Chapter 1

Online Research Supervisor Engagement: Fostering Graduate Student Researcher Positionality

Robin Throne
Northcentral University, USA

Brian Bourke
Murray State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter has pedagogical implications for online graduate students to define researcher positionality. It offers graduate-level examples for the articulation of researcher positionality within online graduate-level research including theses, dissertations, and academic writings. This chapter is relevant to current master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation writers at American institutions of higher education through distance, blended, or hybrid delivery modes. The authors suggest instructional strategies and a research supervisor agency to guide current master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation writers in the articulation of researcher positionality. This fosters self-awareness of an online researcher’s stance, subjectivities, proclivities, and standpoint prior to study participant engagement for data collection. This chapter may also be applicable to tenure-track faculty in need of this exposition for current empirical research and/or graduate student instruction.
INTRODUCTION

Researcher positionality can be considered within the multi-faceted, complex, and necessary structures surrounding research inquiry before it can or should be assessed and engaged (Bourke, 2014; Throne, 2012; Throne, Bourke et al., 2018). Through articulation of an online graduate student’s researcher positionality, especially for new investigators, a necessary transparency can be offered to situate and view perspectives for the inquiry or the study frame as the internal aspects of the researcher as one transforms to a complex instrument within the inquiry (Nencel, 2014; Throne, Bourke et al., 2018). Conveyance of this positionality purports the power structures, ideological assumptions, and social identities of an investigator to fully self-identify their place and position within the scholarship of the field or discipline, and especially to define and explicate a clear viewpoint to draw inferential conclusions and implications from the results of any inquiry (Dean et al., 2017) and in the relational aspects with study participants (Moore, 2012).

When entering the important and priority-shifting engagement with remote graduate-level scholarship, whether the research is supervised online or via hybrid or blended modalities, it is important to understand one’s own position within this landscape before determining how to conduct research within it. Researcher positionality is often considered a necessary process of a principal investigator for critical self-reflection and a determination of self within the social constructs, biases, contexts, layers, power structures, identities, transparency, objectivity, and subjectivities for the viewpoint assumed within the research (Ruuska, 2017; Throne, 2012). Thus, researcher positionality often shifts and evolves for all researchers, especially during the online graduate student research process. These new researchers evolve into an identity whereby an iterative, reflective, and evolutionary process of reflection and integration occurs throughout the research (Carter, Lapum, Lavallée, & Martin, 2014).

Acknowledgement of the role and potential influence of researcher bias is a critical component of a qualitative or practitioner researcher (Bourke, 2014). Through acknowledging biases, and subjectivities, both of which are products of individual positionalities, researchers engage themselves as part of the research (Carter et al., 2014). An important aspect of this integrative process is to assess the multiple identities as professional practitioner, scholar, and investigator as positionality must be considered within the multi-faceted, complex, and necessary structures surrounding research within the discipline (Kidney & Manning, 2017). Thus, the research supervisor who is remote from the graduate student must engage the student to recognize and consider the situated positionality within the research setting and its participants. This is an especially essential phase when the researcher considers inquiry within a workplace research setting or from a particular social
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