**ESSAY PROPOSAL**

*to be considered for publication in*

**“Activating Activism: Promoting Activism within Ed.D. Programs”**

**in *Impacting Education***

Included in this submission is a working draft of our proposed essay. As we prepare to launch our redesigned EdD in Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts during Summer 2020 (pending approval), with this essay, we aim to begin developing a line of scholarly literature that highlights the unique, CPED-influenced features of our new program. In addition, advocacy for full-time working professionals across wide-ranging disciplines, part-time distance learners, and students driven by addressing injustice in their communities and implementing equity-focused best practices, to name a few examples, are discussed.

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**SMACKtivism: A Program Redesign so Good, You Won’t Know What Hit You**

**Abstract**

This article describes the context, mission, guiding principles, and anticipated benefits and limitations of our redesigned EdD in Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts. As we prepare to launch our new program in Summer 2020, our key development efforts are focused on implementing leading-edge coursework centering on problems of practice through a blend of online interactions and applied, real-world experiences. Our primary objective is to equip scholar-practitioners with the expertise to initiate and sustain systematic improvement goals within their local educational communities, both during and following their time in the program.

**Introduction**

With today’s expansive access to distance learning, or learning that takes place partially or entirely over the Internet, online course delivery provides users the flexibility of completing degree programs outside the constraints of time and place (Chaney, 2001; Gilbert, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In the United States, where 85.8% of males and 66.5% of females work more than 40 hours per week, it is no surprise that 48% of today’s students are enrolled in fully online degree programs which allow them to complete coursework requirements alongside myriad responsibilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; Allen & Seaman, 2017).

In the fourteen years since Arthur Levine’s (2005) call to abolish the Doctor of Education degree, researchers such as Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, and Garabedian (2006), as well as the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) consortium which includes over 100 accredited institutions of higher education, have been working to reclaim the professional doctorate through dialogue, experimentation, critical feedback, and evaluation. Furthermore, with the ever-increasing demand for distance learning programs, many institutions now offer online EdD program options that deliver leading-edge content knowledge and research methods through a blend of online interactions and applied, real-world experiences to honor the local educational context of each student.

Through survey data collection and conversations with current PhD students, faculty in the Department of Learning and Instruction at University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, found that many students with full-time work responsibilities and the need for distance learning flexibility sought an applied alternative to their theoretical PhD programs. In response to students’ feedback, the department applied for and secured institutional membership with CPED, appointed a new director of doctoral studies, and collaborated to redesign an existing EdD program during the 2019-20 academic year for an official Summer 2020 launch, pending final program approval.

**The Context for Redesigning our EdD**

 Within our Department of Learning and Instruction, doctoral students are primarily enrolled in the Curriculum, Instruction and the Science of Learning (CISL) PhD program, with the majority of students enrolled in the fully-online version of our CISL PhD program. In May of 2019, a survey was sent out to all 300-plus doctoral students in the department; of the 81 students that responded, 60.5% were currently enrolled in the CISL online program, 65.4% held part-time student status, and 67.5% held full-time jobs in addition to pursuing the PhD. When asked to rate elements of the doctoral program on a scale of importance, less than 40% of students said that earning a career in academia was important to them, and more than 60% of students said that applying what they learn in their workplace and local communities was of utmost importance to them. Finally, when introduced to the idea of a new EdD program focused on solving educational problems of practice and field-focused research, student responses were enthusiastic:

Even with a Ph.D., some of us are not interested in faculty/research pathways in the traditional sense. We have jobs, families, and responsibilities...It’s encouraging to learn that a new Ed.D. will be added to the offerings.

I am very interested in the EdD option...I am interested in quantitative research or classroom action research.

I strongly agree that having an EdD program would direct more practice-oriented folks in a more productive direction for everyone.

I have such a good feeling about this transition and I feel like a weight has been lifted. I spend so much time helping students “learn how to learn” and mentoring other educators, that this EdD seems like the perfect fit for me.

During a department meeting in May of 2019, we reviewed our program completion data coupled with students’ feedback surrounding their experiences in the CISL seated and online programs. Our findings indicated that many CISL Online students were only registering for 3-credits per semester, if at all, and the graduation rate was alarmingly low. Many of our CISL Online students are full-time working professionals who do not intend to pursue careers in academia; rather, many of them chose to pursue the doctorate to advance in their current positions and/or open up new opportunities to design and implement solutions to problems of educational practice. As such, we identified the need to offer our students an applied, professional doctorate geared toward preparing scholar-practitioners to use evidence-based practices to challenge inequity and solve problems that education leaders face on a daily basis. This realization led to the redesign of our previous EdD program in Elementary Education, as well as our membership with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED).

**Program Redesign**

 As previously mentioned, through survey data collection and conversations with students, we realized that many of our CISL Online students’ professional backgrounds and career goals suggested that they might be better suited for a doctoral program that would allow them to collaborate across school, academic, and community boundaries to “blend their practical wisdom with their professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice” (CPED, 2010, para. 9). Since our existing EdD program in Elementary Education was receiving few applicants in comparison to our multidisciplinary PhD program in CISL, we identified the need for a program revision that would accommodate the coursework and experiential pursuits of a wider audience, as well as offer our CISL Online students an applied alternative to a theory-oriented degree designed for aspiring researchers and academics. As such, the proposal for a redesigned EdD in Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts was born.

**Mission**

 As part of our redesign process, it was imperative to articulate a Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts EdD program mission for our current PhD students interested in transitioning, as well as the competitive external candidates we may wish to admit for a Summer 2020 start. When we first introduced the idea of a new EdD program during department meetings and one-on-one conversations in the Spring of 2019, we learned that faculty and students felt unclear about the distinguishable differences between a PhD and EdD. As a result, we decided that our mission should emphasize the EdD’s practical focus on developing transformational leaders who design and implement solutions to problems of practice. Accordingly, we wanted to assert that the EdD/PhD distinction is based on the primary focus of the degree and does not suggest that problems of practice are not amenable to the application of theory.

Designed within an actionable, justice-focused framework, University at Buffalo’s Doctor of Education in Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts blends contemporary theory and practice across synergistic learning experiences to produce the next generation of educational professionals dedicated to addressing emergent problems of practice.

**CPED Framework**

 Following our insitution’s acceptance to the CPED consortium, during the summer of 2019, the Dean of the Graduate School of Education, our department chair, several senior faculty members in the Departments of Learning and Instruction and Educational Leadership and Policy, and a newly-appointed director of doctoral studies attended the June convening. Although we attended the convening with ideas for how we would approach our program redesign, our interactions with experienced CPED members and an improved understanding of CPED’s seven guiding principles provided us with the resources and cornerstones of our program’s identity to ensure a methodical, rigourous, and leading-edge program revision.

**Improvement Science in Education**

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**Promoting Activism**

As proud members of CPED, we are committed to aligning our program with the consortium’s guiding principles to support quality, rigorous practitioner preparation while honoring the local context of our students’ communities. Focused by a lens of justice and an improvement science framework, our new program is designed to empower and equip students to lead proactive and responsive systemic change using problem-solving approaches centered on continuous inquiry and learning. Throughout our three cross-cutting program stages - (1) coursework centering on a problem of practice; (2) design and research methods for educational improvement; (3) dissertation in practice - students will harness their own transformative power to conduct applied research to unique problems of practice in their communities. Our students will employ justice-driven methods derived from iterative inquiry cycles to advocate for diversity and equitable educational practices beyond paradigmatic lines such as race, gender, and sexual orientation inclusivity; they will move beyond knowledge consumption to knowledge ***production*** and champion diversity in educational practice as difference in approach, attitude, and perspective.

**Anticipated Benefits and Limitations of Our Model**

 A key benefit of our model is that University at Buffalo recruits students from diverse educational settings, including fields such as nursing and counseling, and share a common commitment to learning and serving as transformational leaders. Since our program structure allows completion in three full years of part-time study, including summer-term enrollment, our model will accommodate the needs of working professionals through customized learning plans, structured timelines, and an online delivery format.

 On the contrary, a potential limitation of our model is its fully online format. Faculty who are coordinating and teaching within the program will be responsible for cultivating a collaborative, transcultural community for EdD students.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

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