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**The Dissertation Committee for Frank Hernandez Certifies that this is the approved
version of the following dissertation:**

Educating Leaders: Executive Ed.D. Program Experiences

Committee:

Lauren Schudde, Supervisor

Richard Reddick, Co-Supervisor

Marilyn Kameen

Harrison Keller

Victor Sáenz

Educating Leaders: Executive Ed.D. Program Experiences

by

Frank Hernandez

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Dedication

To my parents who instilled the joy of learning in me.

To my wife and family who were with me every step of the way along this journey.

To the friends, advisors, colleagues, and participants without whose help this study

would never have been completed. I am humbled

by your generous gift of time and counsel.

Thank you all.

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At various points along this journey, I was tempted to declare *force majeure* – most recently, when Hurricane Harvey’s floodwaters threatened to overrun my home office. It was at these times that my committee supervisor cautioned about the ebbs and flows of research, advising that life always intervenes.

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Educating Leaders: Executive Ed.D. Program Experiences

Frank Hernandez, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Lauren Schudde

Co-Supervisor: Richard Reddick

In this dissertation, I present an investigation of higher education leadership doctoral programs for mid- and senior-level administrators, specifically executive education programs. I interviewed graduates and administrators of executive education doctorate programs as well as individuals with expertise in higher education leadership. I also collected 12 executive doctoral program descriptions from publicly available information. The 12 doctoral programs represent a cross-section of the programs available throughout the United States and include public and private universities.

Through phenomenological inquiry, I found that graduates of executive doctoral programs felt transformed by the educational experience, citing leadership training and international exposure as highlights of their program. The cohort model had utility across all programs studied and remained a source of information and support for alumni long after graduation. I used Relational Developmental Systems Theory to combine Adult Development Theory, Adult Learning Theory and Critical Friends Theory into a cohesive framework to explain how students processed their program experiences.

The research findings indicated that potential students considered program reputation, including the faculty and program ranking, in their university selection process. Graduate participants also explained that they valued the elements of the program that had direct relevance to their work activity, in particular, the dissertation experience. Program administrators stressed that the doctoral market requires continual assessment for their programs to remain relevant. I propose a theory of change that combines environmental factors, program attributes, administrator and student attributes, and program outcomes to explain the process of doctoral program change. The proposed theory explains the assessment mechanisms that program administrators use to evaluate program and graduate outcomes. While these results cannot be extrapolated beyond the sample, they can inform future doctoral education research and program design.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The doctoral degree is the highest level of academic achievement; those who obtain it seek to contribute to a body of knowledge through research in academia or, alternately, advance to positions of leadership and responsibility in fields outside the professoriate (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). The latter type of professional advancement suggests that doctoral students might pursue the doctorate to develop analytical capability and critical thinking that can be used in many different areas including those outside of academia such as research, industry and education.

The Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) is an alternative to the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education and benefits students who choose to develop professional competence as educators and administrators. Students who pursue the education doctorate often forgo the professoriate, choosing instead to advance in roles that require more advanced credentials. However, despite claims of difference between the Ed.D. and Ph.D., research finds little to differentiate the two degrees (Buttram & Doolittle, 2015; Perry, Zambo & Wunder, 2015; Walker et al., 2008). The distinction between the two degrees is especially important for students who want to pursue a professional practice-oriented doctoral program of study because some Ed.D. programs have a research orientation not unlike the Ph.D. (Zambo, Zambo, Buss, Perry, & Williams, 2014).

In this chapter, I introduce the dilemma created by the confusing array of doctoral education program choices and the mismatch between student requirements and doctoral program alternatives. First, I present the purpose, significance, and research questions that underpin the dissertation, followed by a brief overview of the methodology and the definitions of key terms. I also introduce the study's delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. I conclude with a chapter synopsis.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I examined the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and administrators in order to understand what makes a strong program and how doctoral program changes occur. I also examined the perspective of individuals with expertise in higher education leadership and administration to further inform the understanding of the doctoral program experience and program evolution. I reviewed publicly available doctoral program content to provide a contextual landscape of the overall doctoral program experience. The lived experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and administrators highlighted in this study can be used to inform the design, development, and implementation of executive doctoral programs to make these programs more effective and align with the needs of the educational administration marketplace.

Research Questions

The study was guided by two broad research questions that sought to understand the doctoral program experience and program design considerations:

1. What motivations, experiences, structures, and outcomes do executive Ed.D. graduates describe as making a strong program?
 - a. How do graduates / alumni describe their motivation to attend a higher education executive Ed.D. program?
 - b. How do graduates / alumni describe the appropriate structure of an executive Ed.D. program?
 - c. How do graduates / alumni describe the critical experiences of executive Ed.D. programs?

2. How do people with expertise in executive leadership assess and critique current executive Ed.D. programs in higher education and what future developments and changes for these programs do they anticipate?
 - a. How do experts in executive leadership describe the current state of executive Ed.D. programs including structure, quality, outcomes, networking, and practical skill development?
 - b. What do experts in executive Ed.D. programs predict that executive Ed.D. programs will look like in the future?
 - i. What challenges do experts see executive programs facing? How are programs overcoming these challenges?
 - ii. How do experts advise programs evolve in response to changing higher education contexts and needs?

Significance

Investigations into education doctorate programs have largely focused on differences between the education doctorate (Ed.D.) and Ph.D. programs. Additional research efforts consider enhancements to doctoral programs that distinguish the education doctorate as a practitioner degree suitable for individuals interested in careers outside academia (Perry et al., 2015). Few studies relay the experiences of graduates and administrators of executive doctoral programs. I argue that by understanding the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and administrators, we can gain insight into the needs of doctoral students as well as the educational administration marketplace. In addition, by including the perspective of individuals with expertise in higher education leadership and administration, we can better

understand the challenges associated with the development and implementation of executive doctoral programs and improve executive doctoral education.

Beyond student desires to develop scholarship and educational administrative competence, challenges concerning the actual benefits of the education doctorate as well as calls for doctoral program reforms, suggest that an executive doctoral program should differ from traditional education doctorate programs by providing training in areas of leadership, negotiation, budgeting, and management (Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Zambo et al., 2014). Negotiation, leadership, and building consensus are critical skills required for educational leaders as they engage local community leaders, faculty, and students. These particular skills are often found in business education programs and are rarely included in education doctoral programs. Doctoral students may pursue these areas of focus through cognate courses; however, an executive doctoral program would better meet student needs if such training was central to the program curriculum. Understanding the required elements of effective programs and the ways in which executive programs contribute to the development of skilled educational practitioners are essential to informing the design and development of an executive doctoral program.

My argument is underpinned by the review of relevant research literature concerning the two degree programs. Despite being introduced over one hundred years ago, research finds little to distinguish the Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) from the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education (Leist & Scott, 2011). In addition, the historical perspective of doctoral education shows that the practitioner focus of the Ed.D. is consistent with an aspiration to train and develop educators in areas that traditional doctoral programs lack (Walker et al., 2008). However, the expansion of education doctoral programs to many institutions across the country has blurred the difference between the two degrees. Institutions might offer both degrees to moderate financial

shortfall and expand the available pool of applicants. Efforts by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) suggest that defining the education doctorate dissertation as a problem of practice is entirely consistent with the intent to train skilled educational leaders; however, programs should also differentiate coursework requirements in addition to the dissertation (Perry, 2011).

In addition, doctoral programs must consider student objectives and develop programs that deliver the desired outcomes. A review of education doctoral student aspirations illustrates the need for alignment between the education doctorate and student goals to develop skills and realize career achievement. Practitioner-oriented students seek leadership and management competence to become more effective in their jobs and have impact as university leaders (Zambo et al., 2014). These student practitioners also desire career management competence to help them transition to new and more demanding roles (Mills, 2006). While students might receive management, leadership, and career planning training through cognate coursework, these elements could be required as part of the doctoral program curriculum to better align with student developmental requirements.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate provides a framework for Ed.D. design to instill students with practical skills for the generation of knowledge and stewardship of the profession (CPED, 2016). Doctoral programs that develop practical skills also align with student aspirations to develop competence and realize career opportunity. Indeed, institutions have responded to student requests for more practitioner-focused programs through alternative programs such as the professional practice doctorate and executive doctoral programs (Latta & Wunder, 2012). Students can also choose alternative programs such as the Masters of Education and Education Specialist degree (Bazeli, 1989; Young, 2006); however, these are not terminal

degree programs. The variety of educational administration program alternatives appears to be the result of efforts to satisfy multiple stakeholders and manage conflicting objectives across institution, government, industry, and student (Buttram & Doolittle, 2015). Executive education programs have perhaps the greatest potential to satisfy the needs of all constituencies since they are developed through consultation with multiple groups. Executive programs also provide the greatest flexibility for students interested in pursuing the doctoral degree while working.

In summary, the research literature suggests that the education doctorate remains a valid course of study for professionals interested in advancing in practice and leadership. There is substantial variation among education doctoral programs and that variety often confuses students as they consider the program that best aligns with their goals. Despite doctoral program variety and student confusion about program goals, education doctorate program enrollment is rising. The divergence between education doctorate program goals and outcomes, and the call for greater focus on leadership development, provide a strong case for research that explores the experiences of graduates and administrators of executive doctoral programs. Higher education practice requires strong leaders who can navigate the operational, political, and personal challenges associated with university administration. This study's findings can inform the development of executive doctoral programs toward that end.

Method

Since this study sought to understand the doctoral program experience, I chose to use a qualitative methodology. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, I gathered data in the form of interviews and documents. The phenomenological method seeks to construe meaning of particular phenomena by examining lived experiences of individuals within a specific context, such as the experiences of those students within an executive doctoral program (Creswell, 2013).

Study participants included graduates and administrators of executive doctoral programs and individuals with expertise in higher education leadership. In choosing a phenomenological method, I endeavored to bracket personal bias and let the meaning develop through the critical analysis of participant interviews. I designed the interview guides using available public information from a set of 12 executive doctoral programs that represent the range of program alternatives currently in the United States and relevant research concerning student objectives and doctoral education (Leist & Scott, 2011; Walker et al., 2008; Zambo et al., 2014). Through interviews, I gathered information about the depth of experience, feelings, and commitment of executive doctoral program graduates and administrators. Participant demographic and category details were not the goal of this research effort though they were collected and used to inform data analysis.

I used purposeful sampling to select the executive doctoral programs that informed the design of the interview guides and to select the study participants (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014). In reviewing the variety of programs across the country, there were numerous programs that offered evening classes, online courses and other accommodations for working students; however, I selected 12 doctoral programs that defined a specific term to completion and marketed the program to mid-level and higher working educational professionals who would continue working while attending classes. The 12 doctoral programs represent the range of program offerings from public and private institutions in the United States. I selected doctoral program graduates and administrators from among the 12 executive doctoral programs. The second research question also concerned the perspective of individuals with expertise in higher education leadership, and I defined these participants as persons who have deep experience in educational administration, leadership, program design and adult education. These higher

education expert participants were selected from among researchers associated with relevant doctoral program research. Together with the program criteria, the three sets of research data included: (1) twelve executive doctoral program descriptions, (2) ten doctoral program graduate interviews, and (3) ten program administrator and higher education expert interviews.

I obtained the necessary approvals to conduct the participant interviews from The University of Texas Institutional Review Board. I transcribed and analyzed interviews over a six-month period. The data analysis process followed a sequenced procedure to ensure that participant experiences were appropriately categorized and collected (Edward & Welch, 2011). While I introduce a theoretical framework in the review of literature, phenomenological inquiry brackets preconceptions and it is inappropriate to define a set of codes and themes *a priori*. However, the theoretical framework provided context for understanding executive education and informed findings that emerged through data analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, data were compared to ensure that the coding process was consistent and allowed for new codes to emerge as each new piece of data was added and analyzed.

Assumptions and Limitations

For the purpose of this study, I assumed that executive doctoral program graduate and administrator participants possessed relevant information concerning the executive doctoral program experience. I also assumed individuals with higher education expertise had relevant information regarding the need for and current state of executive doctoral programs. In addition, I assumed that the Ed.D. remained a valid credential that students sought for career advancement among other reasons. These assumptions were supported by research which found that student enrollment and interest in education doctorate programs remain high (Servage, 2009), and that the Ed.D. is a relevant credential for higher levels of leadership (Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown,

2002). While education doctoral program goals and outcomes may not align with the objectives of students who work full-time, the experiences of alumni and administrators of executive doctoral programs are entirely relevant (Perry, Zambo, & Wunder, 2015).

In this research study, I did not attempt to predict the success of students who pursued the education doctorate in terms of completion or career opportunity. Student completion, retention, and success were outside the scope of the study. The focus of this research study was limited to executive programs granting the degree in higher education leadership, administration, and adult education. Other areas of executive education were outside the scope of the research study. The sampling method had an unintended bias towards students who positively viewed the program since participants were identified from marketing and informational materials for each doctoral program. It is also possible that program administrator participants may have been less critical of their institution and doctoral program. The study results cannot be scaled and only reflect the views of participants and data that were collected and analyzed.

Definitions

I provide the following definitions to ensure clarity.

- Ed.D. – The Education Doctorate program of study (Walker et al., 2008). It is not limited to a specific area of focus; however, the focus of this research effort is the higher education related doctorate.
- PPD – The Professional Practice Doctorate is a doctoral degree for working professionals in a specific field of practice. Similar to the Doctor of Philosophy, the PPD is awarded in many fields (Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004).
- CPED – The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate is an ongoing consortium of over eighty higher education institutions that offer the Ed.D. CPED members

regularly share information and consider reforms to distinguish the Ed.D. from the Ph.D. Member institutions expect their doctoral programs to have a practitioner focus (CPED, 2016).

- DiP – Dissertation in Practice, a problem of practice oriented dissertation that is required at some institutions (Storey, 2017)
- Executive Education – Usually described as a program for mid- to upper-level professionals who aspire to higher leadership. Executive programs are designed for students who work full-time while enrolled. Student selection criteria differ between institutions based on desired cohort composition and program goals. Executive education definitions can differ and some institutions include certification programs in addition to the doctorate. For this dissertation, executive education programs are programs that confer the doctorate (Caboni & Proper, 2009; De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009).

Organization of the Dissertation

I present the dissertation in five chapters, beginning with this introductory chapter that provides a brief summary of the document. The second chapter contains a review of the literature, beginning with a historical perspective of doctoral education followed by a discussion of education doctoral programs and student experiences. In addition to the literature review, I introduce a theoretical framework that frames how individuals make sense of the executive education experience. In the third chapter, I describe the research methodology used to conduct the study. In chapter four, I present the data and findings with respect to each research question. The concluding chapter provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for practice

and future research. Each chapter of the dissertation concludes with a brief summary of the key points in the chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter, I outlined the research focus of the investigation to understand the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and administrators and to understand program design considerations. I described how I used phenomenology to extract an understanding of the executive doctoral program experience. The study's qualitative methodology was grounded in prior doctoral program research as well as the program offerings at the institutions studied. I also described the assumptions, terminology, limitations, and delimitations of the study. In the next chapter, I review the relevant literature concerning doctoral education programs and present a theoretical framework that frames the executive education learning processes.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Education doctoral programs can equip students with the skills they need to navigate the cost and performance challenges facing higher education institutions today. To locate research and information related to doctoral education, doctoral student experiences, and higher education leadership, I conducted a search for relevant literature using the EBSCO Education Source, Google Scholar, and the ProQuest Dissertation and Theses databases. Descriptors and root forms for the search criteria included: higher education or college or university, and career or leader or administrator or manager, and doctoral programs or administrator education, and effectiveness or evaluation or outcomes or relevance or educational benefit or program design, and educational administration or educational leadership. I used these search criteria in various combinations to obtain the greatest number of relevant literature related to education doctoral program design, effectiveness, and student experiences. The search was not limited to a specific time period and included related materials from the origination of education doctoral programs at the end of the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I present the outcomes of the research literature review to inform areas for inquiry and lay the foundation for this research study.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the relevant research regarding the history of the education doctorate followed by a discussion of research literature concerning doctoral program design. The program-related research topics are followed by a presentation of relevant research concerning doctoral student experiences. I also present a theoretical framework based on adult learning and development theories to provide context for understanding the experiences of doctoral students and to inform the considerations program administrators use when designing executive doctoral programs. The chapter concludes with a summary of the rationale for the

research study of executive doctoral program graduate experiences and program design considerations.

Doctoral Education Research

At the end of the twentieth century, doctoral program effectiveness came under scrutiny because program requirements varied widely across institutions (Walker et al., 2008). There were also inconsistencies in program objectives and delivery within the same institution. In response to these concerns, the Carnegie Foundation sponsored a doctoral program research effort across several doctoral programs in the United States. The five-year research effort, the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID), considered graduate education across six academic departments (chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics, and neuroscience). Forty-four institutions across the six academic departments participated in the CID study (2008, p. 163).

At the time that the CID was conducted, almost 375,000 students were pursuing doctoral degrees in the United States and approximately 43,000 of those students would graduate in the next year (Walker et al., 2008, p. 1). Given the large number of students pursuing doctoral education and the need to produce scholars capable of generating new knowledge, the CID defined its purpose to evaluate the effectiveness of doctoral education to prepare scholars as teachers, administrators, and researchers. Underscoring this purpose, L. Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation, wrote:

When I first began working in teacher education, I was admonished by insiders never to use the phrase “teacher training.” Training implied mindless, routine practice more appropriate to an assembly line than to a classroom. The correct term was “teacher education,” which more aptly captured the fundamentally intellectual, strategic, and thoughtful functions associated with teaching. I took this instruction to heart. Indeed,

when I delivered my presidential address to the American Educational Research Association in 1984, I concluded my remarks with a revision of Shaw's "Those who can, do; those who cannot, teach," changing it to "Those who can, do. Those who understand, teach." Teaching must be understood as an intentional act of mind for which a rich educational experience is necessary. (2008, p. ix)

Therefore, the study of education as a discipline and as a process is in no way routine; it is a worthwhile endeavor that requires knowledge, skill, creativity, and planning. Doctoral education in particular requires study if only to ensure that it develops scholarship and extends knowledge.

Golde (1996) suggested that doctoral education existed to produce new scholars and practitioners capable of responding to the challenges of an ever-changing world. The doctorate is the highest accomplishment available to students, and it identifies recipients as capable of shifting from student to teacher, or novice to independent scholar and leader. Many individuals who receive the Doctor of Philosophy advance to positions of leadership and responsibility in a variety of fields, including banking, medicine, diplomacy, and education (Walker et al., 2008, p. 1). It is in academia that doctoral education regenerates and expands capability by training students in practice, and developing new scholars through graduate programs aimed at understanding the education process.

The education of scholars requires that students explore difficult questions and develop new knowledge; however, the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate found that there was not a consistent approach to doctoral education. The CID identified significant differences in the graduate education experience across disciplines and institutions. As an example, the purpose of the pre-dissertation doctoral qualifying exams was a source of confusion to students and faculty because the exams served multiple purposes. The lack of a clear understanding for the

qualifying exam underscored a broader confusion between students and faculty regarding the purpose of doctoral education. In addition, Education Doctorate and Doctor of Philosophy in Education programs require a culminating research effort; however, at many institutions there was little difference between the Ed.D. treatise and the Ph.D. dissertation (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel & Garabedian, 2006).

The CID researchers also noted that students and faculty at the same institution were often unable to articulate differences between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. The confusion about the purpose of doctoral education was most acute in students who were interested in doctoral education for practice rather than as preparation for college teaching or research. University administrators acknowledged the confusion about the purpose of education doctoral programs among faculty, students, and administrators. In response, some of the institutions that participated in the Carnegie study chose to reflect upon and reconsider the purpose of their doctoral programs (Walker et al., 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the CID suggested that institutions engage in reflection as a matter of general business, clarifying the doctoral program mission, objectives, and setting a plan of action in place to address gaps and program changes (p. 41).

Despite the past focus on program purpose, content, and scholarship, Caboni and Proper (2009) recommended that doctoral programs expand the dialogue beyond education skills, capabilities, and traditional program norms because doctoral students are increasingly required to have proven leadership skills and the ability to work in groups. Skills such as creativity and intuition are also highly valued. The development of these skills is required for graduates to work and be successful in an increasingly connected world. Therefore, institutions and departments are being challenged to add this content to doctoral programs that were designed to

develop scholars or focus on traditional research intensive areas of study (Bowen & McPherson, 2016). Adding creativity and leadership training to doctoral programs creates tension between the desire to develop scholarship and the requirement to develop non-research capability. The tension is apparent at institutions where faculty fail to distinguish Ed.D. and Ph.D. requirements, and when program goals fail to deliver the desired outcomes. When the CID concluded its work, the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate was commissioned to continue the effort and distinguish the education doctorate from the Ph.D. In the next section of this dissertation, I review the research literature concerning differences between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D., beginning with a history of the education doctorate.

History of education doctoral programs. The education profession entered national prominence in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as universities began to define programs of study. In 1880, Teachers College was entrusted with a mission to develop teachers for the children of New York City. Eight years later, Teachers College merged with Columbia University, and in 1893, it granted the nation's first Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Shulman et al., 2006). In 1891, Harvard University President Charles Eliot appointed Paul Hanus to develop a program in the history and art of teaching (Powell, 1980). Harvard was not the first university to define the education profession but the Harvard University College of Education had a tremendous impact on the development of programs. In 1920, Henry Holmes, Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, created the education doctorate. Holmes envisioned that the Ed.D. could train school leaders to become administrators because educational administration teaching was unavailable and "unlike lawyers and businessmen, teachers could not count on the development of general or unspecified ability to secure their advancement" (Powell, 1980, p. 15). In 1934, Dean Russell of Teachers College established an

education doctorate that provided teachers with coursework on issues common to the field (Zambo et al., 2014). Holmes and Russell asserted that the Ed.D. developed professionals and served a different purpose than doctoral programs that ignored educational practice altogether.

By 1940, many universities offered both the Ed.D. and Ph.D.; however, there was often little to distinguish between the two degrees (Zambo et al., 2014). Many Ed.D. programs were more aligned with the research focus of the Ph.D. and failed to deliver on the promise to prepare practitioners for careers in administration and teaching. When Dean Holmes proposed the education doctorate, he suggested that the Ed.D. was a credential for practitioners and the Ph.D. was designed for those interested in research; however, numerous studies have shown that the two degree programs are more alike than they are different (Deering, 1998; Guthrie & Clifford, 1989; Leist & Scott, 2011; Levine, 2007). In 2012, the Dean of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education eliminated the Ed.D. and decided to focus exclusively on the Ph.D. to better align the rigor of doctoral programs in the College of Education with other colleges at the university (Basu, 2012). Eliminating the Ed.D. at the institution that created it does not necessarily suggest that the education doctorate has little utility; however, it calls into question its purpose, especially at research intensive universities. In the following section, I explore research regarding the similarities and differences between education doctoral programs.

Doctoral program research studies. In recent years, researchers produced three substantial investigations of education doctorate programs. These studies include Carnegie sponsored programs beginning with the CID and the ongoing Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, a study by Leist and Scott (2011) to investigate differences between higher education Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs at over seventy institutions, and several research studies using data

from a University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) survey of over one-hundred higher education institutions. Next, I summarize these three research efforts.

Carnegie foundation programs. Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation, wrote that the terms “formation” and “scholars” in the title of the report on the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate captured the character of the work (Shulman, 2008, p. x). The CID sought to understand the extent to which doctoral programs created graduates capable of advancing knowledge and scholarship. The study of education doctoral programs involved 15 universities from across the United States. The fundamental question underlying the CID was, “What is the purpose of doctoral education?” (Walker et al., 2008, p. 3).

To investigate the purpose of doctoral programs, CID participating universities surveyed students and faculty and observed that Ed.D. and Ph.D. program objectives were substantially similar across institutions. Universities that offered both degrees did not sufficiently distinguish between the two programs and in some cases, Ed.D. programs involved about the same rigor and research focus as Ph.D. programs. Likewise, similar findings were observed when doctoral programs were compared between institutions that offered only one degree. In a call to action, Walker et al. (2008) suggested that reforms were needed if doctoral programs were to satisfy the mandate for creating scholarship and new knowledge (p. 223). In response, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defined the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate to restore the Ed.D. to its original intent (Perry, 2011). Shulman et al. (2006) proposed the establishment of the CPED to further the work of the CID by expanding the effort to more institutions (Zambo et al., 2014). The effort has defined guiding principles and criteria for Ed.D. programs; however, the CPED does not enforce these criteria. Instead, the CPED

remains a research endeavor with a strong focus on sharing best practices, evaluating program designs, and considering implementation alternatives.

Despite the lack of adherence to specific standards, CPED member institutions are singularly focused on distinguishing the Ed.D. from the Ph.D. To do this, member institutions develop Ed.D. programs that train mid-career professionals many of whom continue to work as they pursue the degree. In contrast, Ph.D. programs at CPED member institutions are geared toward individuals who seek tenure track positions (Zambo et al., 2014). The expansion of the CPED effort to over eighty institutions and its focus on design, implementation and differentiating the two degrees demonstrates that there remains a strong interest in the Ed.D.

Leist and Scott. As the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate seeks to distinguish the Ed.D. from the Ph.D., research concerning Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs continues. Leist and Scott (2011) investigated differences between the two doctoral programs at institutions in the United States that offer both degrees. Using a database of doctoral programs in Higher Education by the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), Leist and Scott (2011) reviewed education doctorate program requirements at 77 public and private universities having high or very high research activity classifications. Only institutions offering both doctoral degrees were considered in the study.

Leist and Scott (2011) found that many institutions designated the Ed.D. as a practitioner degree and the Ph.D. was viewed as a research or faculty track preparatory program of study. They discovered that institutions offering both degrees defined educational practitioners as graduates who choose not to enter academia as faculty. Leist and Scott found that educational practitioners chose instead to apply the skills developed in their doctoral programs to operate educational institutions as administrators and in positions of leadership. Leist and Scott also

found that doctoral programs at these institutions made a clear distinction between practitioner and researcher, and marketed the Ed.D. to practitioners. To further emphasize the distinction between practice and scholarship, Ph.D. programs at institutions offering both degrees required more cognate and research coursework than the Ed.D. There were differences in practicum and internship requirements between institutions as well. While Ph.D. students were required to take a research apprenticeship, the majority of Ed.D. programs at these institutions had a practice-oriented internship requirement.

Despite differences in research and practice focus, Leist and Scott (2011) found little to distinguish the qualifying examinations between the two programs. The most significant distinction between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. at these institutions related to the dissertation requirement. They found that Ed.D. dissertations had a practitioner focus that might involve solving practical higher education problems. Students who pursued the Ed.D. at these institutions could choose a more research-oriented focus, only if they demonstrated research aptitude through additional coursework or other means. The Ph.D. dissertation required a focus on original knowledge contribution, scholarship, and theoretical grounding.

Surprisingly, Leist and Scott found that there was little difference in admissions criteria between the two doctoral programs. Earlier research by Richardson and Walsh (1978) suggested that the differentiation between Ed.D. and Ph.D. provided institutions access to a larger pool of applicants. Offering both degrees allowed educational institutions to maximize enrollment by attracting practicing professional administrators to Ed.D. programs, while the Ph.D. program attracted a pool of qualified students interested in a career as higher education faculty member, scholar, and researcher. Leist and Scott (2011) suggested that the larger potential enrollment for institutions offering both degrees provided not only access to talent, but additional revenue from

practitioner-oriented programs. In considering these findings, Leist and Scott recommended that institutions offering both the Ed.D. and Ph.D. could better differentiate program requirements, if only to align with the stated goals of each program.

Other doctoral studies. In 2011, members of the University Council for Educational Administration and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) developed and implemented a national survey of doctoral educational leadership programs to understand doctoral program and student attributes. The objective of the survey was to examine differences between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in the aftermath of program changes and redesign resulting from the CPED initiative. The survey yielded a response from 103 institutions and provided data that informed several studies concerning doctoral program policy and practice. I summarize several studies using these survey data.

Orr (2015) found that there remained little differentiation between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in leadership preparation. The key difference between the two degrees related only to the dissertation and this distinction appeared to result from the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate's aspiration to reframe the Ed.D. dissertation as a problem of practice. In addition, Orr found that institutions marketed the Ed.D. as a program to develop skilled education professionals. Orr posited that there was a reduction in Ed.D. quality as more institutions entered the marketplace to meet rising student enrollment (p. 309).

In addition to program reforms resulting from the CPED initiative, doctoral programs increased in number. Baker, Orr, and Young (2007) found that the number of educational leadership doctoral programs had increased by almost 50% from 1993 to 2003. While the increase in doctoral programs varied significantly from state to state and was not correlated to the size of institution, they noted concerns about academic quality. As a consequence, Topolka-

Jorrisen and Wang (2015) asserted that an assessment of doctoral program focus and delivery was needed because of the proliferation of educational leadership programs. Upon examination of the UCEA survey data, they found that many Ed.D. programs required slightly fewer credit requirements compared to the Ph.D. In addition, while the Ed.D. was intended as a practitioner degree, some programs required few, if any, internship or field placement experiences.

Using the same survey of 103 UCEA institutions, Buttram and Doolittle (2015) examined the state of doctoral education reforms and compared doctoral program structure and content with emerging best practice research for doctoral education. They found that doctoral program reforms resulted from governmental, public, and professional pressure to improve doctoral education. Many programs implemented a cohort-based model, though it was not clear whether this change reflected a best practice. Moreover, few doctoral program reforms aligned with best practice methods. Buttram and Doolittle found that both Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs had undergone some amount of redesign, though Ed.D. program reforms represented the majority of program changes. They posited that the Ed.D. was viewed as a professional degree and it could be a profitable enterprise because institutions could attract many more students than if only the Ph.D. was offered.

Summary of program research. In the review of doctoral education research, I demonstrated the need for clarity between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. Though the historical perspective of doctoral education shows that the intent of the Ed.D. to train practitioners remains true to Harvard University Dean Holmes' vision, external pressure to reform doctoral education has often resulted in changes that fail to apply best practice research. In addition, the expansion of doctoral programs to more institutions has blurred the difference between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. Institutions might offer both degrees to moderate financial shortfall, and expand the

available pool of applicants. Efforts by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate suggest that defining the Ed.D. dissertation as a problem of practice is entirely consistent with the intent to train skilled educational leaders; however, Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs could differentiate coursework requirements in addition to the dissertation. Notwithstanding these concerns, doctoral program objectives must also be considered to determine to what extent they produce the desired outcomes.

Education Doctorate Program Design. In this section of the dissertation, I review doctoral program design alternatives. Students often pursue doctoral education as a way to gain knowledge related to problems of practice (Hawkes, 2016; Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004). As a consequence, the Professional Practice Doctorate (PPD) emerged as an alternative doctoral program in response to the Carnegie Foundation challenge to distinguish between practitioner and researcher oriented programs (Shulman et al., 2006). While PPD programs began outside the United States, the reform efforts by Carnegie and others suggests that American doctoral students also seek to apply educational learnings to problems of practice (Storey & Hesbol, 2014). In the following sections, I review these efforts starting with a discussion of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate design principles. I also discuss alternative education programs and provide perspective concerning the options available to students seeking to develop skills and broaden career options. In addition, I introduce enrollment trend information as an explanation for Ed.D. program proliferation. I conclude the section with a summary and offer areas for additional study.

Carnegie project on the education doctorate. The CPED framework for the education doctorate was developed to provide guidance in the design and development of education doctoral programs that are distinct from the Ph.D. The use of principles instead of standards

provides program administrators some flexibility in approach and pedagogy. Since the principles are publicly available on the CPED website, the principles are accessible to any institution interested in doctoral program design. While anyone can access these doctoral program principles, it is useful to understand that they were developed by CPED member institutions. CPED members share a common aspiration that the education doctorate prepares educators and administrators with skills to apply appropriate practices to the generation of knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession (CPED, 2016). The CPED principles require that the education doctorate is framed around a problem of practice and provides doctoral students opportunities to develop collaboration and partnering skills using field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice. Successful education doctorate graduates develop a professional knowledge base that integrates practical and research knowledge, linking theory with systemic inquiry (CPED, 2016, p. 1). The CPED organization asserts that education doctorate programs that meet these criteria develop transformational leaders able to enact necessary change through consensus and shared vision. The CPED effort is designed to deliver on the call for stronger institutional leadership, develop university leadership competence, and meet student objectives for programs that are relevant to problems of practice (Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Hawkes, 2016; Ottenritter, 2012).

Program alternatives. While the CPED principles provide a framework for Ed.D. program design, the principles are sufficiently flexible that is a wide variety of education doctoral program alternatives across the member institutions. In addition, the education doctorate is one of many choices available to students seeking to bolster their skillset. CPED is not alone in its mission to define programs for practitioners. In 2006, the University Council for Educational Administration developed a framework to distinguish between education

practitioner and research degree programs (Young, 2006). In an essay on the topic of three education degree programs: Masters in Education (M.Ed.), Education Doctorate (Ed.D.), and the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Young argued that each program is necessary to fulfill differing requirements for practitioners and researchers. The Ph.D. generates new scholarship and research, while the M.Ed. and Ed.D. provide practitioners with necessary skills to successfully administer teaching and training. Young argued that program differences must be distinct, and require an aligned curriculum for each degree.

For each degree, Young (2006) argued that the difference between problems of practice and research necessitated differences in the composition of dissertation committees. Young suggested that the Ed.D. committee should include at least one practicing professional in a field relevant to the student's program. In addition, Young recommended that the Ph.D. committee should include an active researcher from a related discipline outside the program of study. Young argued that the requirement to include outside individuals on both dissertation committees provided perspective and reinforced the Ed.D.'s focus on practical application, and the Ph.D.'s focus on scholarship. In addition to clarifying differences in focus, Young defined course requirements for each degree to underscore the distinction between practice and research.

Young (2006) also argued that education doctoral programs should not be constrained to specific course requirements or program offerings. Education doctoral programs often employ a variety of methods and technologies including online programming, cohort models, and executive education models. There are benefits and shortcomings associated with many of these methods. For example, numerous online Ed.D. programs provide students with flexible schedules; however, these programs often have limited student-peer interactions. Aside from the lack of peer interaction, there are concerns about program quality. This concern is largely

directed at for-profit institutions that often suffer from low completion rates (Council of Graduate Schools, 2016). Cohort models have found favor, yet these programs can limit flexibility. Students who desire a specific concentration find the cohort experience too restrictive. Communities of practice models that build a network of practitioners including students, graduates, and faculty provide a reasonable alternative to the cohort experience; however, maintaining community networks requires dedicated staff to support student, peer, and alumni interaction.

In addition to the three education programs defined by Young, the Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree provides training beyond the M.Ed. and can be useful for students interested in higher levels of leadership (Bazeli, 1989); however, the Ed.S. is largely applicable only to K-12 leadership roles. Cox (2007) stated that the Ed.S. is often a credential for those aspiring to superintendent positions, and an Ed.S. program can be imbedded as part of the doctoral program for students who choose not to complete a dissertation or treatise. While the Ed.S. has limited utility for those interested in higher education leadership, Cox argued that maintaining relevant curriculum in the eyes of students was a constant challenge.

Individuals seeking to develop as educational leaders have a variety of program options that are not limited to doctoral programs. The Ed.S. and M.Ed. are two examples that develop competence without the in-depth exploration and research required of doctoral programs. However, the Ed.D. is often required for individuals seeking executive level leadership positions (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), and students seeking the Ed.D. desire a flexible alternative to research oriented programs (Caboni & Proper, 2009). In response to this need, the executive Ed.D. program was developed at many institutions.

Executive programs. The phrase “formation of scholars” in the title of the book on the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate speaks all too clearly to the imperative of a community of scholars, the importance of doctoral student development, and the need for doctoral graduates (Walker et al., 2008). The ongoing Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate brings together over eighty institutions aligned around the need to develop scholarly practitioners, and define the Ed.D. as more applied than the Ph.D. (Latta & Wunder, 2012). By putting problems of practice at the center of the Ed.D., graduates learn, know, and act on the knowledge gained. For example, Chan (2012) noted that Ed.D. students who conducted research in their work setting valued the experience, learning, and professional development opportunity. Chan observed that students experienced challenges balancing their roles as practitioner and researcher; however, the Ed.D. provided the opportunity to apply both roles as they conducted research. Through problems of practice, Ed.D. students experienced the challenge of balancing interconnected political, contextual, and societal concerns. Chan found that students gained a deeper understanding of the challenge of balancing their role as researcher and valued the experience outside the classroom.

At the heart of education doctoral program reforms is the focus on experiential education. Beyond the CPED aspiration to develop scholarly practitioners, Bowen and McPherson (2016) suggested that American higher education administrators must confront serious leadership challenges to remain successful. Institutional survival is threatened when many college students fail to graduate, student equity and access are restricted, technologies create barriers, and funding is reduced. Bowen and McPherson (2016) asserted that institutions require stronger leadership to survive and noted that while there are talented school leaders and administrators, they are few in number and are often unable to confront difficult and unpopular choices. In addition, the leadership problem is exacerbated by poor and inadequate succession practices. There is little

management development in higher education, and this failure underscores the higher education leadership crisis (p. 81).

There are many executive Ed.D. programs and each offers a unique experience. Caboni and Proper (2009) explained how the executive doctoral program at Vanderbilt University was developed and their rationale for a capstone project as opposed to a traditional dissertation which they stated, “had little utility for the problems of practice confronted by administrators” (p. 66). In their program design, the executive doctoral students must have at least seven years of experience in an educational setting. The program required thirty-six months of study and in the culminating project, students analyzed and developed recommendations for a problem of practice (Caboni & Proper, 2009). The executive program cohort was a mix of education policy and education leadership students and the program offered a choice between principal, superintendent, and higher education concentrations.

The increasing need for strong and capable education leadership is the problem that the executive Ed.D. is positioned to solve. At the time of the study, the Vanderbilt University executive doctoral program was developed for mid-career professionals seeking career advancement (Caboni & Proper, 2009). In addition to focusing on problems of practice, the program included a goal to place graduates into senior leadership positions at educational institutions. Vanderbilt University’s program was highly selective and limited to a small number of students to allow for stronger student and faculty interaction. The model was cohort based, with classes scheduled on weekends so that students could continue to work while attending classes. In addition to these factors, the executive doctoral program consulted a national advisory board of senior practitioners who met twice yearly to guide and evaluate the Ed.D. program (Caboni & Proper, 2009).

Though not a member of CPED, Vanderbilt University administrators were consulted and engaged with the organization to influence organization's guiding principles (Storey, 2013). The influence was mutual since the capstone experience is entirely consistent with the CPED principle that the dissertation be a problem of practice. Doctoral problems of practice require students to correctly identify the challenge, avoid misdiagnosis, and develop new skills to enact change and manage relationships (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2012; Chan, 2012). Creating leadership skills, particularly for mid-level professionals who had potential and ambition to advance, was the focus of the executive Ed.D., and it provided a needed response to the higher education leadership challenge and student demand for greater doctoral program flexibility.

Successful executive Ed.D. programs resulted from aligning student goals and program requirements. Developing a program that delivered the desired outcomes requires balancing institutional, regulatory, and practical considerations, as well as fully understanding student objectives. A blend of design characteristics provides perhaps the best alternative to align student and institutional goals; however, creating and reforming doctoral education should not be undertaken without understanding the demand for the education doctorate.

Summary of program design. I reviewed education doctoral program research literature and demonstrated that programs that align with student aspirations to develop skills and realize career opportunities are needed, as evidenced by the growth in the CPED membership and its practitioner development focused design principles. Numerous institutions are developing more practitioner-focused programs such as the professional practice doctorate and executive Ed.D. programs. In addition, students can choose alternatives such as the M.Ed. and the Ed.S. The proliferation of program alternatives appears to be the result of differing objectives between institution, government, industry, and student. Executive education programs have perhaps the

greatest potential to navigate the needs of these disparate groups since executive programs often engage multiple stakeholders in the program design process. Understanding the student experience seems particularly relevant since they are the ultimate consumer of doctoral education.

Student Experience Research

In the prior sections, I reviewed the history and current research concerning doctoral education and noted substantial confusion among students, faculty and administrators regarding the purpose of the education doctorate. In addition, students have numerous choices and alternative program models available that offer skill development and advancement opportunity. The variety of program alternatives is the result of numerous constituencies seeking specific program outcomes including students who aspire to new knowledge, individuals who fund doctoral programs, institutions that hire graduates, and those who desire to improve educational quality (Nyquist, 2002). Although institutional administrators consult specialty accreditation groups as they design doctoral programs, a tension between the purpose to train scholars or to train employees and administrators exists across many doctoral programs (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004). Since students are the ultimate consumers of doctoral education, in the next section, I review what is known about Ed.D. student objectives.

Doctoral student objectives. Many graduates of education doctoral programs choose roles outside of academia; therefore, a program that emphasizes real-world application appears better aligned with doctoral student objectives (Zambo et al., 2014). Indeed, Ed.D. students generally work full-time, enjoy their current role, and aspire to remain in their chosen field. In addition, Ed.D. students seek doctoral education to learn and apply theory to practice, develop problem solving skills, and enhance career opportunity (Perry, 2011). Despite numerous studies

of education doctoral students (Gardner, 2009; Levine, 2007; Lovitts, 2001; Osguthorpe & Wong, 1993), including students in professional practice doctoral programs (Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004), the question remains whether Ed.D. programs deliver promised outcomes.

Zambo et al. (2014) surveyed students at twenty-one higher education institutions affiliated with the CPED to understand what students learned, how they learned, how they perceived themselves, and why they pursued the education doctorate. They surveyed nearly three-hundred students at fourteen institutions that had enacted Ed.D. reforms using the CPED design principles (p. 130). In addition to questions about program characteristics, an open-ended question asked students to explain their decision to pursue the Ed.D. They found that student objectives were generally aligned with the CPED program goals in areas of partnerships, application to problems of practice, development as scholarly practitioner, engaging diverse communities, and learning through authentic experience. Zambo et al. (2014) did not find that leading positive change was a significant reason that students pursued the Ed.D.; however, students stated that the degree would help them meet professional goals.

Many researchers have found that students pursued the Ed.D. for personal, career, and professional reasons (Scott et al., 2004; Wellington & Sikes, 2006; Zambo et al., 2014); however, Scott et al. (2004) and Wellington and Sikes (2006) found that students believed that the doctoral program helped them transition to new roles and higher levels of authority and this was the most prevalent reason students pursued the education doctorate. In addition, Scott et al. (2004) and Wellington and Sikes (2006) found that students who sought the credential felt the Ed.D. valued their work experience and practical knowledge more so than those students in a Ph.D. program. Scott et al. (2004) and Wellington and Sikes (2006) also found that students

believed that the Ed.D. provided a network of support that included class schedule flexibility, and allowed them to complete the program in three-to-four years while working.

Aside from program flexibility and practical application, Zambo et al. (2014) noted that there was significant variation in student views of curriculum related to the ability to engage diverse communities. They found that student perceptions were significantly different from institution to institution, and students at some universities perceived that they were learning these concepts more fully than at other institutions. In a separate study of UCEA institutions, Byrne-Jiménez and Borden (2015) found that higher education doctoral programs lack diversity, and that education doctoral programs often mitigate this shortcoming through cultural awareness training. They asserted that a diverse pipeline of higher education leaders is needed because educational leaders are increasingly required to engage local communities that are often more diverse than the population of university administrators. Byrne- Jiménez and Borden (2015) suggested that an imbalance between administrators and communities foreshadowed challenges for higher education leaders.

In addition, Scott et al. (2004) found that Professional Practice Doctorate programs closely align with CPED design principles. The professional practice doctorate is usually awarded to working professionals in an area of specialty. Scott et al. (2004) noted that students enroll in PPD programs for a variety of reasons and that these reasons largely depend on their work history and experience. In more recent research, Storey and Hesbol (2014) found that students with little previous job experience sought the PPD for professional development, to gain knowledge directly applicable to their job, and to advance in their chosen career. Individuals at mid-career, however, sought the PPD to develop leadership capability and thereby contribute to the profession. Students with a significant amount of work experience sought the PPD for

intellectual challenge. Across the three groups, Storey and Hesbol (2014) found that students pursued the PPD to align with their personal values and their goals to make a difference in terms of self-fulfillment, self-discovery, and career transition.

In another study of professional doctoral programs, Wellington and Sikes (2006) found that students sought the PPD for job advancement, retention, challenge and obtaining insight by applying theoretical knowledge. Job frustration was a strong motivator for students who pursued the PPD, particularly for individuals seeking a career or job change. The more recent studies of Heaton and Swidler (2012) and Chan (2012) found that inquiry skills developed through PPD programs provided students with new perspectives and skills to negotiate relationships, build consensus, and initiate changes in their work setting. Amrein-Beardsley et al. (2012) found that Ed.D. graduates valued the PPD program because it developed leadership skills, particularly those skills that enhanced the ability to engage and enact change processes. They also found that students valued the sense of community developed through practitioner-focused Ed.D. programs.

While I found no research related to salary and job qualifications, I believe that practitioners may have different pecuniary motivations than researchers or faculty-oriented students. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the average annual salary for a variety of roles for Ed.D. graduates ranges from about \$50,000 to over \$100,000, while the average salary for individuals with a Ph.D. in Education is between \$60,000 and \$80,000 per year (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). While the salary ranges of the two degree programs overlap, roles requiring the Ed.D. appear to offer higher income potential than positions for which the Ph.D. is required. Consequently, students who have little interest in research might choose to pursue the Ed.D. to earn a higher salary. Underlying these salary data is the fact that the jobs associated with each degree are significantly different. Positions that

require the Ed.D. involve educational administration, while Ph.D. related roles are largely within the teaching ranks of academia. These job credential requirements might be another reason that students have a different understanding of the two doctoral degrees.

Leadership and career aspirations. Many education professionals find difficulty managing the transition between roles as researcher and administrator (Mills, 2006). Mills found that the transition to a role as dean or department chair was particularly challenging when individuals moved to these roles in the “second half of life” (p. 294). Administrators achieved a successful transition only when the new role was deemed more meaningful, and their focus turned from success and achievement to significance (p. 296). Mills observed that this type of transition was often seen as moving from managing territory and wielding power, to becoming servant leaders, and mentors (p. 302). Mid-career education professionals that enter doctoral programs often seek to develop career transition competence.

Beyond transition management skills, university leaders increasingly feel ill prepared to develop entrepreneurial practices, manage performance, and handle grievances (Morris & Laipple, 2015). The demands of the job interfere with their personal lives and job satisfaction suffers (p. 249). Managing the balance between personal life and job demands requires support and conscious effort (Plater, 2006). Indeed, Morris and Laipple (2015) found that administrators with business training were more effective and experienced higher job satisfaction than peers lacking management training. As a consequence, Morris and Laipple (2015) recommended that leadership development and management training be made available to university administrators to help them navigate job and career changes.

In addition to career transition skills, leadership competence is a necessary skill for successful higher education administrators. Defining leadership competence was the focus of the

American Association of Community Colleges Leading Forward project in 2003 (Ottenritter, 2012). The project developed tools to understand the leadership development needs of America's community colleges, and it defined the key competencies required of successful community college presidents. The Leading Forward project suggested that effective institutional leaders must be able to develop and implement the university mission, advocate for the institution, understand community and economic development, and possess strong interpersonal and transformational skills (p. 10). The Leading Forward leadership competencies provide a framework for assessing performance and guiding change. However, Seemiller (2016) found that while leadership is an integral part of many higher education programs, the link between curriculum, pedagogy, and competence is lacking. Seemiller (2016) recommended that programs more clearly define the link between leadership competence and program outcomes. Further echoing this recommendation, Vera (2012) found that Ed.D. leadership students sought leadership development as an integral part of the doctoral experience. Vera (2012) also recommended that doctoral programs define specific criteria for practitioners and scholars to avoid student confusion between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. (p. 134).

Ed.D. enrollment trends. In addition to understanding student objectives, I considered education doctoral enrollment trends as an indicator of Ed.D. demand. Baker, Wolf-Wendel, and Twombly (2007) found that the number of education administration doctoral graduates increased by about one-third from 1990 to 1996, and the number of graduates remained flat for the remainder of the decade. Of the students who earned a doctorate in educational administration in the 1990s, about eighty percent pursued careers outside of the professorate (Baker, Wolf-Wendel, & Twombly, 2007). While Baker, Wolf-Wendel and Twombly (2007) did not differentiate between Ph.D. and Ed.D. recipients, they noted that about sixty percent of education

administration doctoral graduates in 1990 attended R1 and R2 research universities (Indiana University, 2015) compared to only about forty percent of doctoral graduates in the year 2000. They also found that there was a significant increase in doctoral student enrollment and in the number of doctoral programs during the ten years between 1990 and 2000.

In another study, Servage (2009) found that growing doctoral student enrollment could result in an oversupply of graduates. Servage (2009) suggested that available jobs and candidates were limited by the marketplace; however, the proliferation of alternative doctoral programs was the result of the complex interaction of government, industry, institution, and student actors. Servage argued that professional doctoral programs might serve to deliver skills to the market and to provide a credential for advancement (p. 777). Students might pursue the Ed.D. because of a concern to remain employed as well as a desire to advance. Policies that require that candidates possess the Ed.D. for certain roles can generate greater demand, leading to the proliferation of doctoral programs and increased enrollment. It is the continued growth in Ed.D. programs across the country and the increase in enrollment that raises concerns about program quality. However, these concerns do not detract students from pursuing the degree. Indeed, the Ed.D. has utility for students seeking experiential learning and skills development.

Summary of student experience research. I reviewed education doctoral student objectives and demonstrated the need for alignment between the Ed.D. and student goals to develop skills and realize career aspirations. Education doctoral students seek leadership and management competence in order to be effective and have impact as university leaders. Doctoral students also seek career management skills and this is particularly true for students who aspire to transition to new and more demanding roles. While students might receive management, leadership, and career planning training through other means, including these elements in an

education doctorate program would better align doctoral programs with student objectives. The variety of student interests creates a challenge for doctoral program administrators as they balance between required program elements and the interests of students. In the next section, I review adult learning and development theories that are useful in understanding the doctoral program experience and design considerations.

Theoretical Framework

Given what is known about executive Ed.D. programs, student objectives, and program design, I chose a hybrid conceptual framework that draws on three theories to help me develop an understanding of this type of doctoral education and rely on Relational Developmental Systems Theory to incorporate the three theories—Adult Development Theory, Adult Learning Theory, and Critical Friends Theory—into a cohesive framework. I use Adult Development Theory to understand how doctoral students consider program alternatives and whether to pursue doctoral education as part of a transition between development stages; concepts from Adult Learning Theory to situate the doctoral students’ learning experiences; and Critical Friends Theory to examine the interpersonal aspects of the executive doctoral experience. Next, I describe each theory and my approach for combining them into a hybrid framework for understanding the doctoral education experience.

Adult development theory. In 1956, Erikson proposed a theoretical framework to link the popular and scientific meanings of identity (Kroger, 2007). The concept emerged from the work of Sigmund Freud and defined the term “ego identity” to describe a fully functioning adult. In Erikson’s theory of identity, an individual is ready for the tasks of adulthood only after the experiences of adolescence and thus, the term life-stages theory is sometimes associated with Erikson’s theory. Erikson (1956) believed that a comprehensive understanding of the individual

that includes life history, case history, and ideology was required to understand identity development. Erikson also believed that the ego identity represented the predictable sense of continuity across various contexts, and over a lifetime, an individual faced numerous challenges that shaped them. The theory proposes eight stages of identity development from infancy to older adult. The first five stages span between childhood to adolescence and focus on the sense of self within a group and as an individual. Three higher stages in Erikson's model relate to adulthood and span the spectrum from the development of long-term commitments to a generational perspective.

Levinson (1986) noted that Erikson's theory of ego was deeply grounded in the life course of the individual and "the engagement of self with world" (p. 3). He distinguished between the life course and the life cycle of the individual, and noted that the life course might be viewed as the experience of growing old while the life cycle is the normal order that is common to every person. Levinson defined four distinct eras to define the macrostructure of human development across a lifetime. In Levinson's framework, the mid-life transition occurs between ages 40 and 45 and represents the termination of early adulthood and the start of middle adulthood. Levinson states that the mid-life transition is necessary for the individual to become more reflective, loving, and avoid stagnation. A subsequent transition occurs between ages 60 and 65 when the individual moves into late adulthood. In Levinson's theory, the underlying pattern or design of an individual's life at a given time is essentially the same for everyone.

Figure 1 illustrates the life stages of Erikson's and Levinson's theories.

The research that underpins Erikson's and Levinson's theories is based on interviews of men at various stages of life and in a variety of situations, and subsequent research extended the theory to women (Marcia, 1966). Schiedel and Marcia (1985) interviewed male and female

college students to understand ego development and intimacy and found differences in behavior, but the findings also demonstrated links between gender schema theory and Erikson's theory. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee (1976) used interviews to understand life structure and examine issues of friendship, work, parenting, and crises. Levinson's wife extended the theory to women and found that women and men go through the same periods in life at about the same ages (Levinson & Levinson, 1996).

The extension of these adult development theories to men and women demonstrates the breadth of the life stages concepts, and identify biological, psychological and social influences on identity development. In addition, these theories directly relate to the decision-making process potential doctoral students use to evaluate executive doctoral programs and other developmental alternatives. For example, students might pursue the education doctorate to enhance personal power and effectiveness as they transition to middle adulthood.

Adult Development Theories

<u>Erikson: Stages</u>	<u>Levinson: Eras</u>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infancy: Trust v. Mistrust 2. Toddlerhood: Autonomy v. Doubt 3. Early Childhood: Initiative v. Guilt 4. Middle Childhood: Accomplishment v. Inferiority 5. Adolescence: Identity v. Role confusion 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infancy to Adolescence: Age birth – 20 yrs. 	Birth - Adolescent
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Young Adult: Intimacy v. Isolation 7. Middle Adulthood: Generativity v. Stagnation 8. Older Adulthood: Ego identity v. Despair 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Early Adulthood: Age 17-45 Greatest energy, contradiction and stress 3. Middle Adulthood: Age 40-65 Less energy but still ambitious 4. Late Adulthood: Age 65+ Making peace with world 	ADULT

Figure 1: Erikson and Levinson Adult Development Theories.
 Adapted from *Identity Development: Adolescence Through Adulthood* (2nd ed.),
 (pp. 13-30), by Kroger, J. (2007). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage.

Adult learning theory. In a discourse on the history of adult learning and adult learning theory, Malcolm Knowles stated that there is an essential difference between teaching adults and adolescents (Knowles, 1977). The adolescent is required to attend school and the adult has a choice. Knowles adds that because of this difference those who teach adults must find ways to maintain the interest of adult learners else they will choose to opt out of the learning experience. Knowles explained that pedagogy is rooted in the assumption that the learner is dependent on the instructor to set the direction for learning and the instructor is comfortable maintaining that dependency. In andragogy, the instructor has an obligation to move the learner from dependency to self-directed learning and in so doing allow the student to lead.

Knowles' concepts are rooted in the history of education and through subsequent research he expanded on the distinction between pedagogy and adult learning (Knowles, Swanson, & Holton, 2005). The extension of adult learning and teaching begins with the motivation of the learner. Knowles suggested that as an individual matures, they become responsible and self-directed so that for learning to be meaningful, it must be useful and tie directly to personal experience. The orientation, readiness and motivation to learn are internally focused and solution-oriented. As a consequence, the adult learner needs to be involved in the learning process. Student involvement can be as simple as defining a project and as complex as designing the learning environment and structure. Adult learners choose learning situations that revolve around problem solutions and relevance. Adult learners identify problems for which they require assistance to find solutions. While the adult learning process is not cyclical, the motivation to learn begins with self-awareness as illustrated in Figure 2.

Knowles' theory also aligns with reflective thinking practices that were first explored by Dewey (1934) and extended by Schon (1987) to practitioner learning. The concept asserts that

knowledge, skill, and practice are used to “make sense of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations of professional practice” (De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009, p. 158). As skilled practitioners, adult learners seek new skills and capabilities and experiential learning is essential to effective learning. Practicing administrators and executives use reflective thinking to connect organization, processes, and relationships within an organizational construct in order to develop mental models that help them understand their environment, develop mastery, and guide decisions and actions (De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009, p. 160; Senge, 1990). Executives also use personal thinking and their self-awareness as leaders to interpret and extend experiences to action in new areas. These ways of thinking directly align with Kolb’s modes of experiential learning whereby an individual moves from experience to reflection, hypothesis, testing, and repeats the cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

While De Dea Roglio and Light (2009) applied a reflective executive framework to business education methods, the reflective executive framework extends across disciplines and settings. For example, Travers, Morisano, and Locke (2015) applied the reflective thinking and goal setting framework to understand student academic outcomes and found that when students had a period of reflection as part of their daily activity, they were more successful. In addition, Nesbit (2012) suggested that reflective learning applies in university settings and extends naturally to the dynamic situation confronting organizations. Self-directed leadership development requires personal reflection to instill growth and life-long development (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Nesbit, 2012).

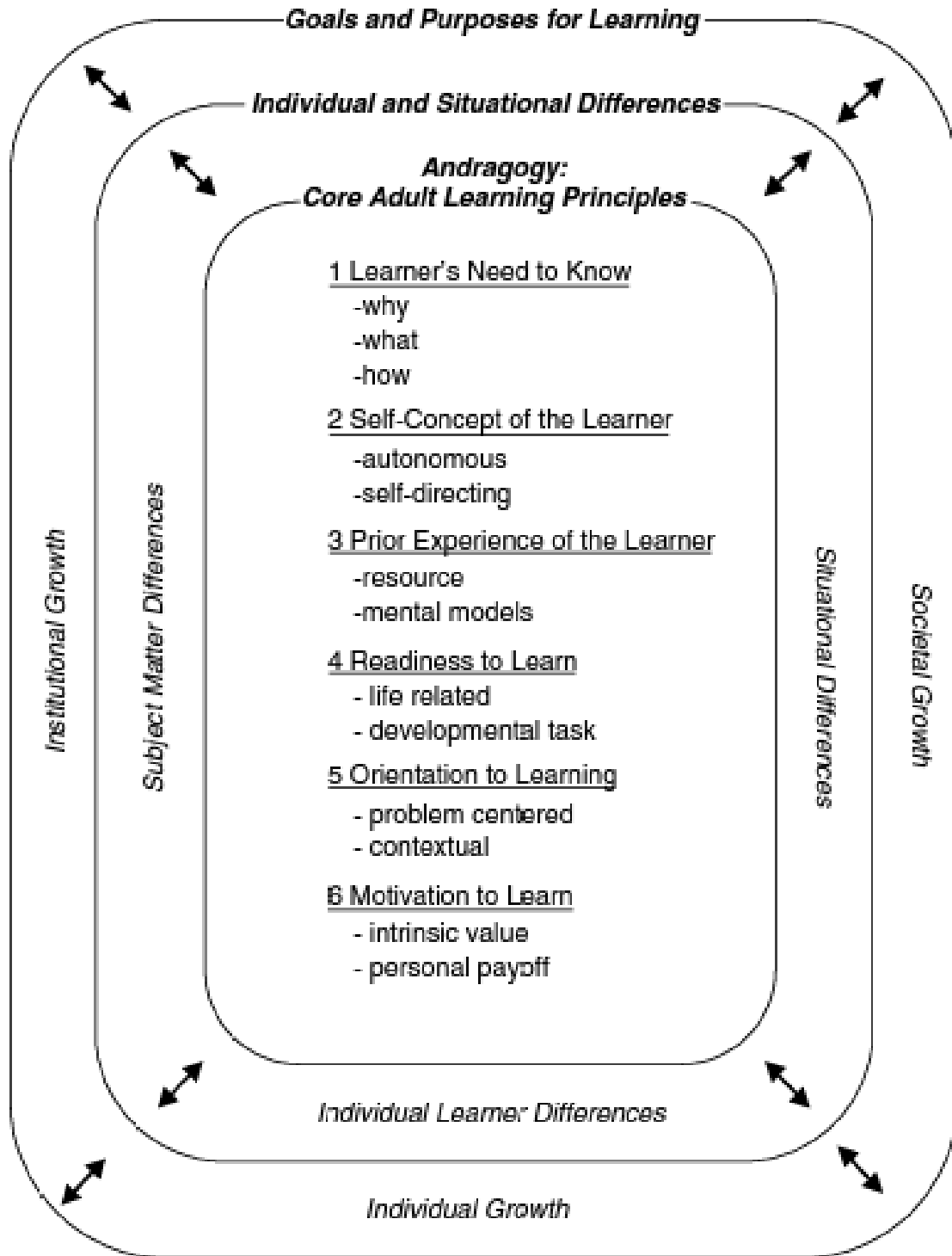


Figure 2: Andragogy in Practice Model
 From *The Adult Learner* (6th ed.). (p. 149), by Knowles, Swanson, & Holton.
 Burlington, MA: Elsevier.

Critical friends theory. While maturity and personal experience are important considerations for learning and teaching, we cannot discount the impact of relationships. Critical Friends Theory provides a way to include the peer and faculty relationship aspects of the doctoral program experience. A critical friend can be a doctoral student who provides friendship, support, and challenge to another fellow doctoral student. The concept has been in use since the 1970s (Storey, 2013). Costa and Kallick (1993) offer a common definition that underpins the linkage between friendship and critique. A critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions as a friend and invests time to fully understand the context and goals of the individual as an advocate for the success of the work (p. 50). We need only consider the cohort experience in the executive doctoral program to understand how Critical Friends Theory might apply to doctoral education. Student peers, faculty and other stakeholders support each other and in the process enhance the learning environment.

In addition, Storey and Taylor (2011) detailed a conversation among institutional administrators to consider how Critical Friends Theory might explain the development of the CPED design principles. Storey and Wang (2017) applied the theory to graduate education through the use of structured protocol to facilitate student presentations, questioning and feedback. The application of the theory in these settings demonstrates its utility beyond adult learning and extends its application to program design and development. Learning through peer consultation and challenge improves the educational experience. The relationships that develop in doctoral programs facilitate learning and Critical Friends Theory provides another lens from which to view the research study of executive the doctoral program experience and program design.

Building a cohesive theory. Since the three theories explain some aspect of the doctoral program experience, it is most useful to consider them in combination or as a system of processes. I leverage Relational Developmental Systems Theory (RDST) to combine the theories and to offer insights at various organizational levels, yielding findings for students and administrators (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Relational Developmental Systems Theory provides scaffolding to understand the relationship between the student and the doctoral program as explained by the three theories and to examine the influences of the environment and doctoral program outcomes. Following the example of recent work that applies systems concepts to social and educational contexts (Callina, Ryan, Murray, Colby, Damon, Matthews & Lerner, 2017; Lamb, 2015; Lerner Johnson, & Buckingham, 2015; Oyama, Griffiths, Gray, & Russell, 2001), I used developmental systems theory as a framework for conducting research. RDST is inclusive, focused on process and sensitive to the context and dynamic of developmental processes, and relevant for optimizing outcomes. Therefore, RDST has utility for understanding the doctoral program experience, design, and assessment.

Chapter Summary

I reviewed the relevant literature concerning education doctoral programs, student goals, and program design and found that the education doctorate remains a useful program of study, particularly for professionals interested in advancing in practice and leadership. There is substantial variation among education doctoral programs in the United States and that variety can confuse students as they search for a program that produces the outcomes they seek. Despite doctoral program variation, education doctoral program enrollment continues to rise and the number of programs across the country is increasing. Any mismatch between program goals and student objectives and a general need for programs that provide a greater focus on leadership

development, provide a strong case for research into the program experience and program administrator considerations.

In addition, research focused on executive doctoral programs in higher education leadership is of singular importance since there is a recognized need for stronger university and college leadership. While there have been numerous studies of executive business and management education, there are few investigations that focus on educating higher education executives. Studies concerning education leadership development often relate to the design of programs across multiple disciplines within the field of education and fail to focus on higher education leadership. A research study that explores the program experience and administrator considerations would inform the understanding of such programs.

Unlike traditional degree programs, executive education programs provide students who work full-time with a structured curriculum that is taught by dedicated faculty that have teaching competence and experience that students can readily apply in their jobs. An executive doctoral program that is developed in consultation with faculty and practitioners ensures that it delivers the desired outcomes and develops the desired student competencies. Challenges concerning the actual benefits of the Ed.D. (Bowen & McPherson, 2016) and calls for Ed.D. reforms (Zambo et al., 2014) suggest that an Ed.D. program tailored to experienced educational professionals will likely differ from traditional education doctorate programs. Yet, despite the focus on doctoral program reforms and the emergence of new programs, there remains a need to understand how students learn and the essential components of the doctoral education. Adult learning, development and relationship theories, when combined with Relational Developmental Systems Theory, provide a conceptual framework to understand how doctoral students process the educational experience and administrators design these programs.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

Numerous researchers have examined program content and differences between the two doctoral degrees, Ed.D. and Ph.D. (Perry, 2011; Perry, Zambo, & Wunder, 2015; Young, 2006; Walker et al., 2008). The education doctorate is usually described as a practitioner degree, suitable for individuals who seek roles outside of academia, yet the requirements for many education doctorate programs are largely similar to those of the Ph.D. In addition, the dissertation requirement for many education doctoral programs involves a research orientation that may not concern a problem of practice. Individuals who seek to bolster their skillset and access leadership development programs find fault with Ed.D. programs that offer little in the way of practical experience. Also, individuals who seek higher level administrative roles usually pursue an education doctorate while working and find fault with research-oriented dissertation experiences. Executive doctoral programs accommodate the needs of students who work full-time by scheduling classes on weekends; however, the majority of programs are targeted at students in principal and superintendent positions. Executive doctoral programs such as the program at Vanderbilt University are comprised of a blend of students seeking the credential in principal, superintendent, policy, and higher education fields (Caboni & Proper, 2009). While there are some executive doctoral programs with a singular focus on higher education, the diversity of programs suggests that there is value in understanding the doctoral program experience.

The variety of education doctoral programs also causes confusion among administrators, faculty, and students. Since education doctoral students often have different goals than Ph.D. students, understanding student objectives might lead to doctoral programs that better meet student developmental needs and allay any confusion about program objectives. Moreover,

executive doctoral programs are particularly relevant because the curriculum for the executive doctoral program is usually developed in consultation with faculty and practitioners to ensure that the program delivers the desired benefits, and develops management and leadership competence (Caboni & Proper, 2009). This research study was guided by two broad research questions in an effort to understand the doctoral program experience and how these programs are evolving:

1. What motivations, experiences, structures, and outcomes do executive Ed.D. graduates describe as making a strong program?
 - a. How do graduates / alumni describe their motivation to attend a higher education executive Ed.D. program?
 - b. How do graduates / alumni describe the appropriate structure of an executive Ed.D. program?
 - c. How do graduates / alumni describe the critical experiences of executive Ed.D. programs?
2. How do people with expertise in executive leadership assess and critique current executive Ed.D. programs in higher education and what future developments and changes for these programs do they anticipate?
 - a. How do experts in executive leadership describe the current state of executive Ed.D. programs including structure, quality, outcomes, networking, and practical skill development?
 - b. What do experts in executive Ed.D. programs predict that executive Ed.D. programs will look like in the future?

- i. What challenges do experts see executive programs facing? How are programs overcoming these challenges?
- ii. How do experts advise programs evolve in response to changing higher education contexts and needs?

My choice of research methodology and procedures was informed by these research questions.

Research Method and Design

Since the research study sought to understand the doctoral program experience, I chose to employ a qualitative methodology using interview and document analysis to gather data for the study. The interview process provides substantially more information than that available exclusively from quantitative survey instruments and allows findings to emerge rather than being imposed by the method or researcher. In addition, qualitative methods provide understanding and description of personal experiences in relation to phenomena and can describe the phenomena in rich detail as situated and embedded within specific contexts that participants relate and describe. I used a phenomenological approach in this study to understand the phenomenon of executive doctoral education. The fundamental objective of phenomenological research is to reduce the experience to its basic essence or nature (Creswell, 2013). The underlying questions in a phenomenological study relate to what individuals experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon; this is precisely what I sought to understand about executive doctoral programs.

Phenomenology was founded in a rich body of research beginning with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and is often used in social inquiry, such as the study of students' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology emphasizes the phenomenon to be explored across a group of individuals and develops an understanding of the lived experiences of individuals and their

perceptions of the experience. Data analysis in phenomenological research requires the suspension of preconceptions. Husserl refers to the suspension of presupposition as “epoche” from ancient Greek and refers to the elimination of the external world from conscious thought (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, what is known about the experience is only that which is learned from the analysis of the experiences of others. The concept of consciousness relates objects and experiences by the manner in which they are perceived by the individual. Subjects and objects are real only if an individual has knowledge and awareness of them (Creswell, 2013). Awareness of subject and object are the result of the experiences that the individual has with each. Therefore, the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and program administrators are real only if they are discovered through data analysis.

By choosing a phenomenological method, I defined the phenomenon as the experiences of alumni and administrators of executive doctoral programs. In using this approach, I developed a deeper and richer understanding of the experience by deeply analyzing participant interviews and allowing themes to emerge from the analysis. While surveys and other quantitative methods have been applied to understand doctoral programs as noted in the review of the literature, the phenomenological approach allowed me to collect stories across a group to construct an understanding of the experience (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach uniquely suited the purpose of this study because it focused on the experiences of doctoral program graduates and administrators. Quantitative methods offer some insight into these aspects of the experience but lack the depth of understanding that accompanies a qualitative study.

Interviews provided the foundational data for this phenomenological study and allowed me to extract deeper meaning behind participants’ experiences. As the interviewer, I pursued in-depth details from my participants and used the context to inform the understanding of the

doctoral program experience. Further, the interview process allowed participants to explain their comments and provide context from which I developed an understanding of their behavior and thinking (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Robson (2011) argued, “the human use of a language is fascinating both as a behavior in its own right and for the virtually unique window that it opens on what lies behind our actions” (p. 273). The interview process provided me the opportunity to probe participant comments to get at their underlying meanings. While phenomenological methods require that I bracket my bias, I share my positionality in the next section as context for consumers of this research study.

Thoughts on Researcher Positionality

Since I was the primary collector of data and executor of analysis, the findings were influenced by my positionality and bias. In addition, the interviews were influenced by how the interview was conducted and in particular how the participant viewed me and the manner in which the discussion occurred (Denscombe, 2007). Beyond these concerns, my personal bias required additional context to inform the research findings from various perspectives and to provide those who consume the research the means to interpret the conclusions of the study (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Creswell, 2013).

I entered this research study as a doctoral student in the Program in Higher Education Leadership at The University of Texas at Austin and as a graduate of the Executive MBA program at the same institution. As a doctoral student in the higher education leadership program at a highly regarded public research institution, I am familiar with the education doctorate program at my institution from personal observation and through discussions with peers, administrators and faculty. The distinguishing features of the Ed.D. at The University of Texas at Austin are the amount of coursework and the practitioner focus of the dissertation.

Adding my executive business school experience with its focus on leadership, management and career, I expected executive doctoral programs would provide leadership training to enable students with skills and awareness to advance their career.

Whether it is the difference between the disciplines of business and educational administration or some other factor, I was truly humbled and surprised by the rationale that executive doctoral program graduates shared in the interviews. Career advancement might be the outcome graduate participants realized, but their underlying rationale for pursuing the degree was improved effectiveness and awareness that came from exposure to new concepts and a diverse group of similarly driven peers and colleagues. The gift of participant time and their willingness to openly tell their story was a truly eye-opening experience. I endeavored to capture their motivations and experiences through reflection, triangulation, and continued inquiry. While some element of researcher bias remains, I believe I have captured the underlying essence of the program experience and challenges surrounding executive doctoral education. I am truly thankful for the honor and courtesy that participants shared during the interviews. With this background, I turn now to the description of the population and sample.

Description of Population and Sample

I used purposeful sampling to select the executive doctoral programs for the study and to select individual participants (Jones et al., 2014). In reviewing the variety of programs across the country, I found that there were numerous programs that offered evening classes, online courses and other accommodations for working students; however, I chose to select from programs that defined a specific term to completion and marketed the program to mid-level and higher working educational professionals. While my focus was on students who were interested in a higher education administration and leadership doctorates, I chose to include multi-disciplinary

programs in the search criteria, thus expanding the set of programs from which to choose. I selected executive doctoral program graduates and administrators from among the resultant set of education doctorate programs that were defined as programs for working professionals. Since the second research question also includes the perspective of individuals with expertise in higher education leadership, I defined these participants as persons who have deep experience in educational administration, leadership, program design, and adult education. Together with the program criteria, there are three sets of research data: (1) executive doctoral program descriptions, (2) doctoral program graduate interviews, and (3) program administrator and higher education expert interviews. The sampling method and further details about the sample and population follow.

Doctoral program sample and criteria. Executive doctoral programs were selected from a combination of criteria. First, a Google search of executive doctorate in higher education management programs yielded numerous results, many of which were unrelated to higher education. Next, I conducted a search for programs using the ranking of graduate education schools compiled by *U.S. News and World Report*. I deliberately wanted the set of programs to represent a range of criteria including program term, cost, history, focus, curriculum, and structure. In addition, I desired the program set to represent an equal number of public and private institutions. Based on these considerations, I selected 12 doctoral programs that offered an education doctorate in some type of higher education or adult education discipline. Students in these 12 programs work full-time and while there may be some online course facilitation, face-to-face classroom session participation is required.

The institutional dataset is not intended to be exhaustive, only representative of the variety of executive doctoral programs in the market at the time of this study. The dataset

represents recent executive program entrants that had operated less than five years and long-standing programs with in excess of fifteen years of history. Some programs were ranked among the best graduate schools in higher education administration while other programs were lower ranked. Among the 12 doctoral programs, the student cohort might have had a singular focus on higher education while other programs brought together students from several disciplines. All of the 12 programs in the dataset recruited students who worked full-time while enrolled and students were mid- to senior-level professionals. The set of 12 executive programs reflected a wide diversity of attributes in terms of institutional type, program focus, and format. Though not exhaustive, the program dataset was representative of the range of executive doctoral programs on the market today.

Graduates sample and criteria. Doctoral program graduate participants were alumni of one of the 12 identified executive doctoral programs and were identified from the publicly available information on program websites and linked video and program materials. Institutional websites contained information about the executive doctoral program with testimonials and commentary by current and former students of the program. In addition, program websites listed current and former students, including a short biography of these individuals. The amount of information on each website varied and therefore, the potential list of participants varied from program to program. Nevertheless, there was sufficient information to identify individuals who graduated from the executive doctoral program with a credential in higher education administration and leadership.

I used purposeful sampling from the aforementioned public information concerning program graduates to identify potential participants, choosing individuals who graduated with an education doctorate in higher education administration and leadership. I identified three

potential graduate participants at each of four programs, seeking a mix of both public and private institutions, program history, and from recent and later graduates. The graduate participant dataset was not intended to be exhaustive but was a selected sample based on the available information, such as year graduated and higher education focus, for graduates of the four institutions from the original 12 programs that I reviewed. While graduate participants were from a subset of the reviewed doctoral programs, the four programs from which graduate participants were recruited represent a range of program criteria including program term, structure, curriculum and focus. A total of ten graduate participants were interviewed with two to three participants from each institution. Graduate participants reflected recent graduates with less than five years since graduation to graduates who completed their doctoral program more than seven years ago. Summary information for the program graduate and administrator participants is listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Graduate and Administrator Participants

Participant Type	Doctoral Program¹	Program Type	Time Since Graduation²	Current Position
Graduate	Titan	Private R1	1	University president
Graduate	Titan	Private R1	2	Education consultant
Graduate	Titan	Private R1	3	VP administration
Graduate	Io	Public R1	2	Asst. Dean external affairs
Graduate	Io	Public R1	2	College president
Graduate	Io	Public R1	2	Director of admissions
Graduate	Pandora	Private R1	2	VP college advancement
Graduate	Pandora	Private R1	2	Asst. Dean student engagement
Graduate	Mimas	Private R1	1	University professor
Graduate	Mimas	Private R1	1	VP program management
Administrator	Io	Public R1	NA	Associate director and professor Io.
Administrator	Io	Public R1	NA	Associate director and professor Io.
Administrator	Pandora	Private R1	NA	Former instructor Pandora and college professor
Administrator	Pandora	Private R1	NA	Coordinator Ed.D. program and professor
Administrator	Europa	Public R1	NA	Director university association and professor

1. Pseudonym to protect participant privacy.

2. Number of years since graduation. 1 = 1-3 years, 2 = 4-6 years, 3 = 7+ years. NA = Not applicable.

Administrator and expert sample and criteria. Program administrators provided a different perspective of the executive education experience than graduate participants. I recruited program administrator participants from among the 12 doctoral programs using similar criteria to that used for graduate participants. I defined program administrators as individuals who manage or have managed an executive doctoral program including individuals who were involved in the doctoral program design, development, implementation, and ongoing administration. Since I desired input from individuals with higher education administration and leadership expertise, I chose to recruit an equal number of program administrators and experts. I also desired that participants represent both public and private institutions. In addition, I sought administrators from the same four institutions from which graduate participants were recruited. These criteria resulted in four program administrator participants from two of the institutions associated with graduate participants and an additional program administrator participant from one of the 12 programs that were reviewed for a total of five administrator participants.

Higher education administration and leadership participants were selected from among the researchers and commentators that were identified in the review of research literature. These individuals represented persons who are senior leaders in higher education and were also actively engaged in educational research groups. Some of these expert participants were also engaged as program administrators in institutions that were not among the 12 programs that I reviewed; however, their program and research experiences were directly relevant to the understanding of executive doctoral program design considerations. The expert participants were not intended to be an exhaustive group and only represented the areas explored in the review of literature. Administrator and expert participants were selected to provide commentary regarding the breadth of education doctoral program history, current state, and future.

Sources of Data

There were two main sources of data for the study: online doctoral program information and participant interviews. The publicly available online program information was gathered from institutional websites and linked content. As the primary researcher, I interviewed program graduates and administrators to understand the doctoral program experience from multiple perspectives. In addition, I interviewed individuals with expertise in higher education leadership to provide another perspective on doctoral education. In this section, I describe these two data sources.

Online program information. I extracted program research data from publicly available information about executive doctoral programs contained on institutional websites and associated documents including linked video content and informational materials. Institutional websites contain substantial information concerning executive doctoral program structure, content and other characteristics that provide potential students with basic information about the program and possible graduate outcomes through commentary by current students and graduates. In addition to a description of the program, doctoral program websites describe the application process and define the desired student attributes including work history, aspiration, target test scores and academic record. Online program information can also include contextual information such as graduate, student, faculty and administrator testimonials. Many programs also include video content that describes the program beyond short paragraph comments often contained in program documents. Doctoral programs might also include a listing of current and former students along with a short biography.

I gathered the publicly available doctoral program information and organized it by characteristic, not in an analytical coding process, but to highlight the variation of program

features such as dissertation, curriculum, cost, term, and schedule. These program characteristics were described in each of the 12 program websites and provided a common framework that I used to inform participant selection and develop the interview guides. The online program data, described in Tables 2 and 3, illustrate some of the program characteristics of the 12 doctoral programs. The online content was downloaded and coded alongside participant interviews as an additional perspective of the doctoral program experience and evolution.

Interviews with program participants and experts. While the online doctoral program content described each program in some detail, even with linked testimonials these descriptions only provided a glimpse into the program experience. Interviews of program graduates and administrators offered an additional source of information about the program experience that was enhanced by the ability to explore aspects of the doctoral program in greater detail. As the primary researcher, I interviewed program graduates and administrators to explore the doctoral program experience from their perspectives. In addition, interviews of individuals with higher education expertise provided a perspective on doctoral education that expanded the understanding of doctoral programs beyond institutional borders.

Through semi-structured interviews, using the program characteristics from the initial review of online program content, I collected data from program graduates, administrators and higher education experts. The use of open-ended questions provided participants the opportunity to expand on topics more so than was explained in the online program descriptions. In the same way, higher education experts provided greater insight into their area of expertise through open-ended questioning. I interviewed doctoral program graduates, administrators and higher education experts over a six-month period using the interview guides that I developed from the

online program information to lay a foundation for the discussion. The nature of the interview process allowed participants to cover these topics in as much detail as they felt necessary.

Data Collection Instruments

I collected data from publicly available online program information and through participant interviews. In this section, I describe how the online program information was collected. In addition, I describe the interview guides for each participant group.

Online program information. The online program content was downloaded and program videos were transcribed, creating multiple sources of information for each program. I coded these materials alongside participant interview transcripts to provide another perspective of the doctoral program experience. However, I chose not to code the online program content before coding the interview transcripts because I desired to extract the program experiences through the identification of words and phrases that participants used to describe their program. Instead, I organized the information in the program documents using high level themes to examine similarity and differences between programs. For example, program documents included information about the required coursework, term, schedule, cost, and admission process. Some programs also described the program experience including the cohort structure, student diversity, faculty, and other aspects of the executive program experience. From a simple examination of these program materials, I identified marked differences between programs in terms of structure and content that informed the structure of interview guides for doctoral program graduates and administrators.

Participant interview guides. Since there were three participant groups – graduates, administrators and experts – I developed three distinct interview guides. I developed interview guides using the information contained in online program materials as well as the relevant

research literature concerning doctoral program design and development. For example, by examining online program testimonials, I identified the cohort structure, the dissertation experience, program schedule, and the rationale for the program as areas of interest. As a consequence, I chose to focus the interview guides into two main topic areas. One area of focus concerned the program structure and content while another topic area concerned program experiences. For program graduates, I organized the interview guide to gather information about the student experience including the decision to pursue the doctorate and their particular program. I also asked participants to describe their program structure and content. Using online doctoral program administrator testimonials and program information, I structured the administrator interview guide similar to that for program graduates. Therefore, the online doctoral program testimonials provided a starting point for graduates to describe their program and the interview guides created a framework for the discussion.

Recent research also provided another perspective to inform the development of the interview guides. For example, the Likert survey questionnaire of recently modified doctoral programs and student expectations (Zambo et al., 2014) provided information about program objectives and outcomes. The CPED program principles contained information regarding program organization, structure and content (CPED, 2016). Doctoral program reform-related research also provided context concerning student goals and objectives of the education doctorate (Perry, 2011; Walker et al., 2008; Zambo et al., 2014). In summary, the online program information and research literature were used to develop the participant interview guides.

While the interview guides for each participant group were similar, the intent and focus of each guide was aligned to the particular participant. I used the interview guides to facilitate a

semi-structured discussion with each participant around topics for which they were most familiar. Therefore, the questions and topic areas did not represent a specific set of questions, but were instead used to structure the discussion. I developed the interview guide as an open-ended inquiry into the components of the executive doctoral education experience and thus, the guides provided the flexibility to cover a set of topics while providing participants the majority of the time in the conversation. In addition, I thoughtfully considered the lines of inquiry and questions to avoid bias and misinterpretation, using words and phrases that were common to the institutions under study and consistent with the terms used in the research literature.

Graduate interview guide. The interview guide for graduate participants was organized for participants to describe the experience from multiple perspectives and to inform the first research question. First, graduate participants were asked to describe the program experience, covering topics from the application process through program completion and graduation. This general area of questioning allowed graduate participants to describe the program experience in their own words. The second topic area concerned the graduate's decision to pursue the doctoral program. The underlying theme within this topic concerned the factors that the graduate evaluated and the relative importance of each as they considered program alternatives and what opportunities they anticipated the degree could provide. Since much of the online program information described the cohort experience, the third area of inquiry related to the personal connections developed in the program including how these relationships might continue after graduation. While the first topic area asked graduate participants to describe their doctoral program in general, the fourth topic examined the evolution and structure of their doctoral program. A final topic area concerned participant demographic information. This set of information was only used to provide additional context about the participant. The graduate

participant interview guide was organized to collect data to inform the understanding of their doctoral program experience using descriptive information in their own words.

Administrator interview guide. The second research question concerned the factors that doctoral program administrators consider when developing and reforming executive doctoral programs; therefore, the program administrator participant interview guide was organized for them to describe their doctoral program. Program administrator participants were first asked to describe their role and program experience, covering topics that included their management function and interaction with competitor institutions. This general area of questioning allowed administrator participants to describe the program experience in their own words. Since graduate participants were asked to describe the relationship experiences across peers, faculty and administrators, the second topic area for program administrators concerned their relationship experiences with students and colleagues. This line of inquiry provided additional insight into the relationships that developed in the doctoral program. In a further effort to triangulate data collection surrounding the doctoral program experience, the third line of inquiry for program administrator participants asked them to describe the program. Lastly, program administrator participant demographic data were collected as context for data analysis. The administrator interview guide was organized to provide data to inform the understanding of doctoral program experiences including program design using descriptive information in their own words.

Expert interview guide. In addition to understanding the perspective of doctoral program administrators, the second research question concerned understanding the importance and evolution of executive doctoral programs. To collect this information, the higher education expert participant interview guide was organized around a slightly different set of topics than those used for program administrators. Expert participants were first asked to describe their area

of expertise and the challenges they experienced in their role. This general area of questioning allowed expert participants to describe leadership experiences and challenges associated with managing complex organizations and influencing change in their own words. In the same manner that other participants were asked to describe relationship experiences with peers and colleagues, the second topic area for expert participants concerned their relationships with colleagues and other interested groups. This line of inquiry provided additional insight into the connections necessary to understand the complex higher education landscape. To triangulate data collection surrounding the doctoral program experience, the third line of inquiry for expert participants asked them to describe executive education program experiences with which they had familiarity. This line of inquiry provided experts the opportunity to share information across the educational pipeline. Demographic data were also collected for this set of participants. The higher education expert participant interview guide was organized to collect data concerning the second research question.

The interview guides were developed using online institutional doctoral program information and relevant research studies to respond to the two primary research questions. While the interview guides contain specific questions around each topic area, these questions were only used as prompts to facilitate the discussion. The interview guides for each participant group are presented in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected two forms of data: online program information and participant program and expert interviews. I describe and summarize these data in Table 2 to illustrate the data collection method. In this section of the paper, I also describe the online program information collection

procedure, the review process for research involving human subjects, the scheduling of interviews, and how I conducted participant interviews.

Table 2.

Data Collection Summary Details

Data Type	#	Collection Method	Characteristics
Executive Ed.D. Online program information	12	Program websites, linked video and document content	Such as public or private university, institution size, ranking, cost, term and history.
Program Graduate Interviews	10	Identified from program documents and internet search.	Program, role and time since graduation.
Program Administrator Interviews	5	Identified from program documents and internet search.	Program and role
Higher Education Expert Interviews	5	Developed from literature review and recommendation from interviews	Role, research and expertise.

Online program information. I extracted the online program information from the doctoral program website home page, Uniform Resource Locator (URL), by saving it as a Microsoft Word document. I also extracted attached informational materials that were linked to the program home page such as the program curriculum, costings, and schedule. I transcribed linked program videos and included these with the program dataset. Therefore, the online program dataset represented the full set of information that was tied to the home page URL for each doctoral program. Although the amount of information for each program varied by institution, I captured the information for each doctoral program that was available at the time of the research study.

Twelve executive doctoral programs were selected to represent a broad sample of the variety of program offerings across the country. I organized program data using pseudonyms to

protect interview participant privacy into a table to show different program characteristics for the program dataset. As listed in Table 3, the program dataset includes newly developed programs which expect an inaugural cohort in 2018 and programs which have existed for some time. Doctoral program terms ranged from two to more than three years and the total cost for tuition and fees in these programs ranged from \$40,000 to \$160,000 for the full program term. Students can expect to incur additional expenses for travel and other related personal expenses. Programs conferred education doctorates in higher education administration, leadership, adult learning, and some programs had a globally focused doctorate. In addition to the executive Ed.D. some institutions offered the Ph.D. and an education doctorate for non-working students. These doctoral program details are also listed in Table 3.

There was a substantial amount of online program information and the tabulated program characteristics are not intended to represent the codes or themes that emerged from data analysis of online program information and participant interviews. These data are illustrative and highlight some of the program characteristics for the 12 programs I reviewed.

Table 3.

Doctoral Program Characteristics and Participants

Institutional Statistics			Program Statistics				Program Goals			
Program	Size ¹	Class ²	Rank ³	Age ⁴	Time (yrs.)	Total Program Cost ⁵ (\$k)	Degree	Target Student	Other ⁶	# Interview Participants ⁷
Io	L	Public R1	Top 50	2	2.0	100	Higher Education Administration	Mid- to Senior-level education professionals	2	5
Europa	M	Public R1	Top 50	2	3.0	150	Higher Education Management	Working professionals	1	1
Ganymede	L	Public R1	Top 50	1	3.0	60	Higher Education Administration	Working college administrators	1	
Callisto	M	Public R3	Top 200	2	3.5	52	Higher Education Leadership	Working professionals	0	
Metis	M	Public RD	RNP	1	3.0	40	Community College Leadership	Community college leaders	0	
Thebe	L	Public R2	Top 100	2	3.0	50	Higher Education Administration	Working professionals	2	
Titan	M	Private R1	Top 10	3	2.0	150	Higher Education Management	Senior-level	2	3
Mimas	M	Private R1	Top 50	1	2.0	140	Global Ed.D.	Significant leaders	2	2
Pandora	S	Private R1	Top 50	2	3.0	100	Higher Education Leadership and Policy	Mid-career-level	1	4
Calypso	S	Private R2	Top 50	3	3.5	160	Adult Learning and Leadership	Experienced professionals	2	
Dione	S	Private R2	Un.	2	3.0	70	Higher Education Policy and Leadership	Mid-career professionals	1	
Atlas	L	Private R1	Top 50	2	3.0	120	Higher Education Administration	Higher education or corporate education leaders	1	

1. Small, Medium, Large based on student enrollment. Small < 10,000 < Medium < 20,000 < Large.
2. Public or private university and Carnegie research university classification (Indiana University, 2015)
3. School ranking in higher education administration or graduate education. RNP = Rank not published. Un. = Unranked. (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2017)
4. Age of program. 1 = 5 years or less. 2 = between 5 and 15 years. 3 = more than 15 years.
5. Total cost for the expected term of the program exclusive of travel and related personal expenses
6. Other doctoral programs at institution. 0 = No other programs. 1 = Also Ph.D. 2 = Also Ph.D. and non-executive Ed.D.
7. Participants = Number of program graduate and administrator interview participants

Program and participant interviews. In addition to the online program information, I interviewed several graduates and administrators from a subset of the 12 doctoral programs. The association between the doctoral program and interview participants is also included in Table 3. The information in Table 3 shows that graduate and administrator participants include individuals from public and private universities as well as a variety of program characteristics. I provide additional information concerning the interview participants in Table 4 to illustrate the diversity across roles and position for graduates, administrators and higher education experts.

Before conducting interviews, I submitted my study for review to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin. The University of Texas at Austin IRB is responsible for the administration of research ethics and reviews human subject research projects to minimize the risk to human subjects, ensuring all subjects consent and are fully informed about the research and any risks, and to promote equity in human research. The nature of human inquiry requires that participants provide consent willingly and are fully informed of any risks. As such, I informed study participants of the purpose of the research effort, confirmed that their participation was voluntary, and obtained their consent. The University of Texas at Austin IRB categorized the research study as exempt and noted that all participants were adults and the data to be collected posed minimal risk to study participants.

While there were differing interview guides for each participant group, the process to schedule the interview was essentially similar. I sent each prospective

participant an introductory email outlining the objectives of the study and requested between 30 minutes to an hour of time for the interview. Email exemplars are contained in Appendix B. In many cases a follow-up email or telephone call was required to arrange the interview. About one third of the potential participants did not respond to the email or telephone call. In a few situations, I sent the interview guide at the request of the participant. I chose not to share this level of information in the initial email to avoid an overly lengthy note.

Ethical considerations require that participants were well informed about the purpose and benefits of the research (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). Before the start of the interview, I advised participants that they would be recorded throughout the session and provided anonymity. Since participants were located in various regions across the country, with few exceptions, the majority of interviews were conducted by telephone. In addition to recording the interview, I took notes during the discussion. Since I advised participants that the interview would require from 30 minutes to an hour at the time of scheduling, I reconfirmed timings at the onset and inserted a time-check at the half hour point of the interview. Participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions during the interview and none of the interviews exceeded an hour in length. I only conducted one interview with each participant; however, I provided contact details should they desire to share more information. I also sent a note of appreciation to each participant following the interview.

I established rapport at the onset of the interview by explaining the context of the study, sharing my research interests, and confirming participant consent. Since the interview guide was only a starting point for inquiry in the semi-structured interview, I used clarifying questions to obtain further information, and elaboration as needed. All participants were informed that interviews were recorded and transcribed; however, anonymity was maintained throughout the study through the use of pseudonyms. I sent follow up notes if further clarification was needed to ensure my understanding of the interview was consistent with the participant's intent. I deferred the interview location and timing to participant preferences and given the challenging schedules of the participants, some interviews were scheduled months in advance. Participants were provided no incentive for participation; however, many participants seemed genuinely interested in supporting the research effort and asked for follow-up information as it became available.

At the conclusion of each interview, I sent a follow-up email to each participant thanking them for supporting the research study and confirming any additional aspects of the discussion. Participant interviews were consensual, anonymity was preserved and each participant showed a commitment to the study and its outcome. In addition, I reflected on the notes taken during the interview and kept a journal of these observations. I discussed these observations with trusted colleagues and peers at various stages of the study and these reflections were also maintained within the journal. Regular journaling

throughout the interview process provided a rich set of information to inform the coding and data analysis.

Table 4.

Interview Participant Characteristics

Name¹	Type	Program	Time Since Graduation²	Current Role
Cathy	Graduate	Titan	1	University president
Morgan	Graduate	Titan	2	Education consultant
Cole	Graduate	Titan	3	VP administration
Lexi	Graduate	Io	2	Asst. Dean external affairs
Becky	Graduate	Io	2	College president
Bart	Graduate	Io	2	Director of admissions
Rita	Graduate	Pandora	2	VP college advancement
Nina	Graduate	Pandora	2	Asst. Dean student engagement
Carla	Graduate	Mimas	1	University professor
Edward	Graduate	Mimas	1	VP program management
Lily	Administrator	Io	NA	Associate director and professor Io.
Joe	Administrator	Io	NA	Associate director and professor Io.
Emily	Administrator	Pandora	NA	Former instructor Pandora and college professor
Katy	Administrator	Pandora	NA	Coordinator Ed.D. program and professor
Jen	Administrator	Europa	NA	Director university association and professor
Mark	Expert	-	NA	President education foundation and former college president
Mila	Expert	-	NA	Director university association and professor
Dawn	Expert	-	NA	Ed.D. program coordinator and professor
Beth	Expert	-	NA	Associate dean and professor
Pat	Expert	-	NA	Associate VP for outreach

1. Participant names are pseudonyms to protect privacy and preserve anonymity.

2. Time since graduation. 1 = 1-3 years, 2 = 4-6 years, 3 = 7+ years. NA = Not applicable.

Data Analysis Procedures

I analyzed the research data using a computer software program to organize the information across the various data sources. The NVivo software is a useful tool to categorize similar pieces of data and identify themes. In this section, I describe the analysis procedures for the online program information and participant interviews.

Online program information. I analyzed and coded the online program information alongside the participant interviews to use the coding structure that emerged from the analysis of participant interviews. I could have coded the online program data before analyzing the participant transcripts; however, doing so would have been at odds with the phenomenological methodology which sought to allow codes to reflect the participant wording and phrases. Phenomenological methods are best suited to understand an experience such as the doctoral program experience and I chose to delay coding the online program information until I had coded several participant interviews. By taking this approach, I remained consistent with the research methodology throughout the data analysis process.

The online program information was another source of data to triangulate the participant interview findings and explore how participants used the available public program information to inform the program experience. For example, the online public information included detailed program costings, application criteria, curriculum, and scheduling details. Participant interviews and the emergent coding structure provided a way to augment the understanding of the program details in these areas. In addition,

participant interviews provided information about aspects that were not covered in the online program information, such as details concerning career support and the education doctoral marketplace. The combination of the online program information and participant interviews provided a broad perspective of the doctoral education experience and market. To further ensure consistency and validation, I updated and reviewed the program coding as I revised and consolidated the coding of participant interviews.

Program participant and expert interviews. While I introduced a theoretical framework in the review of literature, phenomenological inquiry brackets preconceptions and builds understanding from the collected data. It is therefore inappropriate to define a set of codes and themes *a priori* even though the interview guides and program descriptions provide some insight into the doctoral program experience. The research study sought to understand the doctoral program experiences of graduates and program considerations of administrators and experts in higher education. Therefore, I chose to let the program experiences and themes emerge from the collected data and referred to the conceptual framework and theory of change only in the discussion of findings.

Extracting an understanding of the underlying experience from the data requires a successive series of analytical steps. In addition, these steps require reflection and confirming understanding. Collecting data across differing perspectives provides additional validity. Edward and Welch (2011) suggested that the analytical process in phenomenology involves several steps to ensure validity and consistency across all data sources. While Colaizzi (1973) suggested that interviews need not be transcribed

verbatim, since only the essence of what was communicated should be collected, I chose to transcribe each interview and validate meanings with participants through follow-up communications. I coded each interview and created meaning that described the experience from the collected narratives. These narratives were aggregated into themes that related to emotions and beliefs to develop a description of the experience. To assist with the data analysis, I used qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to code and analyze the interview transcripts. Creswell (2013) suggests that a computer program provides an organized storage file system for quick and easy accessibility of data. The resultant themes and description of the experience informed the purpose of this study.

I also examined the findings and tested for congruence by reviewing my understanding of meaning with participants during the interview and in follow-up communications if necessary. This aspect of the analysis procedure also tested the alignment of findings with the research purpose as recommended by Maxwell (2013) to improve research validity. Merriam (2009) also asserts that research findings must present a holistic interpretation of the central phenomenon for consistency and validity; therefore, I triangulated findings across multiple institutions and participant groups. Data collection and analysis continued until the emergent findings were saturated (Merriam, 2009). By comparing data in this fashion, I countered threats to validity (Robson, 2011).

Initial coding. Since phenomenology makes no preconceptions about the experience and allows the understanding to emerge from the data, I did not define an initial set of codes to analyze the research data. Instead, I coded each piece of data using

the wording and context from the data as they were gathered. Participant interview transcripts were coded as they were collected. As a consequence, the codes evolved during the course of data collection. In addition, the codes were compared with the interview guides and online program information to ensure that all relevant content was considered, compiled and coded within the appropriate context. Consolidating the data into groups by institution and participant categories further provided a check on the coding consistency and provided a triangulation of the analysis.

As I added the online program information, the codes expanded to include topics related to the application process, target students, program mission, and outcomes. At this point, a total of 23 codes were identified, but they had yet to be organized into topic areas or higher level structures. I generated word comparison charts to test the soundness of the coding procedure. See Appendix C for a list of the 23 initial codes and illustrative comparison charts.

Subsequent coding. As additional participant interviews were transcribed and coded, a total of 43 codes were identified. It was within this larger set of codes that the program experience began to emerge. I initially organized these themes into two groups, those associated with the program elements and those associated with the student description of the experience. The program themes included codes related to the program reputation and ranking, the pedagogy, and the support systems used to ensure student completion and success. Student experience themes included the emotions students expressed concerning the need to complete the program, the challenge associated with the

program, and the transformation they realized at the completion of the program. The emergence of these themes went beyond the initial logistical and interview guide-related codes that were developed from the analysis of the online program information.

At this point I began to organize the codes into higher level nodes and tested this grouping with some of the participants as further validation. In this way, the coding and analysis was a living process that continually evolved and was informed by personal reflection and testing with participants. Additional insights emerged with each subsequent interview and validation was confirmed as new data were analyzed.

Final coding. The final coding represented a consolidation of concepts that I tested with participants and validated against all data sources. I used memos and reflections during each step of the coding to organize 39 final codes into a set of four high level nodes that related to the program experience and rationale. In addition to reflection, I reviewed the high-level nodes with colleagues to further validate the process and as a way to mitigate researcher bias. I also grouped and compared the coding of administrator and graduate participant data to expose those codes and themes that were unique to each group. This step was a check to understand how each data source informed findings associated with each research question. As a final validation step, I compared wording, meaning, and text usage across the participant dataset to identify similarity and differences between participant groups. The resulting high-level nodes represented the emergent themes exposed by the analytical rigor that was the result of continuous testing and retesting of coding methodology, reflection, and validation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the research methodology used to discern the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates, program administrators, and individuals with higher education leadership expertise. The research data included online program information from 12 executive doctoral programs and participant interviews of program graduates, administrator, and higher education experts. The participant sample drew from the population of graduates and administrators at four research intensive universities that offered executive doctoral program and from educational researchers with expertise in higher education leadership. I coded the research data as it was collected and triangulated the analysis through consideration of multiple institutions and participant perspectives. The validation step allowed additional themes and codes to emerge and ensured the trustworthiness of results.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Data and Findings

This research study sought to understand the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and how executive doctoral programs are changing. Two research questions guided this study:

1. What motivations, experiences, structures, and outcomes do executive Ed.D. graduates describe as making a strong program?
 - a. How do graduates / alumni describe their motivation to attend a higher education executive Ed.D. program?
 - b. How do graduates / alumni describe the appropriate structure of an executive Ed.D. program?
 - c. How do graduates / alumni describe the critical experiences of executive Ed.D. programs?
2. How do people with expertise in executive leadership assess and critique current executive Ed.D. programs in higher education and what future developments and changes for these programs do they anticipate?
 - a. How do experts in executive leadership describe the current state of executive Ed.D. programs including structure, quality, outcomes, networking, and practical skill development?
 - b. What do experts in executive Ed.D. programs predict that executive Ed.D. programs will look like in the future?

- i. What challenges do experts see executive programs facing? How are programs overcoming these challenges?
- ii. How do experts advise programs evolve in response to changing higher education contexts and needs?

In this chapter, I present a brief synopsis of two executive doctoral programs to highlight some of the defining characteristics of each program. I also present research findings organized around each research question.

Data Presentation

The research findings draw from all data sources across the entire dataset of online program information and participant interviews. I illustrate program characteristics in greater detail through synopses of the Io and Pandora doctoral programs by using excerpts from the collected data for each program. I also highlight characteristics of the other doctoral programs to illustrate the diversity of program offerings. In addition, I provide a glimpse of the content from interviews of higher education experts.

Io doctoral program synopsis. Io is a public university categorized as a large R1, doctoral university of highest research activity located in the Southeastern United States. It is ranked as a top 50 best Higher Education Administration graduate school in the 2017 *U.S. News and World Report* graduate education ranking (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2017). The Io doctoral program was developed following the success of the Titan and Pandora executive doctoral programs, and as a result, there is some similarity

in program attributes. Io's doctoral curriculum covered all major areas including finance, fundraising, and leadership, with a strong focus on management within the field.

Leadership was of particular focus and the regular class sessions brought together leaders from academia and business to speak during the dinner program. The Io program dissertation was integrated into the coursework so that students began exploring research topics when they began their studies and each dissertation topic related to a specific higher education challenge. Students participated in two international travel programs that explored differences and similarities between higher education in United States and abroad.

Students can expect to complete the Io doctoral program in two calendar years. Classes were conducted in a hotel near a major airport and students rarely visited the college campus. Hotel arrangements were included in the program tuition; however, students were expected to cover the cost of travel from their home to the class location. With the exception of the international component, classes met for four days every six weeks throughout the program. Although it was a public program, the Io executive doctorate was organized within a separate part of the university system and tuition was higher than traditional doctoral programs in the college. The higher tuition cost was used to cover hotel accommodations and other expenses associated with the program. The total cost for the complete program term was about \$100,000, excluding student travel expenses.

Students were selected based on academic criteria, expected contribution to the class, and higher education aspiration post-graduation. The cohort experience was described as providing students an opportunity to learn from and support one another. The cohort was described as incredibly diverse in terms of student position within higher education institutions, educational agencies, or other nonprofits. In addition, the program was described as originating because of interest from mid-career individuals, who were in administration or faculty in higher education and wanted to study more about the institution of higher education.

I interviewed five individuals associated with the Io doctoral program including three graduates and two program administrators. The graduate participants continued to work in higher education at various levels in public and private institutions and were extremely positive about the Io executive doctoral program. Bart, who moved to a position as the director of admission after graduation, explained that the international component and the leadership focus were highlights of the program. He credited the international education credential as helping him land his current position. Another graduate, Lexi, explained that as an experienced professional, she really enjoyed the cohort structure and professionalism. “When you're in your mid-forties and you've got 20 plus years of professional life, you're just in a different place and so having your peers in a graduate program be kind of in the place where you are was absolutely essential.”

I also interviewed two Io doctoral program administrators who provided information about the program history, its design and development, and management

considerations. Lily, who was on the faculty at Io and the associate program director, explained the importance of keeping the doctoral program competitive by tracking its ranking against “peers and aspirational whether or not they have executive programs.” Joe, another member of the Io faculty, said that the Io brand and market position were important considerations. “We didn't want to dilute our brand in doing this. We did not want this to be an easy program, a program that folks could come into and breeze through.” Joe added that the focus of the program was not seen as a revenue generator or one that conferred certificates or lacked academic rigor. These excerpts demonstrate that program management were keenly aware of the Io doctoral program’s stature and its value to alumni and prospective students.

Pandora doctoral program synopsis. Pandora is a small sized private university categorized as R1, doctoral university of highest research activity located in the Southeastern United States. It is ranked as a top 50 graduate school in higher education administration by *U.S. News and World Report*. The Pandora doctoral program entered the market after the strong success of the Titan executive doctoral program; however, unlike the Titan and Io programs, the Pandora doctoral program did not include an international educational component and the Pandora cohort was a mix of K-12 and higher education professionals. The Pandora website stated that the program objective was to train scholar-practitioners to lead and operate colleges and universities, government agencies, professional associations, and consulting companies. Classes met

on the Pandora campus and the curriculum was structured to blend theory and practice by focusing on problems of policy and practice.

To further emphasize the practice focus of the program, the Pandora dissertation was structured as a group project with a culminating presentation to the sponsoring educational organization. This capstone project was structured to mimic a consulting engagement that students might experience in their professional career. The capstone project also provided students the opportunity to engage education professionals outside the classroom setting and established connections with partnering organizations, thus extending their professional network. Some capstone projects combined student groups from K-12 and higher education, thus providing a perspective that spanned the entire educational pipeline.

Pandora doctoral students came from numerous facets of leadership in higher education and K-12 education, including deans, associate deans, directors of admissions, as well as assistant superintendents, and principals. The online program information stated that the Pandora doctoral students were mid-career professionals from around the country who traveled to campus each weekend for the three-year duration of the program. The cost for the Pandora executive doctoral program was \$100,000 for the three-year program term plus expenses for books, transportation, accommodation, meals and personal travel to and from campus.

I interviewed two graduates of the Pandora executive doctoral program and two individuals associated with the program management and development. Despite

differences in structure and content, the Pandora graduates extolled the friendships developed in the doctoral program. Rita, who was vice president for college advancement, explained that the cohort structure was one of the strengths of the program because it provided opportunities for students to engage with each other and learn about the entire educational pipeline from practitioners. Nina, another Pandora graduate, highlighted the value of the multi-disciplinary cohort and how it deepened relationships with other professionals and expanded her understanding of the educational pipeline. While her focus was on higher education, she, “really liked that we would be forced throughout the program to work with teachers and K-12 administrators.” In addition to the cohort experience, Rita described the capstone project as very practical and useful for where “she wanted to go” with her career. She explained that faculty would source projects from universities that were struggling with some issue and students would rank order their interests.

While graduates described the capstone project as extremely practical and useful, Pandora administrators explained that group projects could be difficult to manage. A free rider challenge occurs when students cannot successfully divide the workload and students who contribute less are credited with the same achievement as those who contribute more. Despite these inherent challenges, Pandora administrators found value in the relationships that developed among student peers, faculty and partner organizations. In addition, the program’s learning objectives more closely aligned to the work environment that students experienced in their daily job. Katy, the program

coordinator, stated that the capstone project was what brought students to their doctoral program because they felt it was “precisely what they need and why they're pursuing the advanced degree.” She went on to state that the capstone was the right model for Pandora and would continue in its current format for the foreseeable future.

Other doctoral programs. These program synopses illustrate some of the program alternatives and development considerations. From a review of the online program information I found that some programs required face-to-face classroom interactions (Calypso) while others used technology to facilitate the diversity inherent in a cohort with a large international group of students (Mimas). The total cost associated with these doctoral programs ranged from \$40,000 (Metis) to \$160,000 (Calypso) for the full program term. The time to complete the program did not necessarily align with the program cost since program completion could be as short as two years (Io, Titan) to over three years (Callisto, Calypso). In addition, the dissertation experience varied by program, with some programs using a project format (Pandora, Mimas) while the majority required a traditional dissertation that emphasized a problem of practice. All programs used a cohort model to build connections with peers and faculty and some programs stated that the cohort experience continued beyond the completion of the program. Of the 12 programs reviewed, only four programs included an international educational component (Titan, Io, Mimas and Thebe). Of the four, Mimas’ doctoral program integrated the international experience into the regular classroom setting,

requiring students to travel abroad for many of the face-to-face classroom interactions in its doctoral program.

Beyond the structural difference between programs, new entrants were emerging into the educational market. The Metis doctoral program extended its reach beyond the Midwestern region and partnered with a community college in the Southwestern United States to offer an education doctorate in community college leadership beginning in 2018. The Ganymede program opened its doors to the executive cohort in the 2017 academic year in order to access full-time educational administrators. These two examples demonstrate that the educational market is actively seeking potential students across borders and structural boundaries by providing new options and models.

Higher education expert interviews. In addition to interviews with program graduates and administrators, I interviewed five individuals with expertise in higher education leadership and administration. This group of individuals included: Mark, the former president of a private liberal arts college; Dawn, a member of the faculty and coordinator of the Ed.D. program at a large public university in the Western United States; Mila, the director of a large higher education university association; Beth, professor and associate dean for academic affairs in the department of educational administration at a large public research university in the Southwestern United States; and Pat, the vice president for service and outreach at a large public university in the Southeastern United States.

The diversity of experience across all levels in higher education administration and leadership through affiliation with CPED and university associations represented by this group of five individuals provided a reasonable basis from which to consider doctoral program evolution and future including executive doctoral programs. As an example, Pat who developed an adult education program at a large R1 university in the Southeastern United States, explained that adult learners require different teaching methods. Course assignments should be made relevant within the context of the profession and role, balancing deep knowledge and breadth. Mark, a former college president, explained that developing and implementing doctoral programs without collaborating across university departments was a strong test of leadership at different levels. “Faculty know about more than curriculum and that knowledge needs to be included. But you cannot have the faculty creating a new department that's not going to get any students.”

These excerpts provide a glimpse into the considerations and challenges associated with the design, development and implementation of executive doctoral programs. Within the institution, the dynamic between administration and the faculty can create tensions if program goals are not agreed and physical plant requirements are poorly defined. In addition, faculty must recognize the challenges associated with teaching experienced professionals and applying research and theory to practice. The balance between the market for the higher education doctorate and institutional capability requires careful consideration as program designs are considered. It is not as simple as throwing together a course listing and requiring a dissertation in practice. The

perspective offered by individuals with higher education expertise can inform doctoral program design considerations beyond those of administrators and graduates alone.

Emergent Themes

Doctoral program descriptive data and participant interviews were the bases from which four distinct themes were revealed through data analysis. These four themes are listed with associated sub-level codes in Appendix D. The themes include: adult education or andragogy, which relates to adult learning and is distinct from pedagogy which is by definition, related to youth learning processes. Another theme relates to the doctoral program marketplace and its evolution including the history, current state and future of executive doctoral programs. The robustness of the doctoral program and its reputation is a theme that considers the rigor and factors related to the educational marketplace and its influence on the structure and content of doctoral programs. Support processes is the fourth theme and it concerns the activities and programs that are used to facilitate student learning and completion. I used these themes to extract findings for both research questions. Within each theme is the necessary evidence to expose the underlying experience of program graduates and the considerations and factors that result in changes to executive doctoral programs.

Research Findings

Analysis and findings for research question 1. The first research question sought to understand the executive doctoral student experience in terms of program characteristics, their motivation to pursue the Ed.D., and the underlying experience. By

examining the data that underpin the emergent themes, I discovered four findings that related to the student experience and what made a strong doctoral program.

Finding 1 (RQ1): Students felt transformed. Graduate participants used the words “transformational” and “life-changing” to describe their doctoral experiences. Digging deeper, I found three areas where graduates spoke to the sense of change that occurred. The first area of change that they experienced was the recognition that their rationale and motivation for undertaking the program no longer applied. They had new aspirations and the program would enable them to attain those goals. Another area where students felt they were changed by the program concerned self-awareness and improved confidence that reinforced their drive and ambition. Graduates were invigorated by the program experience and undertook new roles and activities. Program graduates also expressed that they realized new skills and capabilities that resulted in improved effectiveness. I explore these transformational areas in the following sections using the graduate participants own words as evidence.

Changing motivation. The publicly available online program information suggested that executive doctoral programs enable graduates to attain greater influence and authority in their profession. Titan’s program material highlighted that its graduates were presidents of colleges and universities. Such outcomes might have resulted from the selection criteria that require applicants to be high level administrators as well as the Titan graduate’s inherent capability. Other programs highlighted different outcomes and students enrolled anticipating that result, be it as a college president or global

entrepreneur. However, what was fascinating about the executive program experience was how it required students to test their assumptions to reinforce their goals and possibly consider new ones.

At Titan, Morgan described the final class session where the facilitator asked each student to explain how they felt about the program and what they will do now that program was over. To her surprise, Morgan stated, “I’m not sure that I want to work in higher education in the way that I have been.” She had been working in a higher education administration role for almost thirty years and believed that the executive program would provide the skills to realize greater authority, influence, and advancement. At the conclusion of the program, she realized she wanted to try something entirely different and embarked in a new direction as an educational consultant. The final class session was not the aha moment for her, but it was the first time that she vocalized what she had been thinking as she progressed through the program.

Edward described a somewhat similar experience at Mimas as he explained the process the program required in the evaluation of educational systems and networks. The Mimas program asked students to critically examine assumptions and in the process, test their beliefs. Edward said, “you start really looking at what are your motivations, what knowledge did you have or do you have now and that really starts to raise questions.” Edward continued to use these reflective practices to invigorate and define the mission

and aspiration of the educational institution where he was the Vice President of Program Management.

Increased confidence. Discovering that your underlying beliefs might be suspect can be a terrifying realization just as moving into an entirely different area of practice. These graduates did not jump into the deep end of the pool without support. Indeed, graduates spoke about the newfound confidence that came with the completion of the doctoral program. That confidence was as simple as realizing that the world was a bigger place than your local community and you had the skills to travel abroad. As Lexi said, “For some people in the program, they hadn't traveled at all, and now they're traveling for the first time and dealing with languages and cultures and different money.”

But the increased confidence resulted from more than just the international experience. Morgan summed up the doctoral experience as a revelation, “You have pushed yourself beyond your limits, done something really challenging and important. And it is a new confidence.” In addition, while reflection occurred throughout the program, Cole found value with the self-awareness that transpired in the program. He stated, “The most important thing is to really have a great self-awareness about yourself, which gives you confidence, which then translates thought into action to place you in situations where you're going to thrive.” The executive doctoral programs transformed students by building confidence that moved them to action.

Enhanced effectiveness. The action orientation informed by research and analysis that graduates gained in these programs was a result of their increased confidence but it

was tempered by a greater understanding not only of themselves but also the entire system. Graduates expressed that they were better able to understand the complexity of the broader educational system and able to navigate within that landscape to achieve results. Nina was very clear when she said, “I gained a much better sense of challenges of the whole university versus just the path that I was on.” Prior to embarking in the program, she had a narrow view of how university systems operated. Bart explained how the program helped him to realize that the university was not a closed system but worked within the broader community. He said, “We learned a lot about upper-level governance at a university, and how the wheels really turn, looking into things like finance, how economic trends can affect higher education.” Using data to inform decisions was a common theme across these programs.

Edward explained how his understanding of the education system grew to include adult training. He credited the Mimas program with helping him to delve into the underlying practices within the educational system, “You learn to apply a very specific lens to get down to root causes and not make assumptions.” He went on to add, “I think the assumption that global education equals higher education, this program also breaks down. You cannot separate higher education from adult training and from K-12.”

Executive doctoral programs instilled in graduates the ability to question assumptions, to critically evaluate systems, to expand systems to encompass the broader community and to question their influence and impact. Programs required students to reflect on the experience and its influence on their goals and ambition. Program elements

such as the international educational experience further stretched students and built self-confidence. As Edward said, “The vast majority of students will tell you the program is simply life changing from a personal perspective distinct from academic and I can't stress that enough.”

Finding 2 (RQ1): Programs were a good investment. While graduates may have discovered that their motivation for undertaking the doctoral program changed as they moved through the program, that realization did not reduce their feeling that pursuing the doctorate and the executive program was the right decision. Graduates spoke of the reputation and strength of the program as one reason for feeling that the program was a good investment. In addition, graduates mentioned the connection to peer, alumni, faculty, and partners as another benefit that these programs provided. However, positive feelings about the program were tempered by the fact that the program was costly, both financially and in terms of the time and energy associated with completing program. In this section, I provide evidence that speaks to the value of the program as well as the demands of the program to underpin the finding that executive programs are good investments.

Reputation. The prestige of the program was an important consideration for applicants because as Cole said, “What I generally tell people if they're thinking about it, make sure you get into the very, very, very best place you can because it makes a big difference to you and in the marketplace.” But knowing that you were attending one of the best institutions in the world did not necessarily confer success. For Cathy, the

reputation was measured in the success of its graduates, “The reputation of the Titan program was the key factor for me. I interviewed a lot of people who had gone through the program and they all had done extremely well in their careers.” Program administrators were also keenly aware of how program prestige influenced the market for applicants. Lily was quite clear that Io was competing with all types of higher education leadership programs, “When I think about who are competitors are, I think about executive programs, but I also think about the stature of institutions whether or not they have executive programs like ours.” She went on to add, “Io is a fantastic place. It's very highly esteemed, very well known. Our faculty are very well known and highly regarded nationally and internationally.”

Although the stature of the doctoral program was an important consideration for students, Cathy's and Cole's comments suggest that reputation alone was not the deciding factor for which program to pursue. Indeed, the program outcome was what graduates valued most, and administrators were quick to point out how programs provided connections to esteemed faculty and exposed students to global networks.

Connections. To say that executive doctoral programs are a good investment requires an understanding of the value they produce and outcomes. Online program information described the program content and a sense of outcomes through video testimonies that highlight current and former students. In addition, doctoral program materials described how alumni remain connected to the program. For example, the Titan website stated that its network of alumni around the world was a powerful asset that

starts to work when students enroll in the program and the network remains a life-long source of support. While other programs were not as explicit, the networks that were developed in the cohort and throughout the executive program were indeed valued by graduates.

Carla, a Mimas graduate stated, “I was able to build relationships, and to trust and connect with individuals who wanted me to be successful and it's proven to be great.” Edward further extolled the value of the Mimas network, “Mimas prides itself on the Mimas family and its very large network of alumni, globally. And so yes, there's connection with my colleagues that were in the program.” The connection was also valued by administrators who used the alumni connection to ensure that the doctoral program remains relevant. Joe said that Io wanted to be sure that it addressed what folks who are mid-level to senior-level administrators felt they needed in doctoral education. The Io doctoral program remains current by making sure it connects with graduates and potential students using the relationships established in the program.

Costs. There is no doubt that executive doctoral programs were pricey and ranged from about \$40,000 to \$160,000 for program tuition and fees for the full program term before adding expenses for travel to and from the institution. Despite the relatively high cost of these programs, students remained confident that the experience was valuable and a good investment. Indeed, Lexi found that the high cost was an inducement that resulted in higher level commitment, “There's a factor that we haven't talked about that, I think, informs that commitment to, perhaps, a greater extent than people are willing to admit,

which is, 'I am paying for this. No way, am I not finishing.'" Other graduates felt that even for students who received financial support, their support resulted in greater commitment.

In addition to the financial costs, there were social costs that students experienced. Morgan spoke about the challenges to friendships, "You really have to limit what you're doing outside of the program. They tell us to prepare our families and significant others, and friends, that we are going to be less available for the next two years." In the same manner that financial costs inspired greater commitment, the social costs resulted in stronger reliance within networks and with peers. Cathy spoke to the value of program alumni, "They had members from other cohorts come and talk to you about their experience. Things the institution can't share with you, but they can share with you because they had families. They had jobs. They had pressures, and how they managed through it."

When considering whether graduates valued the executive doctoral education experience, I examined how students considered factors such as the cost of the program, its reputation, and the connections that arose from the program. Graduates found that despite the high financial and social costs, the network and connections created opportunities that outweighed the short-term hardships associated with the program. Program reputation amplified the value of program connections because of the link to faculty and global connections that result and continue after program completion. As

Cole said, “If you're going to put that much time into something, your goal shouldn't just be to get through, it should be a high-quality experience in which you grow and learn.”

Finding 3 (RQ1): Content is a prominent feature in the value proposition.

While graduates valued the program experience and found that the program resulted in positive outcomes that they could not have anticipated at the onset, doctoral program graduates were very clear about what they wanted from executive doctoral programs. I considered this finding from three perspectives. The first point of view concerns the program curriculum and how elements of the program resonated with the graduates' professional experience and rationale for pursuing the credential. The second perspective concerns several program experiences that graduates found useful including the comprehensive exam required at some institutions. Since the dissertation requirement varied between programs, I include comments from graduates about the utility of the dissertation or project. Taken together, these three perspectives illustrate the sense of worth that graduates placed on the program content and how the experience was more valuable than the credential.

Curriculum. Many executive doctoral program graduates entered programs with significant professional experience and they sought to develop their expertise within the doctoral program. These graduates recognized that differing professional perspectives brought by faculty and peers extended their knowledge and understanding. Rita said, “I was able to bring my experience and knowledge as someone who'd been an administrator, and so while I was knowledgeable of the subject matter, I got to

understand it from a different perspective based on research.” Rita’s perspective demonstrates the value gained from research applied to practice. In another example, Bart explained that the international program opened doors, “It helped me get the position I have now, because I’ve got some oversight of international admissions and recruitment.” He further stated that the leadership component of the Io program expanded his understanding of executive management and decision making required for higher level leadership. In these two examples, I illustrate how the focus on specific topics such as leadership and bringing personal experiences into the classroom setting allowed students to fully participate in the learning experience. The whole-self environment enabled greater learning, not only for the individual student, but others, including faculty. In these excerpts, graduates clearly expressed their desire for relevant curriculum.

Experiences. Beyond coursework, some graduate participants stated that they chose their program for specific program elements such as the international component or the type of dissertation. For example, while not all programs included an international educational component, graduates of programs with travel abroad elements valued the experience. Carla clearly found the Mimas international experience valuable:

Another aspect that attracted me specifically to the program at Mimas was the ability to travel, and conduct research in different countries. So we also went to Hong Kong and to Abu Dhabi, as well as our cohort is very diverse. I think we only had maybe two people from the United States, myself and another woman from California.

Carla appreciated the Mimas program not only for the international component, but also because of the networking opportunity that she uses in her research today.

The cohort experience provided both support and meaningful learning experiences. In the Pandora cohort, Nina expressed that she valued working alongside teachers and K-12 administrators to understand some of their challenges. She went on to say, “It was probably good for them to hear some of the challenges we were seeing.” While Pandora did not have an international educational component, the differing perspectives in a cohort that included colleagues across the educational pipeline were clearly valued.

Some programs included a qualifying or comprehensive exam as part of the dissertation experience. In some cases, this element of the program was one chapter of the final dissertation product, and at Pandora, the exam was a stressful undertaking. Nina described the exam:

You really had to know your research and it was kind of demonstrating what you learned throughout the first two years. They really want you to not be in a situation where you can memorize everything but actually pulling all your research together. Which I actually think is better, to demonstrate that you can really make a compelling argument.

Notwithstanding the stress of the exam, the accomplishment was a worthwhile endeavor that graduates recognized as an essential element of the doctoral experience.

Dissertation. The culminating project was also an essential experience that graduates valued. Some stated that the dissertation demonstrated the rigor that would enable graduates to engage with faculty and scholars as equals. Others valued the project

experience that enabled graduates to experience consulting engagements. Regardless of project or dissertation, they were set in motion at the start of the program. Bart explained it as, “We kind of came in for that first module and they're telling us to already be thinking about our topic. That was very helpful to me in developing those skill sets that benefited me in my professional job.” Becky reinforced the need for the dissertation to align with professional goals, “I'll tell you what the real driving point was that my dissertation aligned with what my work was. It was in a topic area that would help me with my day to day work.” From the project perspective Rita explained, “We actually worked on our capstone projects together and it was great to have someone be in a classroom as part of that cohort to offer that perspective.” In these examples, graduates valued the ability to tie the dissertation and project experience to their professional endeavors. It was the utility of the experience that graduates valued most.

In considering the executive doctoral education content, I examined how students described their experiences and program curriculum. Graduates stated that despite the challenges of the program, they valued the applicability of the program content to their work and how educational research extended their professional practice. Graduates particularly valued the practical application of theory and research.

Finding 4 (RQ1): Structure also factors strongly in the value proposition. In addition to the executive doctoral program content, graduates greatly valued the structure of the program. In examining this aspect of doctoral program experience, I found four areas of concern. The first regards the organization of the program, its flexibility, and

how the program aligned with personal goals and the practicality of daily life. Another factor concerns how some programs used technology and other tools to facilitate learning. The third consideration regards how program processes supported students to enable completion. In addition to these tools and supports, graduates also desired programs that were flexible and adapted to the interests of the cohort.

Organization. While graduates valued the ability to choose a dissertation topic that aligned with their professional goals, they required a mix of flexibility and stability that allowed them to plan schedules and mitigate other demands on their time. Bart stated that when considering programs, he knew he wanted something that would allow him to hold a full-time job and still complete the doctoral program. All of the programs that I reviewed were organized so that students could work full-time while attending classes; however, Edward expressed that the structure of the Mimas program allowed for classroom sessions that were extremely focused and useful. “The Mimas structure is highly intense, in person, once per semester. That makes a huge difference as opposed to say, a long weekend once a month, because it allows the cohort to truly be global.” Busy executives required clearly defined schedules so that they could plan activities and accommodate their other responsibilities.

Technology. In addition to a defined schedule, technology was used to facilitate student and faculty interactions outside of the classroom. Carla explained that Mimas used a conferencing system for contact outside of class. She also mentioned that it was used during the interview portion of the application process. “You are also able to

connect with individuals 24/7 and it was very important for us to be able to do that because we were collaborating on research projects and things of that nature.” I did not find other collaboration systems that were as sophisticated as the Learning Management System at Mimas, though many of the programs used online programming for one-off type classroom activity.

Support. While I found that graduates valued programs that recognized their professional experience, it is worth noting that there was a structural component to this finding. Successful program administrators selected faculty who were skilled adult educators and graduates stated that skilled faculty help them grow and develop their expertise. Pat, an administrator who developed an adult education program as a large university, explained:

I believe that adult students enter a program of study with a level of expertise, which can be quite extensive and deep in an area. Because of this level of expertise, they may come in thinking they are expert and the degree is a means to an end. However, it can be a frustrating journey for them if their “value” is not supported in some way. On the flip side, faculty often treat the nontraditional learner like a traditional student and do not take the time to discover and regard the skill level and expertise of each student and how each can contribute to direct learning of their classmates and to the faculty member.

In addition to recognizing the experience that executive students brought to the classroom, executive students demand a certain level of support. Cole explained, “The way Titan arranges the kind of support that's necessary like IRBs and things to do with a lot of the research is excellent.” Edward explained, “People joke that it's a million-dollar program. All the little bricks are made for you and done and you're good to go.” This particular finding should not be surprising when you consider that these programs recruit

mid- to high-level executives who have staff and know how to delegate. Executive doctoral program students expect the same level of efficiency in the program that they demand in their work environment.

Adaptability. It is also no surprise that students who managed ambiguity in their daily jobs would expect some level of flexibility in the program. Graduates complained if certain elements of the program were not to their liking. As an example, Cole was unsatisfied with the proposed international program and expressed this feeling to the program director. “I was able to convince the person who was running our program that we should go somewhere different and it was fascinating.” To ensure that concerns and complaints were minimal, administrators conducted evaluations. As an example, Joe stated, “We try with our evaluations of our Ed.D. program to always be asking that question, What can we do better? What would make our program more responsive to what folks want?” All of the programs I studied included some element of assessment and survey. In this example, I found that the assessment extended to the marketplace where students were recruited. Program assessment is important to program administrators who want the program to remain relevant and useful to graduates and potential employers. The market for individuals with an education doctorate is an important consideration not only to graduates of these programs but also to program administrators.

Summary of findings for research question 1. To understand the motivations, experiences, structures, and outcomes that executive doctoral program graduates

described as making a strong program, I analyzed the research data using a successive series of coding, analysis, reflection, and organizing the resultant codes into higher level themes that describe the doctoral program experience. By applying these themes to the first research question, I identified four findings that define the program characteristics that graduates valued most. Graduates revealed that they sought the degree to create opportunities for advancement and realize new opportunities that they had not envisioned at the start of their program. The unexpected realization that they wanted to do something new was one example of how graduates stated that the experience transformed them and how they were able to understand the educational field in greater detail by questioning the assumptions and biases in the system and themselves.

In addition to the transformational experience, graduates explained that they had made the correct decision to attend the program. Graduates considered many factors before deciding to attend the doctoral program and once they matriculated, they committed to completing the program. Program reputation was an important contributor to the feeling that the program was a good investment, particularly because the relationships that developed in the program continued long after graduation. Remaining connected to the institution, the faculty and colleagues enabled graduates to stay up-to-date with the educational field. Therefore, while executive doctoral programs were relatively expensive, graduates found value in the realization of opportunities that developed in the program.

Despite a general appreciation of their program and outcomes, graduates were quite clear that the program structure and content were important considerations. Graduates looked for programs that allowed them to apply what was learned in the classroom to their day-to-day work activities. Many graduates explained that the dissertation and capstone projects provided an opportunity to study a particularly vexing work problem in detail and they appreciated the insight that developed through application of new perspectives and theory.

Although the applied coursework is a necessary aspect of the doctoral program experience, graduates require programs that enable them to work full-time. While there are a variety of program scheduling options, the concern for graduates was that the schedule was well defined and had flexibility for unexpected schedule conflicts. In addition, some graduates complained when certain aspects of the program were not up to par. One graduate explained that program administrators were open to suggestions and changed the location for the international component to better align with the desired learning outcome.

I did not encounter graduates who found particular displeasure with their program experience but some stated that they might have enjoyed additional program elements. For example, one graduate wanted a program with an international component but chose a program that better aligned work and travel schedules. Another graduate explained that it would have been nice to have more time to explore the dissertation project, but given the desire to finish versus continued research, completing on time won out. These

examples highlight the fact that there are numerous concerns that graduates balance in deciding the program that optimizes their competing priorities.

It appears that no single program component, structure or content alone was sufficient to define the strength of the doctoral program. Potential students considered the full suite of program characteristics in making their decisions. However, numerous graduate participants explained that the program reputation was a strong motivator for the program they chose. Given their investment in time and money, graduates explained that the program should be high-quality experience from which to grow and learn. Beyond reputation, these findings suggest that the executive doctoral program marketplace is a moving target and administrators must continually evaluate the market to remain relevant.

Analysis and findings for research question 2. The second research question sought to evaluate the state of doctoral programs from the perspective of program administrators and experts in the field to understand how and why these programs change. I now turn to evaluating the state of the programs from the perspective of doctoral program administrators and experts in higher education. By examining the research data from all data sources, I discovered four findings related to the concerns of program administrators and higher education experts that explain how doctoral programs remain current and adapt to the changing marketplace.

Finding 5 (RQ2): The market is changing. The education doctorate market is changing as evidenced by the emergence of more executive doctoral programs and the

variety of program formats. I found that, in addition to new entrants and formats, market demands are dictating how administrators become aware and respond to these program alternatives. I begin by discussing new program entrants followed by program focus and the influence of the executive doctoral marketplace.

New entrants. From the review of the online program information, I noted that there was a wide array of program offerings including a program that partnered with an institution outside its region to access students in another region of the country. In addition, the influence of the CPED program principles resulted in greater clarity concerning the design and structure of practitioner-focused programs, resulting in greater program similarity. This result is not surprising since the intent of the CPED organization is to define education doctorate program characteristics and distinguish it from the Ph.D.

While education doctoral programs appear similar, there can be distinction in terms of focus and the structure of the program. However, in an effort to access more students and in particular, students who work full-time, programs such as Ganymede have moved to a weekend class format. It is therefore not surprising that Mila, an administrator and individual with expertise in higher education, stated that in five years we would see a lot more similarity in doctoral models across the United States. As traditional program schedules adjust to access full-time educational administration professionals, executive doctoral programs must better define what makes them distinct. Indeed, the distinction of the executive doctoral program offering can become confused

by the array of program alternatives including traditional doctoral programs that are attuned to practitioners.

For potential students, the expansion in program alternatives can be viewed as a windfall; however, program administrators must examine the strengths of their program. Graduate participants explained that program scheduling was only one consideration for their choice of program and reputation was a priority as well as content and structure. It is therefore imperative that executive program administrators consider their value proposition alongside not only new entrants but also new formats and the focus of the doctoral program.

Program focus. Some participants argued that executive programs are revenue generators or perhaps survival mechanisms that emerge as more students opt out of the traditional daytime classroom structure. However, even as new formats emerge, academic rigor remains a relevant factor for students and administrators. Lexi, a graduate of the Io program, stated, “The institutions are taking the programs seriously, academically. As opposed to just, “How much money can we extract by recruiting giant cohorts? They're saying, what do we offer that's unique and good?” Lexi’s comments underscore the need for administrators to examine the strengths and uniqueness of their programs. Doctoral program administrators are defining their market niche and developing programs that align with their areas of expertise. Jen, an administrator with higher education expertise, stated, “We have some programs that are called Ed.D. in Social Justice but not all institutions have experts in that and can really frame an entire

program around it. But they do have people who teach ethics and equity courses that can be integral into that program.” Jen’s comments suggest that Social Justice might be part of a doctoral program, but for it to be the central focus of the program, the faculty and the program must be designed around that theme.

In these examples, I find that the central focus of doctoral programs is an area of distinction. I anticipate that we will see more programs with a defined area of focus and the areas of distinction will increase. The Mimas global education doctorate program is a good example of a niche market program. The Mimas doctoral program’s global focus attracts students from across the world and students travel to different countries for regular classroom activities. The Mimas program is designed to accommodate the global diversity of its students through structure and content that is designed around the relationships and competence of its faculty. Program focus appears to be a growing area of distinction in the executive marketplace.

Market influence. Executive doctoral program development remains strongly influenced by the market. Bart stated that he sought the Io program because, “it was specifically marketed as a degree to help you be a better manager and better leader in the higher education setting.” Indeed, Joe, an administrator at Io, described the doctoral market demand as being influenced by what potential students wanted as well as the skills employers felt higher education leaders need. In describing the evolution of executive doctoral programs Joe stated:

I think the programs were more functions of what was perceived as a marketplace in higher education administration. They saw that as what potential students

wanted, and also as a response to what critics of these programs are saying, that the thesis often proved totally irrelevant or largely irrelevant to what students would actually be doing once they graduated.

In this example, Joe referred to the need for the dissertation to relate to problems of practice. Students and employers wanted executive doctoral programs to develop practical and useful skills for the challenges they face in their daily job.

Even when programs are built on institutional capability, the market remains a consideration. Jen stated, “I believe that the reason programs differ is because they have a reason to be different. It's because either they don't have the skills or expertise to teach everything, or they don't have the demand from students from their region.” Market demand is influencing program design and outcomes. As an example, the Metis program is targeting community college professionals in the Southwestern United States even though it is situated in the Midwest region. The Metis doctorate has a community college leadership focus and is delivering its program using partnering organizations and faculty from across the United States. The expansion by Metis into a new region suggests that there is an opportunity to access students that are not being served by other local programs.

Graduates and administrators discussed the influence of the market on the program. One graduate, Becky, explained that the desired outcome was more than the credential and hinted at other factors that influenced its quality. “I think the biggest drawback to these programs is that certainly they will get you through. You'll have the credential. Is one better than another? I think it depends on where you hope to

work when you're finished.” Administrators Jen and Joe reinforced these concerns but added that the market was only one consideration. Programs are also defined by the skills and capability of the organization. Student goals can explain why programs are different, but you must also consider the mission, goals and capabilities of the institution.

Finding 6 (RQ2): Program assessment varies. To say that the executive doctoral market is changing in response to changing student needs requires an understanding of outcomes. In order to evaluate the success of their programs, administrators seek information from student evaluations as well as partners and other stakeholders. In addition, organizations such as CPED are influencing program design; however, there are no common assessment criteria. I found that program assessment was not necessarily ad-hoc but varied from institution to institution. I explain how program administrators listen to stakeholders and the influence of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate to illustrate how program assessment varies across institutions.

Administrators are listening. The usual practice across educational institutions is for students to evaluate programs and faculty. Executive doctoral programs are no different, though the strength of the cohort model provides a safe space where students share their appreciation and concern. Morgan related the Titan experience, “At the end of our program, everybody in the cohort got together in a big circle and it's sort of a time to reflect on the program. How did it meet your expectations? What's your key take away?” Beth, an administrator and higher education expert stated, “It's not about how

they know they're successful I think, in particular. But you identify the success factors, and determine whether or not they're successful according to those success factors.”

While I did not find a corresponding action associated with these two examples of program feedback processes, Katy, the program coordinator at Pandora, explained that they seek feedback at the end of the program and time and time again, they find that students are “very happy with their experiences.” Katy added that, as a consequence, the capstone was the right model for Pandora and not something that they “would ever walk away from.” Joe also stated that the Io program shared the curriculum with local employers and aspiring students found that they have support from their institutions the instant they show Io program materials to their employer.

While these examples do not illustrate a direct connection between feedback and program changes, the administrators I spoke with shared that they were considering program modifications. Programs without an international component suggested that they were considering adding it. Others suggested that they were considering using online programming to a greater extent, though there was a concern that it might detract from the cohort experience. These observations suggest that program changes result from market influences in as much as they do from direct feedback and assessment.

CPED influence. The Carnegie project sought to define a standard assessment process but because circumstances varied across its member institutions no single assessment tool was possible. Instead, the CPED principles have become a basis for program comparison and members share program updates and details during regular

meetings. Jen explained that this approach provides flexibility and context for its membership:

Our membership pushed back and said that there was no way that there could see a one size fits all assessment model for these programs. So, when we let go of that, we move towards this idea of a set of principles to evaluate programs and set a kind of standard class program that would also be flexible in terms of context of the institution as well as context of the kinds of constituents that were coming into Ed.D. programs.

Despite the flexibility that its principles allow, CPED remains steadfast to the concept that the education doctorate is distinct from the Ph.D. The consequence of this position is that member institutions have moved to a dissertation in practice model which allows for either a dissertation or capstone project. However, designing the dissertation process around problems of practice is not sufficient to distinguish the Ed.D. The program coursework must also be redesigned. Jen emphasized this point and said you cannot just take a Ph.D. and switch some classes around or reduce credit hours and suddenly you have an Ed.D. “It is a rethinking of every aspect of the program.”

While there is no consistent assessment standard, the influence of CPED and its design principles provide guidance that program administrators use to develop doctoral programs. I found that the CPED principles did not forestall the need for student evaluations and the cohort model facilitated perhaps a greater connection between student and faculty that resulted in a more honest assessment of program outcomes and experiences. In addition, program administrators explained that they are using the alumni network to keep abreast of program content needs. Io is a CPED member institution and Joe said that he uses their alumni network to understand what can be done

better. However, Dawn, an administrator at a CPED member institution, suggested that the focus seems to be more on programs that emphasize skills to make students better practitioners. While some institutions may be tracking graduates, she was not aware of how that was impacting doctoral program changes.

Finding 7 (RQ2): Program development is complex. The education market is changing causing doctoral program administrators to continually assess program performance and outcomes. As a consequence, program development is no simple task. Program administrators cannot pull together a program design without consulting faculty, nor can faculty propose a design without considering the required resources. In my analysis, I found that program administrators and experts were keenly aware of the need to engage multiple groups in the design and implementation of programs. I begin with a discussion of the resourcing challenge followed by program design considerations.

Resources. Doctoral market and program assessments can suggest the need to redesign the doctoral program, but adjusting the doctoral program requires that faculty and administrators jointly define the financial, personnel, and physical requirements for any new program offering. Mark, a former college president and the author of numerous books on higher education leadership, stated that program design is a strong test of leadership at different levels. The faculty can design the curriculum since they have expertise in that area, but they cannot be excluded from the physical investment decision. “There has to be a lot more real sharing because faculty know about more than curriculum and that knowledge needs to be valued.” He added that you also cannot have

the faculty creating a new department that might not attract students. Therefore, organizing a program requires collaboration at all levels, the recognition that market forces influence demand, and an understanding of the capabilities of the organization.

From a different perspective, graduates must understand the challenges facing program staff and faculty. Lily, an administrator at Io, recognized that graduates might want more career advising when she said that Io was not adequately staffed to provide such support. She added that adding a career planning process had been discussed and eventually, Io may add it. In explaining the rationale she stated, “For the students who have a high position in mind, they are well-placed and well-connected and have probably had those conversations already.” She added that for the student, the doctoral program is more of a final piece in the puzzle to get to the next organizational level. The implication is that career planning is not a priority and not necessary for the Io program. Program administrators prioritize program elements and as a consequence, not everyone will find the level of service and support to their liking. My understanding from the graduate interview data is that students are not overly interested in career planning and are attuned to the market opportunities before they matriculate as Lily suggests.

Design. Program design also requires convincing other members of the institution of the program’s value. The challenge of convincing seems to fall more on the shoulders of a few champions, as Jen explained when talking about CPED meetings.

We have regulars that come to our meetings that they're faculty back at their home institution and not just the faculty, but deans and graduate deans helping them understand why this needs to look different. There's still a lot of convincing required.

Jen further explained that faculty must rethink the curriculum to fit the practitioner model and that process can be a heavy lift. In one example, she stated that the research courses need to be redesigned for practitioners and taught in a way that applies more to practice than research. For some faculty, such a change in focus is not something they recognize or want to make.

While I did not inquire about constraints on faculty time, Jen's comments suggested that not all faculty members want or know how to make course content relevant to practitioners. It could also be that many of the faculty members feel more confident with their current set of courses and research interests and as such, adapting courses to teach practitioners is not something they choose to do. As an example, Jen explained how the teaching approach also needed to be modified. "Traditionally practitioners were told to leave their practitioner knowledge at the door and that everything they were going to learn, from here on out, was truths, and anything they learned in practice was just anecdotal." Jen spoke from the CPED perspective and her role as an administrator in a large R1 research institution where research was the focus of the education doctorate. As a champion for doctoral program change, Jen stated that not valuing the practitioner experience was "a huge disservice to practitioners, who come with a well of understanding of the real world and day-to-day practice." She added that the intent of practitioner-oriented teaching is for the student practitioner to develop tools that can be applied to practice long after they graduate.

In speaking to the challenge of implementing executive doctorate programs, Joe, an administrator at Io stated, “There was a battle to be fought with administration, with the graduate school, and so forth.” Having won over these stakeholders, he explained that the Io program remained fresh by continually contacting other institutions. “We're in touch with them or they might send us a query about what's covered in our program.” He added that students continued to enroll at Io in the numbers they wanted so there had not been a need to redesign the doctoral curriculum.

Executive doctorate program design and development is a complex undertaking that requires administrators to consider the skills and capability of the institution as well as the doctoral marketplace. This information alone is not sufficient to enable program implementation. Securing resources requires finding allies and supporters within the faculty, administration, and across the institution. The CPED principles provide assistance with design and program examples from among member institutions but the authority to enact change rests with the institution and its leadership. Often, a few select champions are the catalysts for change and doctoral program reform.

Finding 8 (RQ2): Connectivity is a key success factor. Designing and developing executive doctoral programs is a challenging task that requires an awareness of the doctoral market and the requirements of relevant constituencies. Therefore, doctoral programs must establish relationships and maintain connections with students, graduates, relevant stakeholders, and other doctoral programs to ensure continued success. These groups provide information to assess program outcomes and for programs

to remain relevant to constituents. I begin the discussion of the connectivity needed for program success with comments about the breadth of program relationships, followed by the awareness program administrators glean from these groups.

Relationships. Doctoral administrator participants spoke about program design considerations in relation to other programs and the history of the education doctorate. These considerations included the need to take the pulse of the education market by engaging interested parties that include potential students, alumni, employers, faculty, legislators and other stakeholders. The relationships with these groups can become an integral part of the doctoral program experience. For example, the new program at Ganymede stressed the professional mentoring model which was embedded in the field experience and relies on relationships with educational stakeholders. Ganymede students developed professional connections to facilitate their development during the program and throughout their career. Arranging these mentors required Ganymede administrators to work with interested employers and alumni. Another administrator participant explained that the international experience leveraged the connections that the program developer had with international institutions. In another example, the leadership sessions at Io resulted from the program director's relationships with leaders across education and industry. The breadth of the relationships enhanced the program experience for graduates and at the same time, provided administrators the opportunity to become aware of employer and constituent needs.

Awareness. Personal connections facilitated various program experiences and were a source of information to inform program outcomes. One program administrator explained that their alumni network allowed them to learn what changes were necessary to improve the program and respond to the market. Beyond the competitive market, doctoral administrator participants explained the challenge associated with changing programs and the benefit of working with the CPED organization and its design principles. CPED members reviewed program design, development, and implementation concerns, and discussed issues relevant to members during their regular meetings.

While doctoral program management can be challenging, one program administrator explained that the awareness gained through the relationships with interested partners such as local, state, and federal government officials, former students, employers, and community groups provided needed information to keep executive doctoral programs relevant and successful. As an example, Katy, the Pandora coordinator, explained how important relationships were to program success. “We had an alumni conference to mark kind of the graduation of the tenth cohort since the program redesign and 75 percent of the students came back to campus.” Katy added that the high return rate among indicated that students were very hungry for these things and it helped to keep the program relevant for incoming students.

Summary of findings for research question 2. To understand how individuals with expertise in executive leadership assess and critique current executive education doctoral programs and future developments for these programs, I examined the research

data and identified four findings that demonstrated that the education marketplace is complex and program administrators are constantly testing how their program needs to adapt to remain competitive and relevant. Despite the need to respond to market influences, program assessment was significantly different between institutions because the contextual situation differs for each program. Indeed, program administrators explained that developing the doctoral program required collaboration and convincing various groups within the institution of the need to change the doctoral program. Program changes were sometimes necessitated to access students or in the recognition that practitioner scholars require a teaching style that values their professional expertise. While university groups sought to define assessment standards, the organizational complexity across institutions necessitated that each program work within their own system. Relationships with constituent groups were therefore a key success factor for program design and development and also for programs to remain relevant to graduates and educational employers.

Underlying these findings is the realization that the executive doctoral marketplace is changing. The influence of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate and its over eighty-member institutions is a strong case in point. CPED members have created a set of guiding principles that state doctoral programs must have a leadership focus and practitioner orientation. Some CPED members have structured their program so that students can work full-time; therefore, executive programs must better

differentiate their value proposition. Some executive doctoral programs enhance their program niche through a network of alumni, employers, and other programs.

Notwithstanding the similarity that will exist across the education doctoral market in the future, program brand and reputation remain a priority in the minds of graduates and administrators. Programs that can demonstrate their value proposition with measured outcomes will continue to be successful. Indeed, the Pandora program administrator explained that they are beginning to track graduate outcomes. The Io program does something similar through employers and alumni relationships.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented a synopsis of the research data and explained how the variety of program formats resulted in largely positive graduate student experiences. In addition, I presented eight research findings related to the program experience and how doctoral programs adapted to changing market conditions. Regarding the program experience, I found that executive doctoral program graduates felt that the program was transformational in ways they did not anticipate and expressed that there were elements of program content and structure that contributed to that transformational outcome. Administrators explained that the educational marketplace is changing and that designing doctoral programs requires diligence and working closely with a variety of interested partners. These findings underscore the finding that strong doctoral program result from careful consideration of organizational capability alongside the demands of the education market. As market conditions change, executive programs must better define their value

proposition to protect their brand and reputation. In the next chapter, I discuss these findings and consider the relevance of the theoretical framework to program development and the student experience. In addition, I discuss implications for practice and recommend areas for future study.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

In the previous chapter, I presented research findings concerning the experiences of executive doctoral program graduates and the considerations administrators use to design, develop, and continually adjust these doctoral programs. In this chapter, I discuss these findings and consider their relevance to theory, practice and future research. I also include a discussion of the limitations and significance of the study to further explain its utility. I provide concluding comments concerning implications for doctoral program design and end with a summary of the chapter. To begin, I provide a short summary of the study's purpose, research questions, and methodology as context for the review of findings and recommendations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to understand executive education doctorate programs and how these programs are changing to inform program design, development and implementation. The study considered these aspects of doctoral education from the perspective of graduates and administrators of executive doctoral programs and individuals with higher education leadership expertise. These distinct perspectives provide greater clarity and understanding of the doctoral program experience to inform the two primary research questions.

1. What motivations, experiences, structures, and outcomes do executive Ed.D. graduates describe as making a strong program?

- a. How do graduates / alumni describe their motivation to attend a higher education executive Ed.D. program?
 - b. How do graduates / alumni describe the appropriate structure of an executive Ed.D. program?
 - c. How do graduates / alumni describe the critical experiences of executive Ed.D. programs?
2. How do people with expertise in executive leadership assess and critique current executive Ed.D. programs in higher education and what future developments and changes for these programs do they anticipate?
- a. How do experts in executive leadership describe the current state of executive Ed.D. programs including structure, quality, outcomes, networking, and practical skill development?
 - b. What do experts in executive Ed.D. programs predict that executive Ed.D. programs will look like in the future?
 - i. What challenges do experts see executive programs facing? How are programs overcoming these challenges?
 - ii. How do experts advise programs evolve in response to changing higher education contexts and needs?

Methodology

Since the study sought to understand executive doctoral program experiences and administrator considerations, I applied a phenomenological approach to the research

design and methodology. Phenomenology is particularly well suited to investigate the underlying experiences of a specific situation such as the lived experiences of doctoral program graduates (Creswell, 2013). While the phenomenon was not confined to a specific institution, I interviewed a total of ten graduates with at least two and sometimes, three graduates from four executive doctoral programs at public and private institutions. These four institutions were among a set of 12 doctoral programs that I reviewed as a representative sample of executive doctoral programs in the United States.

In addition to graduate participants, I interviewed ten administrators and individuals with higher education expertise to gather information about the factors they considered when developing executive doctoral programs. Four of these participants were associated with the same institutions as the graduate participants. The remaining six administrators and expert participants had higher education expertise that applied directly to higher education including adult education, executive education, and leadership.

The study's credibility and validity were enhanced by the triangulation of multiple data sources that included public information from doctoral program websites, program graduate and administrator interviews and interviews of higher education experts. In addition, I kept notes of each interview, coding memos, and reviewed these notes and reflections with colleagues to maintain a consistent approach throughout each interview and during the data analysis process. I organized and reorganized codes to settle on four overall themes that represent the underlying experiences and considerations of executive doctoral programs. These themes included: andragogy, program reputation,

program evolution and support systems. I applied the resultant themes and underlying data to the two research questions to arrive at a set of eight findings.

Summary of Findings

The research findings focus on the executive doctoral program experience and the factors and considerations that graduates of these programs and program administrators believe make a strong program. In addition, administrators and higher education experts provided evidence to support findings that illustrate the considerations required for program design, development and implementation as well as the evolution and future of doctoral education. For succinctness I summarized these findings in Table 5.

Table 5.

Summary of Research Findings

Findings for Research Question 1

1	Students felt transformed. Upon program completion, graduates explained that they had increased confidence, enhanced effectiveness and some stated that they realized opportunities they did not anticipate when they entered the program.
2	Programs were a good investment. Graduates explained that the strong reputation of the program and the networks they developed more than outweighed the monetary, time and personal costs of the program.
3	Content is a prominent feature in the value proposition. Graduates sought program curriculum and experiences that resonated with their goals and motivation for pursuing the doctorate and valued programs that applied directly to work challenges.
4	Structure also factors strongly in the value proposition. The program schedule and supporting processes were a priority for graduates who have personal and professional demands on their time.

Findings for Research Question 2

5	The market is changing. Traditional doctoral programs are adjusting course schedules to accommodate working professionals and programs are seeking to differentiate by defining specialty areas of focus.
6	Program assessment varies. The Carnegie Project of the Education Doctorate principles provide an evaluation framework, but doctoral program administrators assess program outcomes through a variety of processes.
7	Program development is complex. Doctoral program reform requires collaboration across the institution and program champions face numerous challenges to motivate faculty and administrators to change established programs.
8	Connectivity is a key success factor. Keeping doctoral programs relevant and fresh requires situational awareness of the market and strong relationships inside and outside the organization.

Implications for Practice

The participant experiences that were revealed in this study, as well as the findings, are directly applicable to the practice of doctoral education in four areas. First, the transformational nature of the program experience is underpinned by reflection and critical thinking that are contained within numerous aspects of the program including the cohort, dissertation model, international education, and group projects. Second, the collaboration and relationships that develop in the program explain how the educational experience remains relevant and current for graduates long after they complete their studies. In addition, the program structure is an important consideration for potential students who seek programs that allow them to balance work and other duties while pursuing the education doctorate. Lastly, program assessment requires greater clarity to assess outcomes and ensure these doctoral programs remain effective and to determine if program modifications are needed. I discuss these four areas of practice and provide a theory of change to explain the environmental and other factors that influence the doctoral program experience and program reforms.

The transformation experience. The transformation experience that graduates described was deeply personal and as a consequence, the experience cannot be attributed to a single aspect of the program. For some participants, cohort diversity created greater awareness of the challenges across the educational pipeline and national borders. Others spoke of the reflective practices learned through the exploration of research practices and personal biases.

Graduate participants explained that the program was more than they anticipated at the onset. By the completion of the program, they experienced greater self-awareness and confidence and realized personal changes that resulted in new career opportunities. For some participants, those career opportunities were in a completely different discipline than at the start of the program because as students reflected and examined their personal biases and assumptions, they discovered aptitude and aspired to new career pathways. These reflective practices occurred throughout the program but were most evident in the cohort and dissertation processes of the doctoral program.

Prior to applying to the program, some graduates explained how they examined their situation. One graduate reflected that at age 45, he was ready for greater authority. Another graduate explained that at age 55, she sought executive leadership and the program would provide the necessary ticket for that role. These examples align with the Adult Development Theory transition stage of development wherein an individual experiences tensions when they advance to higher levels of maturity (Erikson, 1956).

Transitions can be challenging and graduates also explained that the doctoral program was intensely challenging. The application process, the uncertainty whether they would be accepted, the experience of meeting equally ambitious colleagues, and learning to digest and apply research to practice required more than just a motivation to advance. Students needed to demonstrate a willingness to learn and recognize that their experience while valued was lacking. Notwithstanding their openness to learning, graduate participants valued learning experiences that directly related to work problems

and had practical application. These aspects of the program are consistent with andragogy and Adult Learning Theory.

In regard to practice, administrator participants also mentioned that these programs can be transformational. Creating an authentic transformational experience is clearly the intent behind the education doctoral program design; ensuring that personal transformation occurs requires that the program is structured and organized to deliver that outcome. Recognizing that the program is a transitional moment for students requires that program processes support students through advising, mentoring and peer challenge. The cohort model was cited by many graduate participants as a model for such support. In addition, program administrators should structure programs to enhance and strengthen the work experiences students bring to the program by aligning curriculum and teaching to recognize the experienced student professional.

Relationship considerations. One way that program administrators design programs that deliver transformational experiences is through peer, faculty, and collegial encounters. These are as simple as group projects for class assignments to major work efforts such as the dissertation. In addition, the international travel component of some doctoral programs was another way that administrators facilitated student engagement outside the classroom. The cohort model is of course one of the foundational tools used to build relationships among students and the diversity of the cohort can enhance and deepen student understanding and awareness. Graduate participants spoke of the benefits of having a cohort that was cross-disciplinary and in some doctoral programs, the

diversity extended across national borders. Since relationships underlie the transformational experience, practices that facilitate students to collaborate are desirable.

The applicability of the learning experience to practice was reinforced by the friendships and collaboration that were inherent in the cohort experiences. Graduates explained that they learned so much from their peers and that the diversity of the group, both in terms of discipline and nationality, was a high point of the doctoral experience. In addition, graduates explained that the connection to practice was enhanced by peers explaining how the educational experience applied in their work situation. Graduates also stated that the international education experience provided a needed perspective to broaden their higher education expertise. The relationships that developed in the doctoral program continued long after graduation and remained a source of learning and support. The questioning and learning that underpin these experiences are consistent with Critical Friends Theory (Storey, 2013). The cohort model and dissertation processes are excellent areas to apply these practices to deepen relationships and improve learning experiences.

Structural considerations. Programs can create authentic experiences that transform student perceptions about the educational system and their role in it; however, potential students would forego the experience if they cannot manage the demands of the program within an already hectic schedule. The use of technology to allow students to engage 24/7 is becoming more prevalent, particularly for programs that include a large group of international students. In addition, some programs have moved to a longer time commitment for face-to-face classroom meetings with a longer period between classroom

sessions. Regardless of weekend, monthly or quarterly frequency, and the use of technology, the program structure must be well organized with sufficient time for working professionals to manage the demands of the program with other commitments. Potential students choose programs that they fit into their schedule and they will choose the program that provides the experience they are seeking. Therefore, program administrators must balance these structural considerations against the realities of the institutional capability in terms of faculty availability, facilities, and support staffing requirements.

While program schedules could detract some students from considering a doctoral program, my understanding of the findings is that students consider multiple factors when evaluating programs. Many graduates cited program ranking, reputation and prestige as priorities. They also cited the rigor and intensity of the program when explaining the experience and its value. In summary, program scheduling cannot trump the integrity of the experience. As one program administrator explained, “We did not want this to be an easy program, a program that folks could come into and breeze through and get the credential.” The value of the credential is paramount and program structure is only one indicator of program worth.

Assessment considerations. Despite desiring a flexible program schedule that permits full-time work and allows students to manage other personal priorities, graduate participants are not seeking a free ride. They and program administrators do not want to diminish the value and brand associated with the executive education doctorate.

Executive doctoral program administrators and higher education experts explained that maintaining the reputation of the doctoral program required continual evaluation of program content and networking with alumni, partner institutions, and other stakeholders. In addition, they stated that designing and developing doctoral programs required collaboration across faculty and administrators to ensure resource requirements were made available to ensure program success. Program design considerations also included the need to examine the skills and capabilities of the organization so that doctoral program goals and mission were reinforced by the strengths of the individuals assigned to teach and facilitate the delivery of the program. In addition, administrators demonstrated flexibility and awareness of graduate needs by adjusting program content when necessary.

In these examples, I find that doctoral program design and development is dependent on the relationships that underpin the program offering and delivery. Administrators assess program outcomes by engaging students as part of the learning experience. These engagements continue through alumni who serve as ambassadors for the program and as a source of capstone and other course projects. By maintaining connections with program alumni, the doctoral program's connection to practice is enhanced particularly when graduates explain how aspects of the program are relevant in their job. Therefore, relationships that developed in the doctoral program are a continual source of information for program administrators.

Yet, despite the need to stay current, program administrators and experts stated that developing programs was a challenging undertaking. Faculty working in isolation as well as administrators setting constraints without understanding the complexity associated with program design was a somewhat common occurrence. One administrator said that change was not easy in explaining how curriculum and teaching methods needed to align with the practitioner orientation of executive doctoral education. However, it is important to remember that the market determines the need for change. As more doctoral programs enter the marketplace and program offerings expand, administrators are challenged to keep programs current and fresh.

Some participants explained that they assessed the quality of the dissertation and other program elements to ensure the executive program was equally challenging as other doctoral programs at the institution. In addition, doctoral program administrators explained that they continually assess program outcomes by engaging alumni and other parties. The CPED principles also provide a basis for assessment; however, this study did not find a consistent application of program assessment. If transformational experiences and program effectiveness are desired outcomes, assessment practices must become a regular part of program design and development. I propose a theory of change that can provide a basis for such an assessment.

Theory of change. The research findings highlight the relevance of Adult Development, Adult Learning, and Critical Friends Theory to aid in the understanding of doctoral programs. In addition, the education marketplace and the assessment of program

outcomes by administrators suggest that there is a feedback mechanism with doctoral program evolution. To illustrate these points, I organized the research findings into a diagram to show the doctoral program experience.

As illustrated in Figure 3, doctoral program attributes such as the mission, goals, application criteria, program ranking, content, and structure influence the program experiences such as the dissertation, cohort, and international education processes. Potential students consider their personal attributes in relation to the program experience to test for alignment. As students move through the program, the program and student influence each other. Students might require that programs adapt to their needs such as changing the international experience and doctoral programs influence student development through self-awareness, reflection, and extended relationships with peers and colleagues. Program completion and the realization of personal goals are outcomes of the doctoral experience.

The proposed student development framework also illustrates how Adult Development, Adult Learning, and Critical Friends Theory are situated within the doctoral program experience. These theories can explain the transformational and relationship experience of graduates and highlight the doctoral program attributes that enable these experiences. Strong doctoral programs have defined mission and goals that are supported by the skills and capabilities of the faculty. Strong doctoral programs protect the institutional brand and reputation by continually assessing performance and ranking in relation not only to other programs, but the higher education leadership field.

These doctoral programs clearly define the target student to enable a cohort experience that belies the relationships and networking that continues after program completion. In addition to a successful cohort experience, strong executive doctoral programs structure the dissertation, leadership, and other experiences to enable greater peer and professional networking.

A more complete illustration of the doctoral experience and adaptation processes includes the influence of the environment as well as the influence of the doctoral program administrator on the program experience. Environmental factors such as competition and the job market can affect the demand for jobs requiring doctoral degrees and thereby, influence the number of individuals seeking the education doctorate. Likewise, the pool of available doctoral program administrators is affected by changing market conditions. At the same time, market conditions affect doctoral program attributes. For example, program administrators explained that they contact employers to share information about program content and confirm relevance. One program administrator explained that the director role was a career-expanding opportunity.

In addition to environmental influences, the system must include the full set of program outcomes such as program ranking, alumni networks, and overall completion rate. Graduate and program outcomes provide feedback to influence program attributes and adaptation. Therefore, program and graduate outcomes, environmental influences, and administrator attributes form the basis for program design and evolution.

This continual cycle of program reform is illustrated in Figure 4 as the doctoral program theory of change. It is grounded by the research findings which suggest that executive doctoral program adaptation results from regular assessment, program outcomes such as ranking and prestige, and the influence of program champions who convince the wider institution of the need for doctoral program reform. The theory of change does not provide an answer to the second research question concerning the future of doctoral education, but it provides a basis for how doctoral programs evolve. The proposed theory of change applies Relational Developmental Systems Theory concepts to organize the research findings in a coherent and structured way to illustrate how the executive doctoral system is a continual cycle of doctoral program renewal. It provides a basis to explain the transformational aspects of the student experience and how program administrators adjust programs based on student feedback and other considerations. The theory of change also demonstrates the influence of program components that make a strong doctoral program. In addition, the theory of change can be used as an assessment tool to align program attributes and outcomes.

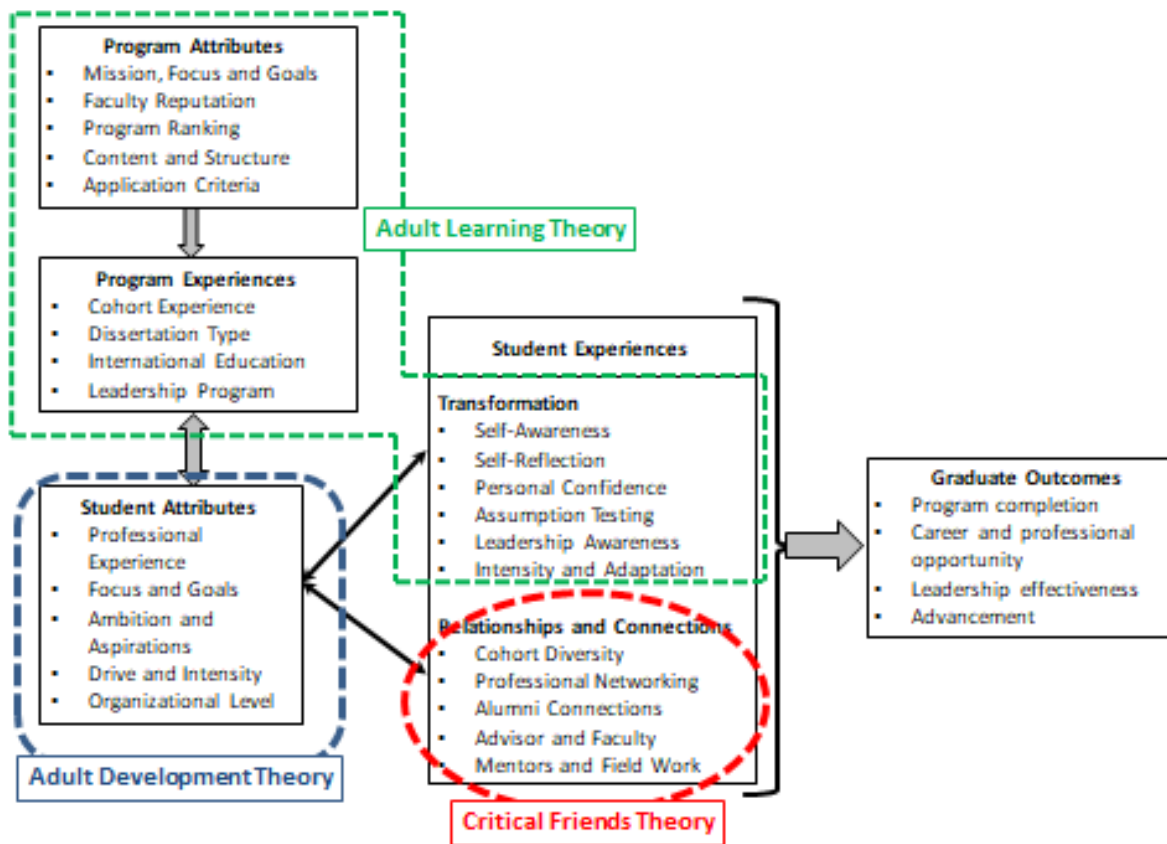


Figure 3. RDST Framework of the Doctoral Program Experience

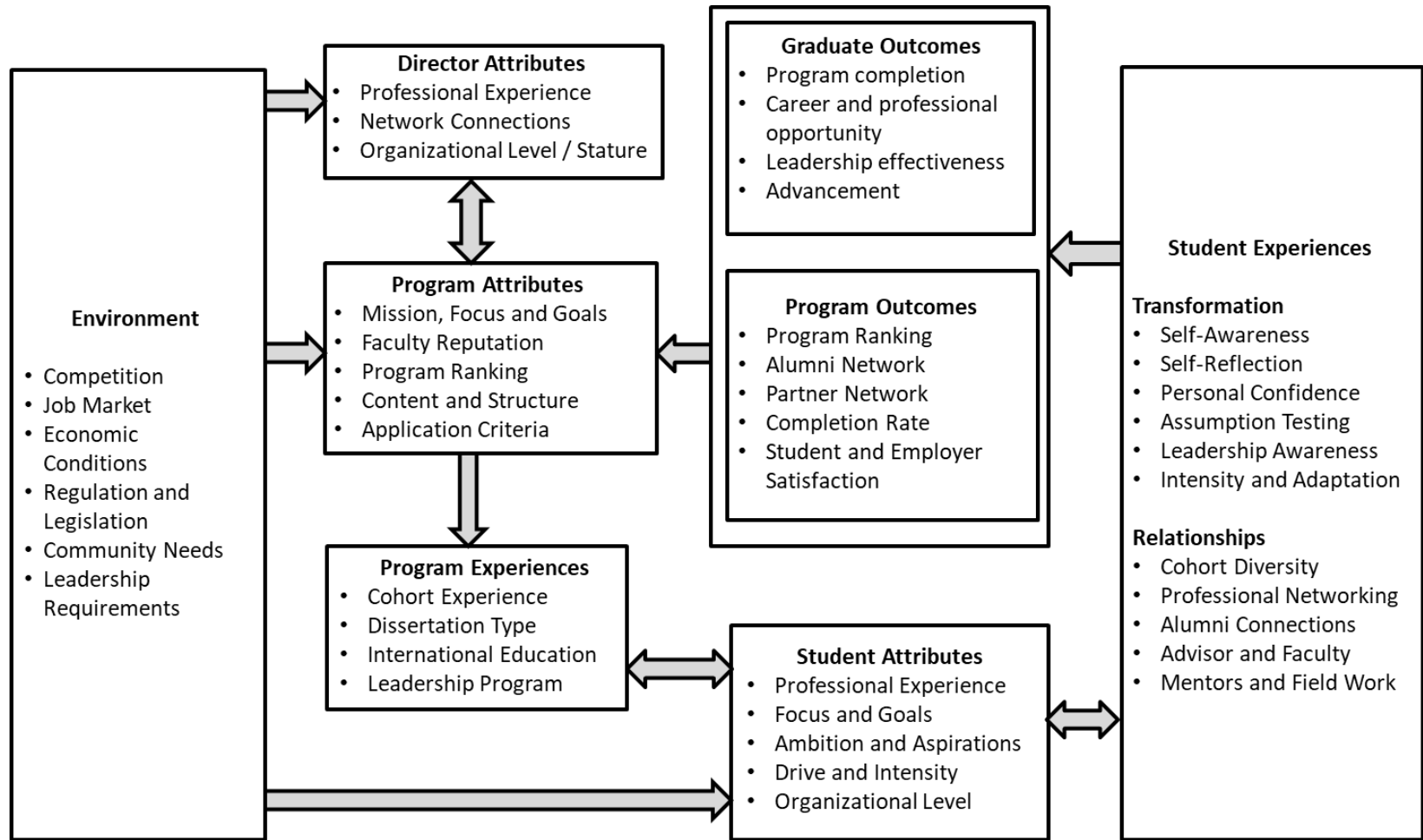


Figure 4. Proposed Doctoral Program Theory of Change

Limitations

Since this was a qualitative study that considered a specific sample from across only a few executive doctoral programs, this research study cannot be generalized to the wider population of executive education that are within the realm of quantitative inquiry. In addition, the participant sample was the result of search criteria linked to doctoral program websites. The selection criteria used to identify program and expert participants was also constrained by the choice of programs and the expertise identified in the review of relevant literature. The study did not identify participants who may not have completed the doctoral program. Instead, this study only offers contextual accounts of the doctoral program experience as told by the 20 program and expert participants.

In addition, participation in the study was entirely voluntary and individuals self-selected into the study. The perspective of a self-selected sample can only provide the perspectives of those willing and perhaps enthusiastic about the program experience. The study excludes accounts from individuals who are within the study criteria and could offer a different perspective. While I also sought referrals, the majority of the participants represent individuals that provide a view of the program that aligns with informational material available in the online doctoral program information. The research study excludes the perspective of individuals who are reluctant to discuss the executive doctoral program experience within the confines of a research study. Notwithstanding these concerns, study participants were quite open about their experience and I was extremely humbled by their candor and openness. However,

because of these considerations, this research study cannot be replicated beyond the application of the methodology to another sample population.

Significance

This study has possible significance in the areas of educational research and practice. In terms of educational research, this research study contributes an exploration of the experiences of adult doctoral education regarding senior professionals who choose to work full-time while pursuing the doctoral degree. Prior work in this area largely focused on differences between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs. More recent research considered enhancements to doctoral programs to distinguish the education doctorate as a practitioner degree suitable for individuals interested in careers outside academia (Perry, Zambo, & Wunder, 2015). Through the CPED organization, additional research has investigated the experiences of graduates and administrators of education doctorate programs, but little research has looked exclusively at executive doctoral programs. This study provides insight into the experiences of doctoral program graduates and administrators of executive doctoral programs to inform the motivations, objectives and outcomes of program graduates. In addition, the research study highlights the challenges associated with the development and implementation of executive doctoral programs. The understanding of program experiences by administrators and graduates gleaned from this study can be used to improve executive doctoral program effectiveness and outcomes.

The RDST framework that blends Adult Development, Adult Learning and Critical Friends Theory demonstrates how these theories intertwine and provide an explanation for the motivation, learning, and developmental aspects of the doctoral program experience. In addition, these theories have relevance to the design, development, and reform of doctoral programs. Storey and Taylor (2011) showed how Critical Friends Theory applied to the design of doctoral programs through the interaction of institutions both within and outside the CPED organization. In addition, Storey and Wang (2017) provided an example of using CFT in graduate education. The Reflective Education framework (De Dea Roglio & Light, 2009) illustrated the application of Adult Development theory to executive business education and this study finds similar applicability to executive doctoral education. Indeed, the cyclical nature of CFT and Adult Learning Theory suggest that the doctoral program experience continues through the relationships that extend long past program completion. It is therefore not surprising that the doctoral program experience originates when potential students consider their life-stage in relation to their current situation. Having decided to pursue the doctorate, adult learners seek doctoral programs that align theory and practice, and their learning is enhanced by the relationship experiences of the program. With that in mind, the potential significance of the study offers considerations for understanding doctoral education and executive program processes as well as how these programs adapt to environmental factors to ensure that desired program outcomes are realized. The proposed theory of

change illustrates the doctoral program experience and can provide a basis for program assessment (Figure 4).

Future Research

As I began writing this research study I realized that despite the numerous ongoing research studies and work underway to refine education doctorate programs including the work of the CPED organization, there are numerous areas that can inform program development and practice. In this section, I list four possible areas for further study that could be informed by the data collected in this research effort. These areas include: the competitive market, program differences, longitudinal affects, and faculty development. The competitive market topic relates to the growing variety of program formats as well as the size of market and how it is accessed. The program and longitudinal affects topics seek to understand experiential differences across format and time. Faculty development concerns the need for faculty to facilitate adult learning and connect doctoral program content to relevant practice. Investigating these aspects of executive doctoral programs would provide a greater understanding of the doctoral program experience and design considerations.

The doctoral marketplace. An administrator participant mentioned that there are more and different program formats and it was becoming less clear what might distinguish executive programs from other education doctorate programs. In addition, another program administrator suggested that they continually assessed the market through contact with partner institutions and alumni. While I only reviewed 12 doctoral

programs for this study, the program set included a doctoral program that was developing partnerships to start a program in another part of the country. Administrators also mentioned the quality of programs varied and one graduate explained that the value of the credential depended on the program reputation. Taken together, these considerations make it clear that potential students, graduates, administrators, and interested stakeholders are clearly thinking about the executive doctoral program as a market. Future research that examines the size, scale, and evolution of the market would inform practice and respond to questions about program quality and value.

Program differences. For this research study, I considered the executive doctoral program experience across all institutions regardless of format or institutional type. In addition, understanding how technology, diversity of cohort, and the other program differences inform the student decision process is an area for future study. The research data for this study provide at best a small glimpse into doctoral program attributes. A case study methodology could be used if more data are collected and the results would better inform how differences in dissertation format, cohort diversity, and the like impact the student experience and program outcomes.

Longitudinal effects. For this study, I collected participant information concerning the year that graduates completed their program and some administrators spoke about the evolution of the executive doctoral program. Within these data, there appears to be some variation between graduate participant views concerning the relative importance of program elements and the time since graduation. For example, graduates

who completed their studies more recently seemed to value the leadership component of the doctoral program more so than graduates of a much earlier cohort. I chose not to include this piece of information in the list of findings because the graduate sample includes very few participants who completed their studies more than seven years ago. In addition, an examination of findings related to program relevance requires a deeper investigation of doctoral program content and structure over time. Despite shortcomings in these data, I believe there is value in understanding how programs evolved and to what extent program evolution was related to the importance students placed on curriculum, content, and format. Future program design considerations are informed by a deeper understanding of how and why doctoral programs change.

Faculty development. The CPED principles provide a framework for education doctorate program design and bring a practitioner focus that is distinct from the research orientation of the Ph.D. Indeed, many CPED institutions have invested substantial effort to redesign the Ed.D. curriculum to highlight differences between problems of practice and research related investigations. One administrator explained that you cannot take a Ph.D. program, switch a few courses and reduce credits to create an education doctorate program. In addition, adult learners require skilled facilitators that guide development towards self-directed learning and provide students the space to bring professional experience into the classroom. One expert participant explained that the doctoral experience can be frustrating if the student's expertise is not included in some way. Faculty must discover and value the skill level and expertise of every student and

consider how each student contributes to the learning environment including the faculty member's own learning. Adult Learning Theory and CPED principles provide some insight into skills required for executive doctoral program faculty; however, this research study did not investigate faculty development and how particular teaching skills and techniques translate into successful doctoral program outcomes. Nor did this research study consider how faculty transition from traditional doctoral programs to teach adult learners. Therefore, executive program faculty development including defining the skills needed to teach executive learners and how to transition faculty to practitioner oriented teaching are worthwhile areas of research.

Implications for Program Design

In this study, I examined the executive doctoral program experience through analysis of program and higher education expert interviews and online doctoral program information. The participant perspectives and online program data provide a rich understanding of the program attributes that doctoral students value and the experiences that program administrators seek to create. Graduates explained that program reputation was an important consideration because prestigious programs delivered outcomes that resonated with student objectives to expand career opportunity and leadership effectiveness.

Nevertheless, program reputation must align with the goals and aspirations of the student, and students sought programs that provided broadening experiences that included a diverse cohort, international exposure and curriculum and dissertation

experiences that enhanced the student's professional expertise. Students were prepared to invest substantial resources in terms of time, money and personal expense to pursue programs that delivered these developmental outcomes. Program administrators tested alignment of program outcomes with students, alumni and interested stakeholders to ensure that programs maintained the rigor and intensity of traditional doctoral programs and as a consequence they stated that doctoral program reputation was enhanced.

Despite assessment measures and processes to secure doctoral program reputation there remains a variety of program formats and structures. The review of online program information illustrates that some institutions are expanding into new regions and others are entering the executive doctoral market. The review of literature finds that doctoral program will continue to flourish because of increased demand and the doctoral marketplace has space for continued growth and diversity. Indeed, the CPED principles provide a framework for program design that enables program flexibility and doctoral program administrators stated that programs are different because there are clear reasons to differentiate. The research findings indicated that the doctoral education market and institutional capabilities influence doctoral program design.

Putting these observations into practice suggests that successful doctoral program design begins with a critical assessment of the organizational skills and capabilities that underpin program reputation. For example, it would be imprudent to design a program around a Social Justice theme if the faculty lacks sufficient grounding and expertise in access and equity practices. I intentionally used the term "practices" and not "research"

because the emphasis on practice is central to executive doctoral program design. Graduates and program administrators explained that executive doctoral programs focus on practical experience and the application of theory to problems of practice. CPED principles further underscore the need to orient the curriculum and instruction of the education doctorate towards practitioners. As a consequence, the assessment of organizational skill must also address the capabilities of the institution to facilitate adult learning with a focus on problems of practice. Higher education experts explained that adult learners seek program content that resonates with their professional aspirations. Many graduates explained that they valued the dissertation experiences that informed particularly vexing problems in their work setting.

Beyond designing a doctoral program built around reputation, organizational capability and problems of practice, the research findings suggested that program management must find instructors that can facilitate adult learning. Successful facilitation recognizes that mid- and senior-level leaders can be transitioning between developmental stages and the added stress of the program can be extremely challenging for doctoral students. Therefore, doctoral program faculty must guide students through this transition and help them move toward self-directed learning. Program faculty must also value the professional expertise of doctoral students and create successful learning experiences that allow the diverse experiences of each individual to be shared and explored. Graduates explained how the program director and faculty engaged the cohort

and facilitated personal development throughout the program. Graduates also valued the relationships developed within a cohort of experienced professionals.

In addition to these program design considerations, doctoral administrators explained that successful program development required champions with strong influencing skills to convince the faculty, administrators and other stakeholders of the need for program reform. One higher education expert explained that successful programs collaboratively design the curriculum, resourcing, and economic requirements for doctoral programs, and added that you cannot have a successful program, if the economic flows that derive from the doctoral market are not factored into program development. In addition, these program champions leveraged their relationships to enhance the doctoral program. For example, one administrator explained that the international education component was developed around relationships with international faculty. Another administrator explained that the leadership sessions resulted from the relationships the program director had with education and business executives.

As a consequence, successful program design begins with an understanding of the factors that influence the doctoral market. As illustrated in the theory of change (Figure 4), the external environment influences doctoral program attributes that are relevant to potential students. Factors such as the job market, competition and regulation influence doctoral program requirements. Program outcomes such as ranking and the alumni network also influence doctoral program content and structure. Beyond these considerations students seek programs that provide practical skills development and

enhance their effectiveness in their professional setting. Successful doctoral program design and implementation requires skilled and capable leaders able to assess the external environment and align multiple stakeholder groups around the need for executive education that produces self-directed learners. Doctoral programs that develop higher education leaders are directed by champions with the drive and influence to convince the broader organization of the need for practitioner oriented executive doctoral education.

Conclusion

In this research study I considered executive doctoral programs across the country to understand the characteristics of strong programs and their development. The findings suggest that the doctoral market is an important consideration for program design and the external environment features strongly in the proposed theory of doctoral program change. While many program administrators and higher education experts mentioned the importance of the doctoral market, the assessment of the market was not fully explored. Indeed, the review of programs finds that there is substantial change occurring in the executive marketplace. Programs are expanding into new areas by partnering with institutions outside their usual area of influence. Some institutions use adjunct faculty to provide skills and expertise that may be lacking within the existing program faculty.

In addition, traditional institutions are arranging course schedules to accommodate working professionals leading to confusion concerning the distinction between executive and traditional doctoral programs. While CPED principles define the distinction between Ed.D. and Ph.D. as practitioner and research orientation, there is now

a need to define the difference between an executive doctoral program and education doctorate programs for working professionals. In the review of the 12 programs and analysis of participant interviews I find that executive programs are distinguished by the student selection criteria, program content and the processes that underpin the program. Executive doctoral program students are usually senior-level professionals that bring significant expertise that facilitates learning beyond traditional instruction. In addition to educational administration topics, program content includes management and leadership development concepts often with access to business management topics facilitated through guest lecturers. While the cohort process is becoming prevalent in traditional programs, the executive cohort is strengthened by the expertise of senior-level administrators and the facilitation of faculty skilled in guiding adult learners towards self-directed learning and becoming skilled practitioners who use data and research to inform decisions and improve practice.

These observations suggest that the next phase of study must extend beyond an understanding of the doctoral market to include the influence of the many factors that continue to shape the market. For example, CPED's influence on program design extends beyond its more than eighty member institutions since non-member institutions can access the publicly available program design principles. In addition, program administrators discussed the doctoral market in both national and regional terms. The scope and scale of the doctoral market is an important consideration in the development of programs in addition to institutional capability. Higher education expert participants

expressed this concept in terms of economic flows, but the discussion failed to explore how to develop this information. Therefore, while this research study defined the characteristics of strong doctoral programs and how these programs develop and change, there remain several additional areas of study needed to fully ground program design and development. The following research questions form a basis for executive doctoral program design beyond the current research effort.

1. How do executive doctoral program administrators assess the market and how does that assessment influence program design and structure?
 - a. What is the influence of new executive doctoral program formats on program design?
 - b. How do CPED and other groups influence program design?
 - c. How do graduate outcomes and employer requirements influence program design?
 - d. How is the executive doctoral market impacted by traditional Ed.D. programs that cater to working professionals?
2. How do institutional administrators assess and define the appropriate set of doctoral program offerings?
 - a. How do administrators define doctoral program focus and graduate outcomes?
 - b. How do administrators define the required resources including faculty development and technology?

- c. How do administrators manage multiple doctoral program offerings including sharing staff and faculty across programs?
- d. How do administrators assess program elements such as the international education component in relation to other program components?
- e. How do administrators decide when it is appropriate to adjust doctoral programs and implement new programs?

Future research in these areas provides grounding for the development of new doctoral programs and transition away from traditional programs. While I identified some new program entrants in the review of 12 doctoral programs, the above research questions provide additional insight into how programs move from development to implementation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented a discussion of the study's key findings and implications for practice as well as its limitations, significance, areas for future research, implications for program design, and conclusions. The first research question for this study was: What motivations, experiences, structures, and outcomes do executive Ed.D. graduates describe as making a strong program? This question was considered in the discussion of the transformative nature of the executive doctoral program as well as the content, structure, and relationship elements of the program. Graduates valued doctoral programs that provided rich experiences for self-discovery, created developmental opportunities, and extended personal and professional networks. The second research

question was: How do people with expertise in executive leadership assess and critique current executive Ed.D. programs in higher education and what future developments and changes for these programs do they anticipate? The discussion of findings related to the second research question revealed that the market for executive doctoral programs is continually changing as new formats and programs enter the market. The ever-changing marketplace creates complexity that requires program administrators to align the skills and capabilities of their institution with the program content and structure best able to reach the desired student population. The relationships that develop in the executive doctoral program are important to graduates and a valuable resource that administrators leverage to align programs with the doctoral marketplace. It is the doctoral market that influences the need for program reforms and skilled program administrators assess the external environment and adjust program content and structure to produce the desired program outcomes. Understanding how administrators consider the doctoral market and its influence on program design is an area worthy of future research to inform the design of new executive doctoral programs and modify existing education doctorate programs to facilitate improved practitioner learning and development.

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guides

Table 6.

Doctoral Program Graduate Interview Guide

1. Describe the doctoral student experience.

- a. Can you start by giving an overview of when you participated in the program and what the Ed.D. program was like (from the beginning, e.g. application, admission, orientation, etc.)?
 - b. What did you learn and how was the program structured, e.g. electives, dissertations, treatise, cohort experience, etc.?
 - c. What was your most memorable learning experience in the program, e.g. coursework, internships, apprenticeship, dissertation, etc.?
-

2. Describe the decision to join the program.

- a. What other programs did you consider, e.g. executive programs only, online programs, private versus public institutions, reputation, etc.?
 - b. What factors influenced your decision to join the program, e.g. cost, curriculum, schedule, funding and financial support, career aspiration, network opportunity, affiliations, etc.?
 - c. How did cost-benefit analysis factor into your decision to join the program, e.g. scholarship, employer support, growth opportunity, etc.?
 - d. What obligations did you have with your employer as a result of joining the program, e.g. commitment to stay with employer, scholarship, advancement opportunities, etc.?
-

3. Describe advising, mentoring, and peer experiences.

- a. Describe the relationship with your advisor and mentor, e.g. how many, how often, roles, objectives, etc.
 - b. Describe the relationship with peers and other students, e.g. how many, program supports, self-developed, institutional supports, etc.
 - c. How did these relationships develop, e.g. were these a conscious part of the program, goals, when did these develop, cohort only are broader, etc.?
 - d. What is the current state of these relationships, e.g. how often do you reconnect, institutional supports, self-directed or more prescriptive, etc.?
-

4. Describe your doctoral program

- a. How was the program structured (e.g. coursework / other requirements, cohort-based, etc.)?
 - b. How and in what ways did the program change while you were a student?
 - c. How were you involved in the evolution of the program?
 - d. How did any program changes affect you?
 - e. What experiences were most valuable, e.g. networking, coursework, dissertation, etc.?
 - f. How well did the doctoral program align with your goals, e.g. outcome alignment, career alignment, etc.?
 - g. What elements of the program did you find most beneficial, e.g. schedule, peer network, faculty connection, reputation, etc.?
 - h. What elements of the program would you eliminate or change, e.g. coursework, project versus dissertation, etc.?
 - i. Why did you decide to pursue an executive Ed.D. program in higher education leadership, e.g. career advancement, cost, schedule, etc.?
 - j. What other Ed.D. programs did you consider, e.g. online, traditional, part-time, etc.?
 - k. How did you decide on this program of study, e.g. job alignment, skills development, etc.?
 - l. What was the treatise or dissertation requirement and how relevant was it to your aspiration and work goals, e.g. structure, practitioner focus, etc.?
-

5. Please provide information about yourself

- a. Demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity)
 - b. When did you attend the program?
 - c. Work experience (roles prior to and since graduation)
 - d. Suggested other individuals to interview.
-

Table 7.

Doctoral Program Administrator Interview Guide

1. Describe the administrator experience.

- a. Can you start by giving an overview of how and when you participated in the program? What did the position entail?
 - b. What is the most challenging part of the job, e.g. managing multiple cohorts, tracking student progress, managing budgets, etc.?
 - c. What do you find is the most rewarding part of the job, e.g. connecting with students, learning about different institutions, etc.?
-

2. Describe experiences with students and colleagues.

- a. Describe your relationship with students, e.g. what is your role, how often do you meet students, do you seek out students or do they come to you, etc.?
 - b. Describe your relationship with colleagues, e.g. how many staff, what are role differences, how often do you interact with colleagues outside the executive program, etc.?
 - c. How did these relationships develop, e.g. are student and colleague relationships part of the job description, do relationships continue after students graduate, etc.?
 - d. What is the ongoing nature of these relationships, e.g. do relationships extend beyond the daily set of activities, what happens when students graduate, etc.?
 - e. Who are the target students for the program, e.g. how for you select students for the program, what marketing do you do, etc.?
 - f. How do you reach them, e.g. where do you advertise, networking, etc.?
-

3. Describe the Executive Ed.D. program

- a. Briefly describe how the program is structured.
 - b. How and in what ways did the program change during your tenure as an administrator?
 - c. How were you involved in the evolution of the program?
 - d. What is the most distinguishing feature or experience of the program, e.g. cohort, singular experience, international elements, etc.?
 - e. What are the goals and objectives of the program, e.g. graduate fulfillment, expansion, distinguished alumni, etc.?
 - f. What elements of the program do you believe are most beneficial, e.g. practitioner focus, networking, graduate advancement, etc.?
-

- g. What elements of the program would you eliminate or change, e.g. continual evaluation of program, outcome orientation, etc.?
 - h. What challenges were experienced during the development and implementation of the executive Ed.D. program, e.g. faculty objectives, scheduling, curriculum development, etc.?
 - i. Why did the institution decide to develop and implement the executive Ed.D. program, e.g. new revenue source, reputation and prestige, connect with higher level administrators and alumni, etc.?
 - j. How does the program differ from other Ed.D. programs at your institution, e.g. faculty are practitioner focused, no dissertation requirement, etc.?
 - k. What are the goals of the treatise or dissertation requirement and how do these compare to other Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs at your institution, e.g. practical application and project oriented, less research intensive, multiple student project, etc.?
-

4. Please provide information about yourself

- a. Demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity)
 - b. When did you begin your position?
 - c. Work experience (roles prior to current position)
 - d. Suggested other individuals to interview.
-

Table 8.

Higher Education Expert Interview Guide

1. Describe your area of expertise

- a. Can you start by providing an overview of how you became engaged in higher education leadership Ed.D. program analysis and evaluation?
- b. What is the most challenging aspect of higher education leadership program design, development and implementation, e.g. building consensus, engaging outsiders, sourcing funding, etc.?
- c. What makes higher education leadership Ed.D. programs relevant, e.g. talent development?

2. Describe experiences with colleagues.

- a. Describe your involvement with students, e.g. how do you engage students?
- b. Describe your relationship with colleagues, e.g. with whom do you consult, what groups or associations do you engage, etc.?
- c. How did these relationships develop and how are they maintained, e.g. what methods do you use?
- d. Who is your audience, e.g. scholars, policy makers, etc.?
- e. How do you reach your target audiences, e.g. what media do you use to connect with interested parties, etc.?

3. Describe the current state and future of Executive Ed.D. programs

- a. Briefly describe how programs are typically structured
- b. How and in what ways have doctoral programs changed and what changes do you anticipate?
- c. Why do doctoral programs continue to change and what does their evolution suggest concerning the future of executive Ed.D. programs?
- d. What is the most distinguishing feature or experience of an executive Ed.D. program, e.g. cohort, singular experience, international elements, etc.?
- e. What elements of executive doctoral program do you believe are most beneficial, e.g. practitioner focus, networking, graduate advancement, etc.?
- f. What elements of doctoral programs would you eliminate or change?
- g. What do you anticipate as challenges for administrators and students of executive Ed.D. programs?

4. Please provide information about yourself

- a. Demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity)
- b. When did you become engage in higher education degree program development?

c. Work experience (roles prior to current position)Suggested other individuals
to interview.

Appendix B. Introductory Email Exemplars

Exemplar recruitment email for program graduates –

Dear Prospective Study Participant,

As a graduate of xx, I would like to speak with you concerning your experiences in the executive doctoral program.

I am a doctoral student in higher education leadership in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. My dissertation research regards understanding the experiences of graduates and administrators of executive education Ed.D. programs in higher education leadership. The results of the research study will be used to inform the design, development and implementation of executive education Ed.D. programs.

I write seeking your participation in this research effort and agreement to a 1-hour interview regarding your doctoral program. The interview will be guided by the following lines of inquiry.

- Experiences as a doctoral student.
- Experiences with advising, mentoring, and peers.
- Describe your doctoral program
- Any additional information.

I understand that you have many demands on your time and appreciate any consideration you can provide. Should you have any specific or clarifying questions, please feel free to contact me directly at the telephone number listed below or through email.

Thank you for your time and support for this research effort.

Kind regards,

Frank Hernandez
Doctoral Student
The University of Texas at Austin
Cell phone (xxx) yyy-zzzz

Exemplar recruitment email for program administrators –

Dear Prospective Study Participant,

I seek an interview to discuss your experiences as the administrator of the (xx) executive Ed.D. program of study.

I am a doctoral student in higher education leadership in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. My dissertation research regards understanding the experiences of graduates and administrators of executive education Ed.D. programs in higher education leadership. The results of the research study will be used to inform the design, development and implementation of executive education Ed.D. programs.

I write seeking your participation in this research effort and agreement to a 1-hour interview regarding the (xx) Ed.D. program. The interview will be guided by the following lines of inquiry.

- Experiences as an administrator
- Experiences with students and colleagues.
- Describe the doctoral program
- Any additional information.

I understand that you have many demands on your time and appreciate any consideration you can provide. Should you have any specific or clarifying questions, please feel free to contact me directly at the telephone number listed below or through email.

Thank you for your time and support for this research effort.

Kind regards,

Frank Hernandez
Doctoral Student
The University of Texas at Austin
Cell phone (xxx) yyy-zzzz

Exemplar recruitment email for individuals with higher education expertise –

Dear Prospective Study Participant,

I seek your thoughts regarding the current state and future of executive Ed.D. programs.

I am a doctoral student in higher education leadership in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. My dissertation research regards understanding the experiences of graduates and administrators of executive education Ed.D. programs in higher education leadership. The results of the research study will be used to inform the design, development and implementation of executive education Ed.D. programs.

I write seeking your participation in this research effort and agreement to a 1-hour interview guided by the following lines of inquiry.

- History of higher education executive Ed.D. programs
- Experiences with students and colleagues.
- Current state and future of executive Ed.D. doctoral program
- Any additional information.

I understand that you have many demands on your time and appreciate any consideration you can provide. Should you have any specific or clarifying questions, please feel free to contact me directly at the telephone number listed below or through email.

Thank you for your time and support for this research effort.

Kind regards,

Frank Hernandez
Doctoral Student
The University of Texas at Austin
Cell phone (xxx) yyy-zzzz

Appendix C. Initial Data Analysis Codes and Code Similarity

1. Advice to Presidents – institutional leadership considerations
2. Advising – student mentoring and advising
3. Alternative Programs – program format alternatives
4. Alumni Network – graduate networking activities
5. Application Rationale – student decision process to pursue doctorate
6. Career Support – career planning and placement processes
7. Class Schedule – program logistics
8. Cohort Model – cohort considerations
9. Curriculum – course requirements
10. Decision process – student decision concerning program alternatives
11. Dissertation Experience – description of the dissertation
12. Financial Aid – financial support and incentives
13. Future Challenges – higher education challenges
14. Instructors – faculty requirements
15. Intensity – program challenges
16. International Experience – international educational experience
17. Mission – program goals and objectives
18. Outcomes – anticipated program benefits
19. Overall Experience – description of program experiences
20. Pedagogy – instructional methods
21. Ranking – program reputation
22. Supports – other student support processes
23. Target students – desired student attributes

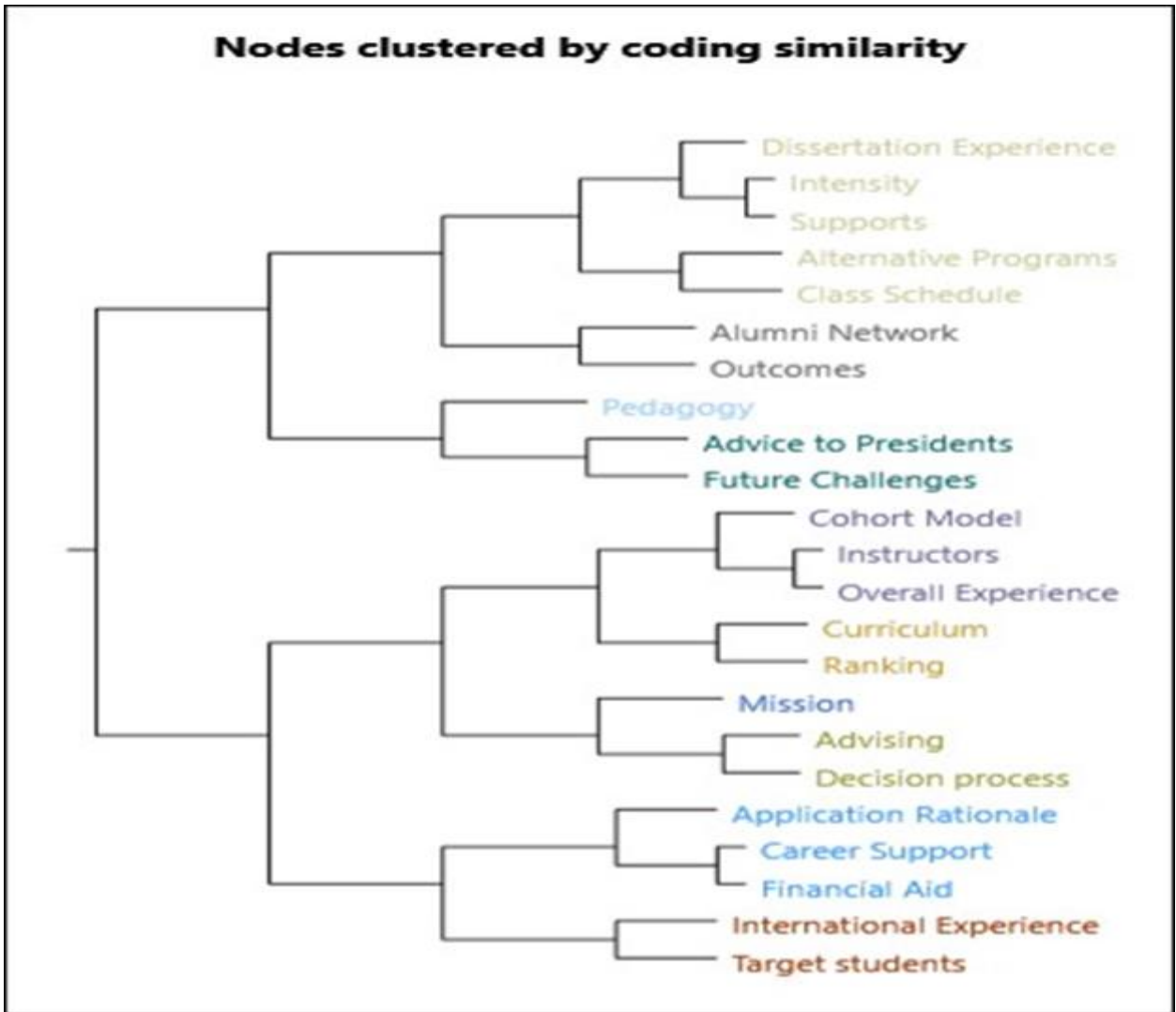


Figure 5: Nodes Clustered by Coding Similarity

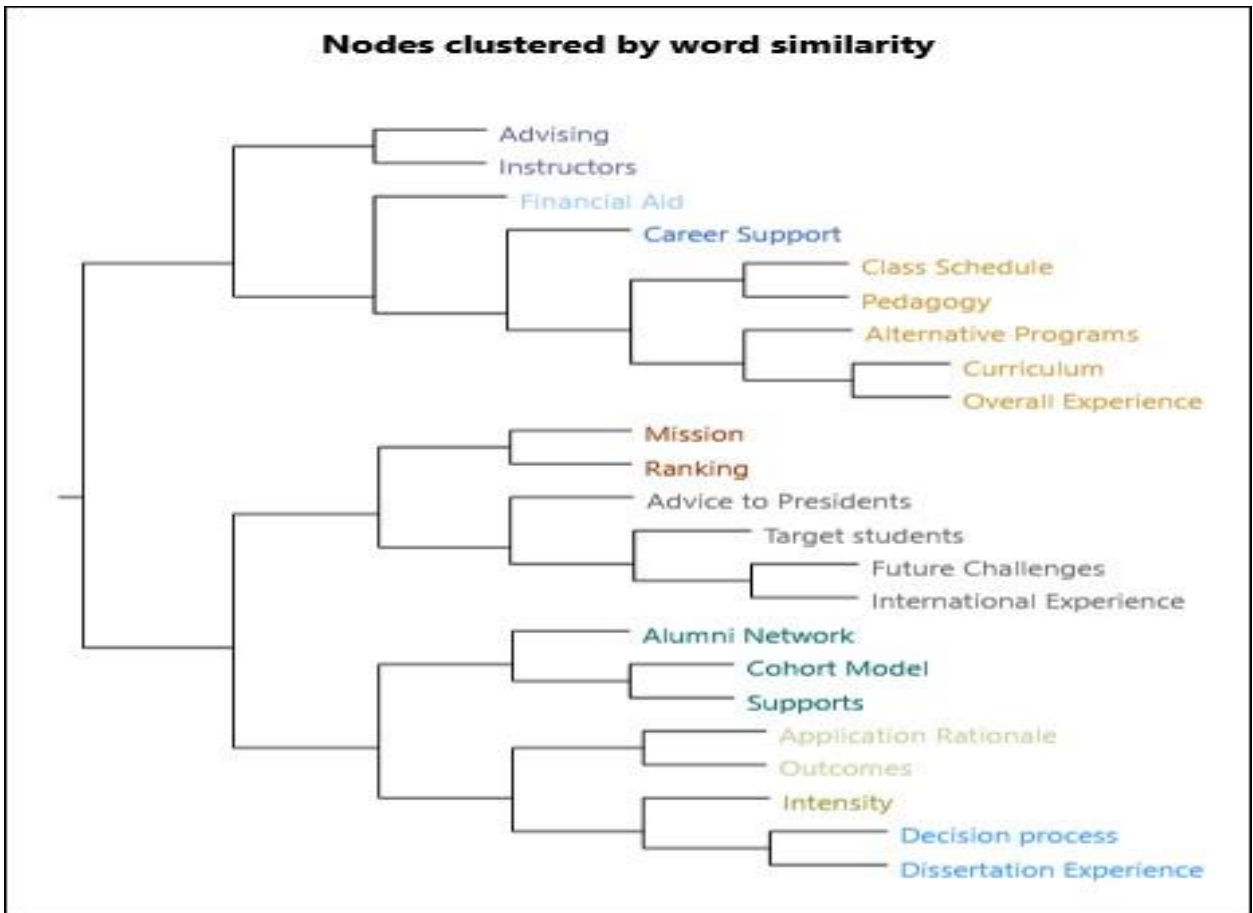


Figure 6: Nodes Clustered by Word Similarity

Appendix D. Emergent Themes

Adult Education Practices	The structure of the program including schedule and curriculum
Certification & Accreditation	Certificate programs, licensing and accreditation
Curriculum	Required courses, sequencing and details.
Comprehensive Exam	Qualifying exam requirement, yes or no. How administered.
Dissertation Experience	The dissertation requirement. It could be a group project or capstone. How it is managed, including committee development.
Field Experience	What is requirement for field experience and internships?
International Experience	How international higher education is taught. International trip and assignment. Is there an international trip or not?
Leadership	How leadership is taught / incorporated into the curriculum.
Themes	Key areas of focus for the program.
Logistics	The structure of the program. Where do classes meet? How often?
Objective	What is the objective of the program? Overlaps with student objectives and similar to outcomes.
Overall Experience	How students describe the program. How they feel.
Cohort Model	How the cohort is organized, size and function.
Intensity	Rigor and intensity of the program. How students feel about

	the program.
Marketplace	The history and future of executive doctoral programs.
Alternative Programs	What is the state of program development? Online and hybrid models. Impact of competition and CPED.
Assessment	How institutions determine the effectiveness of the program and need for change.
Future Challenges	Things on the horizon that impact EDD programs.
Marketplace	How institutions see the higher education market for EDD programs.
Mission	What is the mission of the EDD program? How is it developed and modified?
Program Rationale	What was the genesis of the program? Why was it developed? How did it develop?
History	Background on program development.
Reputation / Robustness	Reputation of the Institution and Program in relation to the market
Admission Criteria	How the admission process works.
Application Rationale	How students choose which school to apply to.
Costings	The cost and staffing associated with running programs.
Faculty	The quality of the faculty. Tenure, skills, etc.
Organization	How the program is organized within the institution
Outcomes	What is the objective of the program? How is it measured / assessed? Includes elements of the program mission, but it is

	more about the distinction that the program hopes to make. It also includes the rationale that students use to apply and matriculate
Partners	What other institutions are affiliated with the program?
Ranking	What is the competitive landscape for the program? It has an element of the HE market; however, it is about how well the program is regarded.
Target students	Which students are admitted? Why? How are they identified?
Support Processes	The support students are provided as part of the program and after graduation.
Advising	How are students advised? How are advisors assigned? Who are advisors?
Mentoring	Is there any mentoring? Includes peer, cohort and alumni network.
Alumni Network	What is the status of alumni organization? What communications occur, e.g. frequency and how?
Career Support	How does the program support student career development?
Financial Aid	What if any financial assistance is provided to students?
Support Examples	What support systems were available to students? What happens when students fall behind?

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