

Part One of the Themed Issue on Reimagining Research Methods Coursework for the Preparation of Scholar-Practitioners

Sarah Capello 
Radford University
scapello@radford.edu

Maxwell Yurkofsky 
Radford University
myurkofsky@radford.edu

Edwin Nii Bonney 
Radford University
ebonney@radford.edu

ABSTRACT

Ongoing efforts to distinguish the EdD from the PhD as a professional practice doctorate have important implications for how research methodology courses are designed, sequenced, and taught in CPED-inspired EdD programs. Currently, there is much debate and little consensus as to what the purpose and outcomes of these courses should be and how the courses might differ from traditional doctoral-level methods preparation. In this first installment of the themed issue on redesigning research methods for CPED-inspired EdD programs, EdD faculty and students share their current redesign work and experiences implementing revised methodology courses as part of larger, practitioner-oriented program revisions.

KEYWORDS

CPED, education doctorate, research methodology, research methodology coursework

INTRODUCTION

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) has transformed conceptions of the EdD degree from either indistinguishable from the PhD or a PhD-lite degree (Levine, 2005; Shulman et al., 2006) to a professional practice doctorate (CPED, 2022; Hovannesian, 2013; Perry, 2016; Perry et al., 2015). CPED and its members have argued vociferously that the EdD is a distinct degree for the preparation of educational leaders who are scholar-practitioners with the ability to inquire into problems of practice, apply justice and equity-oriented framings, integrate research and professional knowledge, and collaborate with diverse communities and partners to bring about solutions to persistent problems (Allen et al., 2016; CPED, 2022; Perry, 2016).

Despite the transformative and rapid progress that EdD reformers and CPED member institutions have made toward re-envisioning the EdD (Bengston et al., 2016; Foster et al., 2023; Perry et al., 2015), debates remain as to how the EdD is distinct from the PhD (See Foster et al. (2023) for a more complete discussion.). Intertwined in these debates, and a key component of them, is the role of research methods (Hochbein & Perry, 2013). The PhD is often referred to as a research doctorate whereas the EdD has been referred to as a practice or professional practice doctorate. The EdD has been derided as a PhD-lite (Allen et al., 2016; Shulman et al.,

2006) due to perceived lax research methodology training and less rigorous dissertations (Levine, 2005; Shulman et al., 2006). Conceptually, the difference between the purpose of research in the two degrees is simple: PhD programs use research methods courses to prepare their students for careers in which they investigate gaps in the knowledge base while re-envisioned EdD programs use research methods courses to teach their students how to identify, inquire into, and solve local problems. However, operationalizing these designations in practice is more challenging. To date, there is no consensus around what EdD students or scholar-practitioners need to know about traditionally taught research methodologies or the research skills they should have. Doctoral research methods courses have historically been designed and structured for PhD students around quantitative, qualitative, and more recently mixed-methods paradigms (Bengston et al., 2016), and they are frequently taught by PhD-holding faculty who are either unfamiliar with revised conceptions of the EdD and new methodological approaches or resistant to proposed program or course revisions (Bengston et al., 2016; Perry et al., 2015; Yurkofsky et al., in press). Furthermore, institutional obstacles, existing school or departmental structures, and faculty resources can also hinder innovation and faculty buy-in for redesigned methods courses (Bengston et al., 2016; Yurkofsky et al., in press).



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A Changing Tide?

Despite these challenges, recent research indicates that the field may be shifting towards more practitioner-oriented research methods preparation. For example, in a study looking for differences between required research methods courses and research credit hours in the PhD and EdD, Foster et al. (2023) found that PhD programs required significantly more research hours than EdD programs. The difference was greater at institutions that offered both degrees, which suggests those institutions are working to differentiate the degrees. Similarly, Perry et al. (2015) found that students in CPED institutions take less research methods hours; however, they argued that the courses students do take are “targeted and useful to student practice” (p. 75) and centered on developing leaders who can make decisions and solve problems of practice. As several papers in this themed issue discuss, many CPED member institutions are transitioning to practitioner inquiry courses specifically designed to align research methods with the work scholar-practitioners do in their practice, especially as fluency in educational data and evidence become more imperative for school leaders (Firestone et al., 2021). There has also been an uptick in the use of practitioner-oriented methods in EdD programs like action research (Barnett & Muth, 2008; Buss & Zambo, 2016; Zambo, 2011), program evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2018; Rohanna & Christie, 2023), and improvement science (Capello et al., in press; Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020). Foster et al. also reported that approximately one-third of EdD dissertations in practice (DiPs) were described as an “action oriented or applied research project” (p. 22). Interestingly, some programs appear to be shifting how they define the success of the EdD program from the production of a rigorous capstone project (e.g., a DiP) to the development of effective scholar-practitioners (Bengston et al., 2016).

Although there have been positive developments in designing methods courses specifically for the EdD among CPED institutions including shifting courses from focusing on research to inquiry, embedding inquiry in practice and coursework, and impacting students’ practice (Bengston et al., 2016), the purpose, design, and content of research methods courses remain one of the most challenging aspects of EdD program (re)design. Given the ongoing conversations regarding the content, design, and teaching of research methods in EdD programs, this themed issue was designed to: (1) promote dialogue around new, revised, and innovative practitioner-oriented research methodology courses and course design sequences and (2) offer theoretical and empirical insights into such changes. In this first installment of the themed issue on redesigning research methods, EdD faculty and students share their current redesign work and experiences implementing revised methodology courses as part of larger, practitioner-oriented program revisions. A second installment of the themed issue is forthcoming later this year.

Below are summaries of the eight papers included in part one of this themed issue:

- In their article, “Reimagining Research Courses for Scholar Practitioners: Rejecting Methodological Binaries,” Hooser et al. describe how two EdD faculty merged quantitative and qualitative courses into one “third space” advanced methods course and how blending content from two methodological traditions can complement students’ DiP inquiry.
- In her article, “Preparing Scholarly Practitioners to Use Improvement Science: A Systematic, Iterative, and

Reflective Approach to Teaching Applied Quantitative Research Methods,” Paufler details one instructor’s reflections on developing and teaching quantitative research methods in a program that uses improvement science for the DiP.

- In their article, “Developing Leadership for Improvement: Iterative Cycles as Opportunities for Learning,” Lozano and colleagues provide an in-depth look at the redesign of one applied methods course as part of a larger program revision to reflect the CPED framework. The authors describe their own theory of improvement in redesigning this course—focusing in on the use of two instructional strategies: learning logs and workshop protocols. The authors offer a detailed illustration of how two students iterated upon their driver diagrams throughout the semester as they engaged in these course activities.
- In their article, “Research Methods Courses Redesigned for an EdD in Instructional and Performance Technology,” Handley and colleagues describe how they designed and redesigned the 3-course research methods sequence (fundamentals, data collection, and data analysis) in their EdD program. The authors provide an in-depth explanation of the purpose and strategies of each course as well as some of the lessons they learned about what skills to emphasize (e.g., descriptive versus inferential statistics) and the sequencing the courses across the EdD program (e.g., the importance of having the data collection course earlier in the program).
- In their article, “Honor, Build, and Restructure: Preparing Transformative School Leaders as Equitable Changemakers through Doctoral Research Methods Courses,” DeMartino and Renn describe how their EdD program drew on transformative adult learning theory, CPED signature pedagogies, and research on building transformative capacity to redesign two methods courses that students take before beginning their DiP. They outline numerous changes they made to these courses to prepare students to embark on team-based DiPs that follow Mintrop’s (2016) *Design-based School Improvement Cycle*.
- In her article, “The Tension Between Rigor and Relevance: Redesigning EdD Applied Research Methods Coursework within an R1 Institution,” Neumerski offers a reflective account of how faculty at an R1 institution redesigned the methods sequence in their EdD in a school system leadership program to move away from a traditional dissertation and towards an applied capstone that centers improvement science. In addition to outlining the revised methods sequence, Neumerski centers in on how faculty navigated—and are still navigating—enduring tensions between rigor and relevance.
- In their article, “Inquiry as Practice: The Pathway to Redesigning an Educational Leadership Doctoral Research Seminar Series,” Tolman et al. redesigned a research methods seminar to help students who get stuck at the ABD (all but dissertation) stage. The redesign allows students to receive support from different faculty throughout the program rather than concentrating it earlier in the program.



- In their article, “Rigor and Relevance in Research Methods: Reflections from a Professor and Alumni of an Online EdD Program,” Borkoski et al. detail how program faculty, based on student feedback, worked to redesign two research method courses in the EdD program to make space for students to practice actually analyzing data so that students could build competencies in doing data analysis. Original courses breezed through the lessons, which students found overwhelming.

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