

# Creative and Innovative Solutions to Accommodate the Growth of a Professional Practice Doctoral Program

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## ABSTRACT

This essay describes one institution's struggle to grow its EdD program by adding an equivalent online version of a successful face-to-face program. One of the challenges faced was that of creating a comparable experience for online students to share their ongoing action research, an activity that had long been part of the face-to-face version of the program. An innovative, all-day, virtual doctoral research conference was developed and implemented. We describe our creative rethinking of the original event, towards a new, successful, and fully-online redesigned event. Although the event continues to be refined, the inaugural event proved to be a successful solution to the challenge of transferring all components of a face-to-face program over to its online equivalent. Feedback from students who participated in the conference is shared, and recommendations for other EdD programs is offered.

*Keywords: creative thinking, innovation, action research, online activities, developmental learning*

## INTRODUCTION

(Education) cannot limit itself to set contents, techniques and values...but must also promote flexibility, openness for the new, the ability to adapt or see new ways of doing things, and courage in the face of the unexpected, in other words, creativity. (Cropley, 2003, p. 136)

The need for creativity and innovation in higher education is increasingly part of the broader discourse of education (Dill & Van Vught, 2010). As the field transforms through digital technologies, globalization, and other 21<sup>st</sup> century changes, there are opportunities to creatively rethink traditional structures of doctoral education—particularly when we expand doctoral learning to online settings (Henriksen, Mishra, Greenhow, Cain, & Roseth, 2014). In making such contextual shifts, however, we must consider what our doctoral programs do well and what they need. We can then rethink or redesign elements of them in ways that resonate with our existing strengths, while working with the advantages and constraints of emerging contexts.

Our purpose in writing this essay is twofold. First, we share our experience of creatively rethinking and redesigning an already highly-effective element of the face-to-face Education Doctorate program at Arizona State University. This involved the redesign of a face-to-face Doctoral Research Forum, in which our EdD students showcased their research each semester. The redesign of the forum

described in this essay was necessary, because of the development of a new online offering of our program. We highlight our rethinking of the conference as *creative*, not to suggest that it is perfect or game-changing work for the field. Rather, we draw on common definitions of creativity (Amabile, 1996; Zhou & George, 2001), which suggest that positive growth and new construction occurs via anything that is relatively novel and effective, even if only within its own context. Sometimes, that context involves sweeping changes of new ideas within a discipline. But as in our example, more often the local creativity and problem-solving we do within our programmatic contexts adds up to big changes that matter for the students we serve.

Our second purpose is that, while specifics of our example may not fit with every program, we hope the broader principle of creative change and renovation of program elements can serve as motivation to other professional practice doctoral programs to seek new approaches. Changing 21<sup>st</sup> century contexts—while at first potentially challenging and confounding—ultimately offer opportunities to be more innovative and effective, allowing for greater access, equity, and quality within and across programs. We hope some of these elements come through in the case we share here. First, we provide some program context for our example, which we then describe in more detail.



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## THE CONTEXTUAL SETTING

For more than 10 years, the Arizona State University EdD Program in Leadership & Innovation has helped educators in Arizona who have dreamed of finding a better way to improve their collective practice. A three-year, cohort-based program, our EdD program is designed for practicing educator-leaders who work in a range of settings and want to transform their practice and create better learning opportunities for students of all ages, PK-20 and beyond (“EdD in Leadership & Innovation,” 2017). Our students enter the program as accomplished teachers, teacher leaders, principals, superintendents, higher education professionals, or leaders in other educational contexts. Through coursework, students deepen their abilities to lead change and implement innovative solutions to self-identified problems of practice in their local educational organizations.

Action research is a signature pedagogy within our program. During their first term in the program, students learn about the action research process and begin applying it to their own problems of practice. They learn about the nature of action research and ways in which it is similar and different from traditional forms of educational research. They enter our program already having identified a problem of practice (PoP), a specific requirement to which they must write in their applications to be admitted to our program. Further, they learn how to refine that problem—in the context of an action research approach to investigating or addressing it—during the initial course. They learn skills in explaining the situational context of their PoPs, how to write research questions specifically designed to help guide their investigations of their PoPs, and begin to develop preliminary ideas for mixed-methods action research designs to study their PoPs. Students are advised to try to retain the same PoP, or variations of it, throughout the program and leading into their dissertations.

Throughout the program, tied specifically to coursework, students conduct multiple cycles of inquiry through action research, and experience developmental growth with respect to their research skills (Buss, 2016). Not only do their skills grow developmentally, but so too do the nature and depth of their understanding of their problems of practice. Students are required to routinely share their research in a public forum. The culminating requirement is an action research dissertation-in-practice, which typically takes the form of the implementation—and assessment of the effectiveness—of an intervention designed to address the student’s self-identified problem in her or his workplace setting (Mertler, Buss, & Henriksen, 2016). As a CPED-influenced program, several of our graduates have won the Dissertation in Practice of the Year Award, while others have attained professional recognition, exemplified in state and regional awards. These accomplishments, in addition to a strong completion rate in the face-to-face version (86% completion, and higher for those who complete their first year), has made the program highly successful.

During its first decade, the EdD program was offered exclusively in a face-to-face format and provided its students with opportunities to present their ongoing cycles of action research in an academic forum. The purpose of these presentations of student research was to give the students experiences in communicating their work in a professional setting. We wanted them to understand the value in sharing their research, engaging in dialogue about it, and gathering feedback from others, at each stage of the process. Therefore, twice each year, near the end of each academic

semester, students presented their ongoing doctoral research to other members of the program and faculty in a three-hour, in-person, *Doctoral Research Forum*. The presentations were conducted in direct presentation, roundtable, and poster session formats. Over the years, student feedback on the Forums was positive, especially in terms of the academic and scholarly growth that students noted that they experienced with each passing year. One of our stated programmatic goals is to help students become “scholarly and influential practitioners.” Engaging in action research inquiry is a part of scholarly practice, but to influence others, students must think about how to communicate and disseminate their work. The Doctoral Research Forums allowed them some practice in this, as it required students to craft a concise, clear presentation of their work, communicate it to others, and then engage in dialogue to receive feedback.

In the fall of 2015, in addition to maintaining the face-to-face program, we implemented a fully-online version of the program. Interest in an online program had been building for years prior, as Arizona State University places institutional focus on increasing access to more students, nationally and internationally, specifically through offering more opportunities for online learning. The nature of professional practice doctoral programs is such that they bring methodological research and theoretical tools to practitioners with direct experience and expertise.

The gap between theory and practice in education has long been a criticism and ongoing concern of the field (Brown, 1966; Levine, 2005). Professional practice doctoral programs should be positioned to address this gap by training practitioners with the skills for bringing impact to research in practice (Perry & Imig, 2008; Perry, 2016). Expanding into online contexts may potentially offer more opportunities to address this gap, by expanding the reach of and access to doctoral-level learning to more diverse practitioners beyond local contexts. However, such practitioners are often constrained by professional demands of location and work schedules. Because online learning frees up such locational and schedule restrictions—taking our EdD program into online expansion was programmatically seen as an opportunity to our increase access to more practitioners. A year prior to the beginning of the online version, program faculty and administrators formed a curriculum review committee to discuss how the face-to-face coursework might best translate into the new medium. This meant ensuring that all course pairings, as well as specific coursework content—including major assignments and milestone activities—were aligned for quality and access across the program. Beyond these curriculum shifts, it was also clear that we needed a substantial change in the format and experiences of the Doctoral Research Forums, as a shift in medium changes the nature of the experience.

## THE TRANSITIONAL DILEMMA

During the 2015-2016 academic year we began admitting two fully-online cohorts per year (in addition to the ongoing once-a-year face-to-face cohort admission). An important caveat was that extensive program design attention would be given to ensure equity in quality of experience and access to resources for students across both modalities of our program. This was an important factor in the decision to move our Doctoral Research Forum into a broader, more inclusive, and fully online forum.

Since our online modality is still in nascent stages, some aspects are unfolding or developing along the way. As mentioned, faculty and administrators spent the year prior to this (meeting once each month for a full day from September through June), dedicating collaborative time to revising the entire curriculum to ensure that the two co-existing modalities of the EdD program were aligned.

We were successful in accomplishing this enormous online undertaking, with an initial exception—the face-to-face Doctoral Research Forums. We knew that since these Research Forums were not specifically attached to courses, their redesign would have to occur after the online version of the program had launched and students had been formally admitted. When the online program first began, these Doctoral Research Forums continued on in the traditional on-campus mode only, which meant that our online students (due to obvious distance/location constraints) did not have the opportunity to participate.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the faculty Program Committee sought a solution to this programmatic dilemma. We knew that an annual student research presentation opportunity must remain part of the program. Both students and faculty viewed the formal sharing of research and communal networking across cohorts as a core strength and essential program element. Keeping it within the face-to-face version and not including it in the online version was not an option, due to serious concerns about equity and access across the two modes of the program. Doing so would create a misconception that the programs were not identical in scope, sequence, activities, and experiences—that students were in two different programs, rather than all part of one program. Because online students in Teachers College are not required to come to campus for in official capacity (e.g., any reason tied to courses or program activities), continuing the forum face-to-face only offered opportunities for face-to-face students to participate and engage in professional opportunities, opportunities that online students lacked. Thus, there were only two accessible options for the research presentation sessions—a hybrid format or a fully online format.

The faculty committee first opted for the hybrid format, believing this would maintain the “feel” of the previous format for those in the face-to-face version of the program, while still providing some access to online students. However, engaging in true creative design and problem solving requires that we acknowledge and work with both the affordances and constraints of any dilemma (Norman, 1999). A hybrid version of the program would offer access—but access is not the same as equity in experience. Along similar lines, the affordance of hanging on to a perception of face-to-face “feel” not only created cumbersome logistical constraints, but also created a potential inequitable perception of the same activity. With face-to-face students in the room with faculty and each other, there was potential for the perception of online students merely *watching* a community event rather than *participating*, while operating from the sidelines. Dillard (1989) suggests that creative thinking necessitates a letting-go of existing ideas or elements that we may be fond of or attached to, especially if they do not serve our design purpose or communicate what we need in the greater scheme of the work. We wanted our students to have an opportunity to *all* be in the *same* space. So, the decision was made to pursue a fully online, all-inclusive format for both online and face-to-face students, to be named the *Doctoral Research Conference*.

## A POTENTIAL SOLUTION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

In creative terms, once any big-picture divergent design decision is made, much of the resultant work then comes down to the craft, details, and logistics of making it happen (Cross, 2011; McCloud, 1993). There is no magic potion for this—other than collaboration, patience, and time spent iterating through the details. The faculty committee spent the first six months of the 2016-2017 academic year problem-solving their way through the logistics and format for the Conference. We also worked with a third-party provider of online conference services in the planning of the event. One of the largest challenges we faced involved expanding an event in a different modality, while trying to maintain its impact and perceived effectiveness. This required us to be proactive with the design of communication and its guiding purpose.

### Communication and Clarity of Purpose

An initial step was of communication to faculty and students, particularly face-to-face students who were used to—and attached to—the previous incarnations of the program. As in any new creative design endeavor, some users of the existing or previous system were uncomfortable with change (Kelley & Littman, 2001). A shift toward something new brings uncertainty and reticence, with a tendency to compare and lean back toward the older more established ways (Bruce, 1993). For the online students, who did not have prior associations with the conference, the new offering was seen as an exciting and fresh experience. But for some of the more established face-to-face students, there was concern and uncertainty about moving it to a new medium. Addressing this concern required the program to engage in several carefully-crafted communications about the rationale for and expectations for the new conference mode and design. One of these communications is included in Appendix A, for more detail. We aimed to outline that having this as a face-to-face event was limiting, since we wanted students to have opportunities to connect and network with other professionals across the national and international contexts of the program. We emphasized this as a chance to share experiences and expertise beyond the bounds of local contexts.

In our first communication, we were careful to craft an email message (see Appendix A) six months prior to the shift, that provided the logistical details (date, time, etc.) and the important, required, participatory nature of the event. It also provided a rationale for why this shift was occurring. This rationale emphasized that a face-to-face only approach lost the diverse spread of students and experiences in our program. An online experience had the potential for more of the connection, integration, and networking we wanted to see, and that students could benefit from. We emphasized that we felt we had been missing wonderful opportunities to talk across contexts, localities, states, time zones, and countries, and this new research conference offered students the connections that our diverse and global society expects and deserves. In communicating it as a positive opportunity rather than something they were giving up, we aimed to shore up stronger support and participation. From there, a big piece of the puzzle came back once again to the logistical planning of the setup and structure of the Doctoral Research Conference.

## Conference Structure and Set-up

In earlier iterations of the Conference, students had presented in roundtables and poster sessions. We knew the new Doctoral Research Conference would have to look different, especially with the number of students presenting. Ultimately, the faculty Program Committee decided to structure the Doctoral Research Conference similar to an all-day, in-person research conference with concurrent sessions held in different breakout rooms. We realized that the physical breakout rooms we had traditionally utilized now had to be operationalized in a virtual space. In some sense, this required a leap of faith, because most of us (while fluent in online teaching) had not engaged in online conferences and it was difficult to mentally visualize what this would look like. We must acknowledge—and still

do—that we did and are become/ing a model ourselves in the process.

We engaged additional expertise to set this up by hiring a temporary, part-time, assistant planner to help with the technical tasks of interfacing with our conference provider and setting up the breakout rooms. The “rooms” themselves were *Google Hangouts*, where all presenters in participatory sessions were present along with other students. All breakout rooms included faculty facilitators who functioned as session chairs. The URLs for the *Google Hangout* rooms were then embedded as links within an overall conference site interface and program, which could also be accessed by student presenters and faculty moderators (see Figure 1).

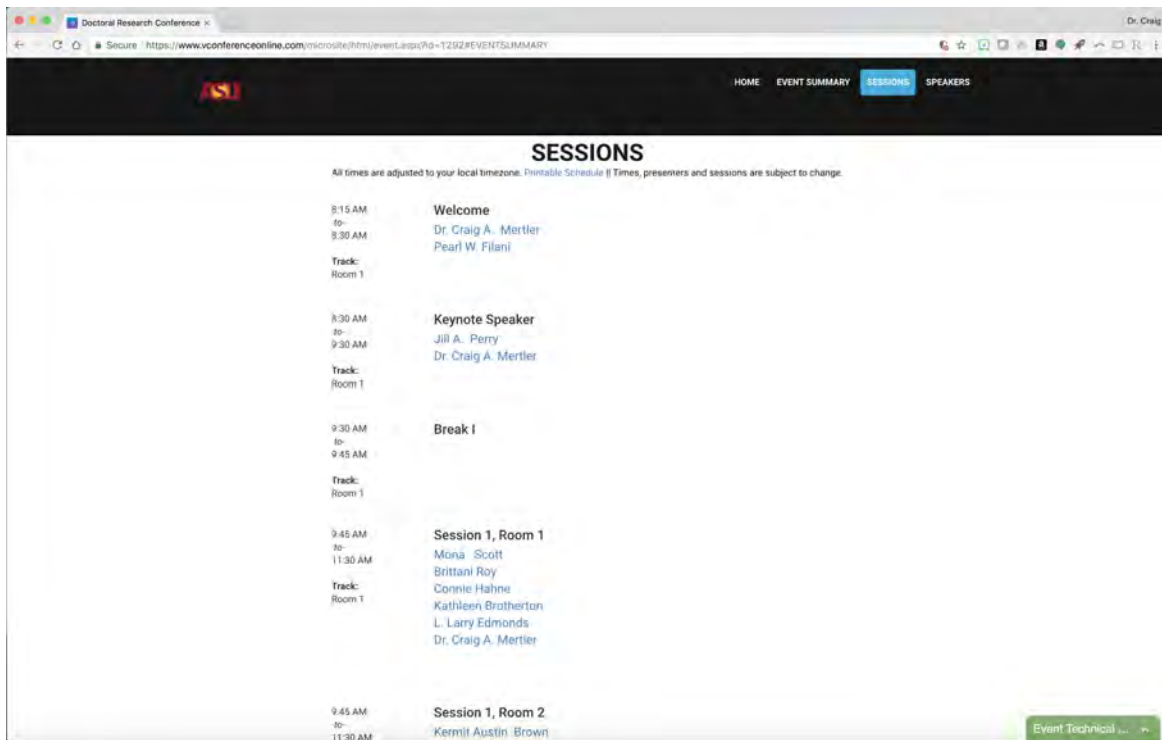


Figure 1. User interface for the Doctoral Research Conference, showing the schedule of events

## Realization and Implementation

Beginning in the spring of 2017, the EdD program launched its inaugural, 100% virtual Doctoral Research Conference (DRC). The DRC was held on a Saturday in April, beginning at 8:00 AM and opened with a keynote address by Dr. Jill Perry, Executive Director of CPED. Dr. Perry's keynote address was followed by organized session rooms with multiple presentations and facilitated discussions. The DRC then ended at 4:00 PM with a closing note by Program Director Dr. Craig Mertler. The overall content of the day consisted of three presentation blocks, each consisting of two-hour concurrent breakout sessions organized by student progression through the program. This equated to a concurrent session with students considered to be in their first year, another with students roughly in their second year, and a third with students at various stages of their final year in the program. Within each concurrent

session, there were as many as eight virtual rooms, with between five and seven student presenters. Students who were presenting during different blocks throughout the day were then able to also participate in sessions in other blocks as conference attendees. Fifteen faculty members served as presentation room facilitators during the day. Over the course of the day, 140 EdD students presented their ongoing research during the DRC.

Our overall feeling upon completion of this first major undertaking of the conference, was generally one of success (see a summary of student feedback in the next section following this), mixed with awareness of things we would work on, such as evening out some technical details or tightening up the timeframe and flow of the day. Overall though, this new instantiation of the Doctoral Research Conference accomplished our key goals of giving all students in the program an opportunity and a space to present their research (whether in early, pre-proposal, or final dissertation stages),



and to interact with, discuss, receive feedback, and answer questions from other ASU faculty, peers, and program students. Our student feedback was generally positive. Despite some of the aforementioned concerns from longer-standing students, there was very little negative concern brought up in post-survey qualitative comments about missing the prior face-to-face conference. We found instead a good deal of excitement, thanks, and positive comments from students (both online and face-to-face) and faculty who were pleased with the experience, and excited about the opportunity to share research, feedback, and ideas more widely.

For the first time, students in the program could share ideas and connections beyond their immediate cohort or program modality, and began to see themselves as participants in a wider community of research in practice. Students in international contexts like Brazil or Singapore met and identified research connections, or shared divergent ideas with students in small towns of middle America, or cities like Phoenix, New York City, San Francisco, and more. The online version of the conference offered many things we hoped for in terms of idea sharing and research connections. It also expanded the program into an international research and learning community. There were a few minor technical bumps throughout the day, but the overall event went off without major quandaries, breakdowns, or serious problems. As anyone who has ever engaged in video conferencing knows, complete avoidance of occasional technical glitches is near impossible. But with planning, the big-picture process tends to go smoothly, and what we gain in the sharing across scales of time and distance is significant. To bring idea-sharing to so many people in one synchronous international event is challenging. Yet our first attempt showed us that if we are willing to approach things with a creative mindset via an openness for the new, the results are exciting. Beyond this anecdotal evidence (which we do put stock in),

our anonymous student feedback on the experience also reified our thinking.

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

Our experience and all informal and anecdotal reactions we noted from both faculty and students trended in a positive direction. But we also felt it was important to capture anonymous feedback, to ensure that our impressions were not out of synch with the perceived reality. We sent out an anonymous survey to capture both formal quantitative and qualitative feedback from all students involved, immediately following the conference. Responses were received from 76 (54%) of the 140 student participants.

### Quantitative Results

We gathered quantitative data in which we asked people to rank their experiences along a 1 - 5 Likert-type scale (with 1 being a most negative score, defined as “far short of expectations,” and 5 being a most positive score, defined as “far exceeded expectations”). We found that the group’s mean scores for each construct of student experience either hovered at or just above a score that “equaled expectations,” or for some constructs clearly “exceeded expectations” (see Table 1). While we do not claim these to be perfect measures or ideal scores, we were pleased with having met or exceeded a significant challenge from the outset. Our intended aims for the day were met and, beyond that, the students’ perceived experience mostly met to exceeded expectations. There were of course students who emphasized problems, or much room to grow and change—but no first try at a novel or creative endeavor is without that. And this feedback also has us working to keep improving.

**Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Response for Feedback from Students Immediately Following the 2017 DRC**

Item	1 Far short of expectations	2 Short of expectations	3 Equaled expectations	4 Exceeded expectations	5 Far exceeded expectations	Mean / Mode
Experiences with the virtual platform	7 (9.2%)	28 (36.8%)	26 (34.2%)	13 (17.1%)	2 (2.6%)	2.67 / 3
Experiences as a presenter	4 (5.3%)	12 (15.8%)	37 (48.7%)	21 (27.6%)	2 (2.6%)	3.07 / 3
Experiences as an attendee	11 (14.5%)	17 (22.4%)	26 (34.2%)	19 (25.0%)	3 (3.9%)	2.82 / 3
Experiences with communications and expectations	5 (6.6%)	13 (17.1%)	21 (27.6%)	27 (35.5%)	10 (13.2%)	3.32 / 3
Experiences with the faculty moderators	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.3%)	25 (32.9%)	26 (34.2%)	24 (31.6%)	3.96 / 4



## Qualitative Results

The qualitative comments we received in an open-ended response portion of the survey helped us to understand student takeaways--and most of them were positive. Even for the ones that skewed more negatively to identify problems, most students framed comments constructively to offer ideas for improvement.

Again and again, the comments noted how much they enjoyed making new connections or meeting program peers that they would not have otherwise. For example, we received several pages worth of comments such as:

- "I loved being able to hear about the work of other students."
- "I think the networking between cohorts was great. I have already made connections with a couple other students that I think will bear fruit."
- "I loved being able to hear about others research and finding some similarities between my research and others."
- "It was so great to link up with students outside my normal cohort, I recommend diversity such as this in the future as well."
- "Loved the opportunity to see what all Ed.D. students are working on and the evolution of work between cohorts. It is good to see faces and hear voices."
- "Awesome to hear from so many of my fellow doctoral students. It was like a level five network on fire."

Many similar comments such as this showed appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about other colleagues and their research, or similarly commented that they felt valued, in being given this opportunity. They noted comments such as:

- "I appreciate the attempt to create a more inclusive research forum for our online cohorts. I appreciated hearing from others and what they are researching, but of most value were the questions asked of me - very tangible areas of new research were identified!"
- "I was very inspired by Dr. Perry's presentation and her insights. I felt so valued as a member of this program."
- As a new doctoral student, this conference provided me with an opportunity get a better sense of how the work fits together. It also exposed me to more theories used in educational research, e.g. transformative learning theory, applied-use theory, communities of practice theory.
- I enjoyed learning about others' research and discovering areas of interest that we share in our work. This conference was a great springboard for networking. Thank you!

Of course that is not to say that every comment was resoundingly positive. There was also critical feedback. The benefit to this critique is that most of it was phrased constructively, giving us things to work on or think about in the next iteration. For example, most of the comments that were negatively skewed tended to cluster around concerns about having to spend the whole Saturday online, or technical blips in Google Hangouts that caused them to miss something they wanted to see, or a desire to have screen sharing to allow for visuals. Some examples can be seen in comments like:

- Sitting from 7:30am - 4:00 pm was way too long. Is there a way to offer more rooms with less people in the room so that the overall time is a bit shortened? I really wanted to see different presentations in different rooms so I jumped around, but it's hard to know the exact timing of presentations...Is there a way to hold everyone to begin and end at set times?
- You cannot expect people to do this for 8 hours on a Saturday!...I loved hearing about other people's research, but please consider how difficult this time commitment is for working people.
- I'm not sure why screen sharing wasn't allowed. A few speakers rambled, and I suspect that if some of them had a PowerPoint to use, they might not have drifted. I understand that it introduces potential technical difficulties, so it's a difficult call.

Some of the negative or constructive critique echoed similar concerns or suggestions, particularly about the time length. This has given us insights about what we need to change in the next conference iteration for Spring 2018. In particular, our program committee is currently working on how to shorten the day's timeframe, so that students do not need to give up a whole Saturday to spend at the computer. Doing this is helping us to tighten and improve the schedule structure, so that students can better identify presentations they want to see, based on topic and more specific times. Further, we are now reviewing technical alternatives to Google Hangouts, to reduce technology problems and allow for more screen sharing.

Given the feedback, in this initial instantiation we felt that we have started to build up a stronger feeling of inclusion and community, particularly in the space between online and face-to-face students. First-year students talked about the benefit of getting to hear more of the hard-won knowledge of dissertation-stage students. The advanced students had a chance to reflect on their time in the program, noting that they liked getting questions from first-year students because it helped them realize how much they have earned in the program. And there was a sense of a globally networked community of friends, colleagues, and peer influencers. Students made comments such as:

- "I loved that people were able to participate from all over the world."
- "It was neat to see so many different participants in the program and hear about what people are doing all over the country."
- "I enjoyed the opportunity to attend the presentations that interested me around my problem of practice...Listening to everyone share their individual studies made me feel confident about my own work. I often wonder if I am doing the right thing and today I felt like I am on the right track."

But perhaps this sense of community and inclusion might be well summed up by this comment from an online student:

- "The conference was great, and the greatest part was my cohort members and I coming together in one communication channel to motivate and empower each other during the proceedings. We answered each other's questions and provided feedback and ended the day feeling motivated and closer as a



group. It inspired us to formulate our own Community of Practice to stay connected and engaged.”

## What we take away

We emphasize we do not suggest this feedback as a strict research methodology, nor do we claim perfect measures or scores. However, this information does tell us that in addressing the challenge of a major rethinking and renovation of an already established program element, we met our goals and did something new and exciting in our context. The comments and reflections of students around the day pointed to their excitement about an innovative endeavor on their behalf, and a chance for new connections, opportunities, collaborations, learning, and growth.

Among the uncertainties and problems that can happen in any sizable new undertaking, most of the big-picture things went right. A few technical blips happened, but we view such blips as grounds for new learning and growth going forward. Speaking to the challenge of creative endeavor, we found that in trying something completely new and unique to our setting, the world did not come crashing down. Rather, our students had many positive experiences, and we achieved our own programmatic design goals of enriching the event and expanding into a larger research discourse community.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

In this essay, we have highlighted the principle of creative rethinking of existing structures, for emerging changes and new contexts in doctoral education, through an example from our EdD in Leadership & Innovation program at Arizona State University. The shift we describe here, moving from an existing research conference structure in a face-to-face setting, to an entirely new structure in a fully-online setting, was a comprehensive change process. It was compelled by the emergent context of a new fully online modality in our program. But our effort really began to move forward when our vision for the conference took a leap from the idea of a hybrid model, into to a fully-online model. From there, the creative process came down to that of crafting this new design, of focusing on logistics and details, and keeping the best interests of our entire population of our design “users” (or the students we serve) at the forefront of our mind. As we have noted, this required us to rethink some of the existing elements, and to let go of some entirely—even those which some face-to-face faculty and students were attached to, such as a “sense of feel” in the on-campus program. Such letting go of the old must sometimes happen during a creative rethink in service of the overall design goals. Here, our design goals included doing what the program knew to be in the best interests of all students, both face-to-face and online. These interests meant increasing opportunities for discussion, collaboration, sharing of research and resources, and greater connectivity between all students across the emerging global contexts of our program. We wanted to ensure equity, access, and quality for all students in the opportunities and experiences we provided to them.

We have positioned this as a kind of creative design experience, not just on the basis of the defined creativity elements of novelty and effectiveness relative to our context (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004), but also on the design process of iterating through ideas and effort to build something that serves a purpose for people (Schön, 1983). By keeping our broad purpose in mind—which for us, meant focusing on issues of equity, access, and quality—we were

ultimately able to create a new and successful approach that better served the students and program as a whole. While this involved the immediate discomfort of letting go of existing elements, it also meant the ultimate benefit of achieving something as good or better, for our purposes, than we had even hoped for.

Change is hard. We do not suggest that this was an easy endeavor. Nor do we deny that there were more than a few challenges and discomfort along the way. We wondered if or how we could pull off the technology and logistics of so many people across so many time-zones, all presenting and facilitating online over one day, and we hesitated over the concerns of students worried about the change, or if we really would lose something programmatically important along the way. But pushing forward with an open mind, carefully but but willingly, is essential to doing anything new and creative or making a change. This also necessitates managing the uncertainty and ambiguity the comes with change, until you have some results in hand.

Creativity necessitates a willingness to try, and to risk that you may fail or need to regroup along the way (Smith & Henriksen, 2016)—but it ultimately it pays off with reward. Our anecdotal and methodical evidence collected along the way tells us that our creative leap paid off in what we wanted it to do, and also left us room to grow. We do not assume that this first iteration was perfect or that it is “a done deal,” so we are ready to keep iterating, changing, and improving the details and the design. As physicist William Pollard once said, “Without change there is no innovation, creativity, or incentive for improvement. Those who initiate change will have a better opportunity to manage the change that is inevitable.”

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## APPENDIX A

### Email Communication to EdD Community Regarding Transition to Fully-Online Research Conference

December 9, 2016

Dear Leadership & Innovation EdD community,

This email is an important communication of essential information you will need for your doctoral program. Please read this through carefully. You need to be aware of a changing requirement to factor it into your Spring planning and calendar, ASAP. We know you are busy, but please CAREFULLY read this email through. You MUST plan the details into your upcoming calendar, and keep a copy of this note. The information below describes the substantive changes to the Research Forum—a change that we are extremely excited about, as it will continue to demonstrate and support the innovative nature of our EdD Program!

As mentioned during the recent Fall Doctoral Research Forum, we wish to let you know of a significant upcoming change in format for one of the required elements (for all students) of the program—the Doctoral Research Forum. As you know, our EdD program has always held a Doctoral Research Forum twice a year, at the end of Fall and Spring semesters on the West campus of ASU. This Research Forum has been required for face-to-face EdD students, as an opportunity to present their work—whether in their first year or at the dissertation stage. It has always provided a great chance for feedback and discussion from fellow students and faculty. However, we have not been able to share the experience yet with our online program, due to the face-to-face format. That is about to change.

We are writing to provide some details on this new conference format. The entire event will be moving to larger and more globally-connected online format. It will include both the face-to-face and the online versions of our program, sharing collaboratively in a virtual research conference, and in a new fully-online format. It will be held once a year at the end of the academic year, always on a Saturday in late-April or early-May. It is an **all-day event**, going from roughly 8am to 5pm. All EdD students—*except for the cohorts that begin the program during Spring semesters of that same semester*—are **required** to be a part of this one-day-a-year online event. It presents the opportunity for all the important things we have valued about the Forum—with the added benefit of connecting us all online as a much larger scholar-practitioner community.

This year, the new online conference format—that we are calling the **Doctoral Research Conference**—will be held on **Saturday, April 22nd, 2017, from 8am – 5pm (Arizona Time) in an online virtual space**. We will send details about accessing the virtual conference space in the near future. For now, please plan accordingly for the date/time. April 22nd is the date for the upcoming 2017 spring event. Each year, this event will be held around the same time—with yearly required participation happening once a year, at the end of the academic year (all day on a Saturday, AZ time).

It is vital that all students be a part of this event, so at present, that means saving the date all day from 8am – 5pm, Saturday, April 22nd, 2017 (Arizona Time). This is considered a **program milestone** and a requirement, so **attendance is not optional—it is mandatory**. The on-campus Doctoral Research Forum attendance has always been required, because of the importance of students experiencing a chance to present research in an academic, collaborative, networked setting. With this one-day, once-a-year commitment, this equates to committing three Saturdays over the course of your entire program. This goes toward the goal of networked collaboration, sharing and improvement in our research and goals, through participation in this online conference. For any students who cannot participate for any reason, there is a program policy in place, which will include substantive project work and writing. This policy of “make-up” work for absence from the Doctoral Research Conference is to ensure that if a student misses the event, she or he will engage in corresponding or comparable work to a missed day-long activity. Active student status in the program requires that students either attend the forum, or complete the extensive makeup writing/work very soon after the event. For your information and future reference, this policy has been attached to this email.

It is to your benefit to attend. So please reserve that date for now, and plan to be there. We will send more information, and your instructors at that time will help prepare presentation of your work in its current stages. We emphasize that while all EdD students are required to attend, the newest EdD students just completing their first semester in the online Spring cohort do not have to present (they may attend only). Everyone else (anyone who has not just started that Spring Semester) will both attend and present.

For those in the face-to-face program who have been used to presenting in this forum on campus only, you may be wondering why we are now planning this once-a-year, fully online format. That's an important question for us to answer.





Our Doctoral Research Forum has been a wonderful opportunity to share work, get feedback, and connect and network with other faculty and students. It is a requirement of our program because we think such sharing of ideas and research is key to a productive intellectual community. But, because it has always occurred in-person only on the West campus, only on-campus students could participate. That is too limiting, since it means that our program, with its rich spread of students and experiences, cannot be as connected, integrated, and networked as we need it to be. With the new online version of our doctoral program, we find that we are missing the voices and experiences of our online doctoral students in this forum. Our online and face-to-face students may be “different,” in terms of the format of the program they experience, but we are all the same program. Among us, we have remarkable experiences and expertise to share globally. Having the forum as a face-to-face only event, we have been missing wonderful opportunities to talk across contexts, localities, states, time zones, and countries. We need this research conference to offer you all the opportunities and connections that our diverse and global society expects and deserves. Fortunately, there are new technologies to help us connect—as we construct an online conference format that brings us all together. This will happen for one day, once a year, and we’ll give you information to help you be prepared to do this. We hope that you are as excited as we are, about the chance to make connections and get feedback/ideas— from other contexts and people that you would never get the chance to meet and interact with otherwise—that can help you in your work.

Once the technical and organizational details for this event are ready to share, we will be in touch again. For now, please allot the time for this experience **on Saturday, April 22nd, 2017, from 8am – 5pm AZ time**. Plan to prepare your work for this event with faculty support in the months prior to it happening, and to come with an open mind for sharing and thinking within the EdD community.

We are incredibly excited about this event, and about bringing the EdD community together more powerfully. If you have questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Mertler ([Craig.Mertler@asu.edu](mailto:Craig.Mertler@asu.edu)) directly.

Thank you sincerely,

The EdD Program Committee