

Chapter 19

The Qualitative Research Dissertation: Preparing Educational Leaders for Challenging Times

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research dissertations can be instrumental in preparing educational leaders for challenging times by providing valuable insights into complex issues within the various fields of education. This chapter explores the meta-learning that can be enhanced when pedagogical intentions more fully embrace the development of the researcher with a focus on qualitative reasoning, advanced critical thinking skills, interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary learning, and social change theories. This pedagogical approach has an eye toward the implications for meaningful actions educational leaders can take based on the process, not only the results, of qualitative dissertation work. This work allows educational leaders to gain nuanced and contextualized understandings of various factors affecting educational institutions and those impacted such as educators, students, and community members. By engaging in the practice of qualitative research, educational leaders can enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enabling them to make informed decisions in times of uncertainty.

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INTRODUCTION

Completing a doctoral dissertation using qualitative inquiry is a challenging and rewarding experience that can equip researchers with various valuable transferable skills. This chapter extends the conversation about the concept of transferability, beyond how dissertation findings may have relevance to broader, similar, or adjacent populations and contexts-- to a form of transferability related to researcher identity, enhanced questioning, and knowledge creation skills, as well as increased sensibilities related to collaboration when researchers engage in a dissertation-level qualitative research study. Scholars have identified the transformative nature of graduate education in general (Contreras & Bedford, 2024). A further argument is made here focused specifically on the kinds of transformations that can occur when engaged in a qualitative research dissertation process--transformations that have continued impact on the professional thinking and actions taken by educational leaders.

With a focus on qualitative reasoning, advanced critical thinking skills, interdisciplinary/ transdisciplinary learning, and social change theories, this chapter explores the meta-learning that can be enhanced when pedagogical intentions more fully embrace the development of the researcher. This pedagogical approach has an eye toward the implications for meaningful actions educational leaders can take based on qualitative dissertation work's process and results (Budhai & Hill, 2024; Pecci et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2022).

Qualitative research dissertations can be instrumental in preparing educational leaders for challenging times by providing valuable insights into complex issues within the various fields of education. Through in-depth exploration, qualitative research allows educational leaders to gain a nuanced and contextualized understanding of various factors affecting educational institutions (Guerra & Pazey, 2016; Hatch, 2023; Jones et al., 2013; Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2023a, 2023b), and all those impacted by these institutions such as educators, students, and community members (Alpert et al., 2023). By engaging in qualitative research, educational leaders can enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enabling them to make informed decisions in times of uncertainty. Coupled with high-caliber mentoring, the process of completing a qualitative dissertation provides educational leaders with elevated leadership skills and sensibilities. Additionally, qualitative research fosters a culture of reflection and continuous improvement among educational leaders, encouraging them to adapt to changing circumstances and develop innovative solutions to address emerging issues. Overall, the process of conducting a qualitative research dissertation can play a pivotal role in preparing educational leaders to navigate the complexities of the education landscape, fostering adaptive leadership skills, strategic thinking, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

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