

Guidelines for the Early Childhood Education Ph.D. In-depth Paper

Each student who is planning to write a Qualifying Exam Paper (an in-depth paper for the Comprehensive Qualifying Exam) is required to first write a *brief* proposal for the paper (approximately 3 to 5 pages). The proposal is to be submitted to the student's advisor and members of the student's exam committee for discussion and input. The following first provides the official explanation of the in-depth qualifying exam paper, including how it is a part of the exams. A format for the proposed in-depth paper is then provided.

The *Qualifying Paper is part of the Comprehensive Qualifying Exam*.¹ The paper may be referred to as the in-depth paper or the qualifying paper. It will be due on the first business day of the designated month of the exams (currently either October or February), prior to answering exam questions on Theories, Curriculum, Policy, Methodology and the Cognate. To determine a student's readiness for completing a final version of the paper, a student is required to submit a next-to-final draft to their advisor and committee members 4 to 6 weeks prior to taking exams.

Based on the *Revised Early Childhood Education Proposal* (1996, p. 61), the topic of the *in-depth qualifying paper* has to be approved by the advisor who will serve as chair of the exam committee. The paper should demonstrate that a student has an in-depth knowledge of a particular area of focus in child development, early learning, early intervention, curriculum, instruction, policy, or another education-related issue. The student's in-depth qualifying paper is to be of publishable quality. Typically, it is also the major focus for the oral presentation part of the exam, which takes place after a student has successfully completed the in-depth paper and the other written parts of the exam. The paper may also be the basis for a conference presentation or publication.

The in-depth paper should include a significant review of the relevant literature and point to directions for curricula/programs, research projects, or policy initiatives pertaining the reviewed area of focus. During the development of the in-depth paper, students will seek input from their exam committee and other relevant faculty. Students will be responsible for generating a list of references.

Although the qualifying paper may constitute a foundation for a dissertation research proposal, it is not intended to be the same document. Rather, the qualifying paper provides the student with the opportunity for in-depth focus in an area of interest.

¹ *Based on the Revised Early Childhood Education Proposal (1996, p. 61), with additions and revisions approved by the Early Childhood Education Faculty (June, 13, 2001) and minor clarifications in October 8, 2009.*

Thus the qualifying paper preparation is foundational to the student's future area of expertise and constitutes a demonstration of the student's knowledge, synthesis, analysis, and articulation in that area. The in-depth paper should provide evidence of the student's research competence for the task of conducting the forthcoming dissertation research project. The in-depth paper should be *at least* 25 to 35 pages in length with additional pages for the references, tables and figures. The paper must be prepared in APA format.

Suggested Format for the In-Depth Paper Proposal

The following is a recommended format for the proposal for the in-depth paper. The student's proposal should be used to gain input from the student's advisor and committee. It should provide a focus for discussions, suggested directions and references from the advisor and committee. The student may seek further advisement in direction, content, format, and references from the advisor and committee throughout the preparation of the full in-depth paper, but because this in-depth paper is considered to be part of the exam, the advisor and committee will not do edits on drafts of the paper. The proposal should include the following parts. The full in-depth paper will likely include additional or other headings and subheadings.

(I) Statement of the Problem or Area of Focus

The first one or two sentences of your first paragraph should specify the problem or area of focus for the literature review. The rest of the first paragraph of your proposal should be a brief summary of what will you focus on and why it is of importance or interest to the field and to society in general. Provide a number of key topics from the relevant knowledge base that you will examine. Your in-depth paper should provide both an overview and in-depth examination of your area of focus. Thus, you should plan to write a paper that is comprehensive, or sometimes referred to as a "state of the art."

(II) The Relevant Major Theories, Empirical Studies, Policies, and Practices

In approximately 2 to 3 pages, *briefly* describe the major relevant:

- (1) Theory or theories
- (2) Key empirical studies
- (3) Laws, policies, standards from governing agencies and organizations

- (4) Educational, care, and support practices in schools, early childhood centers, community agencies and so forth

(III) Key Topics

Provide a list of key topics or descriptors that you will use to:

- (1) Search the knowledge base for the above areas
- (2) Serve as possible subtopics of your paper

(IV) Search and Compilation Strategies

This section is to be here at the end of your proposal for your committee to consider. If you plan to include these specifics in your in-depth paper, this type of section would usually be somewhere in the beginning pages of the paper.

Provide a list of:

- (1) Proposed search strategies, e.g., specified databases, key journals, books, edited volumes and series, and
- (2) Proposed description system for compiling and organizing your articles and documents, e.g., EndNotes, RefWorks, Word, and so forth.

(V) References

List references:

- (1) Cited in the proposal
- (2) Identified thus far to be examined for the paper