K-12 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES APPROPRIATE FOR USE AS THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE EDUCATION DOCTORATE PROGRAMS

Jeff Biddle, Ed. D.
Background

• The University of Central Florida College of Education and Human Performance currently offers 14 Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs and three Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) programs

• The three Ed.D. programs include:
  • Ed.D. in Educational Leadership (two Tracks)
  • Ed.D. in Education

• The Ed.D. in Education program was created as a result of UCF becoming a founding member of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED)

• Goal was to create a professional practice education doctorate based on the CPED guidelines

• The first cohort of this new program began in the fall of 2011

• This study applies only to the Ed.D. in Education program
Career Choices

• Previous research showed that the vast majority of students enrolled in the UCF College of Education and Human Performance Ph.D. programs intend to pursue university faculty positions upon graduation.
• This same research showed that most students enrolled in all of the Ed.D. programs plan on continuing to work in or pursue leadership positions in their current field
• Over 80% of the students enrolled in the Ed.D. in Education program are currently employed in K-12 education
Statement of the Problem

• The faculty implementing the design of the Ed. D. in Education program at UCF were unsure what types of capstone projects should be considered appropriate for the Dissertation in Practice (DiP).

• Their goal is to align the capstone requirements to the guidelines provided by CPED and require an authentic representation of professional work that best meets the needs of program graduates that work in K-12 schools.

• The purpose of the study was to identify the most appropriate project types that should be used as the DiP in the UCF Ed. D. in Education program for those students employed in K-12 schools.
Methodology

• Complete a needs analysis to determine what projects best support school improvement and, therefore, should be included as appropriate project types to be used as the Dissertation in Practice in the Ed. D. in Education program at UCF for those students employed in K-12 schools.
Significance of the Study

• It is the responsibility of program faculty to define the requirements of a Dissertation in Practice in the Ed. D. in Education program at UCF that best supports the needs of graduates to be successful in the field of K-12 education.

• The Ed. D program should ensure scholar practitioners can “construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities” (CPED, n.d.)

• A rigorous DiP, respected by both faculty and students should be defined in order to maintain the credibility of both past and future graduates of professional practice Ed. D. programs.
Many CPED programs continue to require a traditional 5 chapter research or evaluation dissertation.

Programs in the UK and Australia favor use of a portfolio.

Arizona State University uses action research.

California State University system uses different types of projects at different campuses.

Peabody College at Vanderbilt University works directly with local schools or school districts to define problems of practice.

Saint Louis University requires students to work in teams to support local school improvement projects.

No articles were found that described the use of a task or needs analysis to determine DiP requirements.
Research Questions

• Primary Research Question:
  • What types of school improvement projects are needed to improve K-12 schools?

• Subordinate Questions:
  • 1. What skills do “highly effective” administrators and teacher-leaders possess that others do not?
  • 2. What school problems represent the highest concern for administrators and teacher-leaders working in K-12?
Evaluation Methods

• Needs Analysis using qualitative research methods
• Two groups of participants were selected:
  • District Superintendent identified six “highly effective” administrators/teacher-leaders. She was included based on her position.
  • Six current students enrolled in the Ed.D. in Education program who are working in K-12 and have a minimum of 10 years experience.
• Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both groups
  • All were asked to identify projects they felt were needed in their school to effect school improvement
  • Administrator/teacher-leaders were asked to identify qualities of “highly effective” teacher-leaders
  • Student group participants were asked to identify their top concerns within their school
Interview Results

• All interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes
• Answers from subordinate Question 2 were used to further identify and support themes identified for the primary research question
• Answers from subordinate Question 1 were used to identify qualities of highly effective administrators/teacher-leaders to inform program curriculum and instruction
Results of Primary Research Question
What types of school improvement projects are needed to improve K-12 schools?

- Curriculum Improvement
- Policy Improvement
- School Re-design
- Program Evaluation
- Professional Development
- School Improvement Plans
Results of Subordinate Question 1
What skills do “highly effective” administrators and teacher-leaders possess that others do not?

- Collaborative
- Communicate Effectively
- Lead by Example
- Effective Evaluator
- Effective Educator
- Build Relationships
Results of Subordinate Question 2
What school problems represent the highest concern for administrators and teacher-leaders working in K-12?

• State/District policies and priorities
• Unfair teacher evaluations
• Too much testing
• Too much paperwork
• Poor/improper decision making
Conclusions/Implications

• The improvement projects identified should be included for use as appropriate Dissertation in Practice types for the Ed.D. in Education program at UCF for those students in K-12.
• Curriculum, instruction, and assessment should be modified to better support student development of the qualities of highly effective administrators and teacher leaders.
• Other CPED programs may use these results to redesign their capstone requirements and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
• The CPED Working Principles may need to be revised to address the results concerning qualities of highly effective leaders.
Thank You!

Questions?