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The Situated Dissertation Advising Framework for Improved Doctoral Completion

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THE SITUATED DISSERTATION ADVISING FRAMEWORK AND DOCTORAL RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY:
RESEARCH CONFERENCE PAPERS & PRESENTATIONS, 2015-2018

The situated dissertation advising framework (SDAF) was formalized in 2015 by a group of Northcentral University (NCU) Graduate School faculty and continues to involve a resource-intensive, socialized, and high-mentoring approach to dissertation research within an online doctoral community of practice. The framework is founded on Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, and has continued to be refined to improve the doctoral student experience, persistence, and completion. In 2018, the framework was expanded to consider *doctoral researcher positionality* and *chair agency.*

Akagi, C. G., & Fore, C. J. (2016). Dissertation chairs' feats and follies of mentoring online graduate students using a situated advising model: A case study. 19th Annual American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences Conference, Las Vegas, NV.

Working adults are more and more choosing online master's and doctoral programs to obtain their degrees. Enter the online committee chair to mentor the student to degree completion. Serving as a Committee Chair, use of a situated advising model to mentor graduate students requires a specific set of communications and mentoring skills to successfully mentor today's online students. Based on Lave and Wenger's Situated Learning Theory, the Situated Advising Model is a 1-1 chair-graduate student advising model with six key focus areas. Two seasoned doctoral chairs will present themselves as a case study subjects to share with conference attendees their mentoring best practice feats and advising follies in online graduate student situated advising. The presentation will include: (a) examples of quality chair-student communications, (b) student-specific mentoring tips, techniques, and tools, (c) tips for working with ESL and disability students, (d) tips for working with students with varying writing and research skill sets, (e) examples of consistent and timely iterative feedback on dissertation manuscripts, and (f) summing it all up.

Bowlin, L. K., Buckner, S. A., & Throne, R. (2016). Duality, positionality, and stance: Workplace dissertation research as preparation for practice-based research. Twelfth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from http://firescholars.seu.edu/conference_proceedings/3/

At United States online doctoral institutions, many doctoral candidates focus their dissertation research on study problems that emerge from professional practice, which may serve as a vital first experience and preparation for continued practitioner or practice-based research. Although there have been many definitions offered as to what constitutes workplace research, this scholarly reflection explores three essential considerations for duality (dual roles), positionality, and stance in a doctoral dissertation research problem originating from a doctoral candidate's workplace setting or professional practice. As a doctoral scholar with a dual role as a workplace professional and doctoral candidate, the doctoral candidate must often shift perspective and negotiate the concurrent dual or multiple identities of workplace professional, doctoral learner, scholar, and independent researcher. When accomplished, workplace dissertation research may also serve to evolve the candidate's enhanced perspectives, thereby preparing the candidate for continued practice-based research within the discipline that, in turn, may also expand the candidate's views and solutions to post-doc workplace problems. For this scholarly reflection, we defined dual roles, positionality, and stance within the practitioner and practice-based research literature, and further describe our reflections of the experiences as two recent doctoral graduates and our dissertation committee chair. We used Moustakas' critical self-analysis as a scholarly reflective mechanism in context with a critical review of the current literature to consider preparation for practice-based research through workplace dissertation research, and purport that these constructs need further exploration to better prepare doctoral candidates for practice-based research and to generate new knowledge during and following doctoral degree attainment.

Clowes, M. C., Shaw, M., & Throne, R. (2016). Enriching online doctoral advising using situated advising andragogy. 39th Teaching Public Administration Conference, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ.

As the number of online doctoral programs in Public Administration increases, one challenge faced in teaching Public Administration is understanding how to mentor online doctoral students so that they complete their programs successfully and within a reasonable amount of time. This research includes a summarization of strategies used by certain faculty to increase effectiveness, decrease time to completion rates, and increase retention. The authors recommend a formal approach to situated dissertation research advising to improve doctoral student persistence and completion especially for the dissertation research phase of a doctoral program. The suggested model can lead to chair efficacy, higher quality mentoring skills, and more collaborative communication between the chair and candidate.

Poster presented at the *2nd Annual Conference on Academic Research in Education (CARE)*,
Las Vegas, NV, February 26-27, 2018

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. USA: Cambridge University Press.

As first posited by Lave, the authors elucidated learning as *situated* in that it occurs normally, within any embedded learning activity, context, or culture; that is, as it normally occurs, learning is embedded within activity, context and culture. The learning setting must be *situated* so as normally to involve the construction of knowledge. Socialization and collaboration are essential components of situated learning theory whereby the learner participates within a community of practice comprised of the established conventions, beliefs, and behaviors to be acquired. While initially, the learner may reside at the periphery of the respective learning community, over time the learner becomes more socialized, engaged, and active within the learning culture until assuming a pinnacle role as an expert.

Rademaker, L., O'Connor Duffy, J., Wetzler, E., & Zaikina-Montgomery, H. (2016). Chair perceptions of trust between mentor and mentee in online doctoral dissertation mentoring. *Online Learning, 20*(1). Retrieved from https://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/download/605/199

We explored online dissertation chairs' perceptions of trust in the mentor–mentee relationship, as trust was identified as a crucial factor in the success of doctoral students. Through the implementation of a multiple-case study, and a qualitative, online questionnaire, and through qualitative data analysis, we discovered 16 chairs' perceptions of trust and that student vulnerability is an important part of the relationship that chairs consistently work to alleviate. Findings point to the importance for chairs to establish trust through feedback, consistency, and personal connections with students. Second, chairs perceived student vulnerability to include both students' discussion of their academic skills (or lack thereof) and their willingness to share personal information. Chairs were very resourceful in enacting strategies to alleviate all types of student vulnerability, including recognizing student strengths and pointing to the positives of vulnerability and by offering scholarly resources for students to develop their academic strengths.

Rigler, K. L., Bowlin, L. K., Sweat, K., Watts, S., & Throne, R. (2017). Agency, socialization, and support: A critical review of doctoral student attrition. 3rd International Conference on Doctoral Education, University of Central Florida.

Almost universally, residential doctoral programs have reported attrition rates of up to 50% for face-to-face programs and 50-70% for online doctoral programs. The purpose of this critical review was to explore current literature for doctoral attrition and persistence to explore reasons and attributes for improved persistence to completion. We analyzed a final sample of 79 studies for context with doctoral attrition and persistence and, following coding, pattern matching, and synthesis, four final constructs emerged: (a) chair agency and chair-candidate relationship; (b) candidate socialization and support systems; (c) candidate preparedness; and (d) financial considerations. These constructs indicated that internal factors from within the doctoral program have affected attrition and we encourage doctoral educational leadership to implement strategies to improve dissertation chair practices through professional development, increased candidate support and socialization opportunities, creation of clearer pathways from academic to dissertation research coursework, and improved financial opportunities and support for candidates. We recommend quantitative explanatory studies to further examine the four factors within the doctoral program to examine the effects on doctoral candidate completion.

Throne, R. (2018). Positionality meets agency: Dissertation supervisor agency, a necessary construct for online research supervision. Paper presented at 14th Annual International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

This conceptual paper critically explores the construct of agency from a dissertation research supervisor perspective. While the literature has expanded in the exploration of student agency, little focus has been given to the construct from a research supervisor agency stance. While current research into doctoral completion has shown the relationship between supervisor and dissertation writer as critical to persistence and completion, less investigation has focused on the aspects of dissertation supervisor agency and the evolution to a high mentoring approach especially for online doctoral students. The inquiry utilizes the lens of Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory and how supervisor agency can be developed to guide doctoral scholars from the margins of the doctoral learning community to the center of scholarly life and post-doctoral practice-based research and evidence-based decision making.

The Situated Dissertation Advising Framework for Improved Doctoral Completion

Throne, R., Bourke, B., Bowlin, L., Hailey, V., Joseph, S., & Yedgarian, V. (2018). Insider/outsider, betwixt and between: Post-doc perspectives of researcher positionality after dissertation research. 2nd annual Conference on Academic Research in Education, Las Vegas.

This poster session presents considerations for post-doctoral perspectives of researcher positionality within dissertation research at one online university. Researcher positionality is essential for valuable self-examination of new investigators, especially those who desire to focus on a dissertation research problem from professional practice. A doctoral candidate acquires a researcher identity whereby the candidate must consider and integrate through an iterative and evolutionary process of reflection and integration throughout the research experience to distinguish an emergent positionality, and these perspectives often evolve post-doc as the researcher continues to engage within the scholarly community. Consideration for the inherent dualities of insider/outsider and positionality can offer a transparency necessary to the perspectives brought to the inquiry especially for practice-based research a doctoral graduate may navigate from a post-doc perspective.

Throne, R., & O'Connor Duffy, J. (2016). Situated EdD dissertation advising in an online doctoral community of practice. 2016 WSCUC Academic Resource Conference, Garden Grove, CA.

Doctoral education contributes to a knowledge-driven society in preparing scholar-practitioners who will use formal inquiry to solve problems and discover innovations that benefit educational leadership. The Northcentral University School of Education offers a model for situated dissertation advising within an online community of practice to improve persistence and completion.

Throne, R., Oddi, B., Fore, C. J., Akagi, C, Bloomberg, L., Clowes, M. C., O'Connor Duffy, J., Riggle, B., St. Louis, L., Shaw, M., & Wardlow, R. (2017). The Situated Dissertation Advising Framework for improved doctoral completion in a School of Education. 1st Annual Conference on Academic Research in Education (CARE), Las Vegas, NV.

This poster session presents a synthesis of the experiences of one School of Education in the use of a framework for situated dissertation advising founded on Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory that partially contributed to an exponential increase in doctoral student persistence and completion within a multi-faceted online doctoral learning community. The framework continues to be used by School of Education dissertation advisors in a new university-wide model for the doctoral student experience (both PhD and EdD) and as a lens to view ongoing assessment and qualitative evaluation of the new model from an educational and theoretical perspective.

Throne, R., Shaw, M., Fore, C. J., O'Connor Duffy, J., & Clowes, M. (2015). Doctoral candidate milestone achievement: A philosophy for situated dissertation advising. Paper presented at the Eighth International Conference on e-Learning and Innovative Pedagogies at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

The paper is informed by an institutional case demonstrating the effectiveness of this model in an e-learning environment where technology tools have been evolving rapidly and institutional architectures have been changing to accommodate those technology tools as well as dynamic student expectations. In a primarily doctoral granting institution, it is critical to have provisions to ensure high rates of student success to ensure institutional viability. In this research, the authors present the challenges experienced by doctoral candidates and propose a philosophy of dissertation advising to help online students complete their programs successfully and within a reasonable amount of time. This research includes a summarization of strategies used by certain faculty to reduce student complaints, decrease time to completion rates, and increase retention. The authors recommend a formal approach to situated dissertation research advising to improve online doctoral student persistence and completion especially for the dissertation research phase of a doctoral program. The suggested model leads to chair efficacy, higher quality mentoring skills, and more collaborative communication between the chair and candidate.

Wetzler, E., O'Connor Duffy, J., Fish, L., & Rademaker, L. (2016). Finding empathy as we guide doctoral students and repair mentor/mentee relationships: Using Rusbult's model to explore our work. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

We, collectively as four dissertation chairs, use autoethnography to examine our relationships with graduate students by using Rusbult's (1982) framework of responses to relationship deterioration. We explore how our mentoring can impede or facilitate student success once a mentoring relationship is damaged. Collaboratively, we examine how our different mentoring styles lead to the different outcomes when relationship conflict arises. Given Rusbult's model of Exit, Voice, Loyalty, Neglect, (EVLN) we reflect upon mentoring examples from our own work that illustrate each of the constructs. Our analysis reveals that varying levels of empathy lead to either constructive approaches to relationship repair or further deterioration. Implications can guide chairs to adopt mentoring techniques that rehabilitate the mentor-mentee relationship resulting in student success.