

The professional doctorate in education: seeking a distinct identity in Brazil and abroad

O doutorado profissional na área de Educação:
buscando uma identidade própria no Brasil e no exterior

El doctorado profesional en educación:
en busca de una identidad propia en Brasil y en el exterior

Robert Verhine¹

ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative analysis of the professional doctorate in education in the United States and Brazil, highlighting the implications of the U.S. model—initially implemented in the 1920s—for the Brazilian context, where this type of program was formally established nearly a century later. In both countries, a longstanding challenge persists: to consolidate a distinct identity for the professional doctorate that clearly differentiates it from the academic doctorate and grants it the prestige necessary to achieve the expected social and educational impact. The article is structured into three main sections. The first two examine the Professional Doctorate in Education in the United States (Ed.D) and in Brazil (PDE), respectively. The final section offers recommendations for consolidating a distinct identity for the Brazilian PDE, focusing on faculty and student profiles, as well as defining activities and outputs.

Keywords

Professional Doctorate. Graduate Education in Brazil. Graduate Education in the United States.

¹ Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brasil.
E-mail: rverhine@gmail.com | ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5157-3680>

RESUMO: O artigo realiza uma análise comparativa do doutorado profissional em educação nos Estados Unidos e no Brasil, destacando as implicações do modelo norte-americano — implantado inicialmente na década de 1920 — para o contexto brasileiro, onde essa modalidade foi formalizada quase cem anos depois. Em ambos os países, observa-se um desafio histórico: consolidar uma identidade própria para esse tipo de doutorado, distinguindo-o do doutorado acadêmico e conferindo-lhe o prestígio necessário para alcançar os impactos socioeducacionais esperados. O trabalho está estruturado em três partes principais. As duas primeiras examinam, respectivamente, o Doutorado Profissional em Educação nos Estados Unidos (Ed.D) e no Brasil (PDE). Por fim, a terceira parte apresenta recomendações para a consolidação de uma identidade própria para o PDE brasileiro, abordando seu corpo docente e discente, bem como suas atividades e produções definidoras.

Palavras-chave: Doutorado Profissional. Pós-Graduação no Brasil. Pós-Graduação nos Estados Unidos.

RESUMEN: El artículo presenta un análisis comparativo del doctorado profesional en educación en Estados Unidos y Brasil, destacando las implicaciones del modelo estadounidense —implementado inicialmente en la década de 1920— para el contexto brasileño, donde esta modalidad fue formalizada casi cien años después. En ambos países se observa un desafío histórico: consolidar una identidad propia para este tipo de doctorado, distinguiéndolo del doctorado académico y otorgándole el prestigio necesario para alcanzar los impactos socioeducativos esperados. El trabajo está estructurado en tres partes principales. Las dos primeras examinan, respectivamente, el Doctorado Profesional en Educación en Estados Unidos (Ed.D) y en Brasil (PDE). Finalmente, la tercera parte presenta recomendaciones para la consolidación de una identidad propia del PDE brasileño, abordando su cuerpo docente y estudiantil, así como sus actividades y producciones definitorias.

Palabras clave: Doctorado Profesional. Posgrado en Brasil. Posgrado en Estados Unidos.

Introduction

In 2018, based on Ordinance No. 389 of March 23, 2017, the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) changed the professional modality of *stricto sensu* graduate studies to include the Professional Doctorate (PD). Following this guideline, the area of Education approved its first Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) in the same year. Considering the short time that has elapsed since its implementation, it is not yet possible to comprehensively assess its impact on the Brazilian postgraduate system. However, to

understand its potential implications, it is pertinent to examine the international experience with professional graduate programs, as already done, albeit preliminarily, by Calderon et al. (2019), Frucci et al. (2024), and Kot and Hendel (2011).

These studies indicate that PDE is present in internationally prestigious universities, with the United States being the country with the greatest consolidation of this modality. The first American professional doctoral program was established in the 1920s, while in

several other countries, its implementation only occurred in the 1990s. Currently, its presence is consolidated in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand (Perry, 2017).

During the discussions that preceded the legal authorization of the professional doctorate by the National Education Council (NEC), the American experience was often used as a reference. One of the recurring arguments was that, since this modality was common and successful in the United States, it could also be successful in the Brazilian context. This assumption, as well as other implications associated with the American model, are analyzed in this article, whose objective is to present subsidies and suggestions for improving the offer of PDE in Brazil.

In addition to this introduction, this paper is structured in three main parts. The first examines the Professional Doctorate in Education in the United States, with an emphasis on its contextual, historical, and problematic aspects and its possible implications for the Brazilian reality. The second part is dedicated to the analysis of the PDE in Brazil, based on national regulatory documentation and its dialogue with international experi-

ence. Finally, the third part presents considerations and recommendations regarding the consolidation of a distinct identity for the PDE, in order to ensure its impact on the Brazilian scenario, independent and no less relevant than the contributions generated by the academic doctorate.

This comparative exercise provides an understanding of the American and Brazilian cases, considering the history and development of the professional doctorate as a subject of analysis. The assumption is that the PDE will only represent an advance in Brazilian postgraduate policy if it is specifically aimed at training professionals working in the country's educational structure—such as teachers and/or managers—and not primarily at training researchers focused exclusively on the production of scientific knowledge. Although PDE graduates may produce new knowledge, this knowledge must be applicable to their professional practice and based on concrete problems faced in the field of education. In addition, their training should prioritize the development of skills such as decision-making, the ability to work collaboratively, and the technical expertise necessary for educational practice at various levels and in various institutional contexts.

The PDE in the United States

To contextualize the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) in the United States, it is necessary to highlight that there are two main categories of professional doctorates in that country: the academic professional doctorate and the first-degree professional doctorate. The first is characterized by the requirement to develop new knowledge, culminating in the preparation of a written document (thesis or equivalent instrument),

which must be formally approved by an academic board. The second, in turn, refers to professional training at the postgraduate level in areas such as Medicine (MD), Dentistry (DDS), and Law (JD). Such courses, which in Brazil correspond to undergraduate training, are not recognized as doctorates by the National Science Foundation (NSF), as they do not require students to produce original knowledge.

Thus, the analysis presented here focuses exclusively on academic professional doctorates, as they are more similar to the Professional Doctorate model currently in place in Brazil. It is important to note that, in the United States, the doctorate classified as “academic” in Brazil is designated by the acronym Ph.D., while the professional doctorate is represented by the letter D, usually combined with other letters that indicate the area of specialization. In the case of Education, the acronym used is Ed.D.; in other areas, it is common to find designations such as DPH (Doctor of Public Health) and DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) (Writers of UoPeople, 2025).

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of types of professional doctorates available in the United States. The online encyclopedia Wikipedia identifies 51 different classifications of degrees; however, in its annual surveys, the NSF officially recognizes only 18 types. In general, programs are organized into areas traditionally focused on professional practice and the application of knowledge, requiring specific training that goes beyond preparation for scientific research and the production of original knowledge. Among the main areas covered by professional doctorates—in addition to Education—are Business Administration, Engineering, Health (with an emphasis on Public Health and Nursing), Law, Arts/Music, and Theology. It is important to note that, in the United States, most areas of knowledge do not offer professional doctorates.

According to data from the National Science Foundation (NSF, 2023), of the 55,000 doctoral degrees awarded in the United States in 2022, 98.6% were Ph.D. degrees. The most prominent professional doctorate was the Ed.D., although it represented only 0.9% of the total degrees awarded in that year and approximately 10% of the doctorates awarded in the field of Education. These

data show that the assumption, sometimes held in Brazil, that professional doctorates are predominant in the United States—including in the field of education—is mistaken. Even in this area, approximately 90% of doctorates awarded are Ph.D. degrees, which are academic in nature. Thus, contrary to what is assumed in certain Brazilian institutional discourses, professional doctorates have a relatively limited presence in the US.

In the United States, the first Ed.D. program was implemented at Harvard University in 1921. Its creation was part of the efforts of the period to legitimize education as a profession through its association with institutions of higher education (Perry, 2024). The Ed.D. expanded significantly in the following decades; however, from the 1970s onwards, with the strengthening of scientific research as a priority in educational research, the Ph.D. title became predominant, as it valued more rigorous theoretical and methodological approaches.

Despite its lower statistical representation, the number of Ed.D. programs offered in the United States is quite significant. According to data from the Ed.D. Programs.com platform, there are currently 233 Ed.D. programs distributed across 188 universities located in 42 of the 50 US states. The website classifies these programs into 12 thematic categories, the most common being those focused on administrative and organizational leadership, followed by curriculum and instruction, educational technology, special education, and educational psychology. The emphasis on leadership training is consistent with the profile of the target audience for these programs, which is mainly composed of practicing professionals seeking to update their skills and advance their careers in the US educational system (Louie, 2024).

The importance of offering professional doctorates in education is corroborated by a survey based on the most recent edition of the U.S. News ranking (2024). Of the 20 best graduate schools in Education in the United States, 17 offer both types of doctorates—Ph.D. and Ed.D.—concurrently, with 11 public and 6 private institutions. These data indicate that, although a minority in quantitative terms, the professional doctorate occupies a consolidated position among the main institutions training educators in that country.

The study of the nature of the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in the United States reveals relevant trends that may offer insights for the consolidation of the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) in Brazil. The first refers to the flexibility in offering the Ed.D., especially with regard to the teaching modality. Considering that American professional programs are generally aimed at older students who are already in the job market, it is common for the Ed.D. to be offered through distance learning. Although current Brazilian legislation theoretically allows for the possibility of a remote doctorate, this has not yet materialized in the country (Verhine & Silveira, 2024).

In this sense, it is pertinent to observe how this modality works in the American context. Although historically associated with low-prestige institutions—many of them for-profit—the offering of distance learning graduate programs, especially in online format, has come to be valued by several prominent universities in the United States (Louie, 2024). Among the 20 best graduate schools in Education in that country, nine offer the Ed.D. online.

A comprehensive description of the online Ed.D. is presented by Verhine and Dantas (2024), who highlight, among other aspects: (1) online and face-to-face versions tend to be equivalent in almost all elements, except

for the teaching format; (2) in many institutions, the mode of delivery of the program (in-person or remote) is not stated on the diploma or academic transcript; (3) several online programs adopt a fully asynchronous model, allowing students to access content according to their availability; and (4) in most cases, there is no requirement for face-to-face meetings, which contradicts current regulations in Brazil, which require mandatory in-person interactions.

The second relevant trend concerns the level of academic requirements for obtaining the degree. In general, the formal requirements for an Ed.D. tend to be less rigorous than those required for a Ph.D. This distinction has existed since the origins of the modality: the first Ed.D. program, offered by Harvard University, had a lower course load than the Ph.D., did not require proficiency in a second foreign language, and accepted dissertations with an emphasis on practical application rather than theoretical foundations (Perry, 2013).

These trends remain current, as demonstrated by a recent study that analyzed 188 programs at 145 US institutions (Storey & Hesbol, 2016). Among other findings, the study indicates that Ed.D. programs are expected to take less time to complete. This aspect is related to the focus of the course: while the Ed.D. aims to produce knowledge applied to the professional context, the Ph.D. emphasizes theoretical research, whose processes are longer and more academically complex. For this reason, many Ed.D. programs advertise an estimated duration of two to three years, while Ph.D. programs rarely indicate such short timeframes on their official websites.

In addition to the time issue, the two models differ in several other academic requirements. Compared to the Ph.D., the Ed.D. often: (a) does not require proof of foreign language proficiency; (b) waives the

requirement to take courses in a field related to education (known as a cognate field); (c) does not require the participation of faculty members from outside the academic unit in the defense committee; (d) does not require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), a standardized exam widely required for admission to graduate school in the United States (Latta & Wunder, 2012).

A third trend with relevant implications for the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) in Brazil is related to the prestige and legitimacy attributed to the Ed.D. in the United States, in comparison to the Ph.D. According to Shulman et al. (2006), the Ed.D. is often perceived as a Ph.D. lite, that is, as a “watered-down” version of the academic doctorate, with a lesser reputation. The experience of Harvard University itself illustrates this perception. In 2012, its Faculty of Education discontinued the Ed.D. program and began offering, for the first time, a Ph.D. in the field, in addition to establishing the Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.). In doing so, the institution reaffirmed its commitment to theoretical research in the field of education and more clearly redefined the nature of its professional program (SALTER, 2012).

Although, from a legal standpoint, the academic doctorate (Ph.D.) and the professional doctorate (Ed.D.) have equivalent status—both being considered terminal degrees in the university system—the distinction between the two degrees in the United States has been the subject of recurring controversy and debate. In conceptual terms, the Ph.D. is recognized as a research-oriented degree, while the Ed.D. is intended for the training of practicing professionals. However, in many institutions, this distinction becomes blurred, raising questions about the validity of maintaining both models simultaneously. Some authors, such as Deering (1998), have even advocated for

the extinction of the Ed.D.; others, on the contrary, propose that education faculties should stop offering the Ph.D. There are, however, scholars who recognize the importance of both degrees, provided they fulfill distinct functions: training academic researchers, on the one hand, and educational leaders working outside academia, on the other (Shulman et al., 2006).

Since its inception at Harvard, the Ed.D. has faced what Perry (2013) calls an “identity crisis.” According to the author, over time, the distinctions between the Ph.D. and Ed.D. have become blurred, with the difference being more noticeable in terms of institutional prestige than curricular content. With the aim of strengthening this differentiation, the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) was created in 2007, initially with the participation of 26 institutions, and has now expanded into a consortium of more than 125 universities (Foster et al., 2023).

The CPED consolidated a consensus view that the Ed.D. should be understood as a degree aimed at training professionals in practice, with a focus on applied research, generally aimed at intervention and inducing institutional change. The final product may take the form of a dissertation or capstone project, based on the investigation of a specific problem identified in the student's professional context (Buss, 2018; Perry, 2024).

The CPED approach emphasizes that incoming students should already have significant professional experience, and that the training path should be, to a large extent, compatible with professional employment, so as to allow the work environment to function as a laboratory for solving relevant problems. In this model, research is based on practical demands rather than theoretical gaps, even though it is supported by an academic framework built on both scientific research and professional experience (Kumar & Dawson, 2013).

Theses or final projects can take different forms, such as funding proposals, curriculum materials, or evaluation reports, and should be written in language accessible to the professional communities for which they are intended (Storey & Hesbol, 2016).

The CPED consortium has developed a variety of procedures, techniques, and tools to articulate theory, practice, and problem-based research, seeking to operationalize its conception of the Ed.D. An example of this effort is the 2013 edition of the journal *Planning and Changing*, which published fifteen case studies on the redesign of professional doctorates in various regions of the United States². These studies introduce specific concepts and acronyms to characterize the programs, such as PoP (Problem of Practice), CoP (Cohort-based Practice), LSC (Leadership Scholar Communities), CAR (Cycles of Action Research), and DLT (Double Loop Training) (Buss, 2018).

The controversy in the United States surrounding the coexistence of two types of doctorates in the field of education—the Ph.D. and the Ed.D.—still persists. Most Ed.D. programs are not part of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) consortium, and in many cases, the distinction between the two degrees remains unclear. Foster et al. (2023), based on a national survey, state that the differentiation tends to be more evident when both mod-

els—academic and professional—are located in the same graduate department. Still, the authors acknowledge that “studies of difference do not produce findings that are consistent” (Foster et al., 2023, p. 20) and reinforce that “The Ed.D must be valued for its purpose and not be seen as a Ph.D-lite” (p. 24).

In concluding this section, it is pertinent to return to the two central questions presented at the beginning: the success of the Ed.D. and its transferability to the Brazilian context. With regard to its effectiveness, the results are ambiguous. On the one hand, the Ed.D. is widely available and meets a concrete demand for the training of professional leaders in the field of education. On the other hand, when compared to the Ph.D. in Education, it is less widespread and faces challenges related to academic prestige, institutional respectability, and the definition of its identity.

The answer to the question of whether the model can be adapted to the Brazilian context is also complex. This process requires a greater understanding of both the concept of the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) and its practical implementation. As will be discussed in the following section, the concern with defining a distinct identity and clear distinction between the PDE and the academic doctorate, so prevalent in the United States, is also significant in Brazil.

The PDE in Brazil

The first proposals for the Professional Doctorate (PD) were evaluated by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) in 2018 and implemented the following year. Among the approved programs, three in the field of education stand out. Since then, the modality

has been expanding rapidly. By 2025, 173 PD courses had been approved, of which 167 are linked to programs that also offer Professional Master's degrees (PM). The areas of evaluation with the highest number of approved PDs are Education and Interdisciplinary, with 20 courses each, followed by

² See *Planning and Changing*, v. 44, n. 3/4, 2013, pp. 113-326.

Administration and Teaching, both with 19 offerings. Among the 50 areas recognized by Capes, 18 do not yet offer professional doctoral courses, which suggests that, as in the United States, this modality is not considered appropriate for all fields of knowledge.

As in the US scenario, Brazilian PDs tend to concentrate on areas that are more applied than theoretical in nature. However, it is noted that some areas with a strong practical component — such as Psychology, Social Work, and Engineering — do not yet offer this modality. The case of Engineering is particularly significant, given that, in the United States, it is a well-established field in terms of professional doctorates. Although the documents prepared by the four areas of Engineering at Capes recognize the viability of the PD, the proposals submitted to date have not met the established criteria, especially with regard to the presentation of a clear justification for the adoption of a professional doctorate instead of an academic one.

At the regulatory level, CAPES' official documents seek, at least in conceptual terms, to establish a distinction between the two types of doctorates. Ordinance No. 389, dated March 23, 2017, clearly differentiates between master's and doctoral programs and, in the specific case of professional doctorates, defines their focus as advanced and transformative professional practice, as well as the social, organizational, or professional demands of the labor market and local productive arrangements. The stated objective is to contribute to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public and private organizations. It is important to note that terms such as "research," "academic production," and "science" are not mentioned in this document.

Ordinance No. 60, dated March 20, 2019, reinforces this differentiation by emphasizing

that PDs should seek solutions to highly complex problems, with an emphasis on applicability and innovation. With regard to the teaching staff, up to 30% of professors are allowed to not have a master's or doctoral degree **from (retirar a palavra)**, which represents a significant relaxation compared to the criteria traditionally adopted for academic programs.

With regard to (With respect to) final projects, the same ordinance adopts an open and innovative stance, providing for the possibility of using alternative formats, as long as they are approved by the respective evaluation areas. This guideline seeks to value technical and technological products that reflect the practical and applied nature of the professional doctorate.

On the other hand, an analysis of official documents related to the approval of new courses and the Capes (2025) evaluation form in the four areas with the highest number of Professional Doctorate (PD) courses reveals that the distinction between the two types of doctorates (professional and academic) varies significantly. In one of these areas, the only explicit difference refers to the value placed on the production of technical-technological products (TTP) by faculty and students in professional programs. The other areas also highlight the importance of TTP, but add other distinctive criteria. Two of them allow the inclusion of up to 20% of faculty members without a doctoral degree and accept final projects that do not use the designation "thesis." The other emphasizes the resolution of complex problems related to professional practice and values the prior experience of faculty and students in this field. In this third case, it is even mandatory to offer a course focused on monitoring professional practice.

However, it should be noted that none of these four areas addresses the flexibility of study schedules or the adoption of specific

pedagogical methodologies focused on the performance of students in their professional contexts. In contrast to the model proposed by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), the documentation analyzed does not emphasize leadership or the profile of mid-career students who combine doctoral training with professional practice.

In the 2021–2024 quadrennium, 19 Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) programs were evaluated by Capes. All are linked to Professional Master's programs, but only six are based in institutions that also offer Academic Doctorates in Education. In terms of geographic distribution, most of these programs ($n=13$) are concentrated in the South and Southeast regions, reflecting the predominant pattern of Brazilian graduate studies. The main areas of focus for PDEs are: teacher training, educational management, and educational technology.

In order to investigate whether Brazilian PDEs have their own identity—in line with Capes' normative guidelines and international conceptions of the modality—a qualitative analysis of three programs approved in 2021/2022 was conducted. Two of these programs have educational technology as their thematic axis, and the third focuses on the training of school professionals³.

The methodology included an analysis of the programs' institutional websites and the Lattes⁴ platform for curricula of permanent faculty members. The objectives and mission of the programs were examined, especially with regard to the emphasis on solving concrete problems related to professional practice. In addition, we sought to identify characteristics in faculty members that, according to the CPED model, distinguish a professional program professor from one

linked to an academic program. These characteristics include: professional experience outside the university environment, the nature (theoretical or applied) of the doctoral thesis, the profile of ongoing research, the type of scientific production, and the thematic focus of doctoral supervision. The history of participation in academic and professional programs and current involvement in university extension projects were also considered.

The results obtained were largely inconclusive. On the one hand, the PDEs analyzed present, in their institutional documents, a mission and objectives consistent with the proposal for training for professional practice outside the academic environment. On the other hand, the profiles of permanent faculty members do not clearly show a differentiation from academic programs. Most of these professors graduated with academic doctorates, with theoretically based theses, and maintain this same orientation in their current research. Many have never worked in basic education, and few are involved in extension activities.

An analysis of the titles of the theses supervised by these faculty members also does not reveal a clear distinction between the modalities. For example, there are works in the areas of history, philosophy, and linguistics, whose focus is not necessarily related to solving practical problems in everyday education.

It is important to emphasize that this analysis is exploratory in nature and needs to be further developed through more comprehensive studies. Even so, the initial findings are not promising in terms of consolidating a distinct identity for the PDE in Brazil. The ab-

³ This analysis was conducted by the author of this article based on data available on the internet regarding the following programs: School Education (UNIR); Education and Technology (IFSUL) and Education and New Technologies (UNINTER).

⁴ Currículos Lattes refers to a Brazilian national platform that stores the performance data of undergraduate and graduate professors in research, teaching, and outreach, which is regularly updated by the professors themselves..

sence of clear distinctions between professional and academic programs, especially with regard to the teaching profile, raises questions about the real need for two types of doctorates to coexist in the field of education.

Before concluding the analysis of the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) in the Brazilian context, it is pertinent to raise two additional points that are directly related to the American experience.

The first refers to the centrality attributed to leadership in Ed.D programs in the United States. In that country, high-level administrative functions in the field of education are highly professionalized, the result of a process that dates back to the 19th century (Urban, Jennings & Gailher, 2019). As a result, a doctoral degree is often a mandatory requirement for holding educational leadership positions, both in institutions and in education systems. It was in this context that the Ed.D was originally established. Currently, for example, this degree is generally required for the position of school superintendent, a position equivalent in Brazil to that of municipal secretary of education. Other professionals with Ed.D degrees hold leadership positions in university management, exercising career administrative positions.

However, in Brazil, such positions—both in basic and higher education—are not widely accessible to PDE degree holders. Secretaries of education and most of their senior staff are often chosen based on political criteria rather than academic credentials (Ottman, 2006). A similar situation occurs in Brazilian public universities, where the main management positions are mostly held by faculty members from the institution itself, selected through internal processes often influenced by political and/or personal dynamics. In addition, these managers usually perform administrative functions for limited periods, combining them with teaching and research

activities (Balbachevsky & Schwartzman, 2011). In other words, many of the professional niches and positions traditionally occupied by Ed.D graduates in the United States are unlikely to be filled in Brazil by PDE graduates.

The second relevant issue, already discussed by Sousa Júnior and Verhine (2020), concerns the possible negative impact of the consolidation of the PDE on the Professional Master's Degree in Education (PME). In the United States, as in other developed countries, it is common for teachers and managers in basic education to have a master's degree. In Brazil, this presence is still limited, which contributes to the unsatisfactory performance of public schools. The PME has played an important role in mitigating this deficit, albeit only partially.

In this scenario, the consolidation of the PDE may compromise the mission of the PME by diverting potential students to a more prestigious degree, which, in practice, tends to direct them to higher education, distancing them from direct involvement in schools and basic education systems. This problem does not arise in the United States, where there is a significant ratio of master's degrees to doctorates (6:1), whereas in Brazil, this ratio is only 2:1 (NCES, 2024). This difference stems, in part, from the fact that many US institutions are authorized to offer only master's programs and are legally prohibited from awarding doctoral degrees, which allows for a clear distinction between research-oriented institutions and those focused predominantly on teaching (McCormick & Borden, 2017).

Therefore, unlike in the United States, Brazil does not yet have a broad base of master's degree holders capable of meeting the demands of basic education. The disorderly expansion of the PDE, without strategic coordination with the PME, may compromise the advances already achieved in this area.

Based on the reflections presented in this section, the last part of this paper proposes recommendations and suggestions for improving the Professional Doctorate model in Brazil, with a view to consolidating its identity

as a legitimate modality that is relevant and consistent with the needs of the Brazilian educational system.

Considerations and Recommendations

Based on the discussion presented, it is clear, based on the experience of the United States, that in order to avoid duplicating the contributions already made by the academic doctorate and to achieve an equivalent level of prestige and relevance, the professional doctorate must build its own distinct identity. As with the CPED (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate) initiative in that country, this identity must be built in a participatory manner, involving both graduate programs and members of the academic and professional communities.

However, this identity cannot be a mere reproduction of the American experience, which focuses almost exclusively on preparing students for leadership positions in basic education. In Brazil, the implementation of this modality in the field of education requires caution, otherwise the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) could compromise the important contributions already made by the Professional Master's Degrees in Education (PMEs) in operation.

The PDE should not compete with the academic doctorate, but rather complement it, offering knowledge that is distinct from that provided by the latter. Thus, PDEs should have a clearly defined professional and practical focus, aimed at preparing professionals to occupy high-level positions—preferably linked to basic education—who would effectively benefit substantially from the training of a professional doctorate. Brazilian education needs, as in the United States, a

“doctorate of practice,” in which students acquire skills aimed at promoting concrete improvements in the country’s schools and educational systems.

To conclude this article, here are some recommendations that deserve consideration:

- The research developed within the program should originate from concrete professional problems, rather than starting exclusively from theory, and should offer solutions that can be operationalized and applied in the short and/or medium term. The quality of this research should be evaluated based on its effectiveness in solving problems related to the professional world. The research-oriented components of the curriculum should emphasize the relationship between theory and practice, preparing students to conduct applied, action, or intervention-oriented investigations.
- The professor of a professional doctoral program must have significant prior experience in the professional field to which the program is linked. Such experience must have been developed over several years and demonstrate that the professor, prior to joining the program, had already acquired professional leadership attributes and acted as an agent of transformation. Their intellectual production, resulting from research and/or extension activities, must be

focused on solving practical problems. Faculty members who do not hold a doctoral degree but who demonstrate exceptional professional competence may also be eligible to join the program's faculty.

- Students in a professional doctoral program must also have relevant prior professional experience that clearly demonstrates their dedication and competence in their field. It is recommended that students remain in their professional contexts during the course, using the work environment as a space for experimentation and development of their Final Course Project (acronym in Portuguese TCC).
- The TCC should be conceived as an instrument geared toward professional practice, in which problems in the occupational context are investigated and concrete solutions are proposed. The document may take different formats, ranging from a traditional dissertation to projects, technical reports, technologies, or teaching materials. It should be written in a manner accessible to the relevant professional community and evaluated by a panel that includes representatives from the professional context under investigation.
- To enable students to remain in professional activity during their doctorate, the Professional Doctorate in Education (PDE) should be flexible in terms of schedules and learning formats. Thus, the use of hybrid strategies and distance learning platforms

should be incorporated in order to meet the specific needs of students with time and geographical access restrictions. In this sense, it is necessary for Capes to review its overly restrictive rules regarding hybrid teaching and distance learning, as recommended by Verhine and Dantas (2024).

- The Capes evaluation process should be reformulated to place greater emphasis on the distinctions between academic and professional modalities, using differentiated criteria—and, eventually, forms—for the evaluation of the two types of programs, with regard to their organization, functioning, research quality, intellectual production and output, faculty and student profiles, nature of final projects, and social impacts. The approach currently adopted by the Education Area, which is limited to assigning different weights to publications and technical-technological products, proves insufficient to capture and promote the unique identity of the professional doctorate. This identity is essential so that this modality is not perceived as a second-rate academic doctorate, but rather as a prestigious program aimed at effectively improving the quality of educational practice in Brazil.

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