set of factors opened the way for reinventing the education doctorate to be more distinct from the Ph.D. and more relevant to practice and the needs of practitioners.

Some of the factors constraining an applied approach were the state legislation, CSU mandates for traditional dissertations based on rigorous research, WASC accreditation requirements, the need to differentiate

dissertations from master's theses on campus, the orientations of more academically-inclined faculty, and the threat of political scrutiny of CSU dissertations by R1 universities. Infrastructure challenges such as funding, program director turnover, and the hurried roll-out of the first-wave programs meant that directors had more pressing administrative priorities than meeting to co-construct a doctoral culture. In the rush to develop program proposals and the absence of time for faculty dialogue, the template provided by the Chancellor's Office and by Ph.D. dissertation guidelines became the default for policy implementation. This set of constraining factors inclined programs to maintain the status quo of traditional expectations for dissertations, like those they had under the former joint Ed.D. programs with University of California campuses.

Broader institutional constraints on program coherence around the dissertation had to do with the decentralization of doctoral faculty. All programs in the study involved faculty across colleges and departments in teaching doctoral courses and serving on dissertation committees. If philosophical differences divide faculty in educational leadership departments or schools of education, those differences become magnified with outside faculty who are not privy to debates within leadership education. Faculty outside education may also be less likely to attend doctoral faculty meetings, making it more likely that the status quo on dissertations will prevail.

Another dynamic that pulls against a sense of joint enterprise and shared repertoire in the CSU doctoral programs may be deference to the authority of dissertation chairs. Participants reported that decisions about dissertation direction and approach were at the discretion of the dissertation chair. This norm of traditional academe was adopted as a holdover of doctoral culture elsewhere, that is, professors' own doctoral experiences. To the extent that chairs are given autonomy in dissertation guidance, dissertations will vary widely in approach. This would seem to constrain programs' capacity to pursue a consensus or innovation on applied dissertations.

Yet another dynamic may limit the programs' impact on leadership practice in local communities, which participants in this study claimed to want to see as a result of applied dissertations. Though all were intended to be Ed.D. programs in leadership for working administrators, the student make-up did not always reflect this goal. Programs admitted teachers, counselors, and other educators, depending on the pool of applicants. The curriculum and Student Learning Outcomes emphasized leadership, yet students were not required to do dissertations on leadership topics, demonstrate the implications of their research for educational leaders, or report results to a leadership audience. This is another area in which programs may find that more explicit direction is needed for more coherence and prevention of mission drift.

While the above constraints are my interpretations and were not directly noted by participants, they may

represent barriers to coherent communities of practice. It would be useful for CSU Ed.D. programs to review the impact of these and other factors on their approach to the dissertation, particularly if they aim to produce applied dissertations by practitioners with the potential to improve practice.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice in Ed.D. programs in educational leadership, both in the CSU system and elsewhere, that aim to have school leaders do meaningful, rigorous applied research. Among recommendations to consider:

- Be explicit about the applied nature of dissertations in dissertation guidelines, program web sites, and advising. Encourage students to do evaluations and practitioner action research at their own sites, where appropriate, as long as they have thought through the ethical and logistical complexities. Develop guidelines on research site selection based on faculty discussion and trouble-shooting that will help students sort out the pros and cons of this type of research, given their position, career aspirations, and research interests.
- Redesign Ed.D. research methods courses to provide

more training in action research and the dilemmas of practitioner research. Open these seminars to doctoral faculty outside schools of education who may be less familiar with these approaches, and continue the discussion in meetings of doctoral faculty. Ensure that Student Learning Outcomes, program mission statements, and orientation for new students and faculty reflect a high value placed on action research.

- Set aside substantial time with doctoral faculty, especially dissertation chairs, to discuss and debate expectations for applied dissertations and the challenges of this relatively uncharted practitioner research. These meetings could include readings from relevant literature and faculty professional development, with a special effort at outreach to dissertation chairs across campus and to local PreK-14 educational leaders. Such discussions would ensure greater faculty consensus, smoother operation of dissertation committees, clearer communication among faculty and students, and ultimately higher quality, more relevant dissertations — thus moving toward greater coherence in the joint enterprise and shared

repertoire of the organization (Wenger, 1998).

- Seek ways to connect applied dissertation findings to local leaders and institutions, such as through the presentation of executive summaries at research sites, annual gatherings where administrators and candidates can make presentations or exchange information, and online or print publications geared to the needs of practitioners.

- Encourage innovation and facilitate more discussion among directors, faculty, and community partners across the CSU system on what applied practitioner dissertations look like and how they can be useful to local institutions. Discussion could draw on lessons learned at other CPED institutions or from CSU doctoral candidates' experience. Coordinated, system-wide discussion would help CSU programs learn from one another when implementing a new approach like the thematic dissertation (Marsh & Dembo, 2009).

- Provide more flexibility in time for completion of the dissertation to ensure quality work and meaningful advising for students who generally work full-time and have little research background. Currently,

students who do not finish the program in three years are required to pay full tuition for additional time needed. It seems reasonable under the circumstances to allow for an additional semester or two at a nominal fee without unduly pressuring students or faculty.

The new CSU Ed.D. programs have the potential to produce large numbers of skilled educational leaders and to impact the field of leadership preparation by bringing applied research approaches to the education doctorate on a large scale. What direction will these programs take as they grow? How unified are program directors and faculty in their vision of an applied dissertation, and how do they guide the process? For example, how do institutional norms about the dissertation shape dissertation advising? What impact does the dissertation experience have on graduates' subsequent use or pursuit of research, as well as on leadership for educational reform? Are program graduates more likely than their peers to facilitate action research by educators or research-based reform in the institutions they lead after the Ed.D. program? These are all questions for further investigation, building on the baseline perceptions, policies, and practices documented in this study. I hope that this work will promote deeper discussion in the CSU and other doctoral programs, contributing to the ongoing debate about Ed.D. dissertations and the

purpose and nature of applied research

by educational leaders.

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