

Ed.D. and Ph.D. Programs in Education Leadership in the Southern region of the United States;

Twins or Kissing Cousins?

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### Abstract

This study examined the current status of doctoral programs in Education Leadership in order to provide a cross-sectional view of the nature and design of 21<sup>st</sup> century programs. A sampling of current doctoral programs' websites from public and private institutions within the 15 states that make up the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration's (SRCEA) territory were examined to ascertain if there were any clear distinctions in the required curriculum. A one-way ANOVA test compared the number of administration courses, research courses, theory courses, number of required courses, required electives, and total number of courses in the Ed.D. programs to those in the Ph.D. programs. The researchers concluded that there were no significant statistical differences in the composition of Ed.D. and Ph.D. education leadership programs in terms of the number of required administration, theory, and research courses.

As the gateway to the terminal degree in a given field, doctoral programs serve to develop scholars and practitioners who can efficiently discover, disseminate and apply new knowledge (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel & Garabedian, 2006; Gardner, 2009). This study examines the current status of these doctoral programs in Education Leadership in order to provide a cross-sectional view of the nature and design of 21<sup>st</sup> century programs.

There are currently three classifications of doctorates available in the United States. The first is the professional doctorate, consisting of degrees similar to and including the medical doctor (MD), juris doctor (JD), and doctor of psychology (PsyD) (Gardner, 2009). These professional doctorates are characterized by no formal thesis or dissertation; instead requiring extensive assessments and internships (Gardner, 2009). The second classification is that of the professional research doctorate and includes the doctor of education (Ed.D.) and the doctor of business administration (D.B.A.) (Gardner, 2009). Professional research doctorates are designed and intended for practicing professionals (Gardner, 2009). The final classification is the traditional research doctorate and consists of the doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) and the doctor of theology (Th.D.) (Gardner, 2009). Traditional research doctorates, according to Gardner (2009), are the most extensive, requiring three phases of learning: coursework, assessment of skills, and independent research.

Within the field of education, two of Gardner's doctoral program classifications are available: professional research doctorates (Ed.D.) and traditional research doctorates (Ph.D.). The history of these two educational doctorates goes back to 1893 when the first Ph.D. in education was granted by Columbia University (Shulman et al., 2006). Twenty-seven years later, in 1920, in an effort by education faculty to break away from the strict requirements

imposed by the Arts and Sciences Department, education faculty at Harvard University developed the first Ed.D. (Perry, 2012).

This action by Harvard ignited a movement in the field of education. In 1934, Teachers College responded by establishing an Ed.D. program that focused on training education workers to deal with issues common to their field (Perry, 2012). From 1934 to 1940, several other institutions, including the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford, also began offering Ed.D. options (Perry, 2012). The justifications included breaking free of stringent arts and sciences rules, preparing better educational professionals, and preparing students for entrance into Ivy League programs (Perry, 2012).

While this movement resulted in a new classification of educational doctorate, it also created confusion about the purpose of the degree. Some universities saw the Ed.D. as a Ph.D.-lite; preparing students for the rigors of a professional research doctorate program (Perry, 2012). Other universities created Ed.D. programs that surpassed Ph.D. requirements in an effort to create a more stringent degree (Perry, 2012 & Shulman, 2006). With no clear guidelines, the new Ed.D. programs had a vague purpose that haphazardly blended theoretical knowledge with practical application (Perry, 2012).

Despite this confusion, the popularity of Ed.D. programs continued to grow. From 1920 to 1950, Ed.D. programs actually excelled academically, and were regarded as more desirable than the Ph.D (Brown, 1990). It was not until the 1960s that academia began to suspect that there were no clear distinctions between the two degrees (Brown, 1990). It was during this time period when researchers began to look at the rigor and requirements of the Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs, and several studies emerged that tried to explain the purpose of each program

type (Brown, 1990 & Shulman et al., 2006). From these studies, researchers agreed that theoretically, Ph.D. programs were more research oriented and intended to prepare scholars and researchers, while Ed.D. programs were practitioner oriented and should target current teachers and educational leaders (Nelson & Coorough, 1994, Brown, 1990; Shulman et al., 2006). With these loosely defined distinctions, Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs continued to be developed separately until the 1990s when researchers again began to compare the two program types (Brown, 1990; Nelson & Coorough, 1994).

The 1990 study by Brown was conceived in response to a statement by Frank Freeman in 1931 that declared the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees were virtually identical. Brown (1990) took this statement and devised a study to compare the two types of programs based on foundation and cognates requirements. He determined that while there were no significant differences between the two, Ed.D. programs were slightly more structured due to their additional foundation and cognates requirements (Brown, 1990).

Radford (2001) added to the Ed.D. and Ph.D. research base with his study on the challenges of distinguishing Ph.D. programs from other types of doctorates. He concluded that there were three main reasons for a lack of change in Ph.D. programs (Radford, 2001). First, inertia was already in effect; meaning it would be very hard to change things that are already in motion (Radford, 2001). Second, such a high importance was placed on research that it had become the only acceptable criterion for measuring academic worth (Radford, 2001). Lastly, he blamed national policy; declaring that less funding was allocated, but schools were expected to usher in dramatic change (Radford, 2001). With these three roadblocks, Radford (2001) concluded that distinguishing the Ph.D. from other degrees was almost impossible.

Another study by Shulman (2006) investigated 27,000 awarded doctorates, including 6,500 granted in the field of education, to determine how practitioners' degrees differed from research degrees. The study proclaimed "The problems of education doctorates are chronic and crippling. The purposes of preparing scholars and practitioners are confused; as a result, neither is done well" (Shulman et al., 2006, p. 1). Shulman (2006) concluded that the methods other doctorate programs use cannot be applied to education doctorates because the intended outcomes are vastly different. Shulman (2006) argues that due to the confusion between Ph.D and Ed.D. programs, they should be combined to make way for a new type of degree. He proposed that Ph.D. programs should subsume Ed.D. programs in education and focus on research that is linked to actual practice (Shulman, et al., 2006). In addition, a new type of degree should be created that is concerned solely with developing a scholarly base (Shulman et al., 2006).

Given the current lack of funding in education and the confusion over what constitutes a research doctorate and a professional research doctorate in education, Schulman's recommendations seem to be too extreme for most universities. However, Shulman's findings accurately illustrate the problems of the education doctorates. To further explore this, it is important to go back to a 1994 study of Ed.D. and Ph.D. dissertations by Nelson and Coorough. The study compared 1,007 Ph.D. degrees in education to 960 Ed.D. degrees over a 40-year period (Nelson & Coorough, 1994). They compared types of research, research design, statistical analysis, results significance, and target populations for both types of degrees (Nelson & Coorough, 1994). They concluded that, while the similarities between Ph.D. and Ed.D.

degrees were growing, there was still some identifying characteristics (Nelson & Coorough, 1994):

### **Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)**

- The Doctor of Education degree (Ed.D.) was intended to be a practitioner's degree that focuses more on educational administration and scholarly practice.
- University administrations, faculty, and students tend to believe that the Ed.D. is inferior, regardless of program quality.
- Ed.D. programs typically use more descriptive research, with frequencies and percentages being the primary statistical analysis employed.
- Ed.D. programs are usually comprised of more courses related to educational administration and policy of practice.
- Ed.D. students often pursue research topics that only affect local or state schools and school systems.

### **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)**

- The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) was intended to prepare researchers and scholars; therefore, it focuses heavily on research.
- The Ph.D. has become more popular in all fields except educational administration.
- Ph.D. programs typically emphasize a greater understanding of theory and research methods by using a hybrid design of experimental and descriptive research.
- Ph.D. programs are usually comprised of more research courses.
- Students who pursue the Ph.D. in Education typically want to become researchers who affect nationwide or international outcomes.

Despite these findings, and an additional ten years of research, the role and function of Ph.D and Ed.D. programs remains murky and consensus in the field is small to non-existent. Therefore, it is important to conduct this study to determine the status of doctoral programs in education leadership to provide information for the higher education faculty as they revise and update programs, and for potential students as they choose where to invest their scarce resources.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the differences, if any, between the focus on administration in Ed.D. and Ph.D. education leadership programs?
2. What are the differences, if any, between the focus on research in Ed.D. and Ph.D. education leadership programs?
3. What are the differences, if any, between the focus on theory in Ed.D. and Ph.D. education leadership programs?

### **Methods**

This study examined a sampling of current doctoral programs' websites to ascertain if there were any clear distinctions in the required curriculum based on Nelson and Coorough's listing. Public and private higher education institutions located within the 15 states that make up the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration's (SRCEA) territory were the focus of the study.

Information from the National Center for Education Statistics (NECS) provided a list of institutions within the SRCEA area that offer doctoral-level programs. From that list, each institution's website was examined to determine if, and how many, doctorates in education



leadership were offered. Of the 158 reported institutions, 97 offered doctorate programs in education leadership; however, only 74 provided online access to the necessary information. Within these 74 institutions, 107 unique education leadership doctorate programs were identified. Twenty-four of the identified institutions offered more than one doctorate in education leadership, which caused the number of offered doctorate programs to be greater than the number of institutions.

Information from each of the 107 programs was arrayed by the Nelson and Coorough's defined features of Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in education. The number of courses in theory, research, and administration courses, including dissertation work, were determined for each institution.

**Theory Courses.** Theory courses are designed to teach students to predict and control a phenomenon (Borg & Gall, 1989). These theory courses provide tools, based on theoretical principles and ideas, that attempt to predict or control people, settings, or events.

**Research Courses.** Research courses in the field of education leadership encompasses research design, measurement, and analysis with the intent to contribute information to an ever-increasing body of knowledge (Borg & Gall, 1989). Education leadership research courses uses measurement, research design, or analysis to teach students how to properly describe, predict, improve, or explain phenomena within the field of education.

**Administration Courses.** Administration is synonymous with management, and includes all the activities required to successfully manage an organization (Galford & Seibold-Drapeau, 2003). Educational administration courses increase skills needed for management that help leaders develop trust at the personal, organizational, and strategic levels.

### **Categorizing Courses**

In order to accurately classify courses for each education leadership program, the institutions' websites were consulted. The program of study for the Ed.D. or Ph.D. program was found and the course descriptions were obtained from the most recent online course catalogs. Based on these descriptions, each required course was categorized as either theory, research, or administration; no class was placed in more than one category. In addition to the number of each type of course, the total number of courses, number of required courses, and number of electives was also recorded for each program. The Carnegie Classification, public or private status, and state location of each institution was also documented.

### **Limitations.**

This study was limited by the following:

- the study was restricted to programs that had sufficient information online
- the accuracy of the information published on each institution's website
- data gathering was restricted to higher education institutions in the southern region of the United States

### **Population and Sample Size**

The population for this study was all of the public and private higher education institutions that offer doctorate programs in education leadership, located within the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration (SRCEA) territory within the United States, as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics, and provided access to detailed plans of study and course descriptions on their websites (NCES, 2014). According to the NCES, there are 97 institutions within this geographic classification; however, only 74 provided access to the

required information online (NCES, 2014). From these 74 institutions, 107 unique doctorate programs in education leadership were offered. Due to this limited size, the entire population (N=107) was examined.

### **Results**

Data were collected from the 107 education leadership doctorate programs and was classified as Ph.D. or Ed.D. programs. There were 25 Ph.D. programs and 82 Ed.D. programs in the two groups. A one-way ANOVA test compared the number of administration courses, research courses, theory courses, number of required courses, required electives, and total number of courses in the Ed.D. programs to those in the Ph.D. programs. It was determined that there was no significance in the number of administration, theory, or research courses between the two types of program. However, there was significance found at the  $p < .05$  level between the programs with the number of required electives and the total number of courses. Due to the unequal group sizes that can skew significance scores, a Welch t-test confirmed that size differences between the Ph.D. and Ed.D. groups did not affect the ANOVA findings.

Since no statistical significance was found between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in regards to the type of courses, the mean number of courses for the entire population was examined. It was discovered that mean number of administration courses required were 5, theory courses were 4, and research courses were 7. The mean number of required courses was 16.

Statistically significant differences were discovered in both the number of required electives and the total number of courses required in the programs studied, prompting an examination of the means for each program. The Ph.D. program's mean number of required

electives was 6 and a mean total number of courses of 22 while the Ed.D. program's had a mean number of required electives of 2, and a mean total number of courses of 19. Table 1 displays this information.

Clearly, the Ph.D. programs tend to require more overall courses than the Ed.D. programs; however, the additional courses are electives and chosen at the discretion of the student. Further study would be needed to determine if the courses selected as electives tended to be administration, research, or theory courses.

Table 1

*Types of courses required in Ed.D. and Ph.D. Programs ANOVA*

	Mean		F	Sig.
	Ph.D.	Ed.D.		
# Administration Courses	4.24	5.54	3.392	.068
# Research Courses	7.32	6.66	1.797	.183
# Theory Courses	3.92	4.07	.111	.740
Number of Required Courses	15.48	16.27	.543	.463
Number of Required Electives	6.16	2.34	25.204	.0005*
Total Number of Courses	21.64	18.61	8.212	.005*

\*Significance found at  $p < .05$

Finally, in terms of Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs, a partial correlation analysis was performed, controlling for type of program (Ed.D./Ph.D.). The results indicated a significant, positive correlation between the number of required courses and the number of administrative courses. The r-statistic was .742 with a significance of .0005, thus the effect size was 55 percent. With the mediator factors accounting for more than half of the total variance, it indicates that as the number of required courses increase, the number of administrative courses also increase.

While there was statistical significance indicated in several of the other correlations, these relationships were omitted due to r-statistic values of less than .70, indicating an effect size smaller than 50 percent.

The researchers then turned their attention to the differences among the Carnegie Classifications. Of the institutions used for this study, the Carnegie Classifications of Bac/Diverse, Master's S, Master's M, Master's L, DRU, RU/H, and RU/VH were included. When a one-way ANOVA analysis was applied to this data to determine differences among the number of administration, theory, research, required elective, and total number of courses required by the various Carnegie groups, it was discovered that there was a significant statistical difference in the number of required administration courses and required elective courses. The ANOVA significances reported were .003 and .005 for the number of administration courses and number of required electives, respectively. Upon further examination, it was discovered that the Research Universities--High Research Activity (RU/H) Carnegie classification required the most electives with a mean of 6 and the Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields (Bac/Diverse) classification the minimum electives with a mean of 0 (zero). Conversely, the Bac/Diverse Carnegie classification required the most administrative courses with a mean of 14, and the RU/H classification the minimum electives with a mean of 4.

As a side observation, the researchers also noted that one of the surprising findings was that approximately one-fourth of institutions that offer doctorate programs in education leadership do not provide online access to course descriptions and plans of study. In an era dominated by online advertising and marketing, this surprised the researchers. This trend

occurred in both Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs with approximately 26% of Ph.D. and 25% of Ed.D. programs not providing information online.

### **Conclusions**

From the data analyzed for this study, the researchers concluded that there were no significant statistical differences in the composition of Ed.D. and Ph.D. education leadership programs in terms of the number of required administration, theory, and research courses. Therefore, the typical program characteristics as defined by Nelson and Coorough may no longer be accurate. Overall, the idea that Ed.D. programs are professional research doctorates designed for practitioners, while Ph.D. programs are traditional research doctorates intended to prepare scholars and researchers, may no longer hold true. The distinction between the function of each degree that began in the twentieth century has resulted in two types of doctorate programs that are more similar than different and are attempting to achieve the same goal: to develop scholars and practitioners who can efficiently discover, disseminate, and apply new knowledge. Indeed, the Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs offered in the Southern Region of the U.S. are more like twins than kissing cousins.

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