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Examining the Dissertation in Practice Relative to Responsible Conduct of Research: Alignment or Mismatch?

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the components and uses of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) relative to the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) and the alignment of the DiP description and process to the U. S. Office of Research Integrity Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) conditions and requirements. The essay provides a cursory view of the multiple uses of applied research, a common framing of the DiP, and the essay examines the purpose and components of the DiP relative to the specific RCR criteria and specifications. Information provided explores the alignment of the DiP to RCR through discussions of the commonalities and diverse characteristics of the DiP and RCR to discern if these two important considerations regarding the framing of the Education Doctorate are a mismatch or an alignment. The potential for aligning the DiP with RCR may contribute substantially to propelling the DiP to the highest standard for inclusion within the listing of scholarly research.

KEYWORDS

CPED Dissertation in Practice (DiP), Office of Research Integrity (ORI), Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)

PURPOSE

The Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) is defined by the U. S. Office of Research Integrity (ORI) within various perspectives and illustrated by specific examples. Determining if the focused approach of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) aligns or does not align with the specified requirements for meeting both Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) and RCR definitions, purposes, and uses may provide insight into the level of rigor and responsible conduct of research alignment of the DiP. This essay includes the following posited areas of focus: (a) an exploration of the background and description of the DiP, (b) a discussion of the CPED perspective of the DiP with examples of the components required by CPED to develop and deliver a DiP, (c) exploration of the definition and description of RCR as posited by the regulations determined by the ORI under the auspices of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, (d) a full examination of the interrelationships of the DiP and RCR conceptual components to discern the degree of corresponding concepts and principles, and (e) an examination of these concepts and principles to determine whether there is an alignment or a mismatch using information and criteria established by the Public Health Service research integrity activities on behalf of the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF THE CPED DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE (DIP)

The CPED was established in 2007 as a collection of 100 colleges and schools of education within the United States and Canada focused on differentiating the Doctor of Education degree (EdD) from the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree, particularly regarding the type of dissertation, purpose, and process pertinent to the EdD degree. The Education Doctorate has been described as the “scholarly practitioner” (Perry, 2015, p. 23). Additionally, the scholarly practitioner is prepared as a professional: “to think, to perform, and to act with integrity” (Schulman, 2005, p. 52). The EdD degree has been defined as follows: “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.” (CPED, 2022, para. 1). These descriptors provide a sound reflection of the high quality and detailed alignment of the concepts, convictions, and contingencies of the professional doctorate in education (EdD), thereby promoting excellence in education for the highest level of degree attainment within the field of education. The DiP is defined within the framework of the CPED as follows: “The Dissertation in Practice is a scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice” (CPED, 2022, para. 2). A complex problem of practice is defined 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” (CPED, 2022, para. 2). An examination of these two definitions endorsed by the CPED reveals a strong reliance on the following characteristics of rigor and responsibility inherent within the guidelines posited by CPED and summarized as follows: (a) equity and justice, (b) mutual respect, (c) supportive and safe learning environment, (d) rigorous practices, and (e) shared sense of responsibility and accountability

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(CPED, 2022). These CPED descriptors align accordingly with Shamoo and Resnik's (2009) twelve principles of ethical/responsible conduct in research as follows: (1) honesty, (2) objectivity, (3) openness, (4) confidentiality, (5) carefulness, (6) respect for colleagues, (7) respect for intellectual property, (8) respect for the law, (9) respect for research subjects, (10) stewardship, (11) social responsibility, and (12) freedom. Thus, the CPED descriptors align with the RCR principles and provide a synergistic partnership.

BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

The ORI annual report for the fiscal year 2021 includes multiple areas of focus of this important office within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The areas pertaining to the ORI include the following: (a) investigative oversight, (b) communication with stakeholders, (c) intramural projects, (d) ORI's grant programs; and (e) ORI's compliance programs. ORI's Division of Education and Integrity serves as a solid resource for educational researchers. Some of the multiple functions of the ORI include the following services to assist in responding to allegations of research misconduct as represented in the 2021 ORI Annual Report (a) review of institutional research misconduct proceedings, (b) perform whistleblower and retaliation issues, and (c) assist in whistleblower and retaliation issues (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, 2021).

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENT

The prior examination of the properties and characteristics of the CPED Dissertation in Practice (DiP) and the detailed description of the Office of Research Integrity definition of RCR and related functions of the ORI serve to posit the following commonalities and differences: (a) The CPED DiP is a program determined by a national organization within the United States, comprised of higher education institutions, substantiated CPED. (b) The ORI RCR is a program determined by the Office of Research Integrity, a federal office within the United States Department of Health and Human Services, comprised of the Division of Education and Integrity and the Division of Investigative Oversight. An overview of the proposed conceptual discussion related to the DiP and RCR is provided in

Figure 1. Overview of the Proposed DiP and RCR Conceptual Argument

DiP	RCR	Commonalities of DiP & RCR
United States national program underwritten by CPED is the authority on the DiP.	United States federal program underwritten by the ORIis the authority on RCR.	Both DiP and RCR are programs targeted and underwritten by national programs of integrity.
CPED institutions across the United States are dedicated to the prevention of research misconduct and the promotion of responsible conduct of research, especially aligned with the processes within the DiP.	ORI is focused on the prevention of research misconduct and the promotion of RCR.	Both DIP and RCR are programs dedicated to the prevention of research misconduct and the promotion of responsible conduct of research.
CPED institutions across the United States are focused on implementing activities and programs to teach research integrity, especially aligned with the development and implementation of the DiP.	ORI is dedicated to the implementation of programs to teach and responsibly implement the RCR.	Both DiP and RCR are programs focused on implementing and promoting research integrity.
CPED institutions across the United States are charged to deliver various types of DiPs such as policy analyses, program evaluations, and applied research studies requiring intensive scrutiny to ensure the highest level of responsible conduct of research.	ORI is committed to assisting all types of institutions across the United States in protecting the rigor and responsibility of the researcher to adhere to intense scrutiny to ensure the highest level of responsible conduct of research	Both the DiP and RCR are programs devoted to the rigor and intense scrutiny of the research by the researcher to ensure the highest level of responsible conduct of research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Specific implications of the proposed conceptual argument associated with the DiP and RCR are examined in this section relative to the overriding question posited within this essay, i.e., Is the DiP and the RCR in alignment conceptually and in practice or is the DiP and the RCR mismatched conceptually and in practice? Information presented from the literature as represented in Figure 1 indicates a strong alignment between the DiP and RCR, both conceptually and practically. Information provided in Figure 1 provides specific discussions of the commonalities and characteristics of the DiP and RCR. Four areas of focused discussions provided in Figure 1 offer credence to the alignment and interactive qualities of the DiP and RCR as follows: (1) the DiP and RCR are programs targeted and underwritten by national programs of integrity, (2) the DiP and RCR are programs dedicated to the prevention of research misconduct and the promotion of responsible conduct of research, (3) the DiP and RCR are programs focused on implementing and promoting research integrity, and (4) the DiP and RCR are programs devoted to the rigor and intense scrutiny of the research by the researcher to ensure the highest level of responsible conduct of research.

To discern if these two important considerations (the DiP and RCR) regarding the framing of the Education Doctorate are a mismatch or specifically aligned qualities for propelling the DiP to the highest standard for inclusion within the listing of scholarly research, an examination of the Education Doctorate as posited by CPED is a major consideration for discussion as follows: (a) the CPED has defined and developed a substantive higher education program of study represented by the doctor of education degree (EdD) with practitioner research findings presented to the world through the DiP (CPED, 2022), (b) the ORI RCR is a program office directed by a national organization within the United States, the Office of Research Integrity, comprised of multiple research purposes aimed at national organizations and dedicated to examining research efforts across the US to "support programs that enhance education in the responsible conduct of research" (Steneck, 2007, p. v) at all levels of government, education, private enterprise, and medical research, (c) the CPED DiP and the ORI RCR involve national programs focused on being accountable and trustworthy relative to the research process, (d) the CPED DiP and the ORI RCR national programs focus on reporting

procedures that are "honest and objective" (Steneck, 2007, p. 3), (e) the DiP and RCR provide verifiable actions and results, (f) the DiP and RCR reflect steadfast procedures reflective of "ethical decision making" (Shamoo & Resnick, 2009, p. 29), (g) the DiP and RCR advocate for responsible conduct by researchers "that bind all researchers together" (Steneck, 2007, p. 163), and (h) the DiP and RCR rigorously adhere to the perspectives related to the overriding question posited by this essay, to discern if these two important considerations (DiP and RCR) are a mismatch or an alignment. A cursory review of the two concepts and their degree of alignment or mismatch as posited in Figure 1. DiP and RCR properties reveal a solid alignment of the two concepts and an alignment to the propagation of responsible conduct within the research process, especially directed within the field of educational research applications. This examination of the DiP aligned with the guidelines advocated by the ORI is also implied within the work of Sieber and Tolich (2013) in their appeal to researchers regarding the need for "protecting the vulnerable" (p. 11) and their reminder to researchers of the importance of "beneficence-that researchers should maximize good outcomes while avoiding unnecessary risk, harm, or wrong" (p. 35). Amdur and Bankert (2011) pointed out the potential for bias due to a researcher's conflict of interest “violates the principle of beneficence because it means that risks to subjects are not minimized” (p. 25).

In summary, this essay examined the CPED DiP and the ORI RCR to discern if these two important national organizations considerations regarding the framing of the Education Doctorate by CPED are a mismatch or an alignment to propel the DiP to the highest standard for inclusion within the listing of scholarly research, the RCR. The following response is provided to complete the assessment of the DiP and RCR question posited for discussion within this essay as follows: to determine whether there is an alignment or a mismatch of CPED’s DiP and the ORI RCR. The final decision is alignment supported by two major drivers: (1) the multiple aligned characteristics of the DiP and its adherence to the RCR and (2) the overriding national organizations responsible for governing the DiP and RCR, CPED and ORI. This aligned two-fold partnership is dedicated to producing high quality research and rigor and enforcing the highest standards for scholarly research.

Implications of the alignment of the DiP, driven and monitored by CPED within the specific RCR guidelines, driven and monitored by the ORI, provide a sound foundation for the emerging DiP, and may lend credence to new types of practitioner research efforts across the United States. The DiP may potentially become the practitioner's most popular response to the RCR in the future with the potential to propel the DiP to the highest standard for inclusion within the listing of various types of scholarly research. The high quality and strong connections of the DiP and RCR (both conceptually and empirically) provide conclusive evidence of the strong alignment of the DiP and RCR.

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