

CPED Framework Implementation and Impact Rubrics Self-Study: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

This special issue investigates how Education Doctorate (EdD) programs can engage in self-study as a generative form of organizational learning rather than a compliance-driven task. Seven CPED member institutions conducted a structured self-study using two rubrics grounded in the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Framework, examining the implementation and impact of CPED principles across program artifacts, stakeholder experiences, and field-based outcomes. Analysis of syllabi, dissertations-in-practice, interviews, and program documents revealed strong commitments to integrating theory and practice, inquiry-driven learning, equity, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement. The project also surfaced a common set of self-study phases—purpose setting, team formation, evidence collection, collaborative analysis, and action planning—that supported shared sensemaking and program refinement. Collectively, the findings demonstrate how rubric-guided self-study can deepen institutional coherence, illuminate strengths and gaps, and advance ongoing improvement in EdD program design and practice.

KEYWORDS

education doctorate, self-study, CPED framework, CPED principles

Education Doctorate (EdD) programs operate at the intersection of scholarship and professional practice (Perry, 2023; Young, 2013), preparing leaders to address complex, persistent problems in educational systems. As expectations for program quality, equity, and impact have intensified, EdD programs are increasingly called upon to demonstrate coherence between their stated values and their enacted practices (Phillips et al., 2018; Ryan & Watson, 2021). Program self-study has long been one mechanism for doing so. Yet, too often, self-study is experienced as a compliance-driven exercise tied to accreditation or accountability requirements rather than as a generative process for learning and improvement (Ryan & Watson, 2021; Tanzer et al., 2025). This tension raises a fundamental question for the field: *What does it look like for EdD programs to engage in self-study as a form of professional and organizational learning rather than as an evaluative endpoint?* Despite the centrality of reflective practice and continuous improvement to the EdD, relatively little scholarship documents how doctoral programs examine their own work, what kinds of evidence they prioritize, and what they learn through the process.

This special issue responds to that gap by documenting a self-study effort undertaken by seven EdD programs using a shared set of improvement-oriented rubrics grounded in the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Framework© (see Appendix A, pages 3-4). CPED is an international network of over 160 colleges and universities collaborating to improve EdD programs through the promotion of academic rigor and practical impact. CPED supports faculty through professional development to rethink advanced leadership preparation for professional practitioners guided by the

CPED Framework©. Through a collaborative, authentic process, CPED members developed a Framework© to support quality, rigorous EdD program design while honoring the local context of each member institution. The three-part Framework© includes: (a) a new definition of the EdD, (b) a set of guiding principles for program development, and (c) a set of design concepts that serve as program building blocks (CPED, 2010). This Framework© served as the base for the development of the two rubrics (See Appendix B) that were employed by participants in their self-study. On the Guiding Principles Implementation Rubric (CPED, 2024; Appendix B), institutions are asked to rate their level of implementation of the six guiding principles based on the presence of each principle within the program artifacts. The CPED Framework© Impact Rubric (CPED, 2024; Appendix B) broadened its perspective from the CPED principles to the CPED Framework© more generally. On this rubric, institutions are asked to rate the level of familiarity with the CPED Framework© among students and faculty, presence of the Framework© across program artifacts, and focus of program assessments on practice or the professional field.

Although each institution engaged in self-study within its own context, the collective project offers a rare opportunity to examine how structured, rubric-guided self-study functions across diverse programs when the explicit goal is learning rather than judgment. In this introduction article, we (throughout this article, “we” refers to the co-authors) outline the project in which we engaged to support the member institutions to conduct the self-study. The articles that follow, written by the participants in the project, detail the participants’



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experiences with the self-study process and outcomes of the self-study for the individual institutions. It is through these discussions that the power of self-study is revealed.

THE CPED RUBRIC SELF-STUDY PROJECT AS A DESIGN FOR LEARNING

The CPED Framework© Implementation & Impact Self-Study Project was designed to support member institutions in examining how their EdD programs reflect core CPED principles in both design and practice. Although the participating institutions were provided detailed instructions for conducting the self-study (Appendix A), institutions were allowed more flexibility as the self-study project progressed to reflect individual institution contexts, professional judgment of those conducting the self-study within their contexts, and collaborative sensemaking. Institutions were invited to engage the rubrics as tools for inquiry—guiding reflection on program artifacts, stakeholder experiences, and patterns of alignment.

Initially, the *CPED Framework© Implementation & Impact* rubrics were developed through a design-based process as part of the CPED 2021-2025 Strategic Plan. The rubrics underwent one final review to increase their consistency in format, indicator labels, and indicator descriptions or criteria. Specifically, the final editing sought to clarify criteria, align language across rubric components, and provide more explicit guidance regarding evidence use, while still preserving space for institutional interpretation. Once the rubrics were ready for distribution and use, we developed accompanying

materials—data collection instructions (Appendix A), spreadsheet for data collection (Appendix C), and an interview protocol (Appendix D)—to support institutions in designing locally meaningful self-study processes.

CPED offered these revised rubrics to all CPED member institutions as tools for improving their EdD programs through self-study. At the same time, this project was launched and members were invited to join the collaborative effort. Although the participating institutions were provided instructions for conducting the self-study to bring some measure of consistency across institutions, we were aware that institutional contexts would differ in the sources of evidence they would have available. The project aimed in part to gain a deeper understanding of how the institutions went about this self-study process and the evidence they would gather to support their ratings. We also wanted to get a general sense of the ways in which the rubrics and the process were useful and supportive of faculty learning about their EdD programs.

Participating Institutions

Seven CPED member institutions volunteered to participate in the project. The institutions varied by area of focus, years of CPED membership, CPED phase, institutional type, modality of program instruction, and program size (see Table 1). Collectively, the group formed a purposeful sample through which we set out to explore how EdD programs engage in self-study when provided with a shared framework and common tools.

Table 1. Participating Institution Characteristics

Institution Identifier	Program Area	Years CPED Member	CPED Phase ¹	Public/ Private	Program Modality	Approx # of Current Students	# Full Time Faculty
#1	Education	6	Experienced	Public	Online	55	3
#2	Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis	18	Implementing	Public	Online	103	13
#3	Education	8	Experienced	Private	Online	60	11
#4	Educational Leadership & Org'l Innovation	4	Implementing	Private	Online	350	6
#5	Educational Leadership	8	Implementing	Public	Hybrid & Online	200	12
#6	Education	11	Experienced	Private	Online	600	24 Full and part-time
#7	Leadership & Innovation	18	Experienced	Public	Hybrid & Online	278	15

How Institutions Engaged in the self-study process—method and procedure

To conduct the self-study, each institution was given several documents: (a) the *CPED Principles Implementation & Framework© Impact Self-Study Data Collection Instructions* (Appendix A), (b) the Guiding Principles Implementation Rubric and the CPED Framework© Impact Rubric (Appendix B) as one document (CPED,

2024), (c) the CPED Rubric Evidence Spreadsheet to document the evidence sources (Appendix C), and (d) a list of potential focus-group or individual interview questions (Appendix D). To increase consistency across institutions while allowing for individual differences across institutions, the data collection instructions suggested review of the following sources for evidence of the inclusion of principles and impact of this inclusion within their programs: (a) syllabi and assessments from coursework, (b)

¹ Implementing Phase: Member institutions in the Implementing phase have revised an existing traditional EdD program or developed a new program which has admitted students and may have graduated one cohort. Experienced Phase: Member institutions in the Experienced phase have a program that has been implemented for several years and graduated cohorts.



students' dissertation-in-practice from the most recent two graduation cycles, (c) individual or focus group interviews with constituents—students, alumni, and faculty, and (d) program-level policy documents—student handbook, student orientation materials, dissertation-in-practice handbooks—including descriptions of program benchmarks and capstone project. In addition, institutions were encouraged to examine faculty publications or presentations about the EdD program, alumni publications and presentations about their dissertation work, and alumni feedback from surveys, focus groups, etc. collected separate from the self-study process.

The focus group or individual interviews with current students, alumni, and faculty were guided by suggested questions (Appendix D). The intention of these interviews was to understand how each of these groups perceived the implementation of the CPED Framework© within their EdD program. Specifically, the interview protocol for current students and alumni probed interviewees' awareness of the CPED principles, the CPED organization, implementation of the CPED principles within their EdD program; incorporation of the CPED principles within their dissertation-in-practice; and enactment of the CPED principles within the field. The interview protocol for faculty probed their awareness of the CPED organization, influence of CPED principles on the program, specific integration of CPED principles within coursework, and their understanding of distinction between the EdD from the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree.

After reviewing each source of evidence, participating institutions documented the data source, the CPED Framework© element represented, how that element was incorporated into program materials, and evidence of its application in the field within the spreadsheet provided (Appendix C). Using this information, they calculated the percentage of program documents reflecting each principle, levels of CPED awareness among students, alumni, and faculty, the degree to which the Framework© appeared in program documents, and the number of assignments that were field-based and aligned with the Framework©.

Programs self-evaluated their integration of the CPED principles using a four-point scale. Emerging programs found evidence of a specific principle in 25–50% of relevant documents and in less than 25% of assessments. Progressing programs reflected the principle in 50–75% of documents and 25–50% of assessments. Full Integration programs found evidence of a specific principle in 75–90% of documents and 50–75% of assessments. Exemplar programs demonstrated alignment in 90–100% of documents, in more than 75% of assessments, and in alumni evidence of continued application.

A parallel rubric assessed the impact of the CPED Framework© across three domains. In **Student and Faculty Awareness** domains, programs rated themselves on a range from limited recognition of CPED influence at the Emerging level to the Exemplar level, where individuals could cite more than two examples of applying Framework© elements and were aware of more than four Framework© elements. In the **Program** domain, programs rated themselves from Emerging to Exemplar using indicators similar to those listed above for CPED principle integration. Finally, for the **Professional Field/Practice** domain, Emerging programs found evidence for application of the Framework© to the field and connection to the Framework© in less than 25% of assignments. Progressing programs showed 25–50% alignment and alumni awareness. Full Integration programs connected 50–75% of assignments to the Framework©, incorporated Framework©

elements into more than 75% of sampled dissertations, and alumni, 2-years out, provided examples of how they use elements of the CPED Framework© to drive their work. *Exemplar* programs exceeded 75% field-based alignment, embedded two or more Framework© elements in dissertations and professional outputs, and demonstrated alumni use of the Framework© in their work.

Institutions submitted two files—their Guiding Principles Implementation Rubric and the CPED Framework© Impact Rubric (Appendix B), which included their ratings with brief descriptions of evidence for each rating, and their CPED Rubric Evidence Spreadsheet (Appendix C). After submitting their ratings, the participating institutions' representatives decided to collectively develop and administer a *Post Self-Study Survey* to participating institution representatives to help us understand their experiences more deeply including how they went about conducting the self-study and the outcomes of the self-study process. Participants were asked to indicate the following information:

1. *Institution descriptive information*: name, Carnegie Designation, name of EdD program, start date of program, years of CPED membership, CPED phase designation, program modality, number of EdD students, and number of full-time faculty.
2. *Self-study experience*: motivation for participation, ease or clarity of self-study materials, suggested changes to self-study materials, faculty involvement with self-study, and description of self-study process.
3. *Data collection*: data collection process, specific data collected, numbers of each data source collected (e.g., numbers of syllabi), type of interviews, numbers of interview participants, and faculty and alumni publications collected.
4. *Outcomes of self-study experience*: Two ways in which the self-study was meaningful, suggestions for future self-studies, future plans as a result of the self-study, and advice for others conducting a self-study.

Once the participating institutions submitted their self-study ratings and evidence, we de-identified these data and collected the evidence into separate documents by CPED principle. We calculated the mean ratings within institution and within principle or domain of impact. Following initial review of the evidence institutions submitted evidence, we used ChatGPT as a supportive analytic tool to assist in organizing and synthesizing the data within each CPED principle. All thematic interpretations, analytic decisions, and final categorizations were reviewed, refined, and confirmed through examination of the data by the researcher. For example, a few categories suggested by this analysis were rejected because they did not represent common occurrences, and all category descriptions were revised to ensure they reflected the data.

CPED RUBRIC SELF-STUDY PROJECT FINDINGS

Two sets of data were explored, (a) the ratings and evidence submitted to justify these ratings and (b) the participating institutions' responses to the *Post Self-Study Survey*. From the participating institutions' ratings and evidence, we provide several analyses: (a) the types of evidence participating institutions used to rate their programs, (b) descriptive statistics characterizing participating institutions' ratings, and (c) themes that emerged from the evidence provided across CPED principles. From the *Post Self-Study Survey*, we provide several analyses: (a) the number of institutions that

indicated a data source as important or informative, (b) typical stages of the self-study process as described by the individual institutions, and (c) challenges institutions encountered as they conducted the self-study. We present these analyses to provide a backdrop to the individual stories of the self-study process in this special issue. We also present these findings to support other institutions who may want to conduct a self-study within their EdD program.

Types of Evidence Provided Across CPED Principles

Institutions provided a wide-ranging set of evidence to substantiate their ratings of the integration of CPED principles within their EdD programs. Table 2 provides: (a) the number of institutions reporting each data source as important or informative data to their process of self-study on the *Post Self-Study Survey*, and (b) the mean number of artifacts examined by each institution.

Table 2. Most Important/Informative Data and Mean Number of Documents/Individuals

Data Source	Number of Institutions ² n = 7 (%)	Mean Number ³ (Range)
Course Syllabi	7 (1.00)	15.71 (14-18)
Program-Level Documents	6 (0.85)	3.71 (1-7)
Student Dissertations	3 (0.43)	6.33 (0-10)
Student Interviews	6 (0.85)	7.57 (4-16)
Faculty Interviews	5 (0.71)	5.28 (0-9)
Alumni Interviews	4 (0.57)	2.86 (0-13)
Faculty Publications and Presentations	1 (0.14)	2.43 (0-10)
Alumni Publications and Presentations	0 (0.00)	1.43 (0-8)

Course syllabi were rated as the most important by all seven institutions, with a mean of 15.71 syllabi used per institution (range: 14-18). Program-level documents (e.g., program handbooks, learning outcomes, webpages) and student interviews were noted as important/informative by six institutions, with an average of 3.71 program-level documents reviewed (range: 1-7) and a mean of 7.57 (range: 4-16) students interviewed individually or in focus groups across institutions. Faculty interviews were rated important/informative by five institutions, with an average of 5.28 faculty members interviewed for the self-study (range: 0-9).

Interestingly, alumni were difficult to interview for several reasons discussed below and rated as important/informative by four institutions with a mean number of interviewees being 2.86 (range: 0-13), and students' dissertations were rated as important by only three institutions (mean = 6.33; range: 0-10). Other sources, such as faculty and alumni publications/presentations, were rated as important or informative less frequently, with alumni publications/presentations being used the least.

Looking Across Institutional Ratings—Descriptive Statistics

Seven institutions submitted complete data with ratings for the integration of the CPED principles and the impact of this integration on their program. These ratings are self-report data with a limited number of data points. Therefore, only descriptive statistics were computed. Further, although institutions were initially provided instructions to increase the consistency between institutions, the methodology institutions used was necessarily not standardized. Institutions were given the flexibility to use the rubrics as they felt appropriate for their institution. Thus, no comparisons are proffered.

CPED Principle Integration

Table 3 includes the institution's number of years as members of CPED; ratings by CPED principle; and mean, minimum, and maximum ratings by institution. Mean, minimum, and maximum ratings for the integration of principles across institutions are below these columns. Table 4 includes the number of institutions that indicated each rating by principle.

Overall, these data provide evidence of robust implementation of the CPED principles. In Table 3, we see that the mean rating of 2.76 reflects ratings of Progressing and Full Integration across principles and institutions. The mean ratings by institution ranged from 1.50 to 4.00 and by principle they ranged from 2.43 to 3.14. Only one institution (#3) that has been a member of CPED for 8 years rated their program at the Exemplary rating (mean = 4.00) reflecting an integration of CPED principles within over 90% of documents and more than 75% of program assessments as well as evidence from alumni. One institution, also a CPED member for 8 years, rated itself at the Emerging level for all principles (mean = 1.50) reflecting less than 50% integration. The other five institutions rated their integration at the Progressing to Full Integration levels reflecting evidence of integration within program documents at the 50% to 90% levels.

Examining Tables 3 and 4 together, we see the least amount of evidence of integration for Principles 1 and 3 with most participating institutions rating their integration at the Progressing level (50-75% of documents and 25-50% of program assessments). The greatest evidence for integration across institutions, at the Full Integration level, were related to Principles 2 and 5. Though most institutions rated their integration of these principles at the Full Integration or Exemplar levels (n = 5 for both principles), the largest number of institutions (n = 3) indicated that they found evidence of integration of Principle 5 at the Exemplar level.

² Number of institutions indicating this data source was most important or informative within a multiple-choice question allowing institutions to mark multiple data sources as appropriate.

³ Mean number (range) of documents institutions examined by data source or mean number of individuals interviewed within the student or faculty individual or focus group interviews.

**Table 3. CPED Principles Implementation Rubric Descriptive Statistics by Institution**

Institution	No. Yrs CPED	Princ 1 ⁴	Princ 2	Princ 3	Princ 4	Princ 5	Princ 6	Mean	Min	Max
#1	6	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.00	2	2
#2	18	2	3	2	2	4	3	2.67	2	4
#3	8	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.00	4	4
#4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.00	3	3
#5	8	2	2	1	1	2	1	1.50	1	2
#6	11	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.00	3	3
#7	18	2	4	2	4	4	3	3.17	2	4
Mean	10.43	2.57	3.00	2.43	2.71	3.14	2.71	2.76		
Min	4	2	2	1	1	2	1	1.50		
Max	18	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.00		

Table 4. Number of Institutions with Each Rating by Principle

Rating	Princ 1	Princ 2	Princ 3	Princ 4	Princ 5	Princ 6
Emerging	0	0	1	1	0	1
Progressing	4	2	3	2	2	1

Impact of CPED Framework© Integration

Table 5 includes the institution number of years of CPED membership; ratings by area of impact; and mean, minimum, and

maximum ratings by institution. Mean, minimum, and maximum ratings for each area of impact are below these columns. Table 6 includes the number of institutions that indicated each rating by area of impact.

Table 5. CPED Framework© Impact Rubric Descriptive Statistics by Institution

Institution	No. Yrs CPED	Carnegie-Research Activity Designation	Students	Faculty	Program	Professional Practice	Mean	Min	Max
#1	6	1	4	3	3	4	3.50	3	4
#2	18	2	1	3	3	2	2.25	1	3
#3	8	1	4	4	3	4	3.75	3	4
#4	4	1	3	4	3	3	3.25	3	4
#5	8	2	4	4	4	3	3.75	3	4
#6	11	2	3	3	3	3	3.00	3	3
#7	18	1	4	2	3	4	3.25	2	4
Mean			3.29	3.29	3.14	3.29	3.25		
Min			1	2	3	2	2.25		
Max			4	4	4	4	3.75		

Table 6. Number of Institutions with Each Rating by Category of Impact

Rating	Students	Faculty	Program	Professional Practice
Emerging	1	0	0	0
Progressing	0	1	0	1
Full Integration	2	3	6	3
Exemplar	4	3	1	3

⁴ Ratings: 1 = Emerging; 2= Progressing; 3 = Full Integration; 4 = Exemplary. See descriptions of each level above.

Overall, these data provide strong evidence of the impact of the CPED Framework© on students, faculty, program, and professional practice. In Table 5, we see that the mean rating across areas of impact and institutions was 3.25 or Full Integration, which is reflected in the mean ratings across individual institutions (range = 2.25 – 3.75) and areas of impact (range = 3.14 – 3.29). These ratings indicate that students and faculty were aware of the program and could provide examples of the CPED Framework© in their coursework; program documents provided evidence of the CPED Framework© as guiding principles for the development of the institutions' programs. Only one institution (#2) rated the impact of the CPED Framework© at the Progressing level. Examining Tables 5 and 6 together, we see more programs found evidence of impact on students at the Exemplar level, with the impact on faculty and professional practice also rated at the Exemplar level by 3 of the participating institutions.

Emergent Themes

As described above, certain types of evidence emerged as especially central to the self-study process across the seven institutions. For example, course syllabi, program handbooks, student interviews, and faculty interviews were rated as important and informative to the self-study process by more than half the participating institutions, reflecting their accessibility and their perceived importance in representing program values. These documents provided tangible insight into how principles such as practice-based inquiry, equity, and leadership development were articulated and assessed. The information submitted on the spreadsheet for data collection (Appendix C) was combined across institutions by principle, and following a review of the data, AI was used (see description above) to generate initial themes in the evidence submitted. These themes reveal strong cross-cutting commitments to integration, inquiry, equity, collaboration, and impact, including:

1. **Integration of Theory and Practice:** The evidence submitted related to all six principles reflect a systemic effort to connect academic learning with practical application (Archbald, 2008; Perry, 2023). Coursework, dissertations-in-practice, benchmark assessments, and field-based experiences are designed to ensure students actively apply theoretical frameworks to real-world challenges, especially through improvement science cycles and strategic planning.
2. **Inquiry-Based and Reflective Learning:** Institutions uniformly emphasize inquiry as both a process and outcome (Archbald, 2008; Wergin, 2011; Author et al., 2020). From the Dissertation in Practice to embedded reflective assignments, students are guided through cycles of questioning, implementing, evaluating, and refining. This approach ensures scholarly rigor while reinforcing reflective, adaptive practice.
3. **Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice:** The evidence submitted to support participants' ratings relative to Principles 1, 2, 3, and 5 foreground equity and inclusion as foundational commitments. Evidence often centers on students investigating systemic inequities, engaging marginalized communities, and applying leadership practices through an ethical and socially responsive lens.
4. **Stakeholder and Community Engagement:** Authentic collaboration with stakeholders is a recurrent theme.

Students frequently engage with schools, communities, and professional organizations, co-constructing knowledge and solutions. This not only deepens learning but grounds doctoral work in public good and shared responsibility (Militello et al., 2022).

5. **Leadership and Professional Growth:** Leadership development emerges strongly, particularly in Principles 2, 4, and 5. Students learn to navigate complex systems, make evidence-based decisions, and build coalitions for change (Militello et al., 2022). This theme is supported by focus on leadership theory, organizational analysis, and applied policy work within courses including course and milestone assessments.
6. **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Across the principles, institutions highlight rigorous use of data (quantitative and qualitative) to guide practice. Students conduct equity audits, needs assessments, and program evaluations, positioning data as central to ethical and effective leadership.
7. **Continuous Improvement:** Improvement science principles (e.g., PDSA cycles) appear across Principles 3–6. Institutions promote iterative approaches to problem solving, requiring students to design, test, and revise interventions. These approaches foster a mindset of ongoing learning and adaptation (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020).

These themes show how the seven CPED member institutions anchor their doctoral programs in principled, research-informed, and contextually grounded practices that prepare leaders to transform educational systems.

The Process of Conducting the Self-Study

Participating institutions were asked to describe the process they used to conduct the self-study. Several key phases in the CPED self-study emerged from the participants' descriptions (see Table 7). Across institutions, the self-study process unfolded as a collaborative and iterative endeavor rather than a linear evaluation exercise as described in the research literature (Baretto & Conklin, 2025; Ryan & Watson, 2021). First, each institution experienced some degree of **initiation and purpose setting** for the project as depicted in the literature by Rogers (2003). Often, program chairs or university leadership launched the self-study by tying it to larger program improvement initiatives, accreditation cycles, or university reviews. The programs reported **team formation** as the next phase as leadership engaged faculty teams in this work.

Next, these teams of faculty conducted **evidence collection** with some institutions assigning responsibility for collection of a specific data source to specific teams or individuals. A hallmark of these self-studies was **collaborative analysis** with review teams of core faculty, program coordinators, and sometimes students or alumni reviewing the evidence (see also Baretto & Conklin, 2025; Ryan & Watson, 2021). Together the faculty engaged in structured discussions to interpret evidence and determine rubric ratings. They analyzed evidence through an iterative process of reflection and group calibration to achieve consensus documenting their ratings and justification with supporting evidence citations during the **documenting** phase. In some cases, the ratings were then used for **action planning** by identifying strengths and areas for growth to inform strategic planning and redesign efforts.

Table 7. Key Phases in the CPED Self-Study Process

Phase	Description	Key Activities
1. Purpose Setting	Institutions define motivations for engaging in the self-study.	-Re-envision programs- Deepen CPED involvement- Launch new evaluation efforts
2. Team Formation	Faculty teams and stakeholders assembled to lead self-study.	-Identify core faculty and leadership- Sometimes include students or alumni
3. Evidence Collection	Institutions compile documentation aligned to rubric indicators.	-Gather syllabi, DiPs, handbooks, benchmarks- Conduct surveys/focus groups
4. Collaborative Analysis	Teams interpret evidence and reach consensus on rubric ratings.	-Facilitate structured discussions- Calibrate scores- Reflect on evidence gaps
5. Documentation	Findings recorded and synthesized for internal or CPED use.	-Create written summaries- Justify ratings with evidence- Submit optional feedback to CPED
6. Action Planning	Institutions may use findings to inform next steps in program improvement.	-Identify areas for growth- Align with curriculum revisions- Set strategic goals

Looking at these key phases across several institutions we discovered several interesting findings about implementing a program self-study. Above all, faculty engagement emerged as central to the experience as has been described in the literature (Leach et al., 2020; Perry, 2010; 2013). The process required sustained dialogue to interpret rubric criteria, debate the meaning of evidence, and work toward consensus regarding program ratings. Where participation was broad, the process often functioned as a catalyst for professional learning—surfacing assumptions about program goals, clarifying shared language, and prompting reflection on how CPED principles were understood and enacted. In other cases, tensions emerged around differing interpretations of rubric criteria or uneven familiarity with the CPED Framework©.

Another key finding suggested assembling evidence was itself illuminating. Locating syllabi, benchmark assessments, dissertations, and program documents required programs to confront what was readily accessible, what was fragmented, and what was missing. Although stakeholder engagement through focus groups or interviews—particularly with students and alumni—added depth to the process, institutions varied in their capacity to conduct these interviews. These findings illustrate the productive nature of the self-study process, but at the same time they also surfaced a set of challenges that are instructive for understanding improvement-oriented program inquiry.

Challenges as Features of Improvement-Oriented Self-Study

Although participants described the self-study process as meaningful (see also Ryan & Watson, 2021; Tanzer et al., 2025), they also identified a set of recurring challenges that illuminate the complexities of conducting improvement-oriented program inquiry. Although documents offered an essential starting point, the interpretive work required to understand how principles were enacted in practice depended heavily on dialogue, reflection, and professional judgment. For example, institutions noted that the presence of CPED-aligned language in syllabi did not always correspond to meaningful integration within course assignments or learning experiences. Similarly, alumni and student perspectives proved more difficult to collect consistently, particularly for newer programs or those with smaller alumni networks. Thus, several challenges emerged within the participants' responses to several questions on the *Post Self-Study Survey*.

Evidence Gathering, Interpretive Ambiguity, and Sensemaking

Participants described challenges with identifying and interpreting relevant evidence. They had difficulty locating program-level policy documents or comprehensive course syllabi with detailed assignment descriptions. They faced challenges interpreting how to determine whether a CPED principle was present and to what extent (e.g., does a single mention count as integration?). They were uncertain at times about what qualified as sufficient or appropriate evidence, especially for less formal data sources such as alumni presentations.

Participants also described challenges related to interpreting evidence and applying rubric criteria consistently. They expressed confusion related to applying the percentage-based expectations in the rubric across multiple data types. They struggled with weighting evidence from different sources equally when documents varied greatly in depth and relevance. Inconsistencies in how data were analyzed across institutions, misalignment between data analysis matrices and available evidence, and uncertainty about what constituted sufficient evidence all contributed to moments of confusion. From an improvement standpoint, such ambiguity can serve as a catalyst for professional learning (Rogers, 2003), prompting faculty to negotiate shared understandings of program values, evidence, and expectations (Leach et al., 2020).

Finally, the distinction between the Guiding Principles Implementation Rubric and the CPED Framework© Impact Rubric (Appendix B) was unclear. For example, the program category on the Impact Rubric overlapped significantly with the Principles Rubric. One distinction between these rubrics was their focus, but this distinction did not seem authentic to the participants. The Guiding Principles Implementation Rubric focused on the integration of the CPED principles and the CPED Framework© Impact Rubric focused on impact of the integration of the CPED Framework©. Relatedly, many institution representatives reflected that it was difficult to see impact through the integration of Framework© elements within documents. Perhaps the most notable focus on impact was reflected in the student and faculty awareness of the CPED Framework© and the degree to which the Framework© was taken up in assignments. These limitations may necessitate further revision to combine these two rubrics and refocus some elements specifically on impact.

Representation and Voice in Self-Study Data

Institutions frequently encountered challenges related to data quality and representativeness. Recruiting a diverse and representative sample of faculty, students, and alumni proved difficult, and several institutions reported that student focus groups yielded limited or uneven data, as students were often unsure how to respond meaningfully to questions about CPED principles.

Alumni participation was similarly constrained, particularly in programs with small numbers of graduates or underdeveloped alumni networks. In addition, participation bias among faculty was evident in some cases, with those most familiar or invested in CPED overrepresented in the data. From an improvement perspective, these challenges underscore the difficulty of surfacing authentic and varied perspectives—particularly from those less centrally positioned within program structures—yet they also highlight the importance of attending to voice and representation as core components of learning-focused inquiry (Bryk et al., 2015).

Capacity, Time, and the Labor of Inquiry

Time and resource constraints emerged as another cross-cutting challenge. The process of reviewing and synthesizing multiple forms of evidence required sustained effort, coordination, and collective attention. Some faculty lacked the time or capacity to engage fully, which limited the scope of participation and increased the burden on smaller teams. These challenges reflect a broader tension in improvement work: meaningful inquiry demands time, relational work, and institutional support, yet such resources are often unevenly available within academic programs (Bryk et al., 2015; Grunow et al., 2024).

Developmental Timing and Program Maturity

Finally, challenges related to alumni data highlighted the developmental nature of program evaluation. Institutions with fewer graduates or newer alumni associations may struggle to gather meaningful evidence of alumni impact. These constraints point to the importance of aligning expectations for evidence with program maturity and recognizing that some indicators of impact necessarily emerge over time.

Taken together, these challenges did not diminish the value of the self-study process. Instead, they revealed key conditions under which improvement-oriented self-study operates—attention to detail within program documents, collective sensemaking around evidence, attention to voice and representation, and adequate time and capacity. In many cases, conducting the self-study despite these challenges sharpened institutional understanding of both program strengths and areas for growth, reinforcing self-study as a formative and learning-centered practice.

WHAT THIS PROJECT SUGGESTS ABOUT IMPROVEMENT-ORIENTED SELF-STUDY

Viewed collectively, the institutional experiences documented in this project suggest that rubric-guided self-study can function as a powerful mechanism for organizational learning when designed with improvement in mind. Participants described the experience as meaningful in several interrelated ways. For many, especially those from newer programs, the process served as a form of validation—confirming that the intensive work involved in program design,

course development, and faculty engagement was yielding results aligned with the CPED Framework®. This affirmation could be both motivating and reassuring, signaling that foundational program efforts were on the right track.

At the same time, some participating institutions reported how the self-study surfaced specific areas for improvement such as illuminating gaps in alignment with certain CPED principles, particularly Principles 1, 3, and 4, which deal with equity, collaboration, and communication. The process can draw attention to curriculum components that are less well integrated and deficiencies in course syllabi that could be addressed relatively easily. Such insights may enable institutions to refocus their efforts and attend more intentionally to underdeveloped dimensions of their programs.

Additionally, flexibility in data collection and interpretation allowed institutions to adapt the process to their contexts. Importantly, ambiguity emerged as a generative feature rather than a flaw. Questions about what constituted sufficient evidence, how to weigh different data sources, or how to interpret partial alignment may prompt deeper engagement with program values and priorities. In this way, the self-study process can mirror the very improvement logics many EdD programs seek to instill in their students—iterative inquiry, evidence-informed decision making, and reflective practice.

The self-study also sharpened institutional focus on priorities for some of the participating institutions. That is, the process can help faculty and leadership better understand what it means to be a CPED-aligned program. It may prompt efforts to make references to CPED principles and the CPED Framework® more explicit in program materials and communications. In some cases, this may mean integrating CPED principles more clearly into course syllabi; in others, it may mean initiating broader conversations about how CPED values relate to program values and whether those should overlap completely or remain distinct but aligned.

Finally, the self-study process was widely valued as a formative assessment process. It can allow institutions to celebrate strong areas of alignment with the CPED principles while also identifying areas for continued growth. This dual function—affirming strengths and illuminating challenges—can make the process a meaningful and strategic exercise in continuous program improvement.

CONCLUSION

This collective self-study effort contributes to broader conversations about rigor, evidence, and learning in doctoral program evaluation. For EdD programs, it underscores the importance of approaching self-study as an ongoing, collaborative process rather than a periodic requirement. For CPED, the project offers insight into how field-facing tools evolve through use and how rubric-guided inquiry can support professional learning across institutions. More broadly, this special issue invites the field to reconsider what it means to “study” doctoral programs—not simply to assess their alignment with external standards, but to engage them as learning organizations committed to continuous improvement in service of educational practice.

The articles that follow in this special issue offer institutionally grounded accounts of how EdD programs engaged the CPED rubrics within distinct contexts. Each article reflects the unique history, structure, and priorities of the program described, illustrating how shared tools can support diverse pathways toward learning and improvement. Rather than serving as comparative case studies,



these accounts foreground variation as a strength of improvement-oriented inquiry. Together, they provide rich examples of how programs make sense of their work, surface areas for growth, and leverage self-study as a catalyst for change.

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