# Challenges in (Re)designing EdD Programs：
## Supporting Change with Learning Cases
## Book Review

**Siyuan Gu** 
*Johns Hopkins University*
*sgu0914@outlook.com*

## ABSTRACT

This review assesses Dr. Jill Perry's (2023) text *Challenges of (Re)Designing EdD Programs: Supporting Transformation Through Case Learning* in terms of its relevance to its intended audience of educational practitioners and its contributions to the field. By spotlighting the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) -associated teaching cases, it examines each for insights into the redesign process and offers meaningful discussion questions for further reflection. Addressing challenges like equity integration, defining research roles, and managing program differences, Perry's text assesses their impact on EdD program development. It emphasizes the need for cohesive, outcome-oriented program development and positions case-based earning as a practical tool for faculty development and for promoting critical thinking. The text urges readers to reflect on these cases and uses them as an instrument for fostering discussions on EdD program design challenges in an effort to ideally guide institutional transformation.

<u>KEYWORDS</u>
*EdD, Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), teaching cases, educational leadership, program redesign*

Doctoral programs in education can be classified according to two types: Doctor of Education (EdD) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs, with the traditional PhD programs generally being more widely recognized by both the general public, governing bodies, and other accrediting institutions (Doran, 2021). Traditional PhD programs are typically characterized as research-intensive, as offering a rigorous curriculum, and as using comprehensive exams and a dissertation as methods for measuring student learning. Yet, many traditional doctoral programs are plagued by extended completion times, low graduation rates, declining student enrollment, and a lack of real-world application. To overcome these deficits, several institutions have introduced EdD programs, which are characterized by a shorter 3-4 year duration, as well as a curriculum tailored to practical educational contexts and dedicated to continuous content refinement for practitioners' evolving needs. Despite the promise and potential of the EdD programs, they have nonetheless encountered substantial skepticism from some veteran educators and faculty regarding their perceived efficacy and relevancy (see Buss et al., 2017), in addition to external critics questioning the presumed leniency of EdD standards (Schulman et al., 2006). To overcome the challenges posed by such skepticism, many EdD programs are therefore undergoing a redesign process to bring about transformative change within higher education.

The authors featured in Perry's (2023) *Challenges of (Re)Designing EdD Programs* are well-qualified to weigh in on such

matters, as they bring with them extensive histories within the field. One of the book's greatest strengths is how it effectively draws upon the individual contributors' diverse areas of expertise. Gary Crow, Professor Emeritus at Indiana University, specializes in school leadership, reform, and professional identities. William Firestone, also a Professor Emeritus out of Rutgers University, offers insights into leadership and educational reform. Andrew Leland, a professor at Southern Illinois University, specializes in methods for preparing today's educational leadership. Perry herself serves as CPED Executive Director and Associate Professor at the University of Pittsburgh and has an accomplished background in international education policy. The CPED program, of which Dr. Perry is a part, is dedicated to transforming the EdD degree into a Doctor of Professional Practice in Education degree by reimagining existing curricula. This new framework centers around questions of social justice and ethics, problems of practice explored in field-based environments, and tangibly preparing educators to engender meaningful change within their communities.

The book begins with Perry's critical appraisal of the existing gaps in doctoral training for educators. The core objective of this chapter, as well as the book as a whole, is to equip faculty with practical tools for professional development in redesigning EdD programs. In the past, faculty have typically focused on prioritizing teaching and service over research and publication. For today's EdD

programs, however, Perry suggests a redesign that encourages faculty to equally divide their efforts and change the way they view doctoral preparation. To illustrate what these changes might look like in practice and with the tone for the following chapters thus established, Perry then introduces five real-world cases drawing upon EdD faculty members' experiences working in universities throughout the U.S. Together, they provide a comprehensive narrative on conceptualizing—but more importantly, actualizing—the (re)design of EdD programs.

The first case, written by Andrew Leland, presents a scenario detailing a faculty member's efforts to lead the redesign of the EdD program with an eye towards diversity and equity. This faculty member, Professor Ittunga, specializes in critical race theory, making her poised to lead the redesign of the EdD program by addressing issues of equity, diversity, and social justice, specifically. After supplying the reader with this context, Leland outlines the innovative ways in which Ittunga strengthened her university's EdD curriculum. The new core coursework focuses on developing students' ability to lead change effectively with evidence-based decision-making, which is achieved in part by immersing students in the process of applying and conducting research. Prior to Ittunga's interventions, the EdD program was marked by three significant shortcomings: (1) topics on diversity and equity were only integrated into the curriculum in the form of elective, (2) the concept of diversity as it appeared in the curriculum was nominalized and narrowly define in terms of only race and ethnicity or socioeconomic status, for example, and (3) there was only one system in place for assessing the curriculum (i.e., via standardized test scores). In Ittunga's redesigned version, however, diversity and equity were no longer relegated to an optional subject area for study, but a core requirement. Furthermore, this new curriculum broadened the scope of studies of diversity to now conceptualize it through the lens of gender and gender identity, religion, and much more. One of the more appealing features of this chapter, from an instructional standpoint, is that the author provides the reader with a sample curriculum, so that one can see exactly how these ideals and initiatives translate into practice. The reader is then left with a series of thought-provoking, guiding questions. These questions not only provide tangible instructional resources for facilitating in-class discussion but also prompt the reader themselves to engage with these concepts to further reflect on what diversity means to them.

The next case, written by Bill Firestone, details the case of Western State University's (WSU) EdD program and the countless challenges it faced. The EdD degree offered by WSU was the only terminal degree in education the institution was allowed to offer, due to state politics that designated PhDs in education a right reserved for larger state universities. This, coupled with the fact that the EdD students at WSU experienced high drop-out rates and low-completion times, prompted the faculty and administration at WSU to charge that the EdD degree was not a serious pursuit. These troubles were compounded by accusations that the EdD faculty let students "slide by on subpar work," making this more of a "PhD lite" degree (p. 23).

Firestone's solution to these problems was to make the program more evidence-based, but also more geared towards preparing students to be educational practitioners rather than educational researchers. This meant that students who were admitted to the program already had a problem of practice that they wanted to tackle in mind, and so they identified a specific context for the application of the educational theories and methods they learned in the program. And to counter accusations that the EdD lacked rigor, those leading the program's redesign implemented standardized rubrics for evaluating students' comprehensive exams. However, one challenge remained, and this had to do with the faculty being divided on the program's future directions. The core faculty was committed to career preparation developing skilled practitioners, but the "old guard" (p. 29) was more focused on developing future researchers.

The emphasis on evidence is in line with the EdD programs' preference for action research (Buss & Zambo, 2016; Mertler, 2017; Osterman et al., 2014), which inherently seeks to balance the rigors of academic research as it is traditionally conceived with practical applications. Under this new framework, Firestone argues that program leaders must know how to design and operate data collection systems, analyze outcome-related data, and wisely monitor the outcomes observed. These assessments may be further augmented by seeking out research partners within local communities and making educational decisions with the cooperation of colleagues. He also advises that those involved in redesign efforts reach out to peers doing similar work, as they can provide an invaluable, if not often overlooked, resource in learning.

In many ways, the third case, written by Gary Crow, builds off of the ideas presented in the second case. Here again, the reader sees familiar tensions outlined, such as those between methodological rigor and practical applications, as well as a reverence for the established way of doing things and a desire for change. At the forefront of this desire for change is Dean Rutledge of Western University. This case presents a comparative analysis between two EdD programs, one in the Department of Teaching and Learning (TL) and the other in the Higher Education (HE) Department. As Dean Rutledge observed, both programs were struggling, despite adopting different approaches to curriculum design and instructional practices. The TL EdD program was subject to many of the "PhD lite" criticisms that surfaced in the previous chapter, whereas students enrolled in the HE EdD program had trouble distinguishing it from the PhD program.

The answer to both departments' troubles came in the form of the CPED and its corresponding principles. It allowed the TL department to promote critical thinking among the student body, which was facilitated by the creation of a distinct cohort, by fostering a community of scholars and by focusing on the issues they might actually encounter in their practice. The HE department likewise found the CPED framework to be a great help in redesigning their work; students reported feeling as though they had learned more about methodology and had increased opportunities to interact with faculty. Through the use of the CPED framework to redesign the EdD, the TL Department had, so far, proven more successful than the HE Department. In the HE Department, the CPED-led redesign efforts were met with a fair amount of faculty who expressed concerns about their productivity when their time and attention were being allocated towards revamping the program. So, as with previous cases, this one does not wrap up with a definitive conclusion, but more questions, designed to spur further thought about how to continue the relative successes witnessed in the TL Department and encourage the HE Department to change course.

The fourth case, written by Perry, explores the challenges of institutionalizing change and accounting for an institutional culture that redesigning an EdD program entails and moreover, highlights the effort it requires faculty to put forth and the toll it takes on leaders throughout the redesign process. This case delves into Dr. Silvi Bell's

transformation of Central State University's (CSU) EdD program and her efforts to address low completion rates and enrollment decline by moving to an CPED-aligned EdD. It also introduced the notion of a *dissertation in practice*—that is, a dissertation that was less focused on addressing "gaps in the literature" (p. 56) and more focused on engendering actionable and meaningful changes to educational policy and practice.

The dissertation became a key point of contention, as many of the more seasoned, tenured faculty members argued that a dissertation required the extensive collection of empirical data through involved fieldwork. But such a dissertation model would inevitably be at odds with actual needs of practitioners. This discrepancy between the needs of the EdD students and the goals of the program administrators is what led Perry to question, "Is the professional practice doctorate (PPD) model fully institutionalized if only some elements cater to practitioners?" (p. 56). In other words, is a dissertation in the traditional sense a requisite for the EdD to be recognized as a legitimate academic pathway?

For Perry, *institutionalization* refers to the integration of organizational practices, processes, and structures to the point that they come to be regarded as normative. She points out that while existing structures, processes, and policies are difficult to change, resistance does not mean that change is not possible. It is in this regard that it may be helpful to think of change in terms of a pendulum. As Gallant and Drinan (2008) note, structural and procedural obstacles can be viewed as "swings of the pendulum rather than insurmountable obstacles" that might cause a full collapse or abandonment of the innovation (p. 34). Change happens at the individual, program, and institutional levels, with resistance driving the process and bringing clarity to the concept of the PPD. The good news is that once a change has been thoroughly adopted by an institution (i.e., it has been institutionalized), it is no longer viewed as a change, nor is it met with the resistance that often accompanies change (Rogers, 1995). In the case of the PPD, however, achieving this degree of institutionalization requires fundamental shifts in mindset, as well as a curriculum and dissertation overhauls. Perry leaves the reader with questions pertaining to how to convince hesitant faculty of the merits of this new dissertation format, in addition to specific methods for achieving full institutionalization in light of it.

The final case, written by Andrew Leland, is grounded in the context of Tech University's cohort model and Dr. Williert's attempts to bring about transformative leadership and full CPED integration. The cohort model practiced by Tech University is oriented towards supporting faculty in their efforts to help students enhance their academic and social experiences and improve group cohesion among the student body. One of the key differences between the cohort model and more traditional graduate education models is that with the former, students are following a predetermined coursework trajectory at the same pace. A primary advantage of the cohort model is that it provides ample opportunities for "collective sensemaking" (p. 71), but it is nonetheless vulnerable to groupthink (Janis, 1972) and an inability to see the big picture, when group work is divided up into individual tasks. Leland then closes the chapter by questioning how Tech University's unique cohort-based EdD program may be redesigned for the better.

In the final chapter, Gary Crow summarizes the contributions of all the cases and emphasizes the importance of a critical and collaborative approach that uses instructional cases to move beyond simply seeking a single right answer. In line with the merits of case-based learning that Crow extols, I too saw the diverse case studies introduced here as the book's greatest strength. I came to understand EdD programs as much more than just an EdD versus PhD debate as a result of the breadth of topics addressed through these case studies. The EdD programs presented here are nuanced and highly varied. What's more is that the case studies, as such, impact the specificity and relatability that allow the reader to sense their applicability to a wide variety of contexts, all while avoiding the pedantic tone seen in some textbooks. Finally, for a book whose subject matter is concerned with how to make academia more inclusive for educational practitioners, I think it does an admirable job of practicing what it preaches. The narrative style and straightforward language make this accessible to a wide audience composed of both educators and scholars in education. That said, the text is careful to tie the narratives introduced to the extant literature but operationalizes and unpacks academic terminology so that anyone could follow. My only criticism is that the case study approach seemed to prevent the authors from interjecting their own rich experiences with educational programs. In this way, the case studies functioned more as a summary, but I would have liked to hear from the direct experiences of such an accomplished group of authors. All in all, I believe that this text provides an invaluable roadmap for ensuring that the EdD is not only seen for the promise it holds, but that it becomes accessible and fruitful for both practitioners and scholars alike.

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