Chapter 9

Doctoral Practitioner Researcher Agency and the Practice–Based Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses practitioner researcher agency specific to doctoral education and the post-doctorate research agenda. Perspectives come from both doctoral scholars and doctoral research supervisors of practice-based or practice-led dissertation research for current research insights and examples of dissertation researcher agency specific to U.S. practitioner doctoral programs. Scholar-practitioner agency among the doctoral learning community is defined and discussed as well as the post-doctorate practice-based research agenda.

INTRODUCTION

A doctoral student's agency has been defined as the belief in the student's ability to initiate an active role in one's own learning setting, content, process, and engagement. Various researchers have noted distinct attributes for what constitutes student agency and have also noted the importance of the development of doctoral student agency within doctoral research to facilitate the researcher's evolution from the fringes of the doctoral learning community to center. Some researchers have also synonymously described doctoral student agency with student identity or self-efficacy while others describe student agency as the advancement of research skills or the ability to regulate the research process to prepare independent researchers for post-doctorate career advancement, continued research, and/or to reduce the reliance on the research supervisor during the dissertation research journey. For example, Adams (2019) and Perez et al. (2019) noted the traditional feedback and institutional or relational hierarchies, microaggressions, or other oppressive experiences often found within doctoral education may restrict student agency, and Inouye and McAlpine (2016) described student agentive traits to include confidence, scholarly independence, and relational attributes, which may be enhanced by critical engagement with supportive research supervisor feedback.

While many factors have been shown to influence doctoral student agency, the importance of the awareness of the doctoral research supervisor to influence doctoral student agency development cannot be underestimated and this awareness applies to the scholar-practitioner in practitioner doctoral programs as much as for the research doctorate. This chapter presents discussion of the current scholarship surrounding scholar-practitioner doctoral student agency and specifically the strategies and techniques for quality development of student agency specific to the practitioner doctoral student. Additionally, the literature surrounding methods to promote and foster the dissemination of graduate practice-based research and post-doctoral career advancement is also presented.

BACKGROUND

In past work, several researchers, including the chapter authors, have defined doctoral student agency within the context of the relationship between the doctoral scholar and dissertation research supervisor as well as research supervisor agency (LaFrance et al., 2020). These works framed doctoral student agency within the current scholarship as a pertinent indicator of doctoral persistence and completion and stressed the importance of the relational dynamic in the student-research supervisor relationship (Klemenčič, 2014, 2015; LaFrance et al., 2020; Rigler et

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