

# Affirming the Artist Practitioner Researcher

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My introduction to the field of qualitative research in the EdD program began with analyzing the artistry of a practitioner researcher. If “the aim of the researcher is to discover or reveal truths about the world” (McEwan and Reed 2017), then one must acknowledge that truth and the knowledge of truth lives in consciousness. Individually, as we become conscious through our uniquely lived human experiences, it is the dualistic nature of those experiences that encapsulate and enrich our intellect, our ethos, and our morality. “We all inquire with varying degrees of skill and insight, and for a variety of purposes” (McEwan and Reed 2017). In discussing “the problem of the researcher/practitioner dichotomy,” I agree that the separation is indeed a false one. Our lives are filled with challenges, adversities, resistance, and problems at micro and macro levels. Just as we cannot know love without pain, we cannot know joy without sorrow, nor happiness without sadness. Similarly, a researcher cannot know without first doing because her knowledge is gained through all of her experiences. The human experience is fluid, complex, and unique for every person, so too is the experience and artistry of the practitioner researcher.

Arriving in the space of an emerging artist practitioner researcher has been soulfully synchronistic and life affirming because of the magic I have experienced in the convergence and alignment of all parts of myself; the conscious self, the knowing self, the intuitive self, and the doing self. The manifestation of the deep desire to feel connected and whole was an experience worth waiting for and worth working through in order to have evolved into the next level of self. That next level of the whole self has been all encompassing and completely accepting of my life experiences, cultural conditioning, labels, stereotypes, similarities, and differences that I have been enculturated in. I am filled with amazement as I reflect on how my life experiences have led me to this exact space and time. It has been tremendously transformative in such a short amount of time.

I feel the alignment of both my personal and professional positionalities and see this integration as the most significant first step in developing the artist

practitioner researcher in me. Without this wholeness, the learner and leader in me would be incomplete, fragmented, and unprepared for the undertaking of the philosophy that drives the field of qualitative research. One of the most central key components to qualitative research is “that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam 2009, 15). Accepting this notion that the researcher is at the forefront of her research design, the convergence of my varied identities and positionalities inclusive of my ontology, epistemology, and axiology have allowed me to practice reflexivity, “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher,” (Merriam 2009, 219).

McEwan and Reed (2017), bring to life the artistry of the practitioner researcher, encouraging the inclusiveness of the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of our human experiences. Whereas the traditional researcher’s work separates the knower from the doer and the doer from the knower, the artist practitioner researcher approach does not seek to unbias the biases, exclude the researcher’s perspectives and values, nor deny the fullness of the experience in solving problems of practice. Instead, the practitioner researcher is encouraged to be open about one’s positionalities. “Even in journal articles authors are being called upon to articulate and clarify their assumptions, experiences, and worldview, and theoretical orientation” (Merriam 2009).

The emic and etic experiences of a practitioner researcher gives depth to the researcher’s experiences allowing her to internalize her own experience thereby changing her in the process. We can never be the same person we were in our youth, or even yesterday. The process of artistry in practitioner research reflects natural human development and evolution. We learn, grow, develop, and refine ourselves through our adversities, challenges, resistance, and problems. McEwan and Reed (2017) remind me that, “Artists are persons who seek out resistance and adversity, accepting new challenges, and trying out things that are new, exploring new practices, and adapting old ones (46).”

After reflecting then synthesizing this new understanding, I began to see positionality as a foundation, a process, and a framework for developing the artist practitioner researcher in me. As a Native Hawaiian female born and raised in a Native Hawaiian family in Hawai'i, the strength of the foundation and core of who I am is grounded in this identification of being Native Hawaiian. My physical attributes, my dispositions, and my overall value system are innately and closely aligned to being Native Hawaiian.

Positionality as a process has challenged me to understand that the labels, stereotypes, and perceptions that others may have about Native Hawaiians exist in real and relevant ways; especially in politics. And that owning these labels, stereotypes, and perceptions does not have to diminish my own self-worth and value as a human being, but can serve as a means to continue developing the learner and leader in me. The process of working with other cohort members has reminded me to be aware of how others perceive me. I have come to value positionality as a framework for enhancing the practitioner researcher identity to transform into a refined version of my whole self in order to be ready for a higher caliber of leadership roles and responsibilities in my community. Although I believe my positionality can also be an advantage in the research I hope to undertake, I do recognize the uniqueness of who I am and who I am not.

The concepts of positionality and reflexivity have been the essence and epiphany of my transformation this summer. I now see myself holistically as an artist practitioner researcher who can exercise and utilize intellect, philosophy, justice, peace, passion, creativity, compassion, and courage to affect change and, most importantly, growth in my life and my work. Change begins within, therefore being reflective as an artist practitioner researcher is truly significant to one's work, for without it, we become preachers who share powerful ideas, but never internalize them enough to model, live, or abide by those same concepts. To know by doing and to understand by integrating new knowledge exemplifies and gives life to the notion of "practice to theory."

An artist practitioner researcher possesses a combination of self-awareness and political awareness. My personal commitment for strengthening my self-awareness began at the age of thirty. I made the conscious decision to work

towards healing the deep wounds I endured because of the adversities in my younger life. In these past seven years on this journey towards healing my own micro-ethical dilemmas and entanglements, two major concepts have impacted my growth. The first is owning responsibility for my life and my life's purpose. This has helped me to take back my power and move into what Lipe (2016) quotes from Vizenor (2008) as "survivance, . . . a state of being in which we, as Indigenous peoples, reject being the victim (1)." The second is actually based on the book *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz (2012). Using the indigenous knowledge of the Toltec, the four agreements teach us to "1) be impeccable with your word, 2) don't take anything personally, 3) don't make assumptions, and 4) always do your best." This "practical guide to personal freedom" has helped me to develop self-awareness in the context of my family, my community, and my work. I use this guide as a framework for the way I live and lead.

My early childhood life experiences have significantly impacted my overall development and dispositions. Learning the six key characteristics of a researcher confirmed that perhaps I chose this particular life path filled with the many adversities and harsh challenges as a means to prepare me to become an artist practitioner researcher. The six traits of a researcher: being a careful observer; comfort with writing; having a questioning stance with your work and life context; thinking inductively; asking good questions; and having a high tolerance for ambiguity poignantly describe the skills I developed as a result of my dysfunctional childhood. The troubles that plagued my Native Hawaiian family were perhaps commonplace considering the generational genocide of my Native Hawaiian ancestors and our beloved Hawaiian nation hundreds of years ago. Each subsequent generation worked to live their lives in the best ways they knew how under the complex circumstances of our political history in our homelands. I do not harbor resentment towards my parents for their shortcomings. Instead, I honor them with the utmost compassion because they lived within their capacities and gifted me with a strong foundation of values, most especially the value of collective consciousness.

My parents' prerogative was far from political. I did not grow up understanding the depth of colonization nor its impact upon me personally prior to this summer.

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The dimensions of my identity deepened and shifted drastically as I began to internalize this new knowledge. The topic contextualized my lived experiences as a Native Hawaiian and stimulated a very pertinent part of my emerging artist practitioner researcher identity: political awareness. This motivates me in even greater ways to enter into the field of qualitative research. I now see my role as an artist practitioner researcher for the benefit of my community as we reimagine our lives in this postcolonial period, adding our voices and perspective to tell our stories. This is the reason that I believe that arriving in this space as an emerging practitioner researcher now is significant and symbolic for me. I am content in accepting that the path to this space and time could not have occurred any sooner in my life. We are always where we are supposed to be. Without the commitment in my journey of spiritual maturation, the readiness to deepen my political awareness might not have been as powerful.

Thus far, my understanding in the artistry of the practitioner researcher has been conceptualized in this notion: we are capable of solving our own problems of practice as practitioner researchers. The problems we face in our practice become the impetus in the desire to effectuate change. I believe that it is innately human to want to make sense of our lives. “Basically, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world,” (Merriam 2009, 13). Therefore, as we aim to solve these problems of practice, the artistry of our work is transmitted through our ethos and embedded in our positionalities. We become the catalyst for change and change ourselves in the process thereby transforming the space and caliber of our educational environments.

The social learning environment in the cohort experience of this EdD program has also been vital to my transformation as an emerging artist practitioner researcher. Our presence and the stories that we each brought to the space was synergistic. In a serene and serendipitous manner, we began to create a ‘spirit of transformation’ (Twomey 2017). In these next three years, combining our intellectual abilities and our intrapersonal and interpersonal skills has the potential to refine the artist practitioner-researcher in each and every one of us. Proverbs 27:17 from the New International Holy Bible proclaims “as iron sharpens

iron, so one man sharpens another” (1986, 857). We have definitely begun sharpening each other by bringing our whole and authentic selves to the space. And for the sincerity, generosity, and genuineness of each of my fellow cohort members, I am eternally grateful. Through our diverse backgrounds and the high demands of each and every one of our lives, we have committed to aspire to our highest leadership potential because of our profound passions in seeking truth, justice, and equality. May our love for our shared homeland of Hawai‘i always be at the heart of our future work.

Lastly, I feel that the approach to being an artist practitioner researcher will nurture leadership through a different lens and place accountability upon the researcher in a way that does not seek outside of one’s self for answers, but honors one’s own wisdom and enriches the creative power that we each possess in order to address some of the issues and challenges we encounter. This approach validates the knowledge that we all inherently retain and our capability in solving our problems, fulfilling our own needs, and becoming that which we seek in leadership. The artistry of qualitative research is best expressed in Cremer’s (2017) statement, “the magic of this space is that it reaffirms what you already know.” I feel privileged to have experienced the magic of the EdD program in this first summer of course work and for the deep ways I have already transformed. It is indeed a benevolent experience to enter a space that “allows people to unleash their power” (Lipe 2017). I am affirmed.

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