



*Original Research Article*

# The role of the Historians in a Nontraditional Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

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This study focused on the role of the Historian from the perspective of two doctoral students while they were completing a qualitative nontraditional Dissertation in Practice (DiP). The two doctoral students were part of a cohort of 11 scholarly practitioners known as Cohort 5 at Lynn University and were identified as the Historians for the DiP. This study addressed concerns that the doctoral students mentioned regarding the role of the Historian. The Historians were responsible for documenting, collecting and accurately organizing all the qualitative archival data throughout the entire nontraditional DiP process. The Historians acknowledged the day to day operations of the process over an eighteen month period. This study examined the role of the Historian and how it evolved during the DiP process and concluded with recommendations suggested by the two Historians and implications for education.

**Key words:** Archival data, Historian, Dissertation in Practice (DiP), nontraditional group DiP.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to elaborate on the role of the historian/compiler of artifacts in a qualitative nontraditional DiP. These two Historians collected and analyzed qualitative archival data throughout the DiP process and discussed how it evolved from two scholarly practitioners' perspectives in the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Doctor of Education (Ed.D) Educational Leadership program at Lynn University in Boca Raton, FL. The two Historians were part of a cohort of 11 scholarly practitioners who became the first at Lynn University to undertake a group DiP which involved all members working collaboratively.

### Statement of the Problem

There were two problems from the Historians' perspectives. The first problem was there was not a lot of research articles' regarding the role of the Historians when completing a nontraditional group DiP. The second problem was the term *Historians* is vague and confusing for doctoral students. For example, individuals believe the term

*Historians* are students majoring in History whereas the term in this context refers to students in the Ed.D program at a CPED institution.

### Background

On December 7, 2013, Cohort 5 stated roles that were imperative while completing a nontraditional DiP. One role which was discussed during the 11 cohort members' collaboration session was the Historian.

### Research Questions

1. What did the role of the Historian entail at the beginning of the DiP process?
2. How did the role of the Historian evolve during the DiP process?

### Definition of Terms

**Archival Data** – The collection and compilation of

documents, artifacts, and archival records related to one's study topic which is analyzed by Historians throughout the DiP process (Yin, 2011).

**Cohort Model** – An intact group of higher education students who proceed together throughout the duration of an academic program.(Barnett and Muse, 1993).

**CPED** – CPED stands for the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED, 2010).

**Dissertation in Practice (DiP)** – Defined by Shulman (2005) as the culminating experience which demonstrates the practitioner's scholarly ability to solve problems of practice.

**Historians** – Individuals who collect and document all the essential qualitative archival data throughout the nontraditional DiP process (Moore and Vickers, 2014, Class notes).

**Nontraditional Group DiP** – Browne-Ferrigno and Jensen (2012) state the DiP extends the cohort experience into the dissertation process, requiring students to work in teams on collaboratively conducted dissertations.

**Paradigm Shift** – Through reflections, a shift in the mindset of doctoral students and professors from a traditional dissertation to a nontraditional dissertation (Dweck, 2008).

**Scholarly Practitioner** – According to CPED (2010) scholarly practitioners blend practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice.

## Literature Review

Phase I CPED member institutions determined that scholarly practitioners would continue their learning and application of theory beyond the diploma with the support of their colleagues as they continued to develop skills in putting theory into practice. Following the curriculum created based on the guiding principles noted below and tailored to each individual institution and constituency, an Ed.D provides a leader with the tools to move forward with a “scholarship of practice that is not passive or linear, but rather dialogic, recursive and developmental” (Sawyer and Mason, 2012). At the end of Phase I, the Carnegie Foundation, along with the member institutions, developed six guiding principles for the Ed.D

The professional doctorate in education:

1. Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice.
2. Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations and communities.
3. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships.
4. Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions.
5. Is grounded in and develops a professional

knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry.

6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice (Perry and Imig, 2010).

## CPED Background

CPED institutions agree no one-size-fits-all model of preparation will meet the diverse needs of doctoral students throughout the country. The first phase of CPED concluded that Ed.D graduates should be “scholarly practitioners” (CPED, 2010), individuals who are agents of change, are able to solve problems of practice, which use inquiry to take decisions and engage in critical examination. This was evident when in 2013 Cohort 5 collaborated to write one nontraditional group DiP (Shulman, 2005).

The goal of CPED was to restructure the Ed.D to make it a degree of the highest quality (CPED, 2010).CPED has grown from 22 member institutions in 2007 to 88 Consortium members in 2015. Although not a Research 1 university, Lynn University was invited to join CPED because of their innovative work in the field of educational leadership and a pronounced commitment to designing an innovative scholar practitioner doctorate program in educational leadership (Taylor and Storey, 2011). - Table 1 illustrates the Required Factors for CPED Invitations.

## METHODOLOGY

### Setting/Participant Information

Lynn University's Educational Leadership doctoral program embraces the CPED principles (CPED, 2010) and uses a cohort model with an individualized and group DiP approach. The study was conducted at Lynn University located in Boca Raton, FL in the United States of America (USA) via numerous internet and technological modes of communication. Lynn University has approximately 2,400 students from 90 countries and 45 states and territories. Lynn University's doctoral program began with its first cohort in 2007. The Ed.D program at Lynn University is a cohort model comprising of 10-15 students who work together for the duration of the program.

Currently there are approximately 60 doctoral students enrolled in the program and six professors (Reedy, 2015). Cohort 5 is made up of 11 students, 2 female and 9 male with ages ranging from their late 20's to 50's. Within the cohort there is a range of ethnic diversity, with 1 student from China, 6 African Americans, 2 Caucasians, and 2 Latino students. There were two Historians, both male; one Latino and the other African American, who collected the qualitative data throughout the DiP process.

### Data Collection

The two Historians documented the day to day operations

**Table 1.** Required Factors for CPED Invitations

<b>Participation</b>
Current college or school reform.
A demonstrated commitment to the agenda.
A connection of the pilot or experimental program or experimental program to other ongoing efforts of the school or college.
A potential for “showcasing” to relevant parties.
Each CPED school assembling a team that includes academics, administrators, and graduate students.

<b>Commitment</b>
Envisioning new ways of preparing professional practitioners to function effectively.
Designing new programs that will enable professional practitioners to function effectively.
Examining recent advancements in the learning sciences and human cognition, statistics and technology, leadership and discipline-based knowledge and alternative pedagogies.

Source: <http://cpedinitiative.org/>, (2010)

**Table 2.** The Role of Historians

<b>The Role of Historians</b>
Collected and Documented Qualitative Archival Data
Photos Documented Nontraditional DiP Process
Emails between Colleagues
Weekly Agendas and Minutes
Categories and Themes Identified
Categories and Themes Placed in the Historians' Portfolios

of the DiP process. The Historians collected and organized all the qualitative archival data such as emails, collaboration between colleagues as well as CPED articles and information (Moore and Vickers, 2015, Class notes). Agendas were created and minutes were taken and sent electronically to all members of Cohort 5. Photos were collected which captured visual moments while classroom conversations and dialogue between cohort members were videotaped throughout the DiP process.

### Data Analysis

The two Historians analyzed the qualitative archival data which were collected during the process. Patterns and themes were identified and placed in the archival portfolios during the DiP process. The two Historians were interviewed regarding the role from its inception and how it evolved throughout the DiP process. Table 2 illustrates the Role of the Historians.

When the data from the interviews were analyzed, patterns and themes were identified. Historian A and B stated that they thought the role entailed the collection of emails, records, paperwork, and materials that encompassed the DiP. Historian A and B both further stated

that being a Historian was “time consuming”. They also mentioned themes and topics were identified throughout the DiP. After analyzing the data, discrepancies were identified as well. Historian A stated that other members of the cohort did not truly comprehend the role of the Historian until later on in the DiP process. Historian B stated how the qualitative archival data encompassed various types of information which were collected from the beginning of the DiP until its completion.

### FINDINGS

During the interview with the two Historians, the following information was gathered. Both Historians stated that their cohort members did not comprehend the amount of archival data in the four portfolios when they were presented in February and June 2014. In November 2014 cohort members observed the quality and quantity of information that was gathered in the four portfolios. During the proposal defense for Cohort 5, Historian A elaborated on the role of the Historians and how it evolved over the past 18 months. On January 9, 2015 after the proposal defense, one committee member stated that they were impressed with the detail, neatness and organization of the qualitative archival data in the four portfolios. They showed a detailed account of the cohort’s nontraditional DiP. Two days after the proposal defense the Historians brought the portfolios to class for Cohort 6 to view and discuss.

Cohort 6 were in their second semester at Lynn University. Thus the two Historians provided Cohort 6 with pertinent information if they chose to participate in a nontraditional DiP. The Historians discussed the importance of accurately documenting qualitative archival data throughout the DiP process. Cohort 6 analyzed the portfolios which were presented in a time sequential manner. Cohort 6 were inquisitive regarding the qualitative archival data and asked the Historians several questions such as:

- a)How did the Historians decide on what data to collect?
- b)How long did it take to organize all the data in the portfolios?
- c)Was it a tedious process gathering data and preparing the portfolios?

The Historians elaborated on the role, how the process evolved and offered to assist Cohort 6 in the future with any questions they have regarding the DiP process. During the interview with the two Historians, the following information regarding the role was gathered from each individual Historian.

- Historian A thought at the beginning of the DiP process the role of the Historian entailed the collection of emails and materials that encompassed the DiP.

- Historian B thought at the beginning of the DiP process the role of the Historian entailed keeping track of all records and paperwork during the DiP when taking on the task. Historian B was concerned if the role entailed

transcribing word for word all collaboration within the cohort.

- Historian A thought the role evolved during the DiP process because themes emerged from the classroom discussions and through the exchanges of emails between colleagues. Themes became prevalent in the minutes that were sent out after meetings were conducted on and off campus. The role of the Historians documented the process from the inception of the DiP until its completion. For example, emails were placed in time sequential order by date, which was time consuming. Historian A felt the other members of the cohort were not cognizant of the Historians' responsibilities until later in the DiP process. The cohort members developed a deeper level of understanding regarding the role of the Historians when the portfolios were brought into the classroom to provide updates about the archival qualitative data that had been collected. Historian A stated that being a Historian was a "great learning experience" because it documented the journey of the cohort throughout the DiP process.

- Historian B thought the role evolved during the DiP process because he thought the information which would be collected would not exceed one notebook. Eventually after talking to Historian A, both Historians noticed how vast the qualitative archival data was, therefore; the Historians decided to separate the data by topics and individual portfolios. One observation by Historian B was how time consuming it was to keep accurate records.

## Conclusions

The two Historians collaborated and analyzed notes compiled throughout the DiP process and identified patterns on how the role of the Historian was perceived. Both Historians stated how relational trust was established between the two Historians early in the process by communicating via email, text, phone calls, ooVoo and Google Docs. The Historians worked independently as a result of relational trust being established between the other cohort members since the inception of the DiP process.

The other cohort members had some knowledge regarding the role of the Historian. While preparing for the proposal defense in December 2014, an "aha moment" was experienced. Although the other cohort members seemed to have a thorough understanding of the direction needed to complete the iBook, literature review and Executive Summary it was not until the "aha moment" when the cohort comprehended the intricacies of being a Historian. The Historians are responsible for documenting, collecting and accurately organizing all the qualitative archival data throughout the entire nontraditional DiP process. It was imperative for the Historians to correctly collect and analyze the qualitative archival data and to keep accurate records throughout the DiP process. The Historians believe the qualitative archival data will be vital to doctoral students partaking in a nontraditional DiP instead of a

traditional linear five chapter dissertation at CPED institutions. This research article is original and visionary regarding the role of the Historian in a nontraditional DiP and reflects the vision of future doctoral students.

## Recommendations

The following are recommendations provided by the two Historians to assist future doctoral students participating in a nontraditional group DiP.

- Establishing open lines of communication with cohort members and Historians by utilizing a plethora of technological tools.
- Collaborating with colleagues and Historians on and off campus.
- Correctly collecting and analyzing the qualitative archival data.
- Keeping accurate records throughout the DiP process.

## Implications for Education

The following are the implications for education as a result of this study.

- At the forefront of this process, relational trust in various aspects was established to ensure productive collaboration between cohort members (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 2014).
- Through ongoing reflections, a paradigm shift in the mindset of doctoral candidates and professors is necessary from a traditional dissertation to a non-traditional DiP (Dweck, 2008).
- While pursuing a group DiP, multiple means of communication, on and off campus, facilitates and validates group collaboration when solving problems of practice.
- Laboratories of practice enable cohort members to link theory to practice and inform scholarly practitioners.
- The importance of correctly collecting and analyzing the qualitative archival data and keeping accurate records throughout the DiP process.

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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