Chapter 8
New Investigator Fidelity:
Fostering Doctoral Practitioner Researcher Positionality

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents researcher positionality within the specific context of practitioner doctoral research or practice-based research. The explication of researcher positionality is an essential precursor to practitioner doctoral inquiry for scholar-practitioners and can serve as a key anchor and measure for the scholar-practitioner's journey as new investigator and entrance to the scholarly academic community. The chapter also describes how the use of reflexivity may enhance fidelity of researcher positionality within practice-based doctoral research that informs professional practice. In addition, considerations and illustrations are offered for the evaluation and articulation of researcher positionality within the practitioner doctoral research journey that draws on the insider-outsider role of the scholar-practitioner as new researcher and seasoned practitioner.

INTRODUCTION

When a doctoral scholar in the United States embarks upon a practitioner doctorate (such as the Doctor of Education [EdD] or Doctor of Business Administration [DBA]) over the research or theoretical doctorate (PhD), a likely intentionality exists for the scholar in that the terminal degree sought is relative or often closely aligned with the

scholar's identity as a professional practitioner. Thus, practitioner or practice-based research can be as much about the practitioner conducting the research as it is about the research focus. In a practitioner doctorate, the scholar-practitioner undergoes a journey that leads to a terminal degree within the discipline, and many prior authors have long reported on the importance of the relationship between the doctoral research supervisor and the scholar-practitioner not only for doctoral program persistence and completion. In this chapter, consideration of the practitioner doctoral scholar's identity development throughout the research phase of the doctoral program is also considered and specifically how the doctoral research supervisor may foster this awareness of researcher positionality and ultimate growth.

Practitioner or practice-based research can be as much about the scholar-practitioner conducting the research as it is about the doctoral research focus. Likewise, researcher positionality and a doctoral researcher's stance as insider/outsider to the practice-based research focus is filled with implications due to the focus of the inquiry and the reason the focus was selected by the emerging doctoral scholar-practitioner (Shaw Howe, Beazer, & Carr, 2019). In prior work, the author and others have noted this researcher positionality for doctoral practice-based research may also influence the method of inquiry and the type of analysis selected or even the choices a scholar-practitioner may make to engage the practice-based research setting (Throne & Bourke, 2019; Throne et al., 2018). Numerous past researchers have noted the impact practitioner doctoral programs and the graduates of these terminal degree programs have on various educational contexts (Bartlett et al., 2018; Fillery-Travis & Robinson, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2019).

Scholar-practitioners are also often committed to not only the attainment of the terminal academic degree within their discipline, but the influence they will have in conducting doctoral inquiry to solve the complex issues of practice (Fillery-Travis & Robinson, 2018). The dual or multiple desires can serve to spur a scholar-practitioner through the many challenges and obstacles they may face along the dissertation research journey (Ballock, 2019). Bartlett et al. (2018) also noted the importance of the selection of research problems that are relevant to stakeholders and hold the potential to transform knowledge or practice. At the same time, problems of practice can be quite large and not always feasible for dissertation research, so it is also for scholar-practitioners to select a research problem reasonable for doctoral inquiry with transferability to professional practice and the discipline (Bartlett et al., 2018). Ideally, the scholar-practitioner will use this research problem to make an original contribution to innovation or improvement within practice and "candidates can select the approaches they use and conduct their research according to the creative change, intervention or pursuit that they are investigating in a practice situation" (Costley & Pizzolatto, 2018, p. 33).

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