Methodologies for
PRACTICE RESEARCH

Approaches for Professional Doctorates

edited by

Carol Costley
John Fulton

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Heléne Clark

ABOUT THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Carol Costley is a Professor of Work and Learning and Director of the Work and Learning Research Centre at Middlesex University. She has been Chair of the International Conference on Professional Doctorates (www.ukcge.ac.uk/profdocs) since 2009, Chair of the 'Association of Practice Doctorates' (www.ProfessionalDoctorates.org) since 2009 and a 'Researching Work and Learning' conference series committee member since 1999. Her research interests are in professional doctorates, work-based and work-integrated learning, especially in examining methodologies and epistemologies in work and learning and how they are additional to and support subject-based approaches to knowledge. She works with organisations in the private, public, community and voluntary sectors internationally in the learning and teaching of work-based, taught and research degrees.

John Fulton is a Reader in Practice-based Research and Director of Post Graduate Research at the University of Sunderland. He has over 30 years' experience in teaching and research supervision. He is interested in practice-based research and in particular the methodological approaches which can be used to explore, illuminate and develop practice. He is also interested in social inequalities and their reproduction in education and health, and is involved in a number of social epidemiology studies in sub-Saharan Africa.

Pam Burnard is Professor of Arts, Creativities and Educations at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, in the UK (www.educ.cam.ac.uk/people/staff/Burnard/). She co-convenes the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Special Interest Group Creativities in Education (https://www.bera.ac.uk/group/creativity-in-education). She has, for many years, been a doctoral educator, doctoral supervisor and innovatively managed the EdD (Professional Doctorate) programme in the Faculty of Education. She is an international authority on advancing creativities research and has published widely with 15 books and over 100 articles on the expanded conceptualisation and plural expression of creativities across diverse learning contexts and professional cultures. Pamela is co-editor of *Thinking Skills and Creativity* (www.journals.elsevier.com/thinking-skills-and-creativity) and co-editor of *Transformative Doctoral Research Practices for Professionals* (Sense Publishers).

Heléne Clark is the Director of ActKnowledge, which is a 20-year-old social enterprise with a mission of improving social justice, equality of resources and opportunity, and human rights worldwide. Heléne and ActKnowledge are the leaders in the development and use of theory of change methodology, and she is co-founder of the non-profit Center for Theory of Change. She has taught urban and economic geography, environmental psychology, research methods and theory of change in leading academic institutions. At ActKnowledge, she leads evaluation, policy, planning and capacity building efforts for non-profit partners.

Gill Coleman is Professor of Action Research at Ashridge/Hult Business School, in the United Kingdom, where she teaches and supervises post-experience part-time students in their action research projects for doctoral and masters programmes and has worked with private and public sector organisations on collaborative action research projects in the United Kingdom, United States and Middle East. She has a long-standing interest in action research as a process for learning within higher education, particularly with inquiry-based participative learning for sustainability and corporate social responsibility, and has pioneered its use in supporting a pedagogy for practice-based learning at Ashridge as well as the Universities of Bristol and Bath.

Tatjana Dragovic is a Doctoral Educator and Convenor of the Leadership, Educational Improvement and Development (LEID) research community at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, UK, and a Doctoral Supervisor at the Open University, UK. For the last 25 years she has worked across different disciplines, sectors and industries and is recognised as an international educator, whose interdisciplinary expertise and research interests lie in the fields of creativity, leadership development, coaching and the professional and personal development of educators. Tatjana is a Senior Lecturer in Leadership Development in Slovenia and the co-editor of *Transformative Doctoral Research Practices for Professionals* (Sense Publishers).

Jan Fook has held professorial positions in Australia, Norway, Canada and the United Kingdom, in both social work and education. She is known mostly for her work on critical social work and critical reflection and travels regularly to provide workshops on the latter. Over the last few years she has published several books on critical reflection (including one on researching critical reflection with Routledge (2016)), and is working on several more on learning critical reflection and making organisational changes regarding critical reflection. In January 2019 she is taking up a position as Professor and Head of the Department of Social Work at the University of Vermont.

Catherine Hayes is a Reader in Health Professions Pedagogic Practice at the University of Sunderland and Visiting Professor of Higher Education at both the University of Cumbria and Liverpool Hope. A National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, she is a supervisor of doctoral and masters theses and holds key responsibilities for curriculum development in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing. She also leads pedagogical research for

the University of Sunderland's Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. She is a Founding Fellow of the Faculty of Podiatric Medicine at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons (Glasgow) and a Fellow of the College of Podiatric Medicine and General Practice (London). As a Chartered Scientist and Chartered Manager, she has a particular interest in mechanisms of reflection and reflexivity in research-based praxis. She is widely published, her latest co-edited book being *Textbook of Podiatric Medicine* (2017).

Rebecca Heaton is a Senior Lecturer in Education in the Faculty of Education and Humanities at the University of Northampton. She is the curriculum lead for art and design education and a professional practice tutor training teachers through undergraduate and postgraduate routes. She conducts, publishes, presents and reviews research nationally and internationally concerning cognition, art, technology, creativity and education. She is also a a graduate of the EdD course at the University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education.

Kate Maguire is Associate Professor of Professional Practice in the Faculty of Professional and Social Sciences at Middlesex University and head of its transdisciplinary research degree programmes. Her background is social anthropology of the Middle East and organisational psychology both as a researcher and practitioner. Coming into higher education from careers in journalism, political research and trauma studies, she has engaged with anthropologically informed innovative research methodologies and research pedagogy relevant to professional practice research with particular interest in bridging difference, embracing complexity and theorising professional practice to enhance professional learning and organisational change. She has led on fieldwork design and implementation for a number of projects and innovations in the private and public sectors and has published regularly on trandisciplinarity in Springer publications.

T. W. (Tom) Maxwell is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Education, University of New England, Australia. He led the organisation of the first Professional Doctorates conference in Australia in 1996 and continued to be a key part of organising such conferences to 2004. He has published in the areas of professional doctorates, international education (especially in Bhutan), supervision and teacher education. He retired in 2010.

Jill Perry is the Executive Director of the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) and a Research Associate Professor in the Department of Administration and Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research focuses on professional doctorate preparation in education, organisational change in higher education, and faculty leadership roles. Her publications have appeared in *Planning and Changing Journal*, *Journal of School Public Relations*, *Innovation in Higher Education* as well as in several books and practitioner journals. She has edited two books and is the editor of *Impacting Education*, the new online journal focused on transforming professional preparation in education.

David Plowright is an experienced lecturer, researcher, programme director, supervisor and examiner at masters and doctoral levels. He is currently a Research Associate in the Department of Curriculum Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. In addition, he also works as a consultant doctoral supervisor for the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology at the Open University. Previous appointments have included lecturer in educational leadership and management at the University of Leicester; principal lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University and director of education studies, Norwich City College of FHE. He is currently writing his next publication, *Challenging the Mythology of Methodology: Re-conceptualising Social and Educational Research*, to be published in 2019 by Palgrave Macmillan.

Barry Rogers is a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Since 2002 he has led the MSc course Organisational Life at LSE. The course seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice while addressing emergent issues in the field. Simultaneously he designs and delivers customised executive education programmes working with some of the world's leading organisations. Before life as a pracademic, he spent 17 years working for JP Morgan, Nomura and Morgan Stanley in London, Tokyo and New York. He is currently an EdD candidate at the University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education.

Valerie A. Storey is an Associate Professor in Educational Leadership and Coordinator of the Elementary Education, Lifelong Learning track in the School of Teaching, Learning & Leadership, College of Education & Human Performance, University of Central Florida, Orlando. She is President of the Florida Association of Professors of Educational Leadership. Her research interests are in educational leadership graduate programme design, implementation and outcomes. She designed a reformed EdD programme in Educational Leadership under the auspices of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) and chaired both the CPED and American Education Research Association, Division A, Dissertation Committee.

Kath Woodward is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the Open University. She has published extensively in the fields of gender studies, feminist critical theory and method, and psychosocial studies, with recent empirical focus upon sport and embodied practices, especially in boxing and the Olympics, involving mixed media creative methods of film and auto-ethnographic reflection. Her most recent Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research was into elite performativity and 'being in the zone' and her work on time and temporality in sport (*Sporting Times*, 2012) informed the Olympic Museum Exhibition, 'Chasing Time'. She has supervised and examined a wide range of doctoral students within her research and disciplinary fields and has contributed widely to BSA postgraduate and doctoral seminars and workshops as well as disseminating good practice on getting published to early career researchers and doctoral students, drawing upon her experience of co-editing the *Sociology*, *Leisure Studies* and *Frontiers* journals.

FOREWORD

The editors and authors in this book have taken a step in the right direction seeking first to understand what practice-based research looks like across professional fields, and second to learn what types of methodologies are present in these preparation programmes. In 2007, the US Council of Graduate Schools' Task Force on the Professional Doctorate released a report that sought to distinguish professional doctorates from PhDs. Two important messages came across in this report:

> Graduate colleges should not use one-size-fits-all standards that simply asks why a professional doctorate is not just like a PhD.

> Professional degrees should represent preparation for the potential transformation of that field of professional practice just as the PhD represents preparation for the potential transformation of the basic knowledge of a discipline. (CGS, 2005)

As professional doctorates have flourished around the globe (Perry, 2017), the distinction between them and their sister doctorates (PhDs) has frequently been confused. In particular, this perplexity has focused on the role that research and methodology have in professional preparation. In many programmes the weakening of both has happened where, in fact, they should be strengthened and viewed as tools for improving practice. The more we can understand and distinguish professional doctorates the more we can follow the advice of what the US Council of Graduate Schools describes as preparing professional practitioners to transform their field of practice. We can also learn to distinguish these degrees from traditional doctorates and from each other.

A lesson learned early in the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) was 'context matters' (Perry et al., 2015), meaning no one education doctorate would work across multiple institutions serving a varied body of educational practitioners. In this same vein, we cannot think of professional doctorates, nor the research preparation, as one size fits all. Each profession has its own needs and expertise. Through his work investigating multiple professional practice doctorates (law, medicine, clergy, nursing, engineering), Lee Shulman, President Emeritus of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, discovered that each profession had an individualised means by which professionals are taught 'to think, to

perform, and to act with integrity' (Shulman, 2005: 52) thereby learning the habits of mind, hand and heart in their chosen professional field of practice. He called this type of specialised teaching a *signature pedagogy* and outlined three dimensions that describe how it is done:

1. Teaching is deliberate, pervasive and persistent.
2. Teaching and learning are grounded in theory, research, and problems of practice.
3. Teaching helps students develop a critical and professional stance with a moral and ethical imperative for equity and social justice (Shulman, 2005).

The second dimension notes the importance that the theory-research-practice marriage plays in professional preparation. It also supports this book's editors' revival of Frayling's (1993) ideas that research should be performed on practice (research into practice) and practice should be the focus of practitioner research (research through practice).

As preparers of professionals in these practice doctorates, our role is to teach methodology as a signature pedagogy. We must provide our students with the skills and tools to deeply understand and address the problems they face in practice daily – whether they be of medical, schooling, engineering, nursing, etc. origin. In CPED, we call this preparation *inquiry as practice* – professionals are prepared to use data to design and understand the effects of innovation through the ability to gather, organise, judge, aggregate, and analyse situations, literature, and data with a critical lens (CPED, 2010). Such preparation demands that we, as educators, rethink our own practice and consider the dimensions of a signature pedagogy as we design courses. It implies moving beyond the ways in which we have been taught to consider the new ways that professionals will be expected to think, perform and act on problems they encounter.

At the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University in New York, an effort is underway to re-envision professional education across all fields. Leaders and participants in this effort have come to realise that 'learning to learn will far outstrip the importance of applying the specialized knowledge with which professionals are initially programmed' (Austin et al., 2017: 1). This work suggests that key skills for professionals have become the ability to think critically and creatively, to be flexible and adaptable, and to work effectively in teams (Austin et al., 2017). These skills are equally necessary in the teaching of methodologies as, inquiry as practice. Unlike traditional research performed by academics, research performed in practice is not siloed, nor is it as neat. Professional practitioners work in teams of colleagues, other professionals, and lay people. They work with people who are experiencing real life situations that require immediate or near-immediate solutions that are grounded in evidence that they will work. As preparers of these practitioners, our role is not only to teach research methods and skills, but also to help these practitioners learn to apply them in teams using critical thinking, creativity, flexibility and adaptability.

In short, methodological preparation for professionals needs to look and be different from what has traditionally been taught. The end goal is not to prepare academics who generate knowledge for improved understanding. The goal is to prepare those who apply learning to improve their own practice and those affected by it. In CPED, we call these professionals *Scholarly Practitioners*, someone who:

> blends practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice; uses practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice; disseminates their work in multiple ways; and resolves problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals. (CPED, 2010)

This definition frames the idea that methodology in professional preparation is equally as important as content knowledge and should be taught as a tool, in practice-based settings, with others. In this volume, we see a strong effort by the authors to raise the importance of methodological preparation by demonstrating the philosophical underpinnings of methodological preparation, the types of methodologies taught, how they are applied in practice, and the ways in which professional programmes assess the abilities of their candidates before graduating. The editors and authors are to be commended for this comprehensive look that can guide others who grapple with best practices for teaching professionals.

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Jill Alexa Perry, PhD
Executive Director, Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED)

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INTRODUCTION

This book addresses both the underlying principles of practice-based research and methodological approaches appropriate for practice-based research. It is aimed at the professional doctorate candidate, whether a generic professional doctorate, an EdD, a DBA or one of the many professional doctorates on offer. It covers the general principles of practice-based research and is not tied to a particular discipline or professional group.

The professional doctorate is not a recent phenomenon, but one which has a long history. The Doctor of Education (EdD) was offered by Harvard University in 1922 and, in the United Kingdom, the University of Bristol offered the first EdD in 1992. Since then, first in Australia and then followed by the United Kingdom, there have been a proliferation of doctoral programmes and there are now over 40 named doctoral awards. Despite the establishment of the EdD, MD (Doctor of Medicine) and DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) in the United States, it was not until 2000 that the professional doctorate intensified and since then there has been a proliferation of professional doctorate programmes, focused on particular professional groups (Zusman, 2017). Some of the programmes from Australia, United Kingdom, United States, Canada and many other countries are aimed at those preparing to enter a profession, such as the *Doctor of Clinical Psychology*, while others are focused on established professionals, for example the *Doctor of Nursing Science (DNS)* designed to prepare clinicians for advanced roles. Maxwell (2003) identified a third group, namely that of the generic or work-based professional doctorate, for example the *Doctor of Professional Studies (DProf)*, which is not tied into one profession but has a generic focus on work-based practice development.

Common to all professional doctorates is the relation to practice, and most professional doctorates require a final dissertation or thesis which details the focus and original development of an aspect of practice. Research on the impact from graduates of professional practice doctorates is beginning to reveal an alignment with the needs of communities, organisations and professions and how the graduates' research can generate a wide variety of outcomes that have an impact (Wellington, 2013; Costley and Stephenson, 2009). Their ability to transform research into action can meet the needs of employers and society, demonstrate improvements in practice and help society adapt well to the ever-increasing pace of change in the

twenty-first century (see e.g. the journal *Impacting Education: Journal of Transforming Professional Practice*, from 2016).

The relationship of the research project to practice can vary. Frayling (1993) identifies three ways in which research can relate to practice: research about practice, research into practice and research through practice. Frayling was discussing design practice, but this conceptualisation has a generic application. Research about practice would mean the researcher examining an issue which may have implications for practice and this may involve carrying out research while not being directly involved with the practice area. It has implications for practice and its findings can then be applied to practice. Research into practice involves carrying out research directly on practice actually in the practice area. Research through practice is, as it implies, using practice as the very focus of the research.

It is apposite that Frayling was in the field of arts, as professional doctorates range over many professional areas, but it is those who are historically steeped in practice, such as nursing and other healthcare roles, teaching and arts, that have led the way in many respects in demonstrating the value of research which has a strong impetus on practice.

This book explores research approaches in the context of practice-based research and as such it covers a very broad area. The focus is on research into practice and research through practice. A key argument is that there is commonality about practice and the development of that practice that transcends disciplinarity. When considering practice, there is great value in approaching research into practice and practice development in a structured and focused manner. This book aims to explore both the underlying principles and the methodological approaches which are relevant to research across the curriculum (often addressing complex, 'real-world' problems) that will ensure a careful, systematic approach.

Practice is both broad and to a degree nebulous, and it is often used in a 'cover-all' way: for example, concepts of practice can differ greatly between work environments. However, comparatively recently there has been an increasing awareness of the ways knowledge can be generated from practice. The increasing popularity of professional doctorates has been an important factor in this development whereby experienced practitioners can develop their professional work to doctoral level.

Practice research can take many forms and much depends on the focus and nature of the practice and practice area which are being explored. This book aims to explore the relevant methodological approaches which will facilitate this, not by presenting an exhaustive list, but rather by a consideration of relevant and commonly chosen approaches. What we aim to do in this book is to explore a range of options and we have purposefully drawn on examples from different disciplines and practice areas. It is also worth mentioning that often practitioners choose methodological approaches which are not valued in their particular area of practice. For example, an engineer wishing to implement a new technique might look to approaches involving human interaction and the management of change involving methods that are sometimes undervalued within a scientific discipline.

In practice-research, the 'self' is important because researchers who are also practitioners are not outside observers but are centrally involved in the research and the research process, possibly carrying out research on themselves. This requires a different skill set from more conventional research approaches (Drake and Heath, 2011).

Practice researchers and practitioner–researchers are often, but by no means exclusively, mid-career professionals, coming to the research with a wealth of experience and a variety of projects already completed. The challenge can be to develop this previous work using reliable methodical approaches that result in useful and rigorously achieved outcomes. This provides challenges for all involved and it is important that researchers position themselves within the research process, which requires a reflective and reflexive ability at a sophisticated level.

Ethical issues are also important and do require much thought as the research often constitutes what is referred to as insider knowledge and part of this is the importance of the positionality of the researcher. Additionally, many ethical committees can classify practitioner research as service improvement where formal approval is not required. However, this is not to say that there are no ethical issues involved as full consent of all involved needs to be gained. There also needs to be some thought to potential ethical problems: for example, in exploring practice, suboptimal or bad practice might be uncovered. Not only at the beginning, but also throughout the process, ethical issues need to be given some detailed consideration. When dealing with practice environments there is almost always the requirement for the co-operation of others and this presents many challenges and requires strategic management.

Acknowledgement of the transient nature of practice is often overlooked. Those in the public sector are aware of the changes in policy and funding cuts which can occur when there are government changes, and they also can happen within the lifespan of a government. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the public sector but also common in the private sector. Strategic management and many skills, often including insider knowledge, are essential in managing the process of research in tandem with changes in policy and practice.

The above discussion serves to emphasise the importance of reflexivity and the need for reflective skills for practice-based researchers. In terms of reflection on and during the research process there is a need to consider the wider contextual factors which can impede the research and for reflective ability and adaptability to alter and develop the process in consideration of the experiences of the researcher. This has important implications for the methodological approaches which are relevant to practice-based research and is a key reason why the choosing of an approach requires detailed consideration. It is also important to emphasise that choosing a methodology is not an exact science and methodological approaches are not mutually exclusive as similar elements may be present in more than one approach. It is more a question of choosing the best fit so that an approach is chosen which will shape and develop the research process in the appropriate manner.

The particulars and themes running throughout the book are around the nature of practice and how the essence of practice can be captured through a research focus. Some recurring points are the need for reflection and for the integration of reflection and often also reflexivity into the research process. Similarly the integration of ethics and ethical principles that relate to practice need to be included in the research process. The transdisciplinary nature of work and practice situations is a theme, as well as the focus of research requiring particular outcomes and recommendations for practice. Also apparent in the choice of research approach are deliberations about the advantages and considerations needed for practitioners who engage in research and have insider knowledge and ontological awareness because of their expert experience.

Although the separate chapters each address issues of practice resulting in similar themes running throughout the book, they are sometimes addressed in different ways. The aim is to explore methodological approaches which are useful ways of framing the research and which ensure rigour and consistency that allow the incorporation of the above principles.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is in two parts.

Part I considers the concept of practice-based research and its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. The central idea is that there are a number of practice-orientated projects which have used research techniques to develop practice in a unique and systematic way, and there is now a need to pull together and conceptualise these ideas. For example, consideration is given to how the concept of the *Bricoleur*, espoused by Lévi-Strauss, is used to facilitate this process.

The focus is on the position of the researcher and, as such, issues around reflection and reflexivity are addressed. There are also key issues around ethical considerations and the ways in which practice-based researchers and in particular practitioner–researchers need to incorporate ethics in practice research as a strong strand.

Part II examines the methodologies which can be used as an overarching framework for the development of the research programme. These approaches are carefully chosen to reflect the common approaches which are considered by professional doctorate candidates. Each of the authors is a recognised expert in the research methodologies that are explained and discussed and each chapter incorporates real-life examples with exercises and key points.

PART I

Chapter 1 Philosophy and Practice (T. W. (Tom) Maxwell)

This chapter examines the type of knowledge involved in practice-based research and evaluates a growing body of literature examining knowledge that has been

characterised as modes 1 and 2. Mode 2 is focused on practice research and emphasises the need for transdisciplinary approaches. Mode 1 is characterised as unidisciplinary in nature and follows the rules and customs of a particular discipline. The key debates and issues are examined in some detail, including the binary that the distinction can set up and the more helpful focus on research in the 'real world' and the transdisciplinarity of more practice-based knowledges.

Chapter 2 Research Approaches in Professional Doctorates (Carol Costley)

One of the main challenges of practice-based research is the difficulty of reconciling quite different philosophical approaches. This chapter examines the claims made for an epistemology of practice in research and the challenges this brings. It considers some of the key elements associated with research that is practice based or practice led, and how such research might be at variance with more established research processes and have a different order of priorities. There are implications of complexity.

Chapter 3 Why Policy Matters Particularly in Professional Doctorates (Pam Burnard, Tatjana Dragovic, Rebecca Heaton and Barry Rogers)

Policy is the mechanism through which values are authored and formulated for society. Policy embodies carefully articulated principles for acceptance and enactment. The practices and policies necessary for resourcing professional doctorates comprise one of their defining features in that they form the background upon which researching professionals engage in shaping practice agendas, leading professional change and, in turn, changing policies. This chapter examines vertical policies that come from legislation or accreditation bodies in top-down ways as compared to or in connection with policies that are more horizontal and 'softer' in character, coming from published materials, traditions or forms of professional dialogue. It also features the accounts of two researching professionals who further illustrate how policy and policy thinking disrupt and reorder their professional doctorate projects.

Chapter 4 Reflective Models and Frameworks in Practice (Jan Fook)

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the different meanings of reflection (and related concepts) in relation to research, and to provide practical guidelines for the use of reflection in research. It discusses how reflection is related to practice-based research and, in particular, how reflection and reflexivity might themselves be used as an approach. Practical examples of specific questions to aid reflection are provided.

Chapter 5 Ethics (John Fulton and Carol Costley)

Here the rationale for any concern for ethical considerations in research is discussed through a short historical review followed by the steps it is usually necessary to take regarding ethics of the research. Consideration is given to the research design, the participants in the research, ethics committees in the university and professional ethics of work situations. The specific characteristics of practice-based research and considerations of research ethics for practitioners who are often insiders in their research fields are given particular attention.

PART II

Chapter 6 Methodology as Personal and Professional Integrity (Kate Maguire)

Moral and ethical domains need to be considered along with the relevant literature and the type of knowledge which is found to be informative and valued by the particular area of practice. The situation for researchers in their professional field involves their position in the field or organisation and the standpoint they take on research integrity in their area of investigation. Researchers in this sense serve a multidimensionality of stakeholders, especially the authority of the university and the professional field or organisation.

   Some constructions of research approaches are more concerned with issues of reliability and validity, whereas for others it is trustworthiness and consistency. The personal and professional integrity of the researcher sits at the centre of every action and every choice, thus for professional doctorates where the researcher is more closely connected with the context of the research, the trustworthiness of the research is dependent on the trustworthiness of the researcher and their ability to articulate and account for their choices. This is usually achieved through critical reflection. The chapter lists influences that need to be considered and types of questions to be asked in relation to professional integrity when planning a research design. The approaches to research design raise ethical considerations concerning the choice of what to research, why it is to be researched and how.

Chapter 7 Capstone Design (Valerie A. Storey)

This chapter explains how a dissertation or thesis changes in methodology, format and impact to become a dynamic document guiding change to help resolve a complex problem of practice. Alternative dissertation models are discussed and the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) as a model for practice doctorates is recommended.

Chapter 8 Auto-ethnography (Kath Woodward)

This chapter explores auto-ethnography as a research methodology and a set of methods which are increasingly popular as a way of getting 'inside' the field. The

chapter draws upon work in sport, including one of the editor's work on the Olympics and a range of boxing auto-ethnographies to evaluate the approach drawing upon psychosocial and feminist theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 9 Action Research (Gill Coleman)

The strengths, and challenges, of action research are explored, through this often misunderstood approach (rather than a method) that combines action and systematic reflection. The key principles to action research are explored: it is highly participative; it places the researcher as always present in the research, as co-participant and/or facilitator; and it is messy and emergent. It is therefore appealing to practice-based researchers, who want simultaneously to advance their understanding and their capacity to enact that understanding in their day-to-day work.

Chapter 10 Case Study (Catherine Hayes)

This chapter explores case study methodology within the context of a practice-based professional doctorate. Definitions of case studies are considered and a definition pertinent to practice is established. The variety of approaches to the design of a case study is given detailed consideration: empirical–theoretical, single or multiple, explanatory or descriptive, as well as specific or general approaches are considered. The combination of research methods and how they can be used to address issues of practice development and ways in which the data can be combined are explored.

Chapter 11 Mixed Methods Research (David Plowright)

The chapter introduces an alternative mixed methods approach, an integrated methodology, that is an innovative way of addressing many of the conceptual and design issues associated with a more traditional mixed methods perspective. It provides a coherent and easily applied framework for planning and implementing small-scale research aimed at evaluating and improving practice located in a professional context.

Chapter 12 Translational Research (John Fulton)

This chapter considers translating research findings into practice. Using examples from health and education it considers ways of ensuring the reliability and validity of original research. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the ways in which translational research can structure a postgraduate research project.

Chapter 13 Theory of Change (Heléne Clark)

This chapter introduces theory of change as a methodological approach which can shape and focus a professional doctorate. Theory of change is a well-used and often

demanded process nowadays in social change, social research and philanthropy. The chapter outlines the principles of theory of change and gives a step-by-step guide as to how it can be used to shape a practice-based research study. Some useful addendums help to expand understanding of theory of change.

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PART I

Underlying Principles