

# Competencies for Effective School Leadership: To What Extent Are they Included in Ed.D. Leadership Programs?

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**Purpose:** With the increasing need for well-prepared and leading practitioners in the field of education as well as the renewed efforts to further distinguish the EdD from the PhD in higher education in recent years, the curriculum of EdD programs nationwide has been questioned and criticized for its disconnection from the needs of leading practitioners and schools. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the practical relevance of the coursework of EdD programs in PK-12 school leadership. **Methods:** Three hundred and forty-two principals from California public schools, and 43 EdD program graduates and 38 doctoral faculty members from the California State University system participated in this study. A survey instrument developed on the basis of ISLLC 1996 and ISLLC 2008 was used to measure respondents' perceived importance of the knowledge, skills, and values for effective school leadership and the extent to which they were included in the EdD coursework. MANOVA and discriminant analysis were conducted to answer the specific research questions. **Findings:** Results indicate that the curriculum of the EdD leadership programs lacks practical relevance. In practice the EdD has not been differentiated from the PhD with respect to the coursework. **Implications:** The practical relevance of the coursework should be considered in the assessment and evaluation of the quality or effectiveness of an EdD program, and used to distinguish the EdD from the PhD. The findings add empirical evidence to the renewed debate over the distinction between the EdD and the PhD, and spur revitalization of the EdD.

Each year, schools of education award more than 6,200 doctorates, accounting for 14.4% of the total number of doctorates awarded in all fields of specialization in the United States; of these doctorates in education, over 2,200 (35%) are in educational leadership (Hoffer et al., 2006). It is expected that many of these doctorate recipients will assume leadership positions and responsibility in public schools and shape the future of our children. However, the curriculum of doctoral programs in education, especially EdD programs, has been questioned and criticized in recent years. The criticism of EdD programs has been accompanied by the renewed efforts to further distinguish the EdD from the PhD in higher education in order to bring the EdD back to its original intention as a “high-level academic experience that prepares students for service as leading practitioners in the field of education” (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006, p. 29).

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Golde (2006) concluded that due to the changing conditions and the loss of the central purpose of doctoral education, many of today's doctorate recipients "are ill-prepared to function effectively in the settings in which they work" (p. 5). After a four-year large-scale study of schools of education in the United States, Levine (2005) found that educational leadership programs were the weakest of all, and their "curricula are disconnected from the needs of leaders and their schools" (p. 23). On the basis of the findings of another national project, Shulman et al. (2006) concluded that the EdD did not serve "the needs of professional practice" (p. 29) even though the EdD was intended to prepare the highest level of leading practitioners for schools. Hess and Kelly (2007) draw similar conclusions after analyzing the content of 36 syllabi from the nation's most prestigious and typical doctoral programs in educational leadership. Their study revealed that these doctoral programs provided limited coverage and instruction in some of the key areas of school principal responsibilities such as the use of data and managing personnel. Hence they questioned "whether graduates of principal-preparation programs are being equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability" (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 268).

The conclusions of these studies are quite persuasive, but there is still a lack of adequate empirical evidence to support these claims. For example, Levine's (2005) research has been criticized for providing little evidence, and his conclusions have been questioned because of the methodological weaknesses and "misuse of its own and other's data" (Young, Crow, Orr, Ogawa, & Creighton, 2005, p. 4). The conclusion made by Shulman et al.'s (2006) was challenged since it "remains more of a hypothesis than an established finding" (Evans, 2007, p. 553). As a matter of fact, there is a general scarcity of scholarship in the field of educational leadership, especially in the field of leadership preparation in terms of quality, methodological approaches, empirical evidence, and impact on practice (e.g., Lashway, 2003; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006). Moreover, the existing research on leadership preparation has been restrained by its research design, as indicated by Murphy and Vriesenga (2006) that "Almost always, assessments of these elements rely upon the perceptions of current or former students in the program" (p. 191), overlooking the perceptions of other important stakeholders, such as high level practitioners and university faculty.

In 2011, one of the leading journals in educational leadership, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, released a special issue unprecedentedly with five empirical research papers on assessment of leadership preparation, which increased the number of empirical research papers on educational leadership preparation by 63% in the long history of the journal (Kottkamp, 2011). The topics covered by these five studies include standards, licensure and assessment, and induction and ongoing professional development; fieldwork component of preparation programs; characteristics of graduates, core program attributes and outcomes; and the final outcome measure, and the relationship between preparation programs and school performance. While these excellent studies provided valuable findings, and especially affirmed the association between quality of leadership preparation programs and student learning achievement, they did not seek to investigate the concrete sets of practical competencies in the coursework of the preparation programs. Therefore, we still know little about what specific knowledge, skills and values are being taught in leadership preparation programs that are connected to the needs of professional practices.

As a result of these criticisms and research findings, we embarked on the present study with the assumptions that (1) faculty of doctoral leadership programs perceive the competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, and values) for effective school leadership differently than school leaders

and practitioners do; (2) school principals with different levels of education have different perceptions on the competencies; and (3) what is taught in doctoral leadership programs reflect what is perceived by the faculty on the competencies for effective school leadership.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the practical relevance of the coursework of EdD programs in PK-12 school leadership. We seek to compare school principals, EdD program graduates, and doctoral faculty on their perceived importance of the specific knowledge, skills, and values for effective school leadership; to examine the effect of principals' education level on their importance ratings of the leadership competencies; to investigate the extent to which these competencies are included in EdD programs; and to determine the congruence between what is important to leading practitioners and what is emphasized in the coursework of EdD programs. Our research questions are as follows:

- Are there any differences among school principals, EdD leadership program graduates, and EdD faculty on their perceived importance of the knowledge, skills, and values for effective school leadership? If so, which pair of the groups differs, and on which dimensions of the competencies does the group membership have an effect?
- Are there any differences among three groups of school principals (Master's /professional degree, EdD, and PhD holders) on their perceived importance of the knowledge, skills, and values for effective school leadership?
- Is there a significant difference between what is important to faculty and what is emphasized by faculty in the coursework of EdD leadership programs?
- Is there a significant difference between what is important to EdD program graduates and what is emphasized in the coursework of EdD leadership programs?

## Related Literature Review

### Stewards of Education

The most recent and considerable effort to improve doctoral education in the U.S. was a five-year action and research project called the *Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate* (CID) sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching from 2001 through 2005. The goal of the initiative was to have a deeper understanding of doctoral education and offer a blueprint for increasing the effectiveness of doctoral education by concentrating on the doctoral programs in six fields – chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics, and neuroscience (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). Through a series of published books, articles and essays, the researchers of the CID provided rich insights into the current state of doctoral education and a new vision of how it should be in the future.

One of the messages from the researchers of the CID for doctoral programs is to make “a commitment to the ongoing process of improvement: deliberating about purpose, asking questions about effectiveness, gathering evidence to shape improvements over time, and taking actions:” (Walker, et al., 2008, p. 142). They propose that the purpose of doctoral education should be to prepare doctoral students to be “stewards of the discipline.” As described by Golde (2006), a steward of the discipline is “a scholar first and foremost, in the fullest sense of the term --- someone who will creatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable and useful ideas, and responsively transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application” (p. 5).

Education is a multidisciplinary field of study with a large portion of practice-oriented areas such as educational leadership and educational policy. In addition, education has two

terminal degrees, i.e., the PhD and the EdD. Because of its uniqueness, education is considered as both a field of study and an enterprise. Thus PhDs and EdDs in education are stewards of a field of study and stewards of an enterprise (Richardson, 2006). On the basis of the results of their study, the researchers of the CID presented several challenges in doctoral programs in education, including striking a balance between the practice and research, a lack of distinction between the PhD and the EdD in practice, no common core courses for doctoral students except for research methodology and inquiry courses, and the lower quality of research and dissertations compared with other disciplines (Golde & Walker, 2006).

To foster stewards of education, Richardson (2006), one of the researchers of the CID, prescribes three forms of knowledge and understanding for doctoral students to develop during formal doctoral education: *formal knowledge, practical knowledge, and beliefs*. For the PhD, Richardson (2006) outlines seven specific outcomes of learning for scholarly inquiry as well as the knowledge, skills and habit of minds that students should develop in relation to *formal knowledge*. Although Richardson (2006) does not offer the specific student learning outcomes in relation to *practical knowledge*, she emphasizes the necessity of integrating practical knowledge into the curriculum of doctoral programs.

As for the practical knowledge for the EdD, Shulman et al. (2006) propose to use the “wisdom of practice” strategy to develop EdD programs, beginning with “studying and thinking about the most able exemplars of accomplished practice that can be identified” (p. 29), and then set the standards for the design of EdD programs. Furthermore, Shulman (2007) explains that their conception of practice is drawn on broad and philosophical traditions with “a recognition that practical reason and practical arguments are not limited to premises that drive from practical experience and action alone” and “the premises of practical arguments are replete with theoretical, descriptive, critical, and normative assertions as well” (p. 560).

### **Distinction between the PhD and the EdD**

As mentioned earlier, one of the problems identified by the researchers of the CID is a lack of clear distinction between the PhD and the EdD in practice. Actually, the field of education has lived with the ambiguity of purposes and distinctions between the PhD and the EdD for about a century. Both the PhD and the EdD were accommodated almost from the beginning of doctorates in education around 1900, but in today’s reality the distinctions between these two doctoral degrees are still unclear (Shulman et al., 2006). The ambiguity has been reflected in all aspects of the two doctoral programs, including admissions requirements, coursework, dissertations, and even careers or outcomes (Derring, 1998; Deering & Whitworth, 1982; Hallinger, 2011; Lunt, 2005).

Despite a lack of distinction between the PhD and the EdD in practice, there is a growing consensus in theory on the missions and purposes of the two degrees. As described by Shulman et al. (2006):

The EdD, intended as preparation for managerial and administrative leadership in education, focuses on preparing practitioners – from principals to curriculum specialists, to teacher-educators, to evaluators – who can use existing knowledge to solve educational problems. A PhD in education, on the other hand, is assumed to be a traditional academic degree that prepares researchers, university faculty, and scholars in education, often from the perspective of a particular discipline. (p. 26)

In 2005, the California State University system was authorized by the state legislature to establish independent doctoral programs and award the EdD degree to meet the pressing need for

well-prepared practitioners to lead public schools and community colleges (CSU, 2006). The legislature stipulates that the EdD programs at the California State University system must be distinguished from traditional doctoral programs at research universities; partnered with California public schools and community colleges in program design, recruitment, teaching and program evaluation; and focused on the needs of professional practice and the knowledge and skills needed for educational administrators to do their jobs effectively. As a result, 13 new EdD programs at the California State University system have been established to date on the basis of the legislative mandate.

### **Effective Program Features and Their Impact**

If the EdD is intended to prepare high level educational leaders and practitioners for schools, its curriculum and coursework should be practically relevant and focus on effective leadership practices that lead to school improvement and student achievement. There are certain features of effective leadership programs that have been widely accepted and recommended in the literature, including a coherent curriculum that is aligned with professional standards (such as ISSLC standards); research-based program content that incorporates knowledge and skills of school leadership and management, instructional leadership, and change management; and problem-based learning that addresses practical problems and stimulates reflection (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Orr, 2011).

Although there are limited empirical studies on the effects of school leadership preparation on school improvement and student learning (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006), research on the relationship between preparation programs and graduate leadership outcomes in recent years has been very promising. For example, a study of 17 leadership preparation programs conducted by Orr (2011) found that the recommended program features mentioned above were significantly correlated with graduates' satisfaction with the program, their career aspirations to become a principal, and their learning in key areas of effective leadership (vision and ethics, instructional leadership, organizational learning, management and operations, and parent and community involvement).

Fuller, Young and Baker (2011) examined the effects of principal preparation programs on school and student achievement, and found that a school's qualifications of teachers had significant impact on gains in student achievement, and that "principals prepared by programs housed at research and doctoral institutions are more effective than principals prepared by programs housed at regional institutions in improving the overall qualifications of the team of teachers on a campus" (p. 206). After comparing exemplary and conventional leadership preparation programs using structural equation modeling, Orr and Orphanos (2011) concluded that the quality of program focus, content and internship "contributes significantly to what graduates learn and, ultimately, to how they practice leadership and work to improve their school" (p. 50).

Taken together, the results of these studies suggest that the practical relevance of leadership preparation programs matters and influences a graduate's learning, practice and success. As illustrated and mapped by Kottkamp (2011), a preparation program influences leadership outcomes (e.g., knowledge, skills, values and career aspirations), which then influence leadership practice and behaviors in school, which in turn influence school staff, teachers and community, and which ultimately influence school climate and student learning outcomes.

## Methods

### Participants

Thanks to the endorsement of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), 342 of its members participated in this study. These ACSA members were principals of California public schools. In addition, with the support of the Chancellor's Office of the California State University (CSU) system and the Directors of the CSU's EdD Programs, 43 EdD program graduates, and 38 doctoral faculty members of the CSU system took part in this study. Due to the fact that some of the EdD program graduates and part-time faculty were the ACSA members, double listings or duplication might occur. To eliminate the problem, the duplicated names of the graduates and faculty were screened out from the list of the ACSA members before data collection.

Of the school principals, as shown in Table 1, 54.5% were working in elementary schools, 12.7% in middle schools, 21.4% in high schools, and 11.4% in others (e.g., K-8 and 7-12). Ninety-nine percent of the schools were public, and 1% charter schools. Seventy-four percent of the principals had a Master's degree, 19% EdD, 3.9% PhD, and 3.3% professional degree. Eighty-eight percent of the principals had their highest degrees in the field of educational administration and leadership. Of the EdD program graduates, 27% were school principals, 18.9% were assistant principals, 2.7% teachers, and 51.4% others (e.g., administrators in school districts and the county offices of education). All of them graduated from the EdD programs in the last two years (i.e., 2010 and 2011). Of the participating faculty, 51.9% had a PhD, 44.4% EdD, and 3.7% Master's degree. Part-time faculty accounted for 21.4% of the total. Of the full-time faculty, 77.8% had PK-12 school administrative and teaching experiences before becoming university faculty members. All of the participating faculty members had taught the doctoral students in the last five years when the data began to be collected for this study.

### Instrument

Each respondent completed the Competencies for Effective School Leadership Survey (CESLS), which we developed on the basis of the *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008* (CCSSO, 2008) as well as the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC 1996)* (CCSSO, 1996). The *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (ISLLC 2008)* consists of six broad standards or dimensions:

1. An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.
2. An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
3. An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

6. An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14)

Although these six new standards reflect the research findings on education leadership in the past decade, their language and framework are similar to and almost identical with the original *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC 1996)*. One of the main differences between *ISLLC 1996* and *ISLLC 2008* is that the new standards are clearly policy-oriented (as indicated by the words “*Policy Standards*” in the title) to provide overall guidance and avoid confusion with practice and program standards (CCSSO, 1996; CCSSO, 2008). Therefore, the new standards give leadership preparation programs more flexibility to define leadership. Consequently, *ISLLC 2008* replaces the knowledge, skills, and dispositions in *ISLLC 1996* with the “functions” that define effective school leadership under the six standards (CCSSO, 2008).

The survey questionnaire we developed for this study combines the “functions” in *ISLLC 2008* with the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions” in *ISLLC 1996*. In this way, the questionnaire lists more specific leadership indicators for the respondents, which are better suited for the purpose of this study. The ISLLC organization was created in the mid-1990s by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and major professional education organizations, including the American Association of School Administrators and the University Council for Education Administration (UCEA). In 1996, the ISLLC developed the six universal and core standards for effective school leaders. Each of the six standards is defined by subsets of knowledge, skills and dispositions or indicators. Since then, 46 states have adopted or adapted the ISLLC standards as the basis for designing and operating educational leadership preparation programs (Murphy, Moorman, & McCarthy, 2008). The ISLLC standards also have been widely used for licensure. Commissioned by the ISLLC, the Education Testing Service (ETS) developed the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) based on the ISLLC standards. Currently, 16 states and the District of Columbia use the SLLA examination to license graduates of leadership preparation programs (ETS, 2013). In addition, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has adopted the ISLLC standards for accrediting educational leadership preparation programs (NPBEA, 2011).

Numerous studies have provided evidence for the validity of the standards of *ISLLC 1996*. For instance, Reese and Tannenaum (1999) conducted a content-related validity study that involved a multistate panel of school principals and university educators in examining the linkages between the ISLLC standards and the job-analysis dimensions identified by a national job-analysis study (Tannenbaum, 1999). With the results showing each of the six ISLLC standards was linked to two or more of the 11 job analysis dimensions and confirming 93 percent of the linkages between the ISLLC knowledge and performance indicators and the job-analysis dimensions, Reese and Tannenaum’s (1999) content-relate validity study affirmed that the ISLLC standards are relevant, important and job-related.

Besides the six standards, we added one more dimension “research methodology and scholarly inquiry” with 10 concrete items into the questionnaire for this study. One of the reasons for this addition is that research methodology is a major component of the curriculum of doctoral programs. For instance, research methodology is specified by the California State University system as one of the three major components or core concepts for its EdD programs in educational leadership (CSU, 2005). The topics and areas in the research methodology component include assessment and evaluation, applied quantitative and qualitative inquiry, field-

based research, and data driven decision making. The other two major components for the CSU's EdD programs are leadership foundations and leadership specialization. Furthermore, research methodology might separate university faculty from school principals with regard to its importance and emphasis. Brown, Martinez and Daniel (2002) conducted a study that examined the association between what has been taught in doctoral leadership programs and what is recommended to be included in the coursework of the doctoral programs by high-level practitioners who had also obtained a doctorate in educational leadership. They found that all of the skills related to research methodology and applications were ranked by the high-level practitioners in the bottom quartile of the 48 identified leadership skills but were highly emphasized in the coursework, suggesting that research skills "might be overemphasized in doctoral programs of study" (Brown, Martinez & Daniel, 2002, p. 60).

By combining the research methodology component with the six ISLLC standards, the survey questionnaire (CESLS) for this study has seven dimensions of the competencies for effective school leadership. The CESLS consists of three sections. The first section includes 96 items under the seven dimensions, where all respondents rated how important each of the items on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "very important" to "not very important." The second section has the same items, where only graduates and faculty were asked to rate the extent to which each of the items was included in the coursework of their EdD programs on a five-point Likert-type scale: "emphasized", "covered at length", "moderately covered", "referenced", and "not included." In the first two sections, all respondents were given the choice of "does not apply" for each of the items. In the third section, all respondents were asked to respond to demographic questions, such as their positions and educational backgrounds.

### **Data Analyses**

To answer our first research question, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether or not there were any differences among school principals, EdD program graduates, and doctoral faculty on their importance ratings for the seven dimensions of the knowledge, skills, and values. In contrast to multiple ANOVAs, MANOVA has the power to test the existence of group differences across several dependent variables simultaneously, taking account of the relationship between dependent variables (Field, 2009). In addition, a separate MANOVA was conducted to answer our second research question, assessing whether there were any differences among the three groups of school principals (i.e., Master's/professional degree, EdD, and PhD holders) on their perceived importance of the knowledge, skills, and values for effective school leadership.

After a significant MANOVA was found, discriminant analysis was used to discern the source of the differences, i.e., which pair of the groups differed, and on which dimensions of the competencies the group membership had an effect. Finally, a series of *t* tests were used to compare the mean ratings on importance and the mean ratings on emphasis of the competencies to answer our third and fourth research questions.

### **Results**

The results of our reliability analysis showed that the values of Cronbach's alpha for the seven dimensions or subscales were .88 for "facilitating the vision," .93 for "school culture and instructional program," .91 for "managing the organization," and .93 for "collaboration and community engagement," .92 for "ethics and integrity," .94 for "understanding publics," and .91



for “research methodology.” These high reliabilities indicate that the survey questionnaire consistently reflects the constructs that we intend to measure.

Table 2 compares the means and standard deviations of school principals, EdD program graduates, and university doctoral faculty on the seven dimensions of knowledge, skills and values for effective school leadership. EdD program graduates had higher rates on all the seven dimensions than school principals and doctoral faculty. School principals, on the other hand, had higher rates on the first five dimensions and lower rates on the last two dimensions than doctoral faculty. Overall, the results of MANOVA revealed a significant difference among the school principals, EdD program graduates, and doctoral faculty on the mean importance ratings for the seven dimensions of knowledge, skills, and values,  $\Lambda = .860$ ,  $F(403, 806) = 4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ .

The follow-up discriminant analysis showed two discriminant functions. The first function accounted for 87.1% of the variance, canonical  $R^2 = .12$ , whereas the second accounted for only 12.9%, canonical  $R^2 = .02$ . In combination these two discriminant functions significantly differentiated the three groups of membership,  $\Lambda = 0.14$ ,  $\chi^2(14) = 61.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . As shown in Table 3, the first function discriminated school principals from doctoral faculty, with higher scores characterizing “facilitating the vision,” “school culture and instructional program” and “managing the organization,” and lower scores characterizing “understanding publics” and “research.” The second function separated EdD program graduates from school principals and doctoral faculty, with higher scores on all seven dimensions of knowledge, skills, and values. In other words, principals had significantly higher scores on the first three dimensions than faculty, while faculty had significantly higher scores on the last two dimensions than school principals. Among the three groups, EdD program graduates had significantly higher scores on all of the seven dimensions than school principals and university doctoral faculty.

As shown in Table 4, PhD holders had higher rates on the seven dimensions than EdD and Master’s/ professional degree holders, and EdD holders had slightly higher rates on the last two dimensions (“understanding publics” and “research”) than Master’s/professional degree holders. However, the results of MANOVA showed a statistically non-significant difference among these three school principal groups on their perceived importance of the knowledge, skills, and values for effective school leadership,  $\Lambda = .948$ ,  $F(317, 634) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .257$ , which indicate that the level of principals’ education had no significant effect on their importance ratings of competencies for effective school leadership.

The results of the paired  $t$  tests on the differences between the means of faculty’s ratings of importance and their ratings of emphasis for the seven dimensions of competencies are presented in Table 5. All of the paired differences were statistically significant and all of the effect sizes were large ( $d > .50$ ) using Cohen’s (1988) guidelines. Of the effect sizes, the largest was .89 for the “school culture and instructional program” and the smallest was .62 for the “research.” On average, Faculty’s ratings of importance on the seven dimensions were significantly higher than their ratings of emphasis in the coursework. Table 6 shows that on average EdD program graduates also ranked significantly higher on their importance ratings for the seven dimensions of competencies than their emphasis ratings. Six of the seven effect sizes were large, and only one for the “research” was medium ( $d = .42$ ).

When looking at the 96 concrete competency items, we found that 92 (96%) of them were rated “important” or “very important” by principals. Of these 92 items, 42 (46%) were “covered at length” or “emphasized” in the coursework of EdD programs in graduates’ judgment; whereas only six (7%) of them were rated by faculty as “covered at length” or “emphasized” in the coursework. In summary, the results of the analyses revealed a lack of

congruence between what was important to the three groups (school principals, EdD graduate and doctoral faculty) and what was emphasized in the coursework of EdD programs.

## Discussion

This study investigated the extent to which the practical knowledge, skills and values necessary for effective school leadership were included and emphasized in the EdD programs in educational administration and leadership. We extended the current literature by comparing the perceptions of schools principals, EdD program graduates and doctoral faculty; by examining the impact of the principals' education level on their perceptions; and by investigating the congruence between what is important to main stakeholders (i.e., leading practitioners, EdD graduates, and doctoral faculty) and what is emphasized in the coursework of the EdD programs.

Four conclusions are drawn from our analyses. First, school principals ranked significantly higher than doctoral faculty on three of the seven dimensions of the practical knowledge and skills (i.e., "facilitating the vision," "school culture and instructional program," and "managing the organization"), while doctoral faculty ranked significantly higher than school principals on two dimensions (i.e., "understanding publics" and "research methodology"). Second, there were significant differences between the EdD graduates and doctoral faculty on their perceived importance of all seven dimensions, with the EdD program graduates' ratings being significantly higher than doctoral faculty's ones. Third, education level (Master'/professional degree, EdD or PhD) of school principals did not have any significant effect on their ratings on the importance of the knowledge, skills and values for effective school leadership. Last, judged by both doctoral faculty and EdD program graduates, all of the seven dimensions were not adequately covered or emphasized in the coursework of EdD programs in comparison with their importance ratings. A noteworthy finding is that doctoral faculty and EdD graduates had higher ratings on research than school principals, but they did not feel that the research competency was covered enough in the coursework relative to its importance. One of the possible explanations would be that the EdD students need to learn research methods and skills to finish their dissertations, which are a capstone requirement for both the PhD and the EdD but without clear distinction (Golde & Walker, 2006).

Evidence offered in this study supports the claims of Levine (2005), Shulman et al. (2006) and others that the curriculum of EdD leadership programs lacks practical relevance. Findings of this study suggest that in practice the EdD has not been differentiated from the PhD with respect to the coursework. The findings are consistent with the conclusion by the researchers of the CID that we do not prepare scholars very well, and neither do we prepare high level practitioners (Shulman et al., 2006). Results from this study are also consistent with the finding by Brown et al. (2002) that the research competency is more important to doctoral faculty than to leading practitioners. Part of the reason would be that for many education practitioners, "researcher" or "scholar" is not their core professional identity because of the practical orientation of educational administration and leadership (Golde & Walker, 2006).

There are some limitations of the current study. One of them is that our survey questionnaire does not include the recommendations of the respondents for the inclusion of practical knowledge and skills in the coursework of EdD programs. Although this study reveals that the knowledge and skills defined by the ISLLC standards were not emphasized in the coursework, we are unable to find out the extent to which these practical knowledge and skills, in the view of school principals as well as EdD program graduates and doctoral faculty, should be

included in the EdD coursework, or should be learned on the job or emphasized in inservice training and professional development workshops. Furthermore, we cannot directly address why the coursework of EdD programs lack practical relevance even though we extend prior research by establishing whether the coursework of EdD programs are practically relevant. Another limitation is that the sample of EdD program graduates and faculty came from the CSU system only. Therefore, it should be cautious about interpreting the results of this study and applying them to the EdD programs in other institutions.

Findings of this study contribute further to our understanding of the progress and reality of the EdD programs and curriculum. They imply that the practical relevance of the coursework should be considered in the assessment and evaluation of the quality or effectiveness of an EdD program, and used to distinguish the EdD from the PhD. We are convinced that the practical knowledge and skills should be adequately structured into EdD program. As shown by recent empirical studies, the doctoral programs with a focus on the knowledge and skills related to effective leadership practices have a positive impact on student achievement (e.g., Fuller, et al. 2011, Orr & Orphanos, 2011). At the same time, we need to realize that much of practical knowledge is picked up through experience in practice, and students can only develop a limited amount of practical knowledge in a doctoral program (Richardson, 2006). Moreover, it will be dangerous, as warned by Shulman et al. (2007), to distinguish the EdD extremely from the PhD because both of the degrees should “include an abundance of cross-over experiences and training” and “must be grounded in scholarship as both substance and process” (p. 30).

Nevertheless, our findings lay a foundation of addressing some unanswered questions: Where are the boundaries in curriculum that separate the EdD from the PhD? How can we integrate the practical knowledge and skills into the EdD coursework? How can we strike a balance in the EdD coursework between practice and research, and between professional skills and critical thinking skills? The findings of this study and the questions raised should bring about more dialogue and collaboration between doctoral faculty and educational practitioners to identify which competencies should be included in the EdD, and to what extent; and which competencies could be better developed on the job or through in-service training. Indeed, this study is an addition to the renewed efforts to further distinguish the EdD from the PhD and revitalize the EdD programs, so as to help doctoral students develop “the dispositions, habits, knowledge, and skills that cohere in the professional identity and practice, commitments and integrity” (Foster, Dahill, Goleman, & Tolentino, 2005, p. 100).

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