Foreword

Contemporary Approaches to Dissertation Development and Research Methods is a powerful book. It takes up perhaps the most central problem in graduate education in departments of school leadership today; i.e., the frayed, if not broken, connection between research and practice domains of the profession—and by extension the linkages between the research and development and the policy domains of the profession. It undertakes this assignment by focusing primarily on the role of end-of-program assessments of students. In this case, that is the questionable traditional dissertation undertaken to prepare researchers who populate universities and research centers applied to the education of practice-based colleagues. The editors, Storey and Hesbol, have crafted the most comprehensive analysis to date to examine and help rebuild these weakened linkages. Equally important, they have done so in a cohesive and integrated manner. The book is more than simply a collection of papers. By overcoming randomness, Story and Hesbol provide a comprehensive roadmap for other programs to attend to the challenges and dilemmas that universities represented herein have begun to engage so thoughtfully.

Across the chapters, we find a rich description of the struggle between adherence to an entrenched past that brought some acclaim to educational leadership programs and possibilities for more authentic education of school leaders. Equally impressive, [book title] does so in a manner that rejects the idea of travel without a roadmap, i.e., the assumption that all experiments are desirable, while at the same time helping us see that a single pathway forward is ill-advised as well. They instead, quite wisely, have their contributors emphasize the core principles of appropriate end-of-program culminating activities for practitioner colleagues. The authors of these chapters are to be commended for undertaking this assignment in ways that both illustrate these principles while concomitantly providing sufficient detail to “see into” their change efforts, regardless of their labels. All the authors associated with this initiative are less interested in selling a canned initiative than they are in providing the grist for us to think through how to develop our own Ed.D. programs well. In the process, they also spotlight material that is useful for construction. In short, they assist us in developing needed architecture for and the tools for construction of powerful end-of-program doctoral work.

We owe the editors of the book and the authors of these chapters our professional regard. They have taken on a real and pressing dilemma in doctoral education. They have carried us well beyond the traditional responses of self defense and academic rhetoric. Individually and collectively, they reveal the struggle that will be required to create practice-anchored and intellectually rigorous end-of-program activities for future school leaders. They open a much-needed door to the future. And thanks to them, that future is visible and accessible.

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