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Removing the Mysteries of Research Proposals: A Review of Steven. R. Terrell's Writing a Proposal for your Dissertation: Guidelines and Examples

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Abstract

Close your eyes and reflect on that first moment you entered a research or content-based course and discovered that you would be writing and presenting a research proposal to a researcher to ask for assistance on conducting a study that would solve a current curriculum issue or increase student achievement. Terrell's (2016) book provides the knowledge and skills students need in an introductory research course, a research proposal course, or a content course that embeds research. Terrell guides students through their proposal and provides samples for students to review and apply to their work.

Keywords

Dissertation, Mixed Methods Research Designs, Research Proposal, Review of Literature, Qualitative Research Methods, Quantitative Research Methods, Curriculum, College Course

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Removing the Mysteries of Research Proposals: A Review of Steven. R. Terrell's *Writing a Proposal for your Dissertation: Guidelines and Examples*

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Close your eyes and reflect on that first moment you entered a research or content-based course and discovered that you would be writing and presenting a research proposal to a researcher to ask for assistance on conducting a study that would solve a current curriculum issue or increase student achievement. Terrell's (2016) book provides the knowledge and skills students need in an introductory research course, a research proposal course, or a content course that embeds research. Terrell guides students through their proposal and provides samples for students to review and apply to their work. Keywords: Dissertation, Mixed Methods Research Designs, Research Proposal, Review of Literature, Qualitative Research Methods, Quantitative Research Methods, Curriculum, College Course

A Research...What?

A doctoral student nervously walks into a curriculum content course focused on current trends and issues in curriculum. She had already brainstormed current curriculum issues with her administrative team and was prepared for success in the course. While quietly entering the room, she sheepishly looks around and observes exhausted professionals who had just come to class from work and a professor who has many curriculum materials visible and the other students focused on Schiro's (2012) Curriculum Ideologies Inventory. After completing the inventory, the doctoral student examines her responses to see if her curriculum beliefs more closely aligned with scholar academic, social efficiency, learner centered, or social reconstruction ideology. The inventory validates her professional belief of focusing on students' interests with curriculum, which aligns with the learner centered ideology (Schiro, 2012). Completing the inventory confirms the student's interest in the course, and she waits patiently for the discussion of the syllabus. After gaining the interest of his students, the professor passes out the syllabus to review with students. The doctoral students quickly skip the first four pages of the syllabus, so they can see the required assignments for the course on page five. As she begins reading the assignments, the student mistakenly states out loud, "A research...what?"

Reviewer's Statement

A vignette like the student in the curriculum course may occur when a student registers for a content course but realizes that the new knowledge gained in the content will be shared through a research proposal. As a professor of doctoral students, I have learned that many students do not have experience with writing a research proposal, and they are very nervous about the project. With the field of research being so broad with lots of knowledge and skills to gain, it was important to me to find a book that succinctly explains how to write a proposal

for a dissertation. Terrell (2016) wrote a book titled *Writing a Proposal for Your Dissertation: Guidelines and Examples*, which thoroughly covers how to write a proposal without overwhelming students. I adopted this book for a doctoral course titled *Trends and Issues in Curriculum Studies*. For the proposal, students interview administrator(s) and other leaders about a curriculum trend or issue in primary, secondary, or higher education they believe needs addressing through research. Students are provided with suggested topics such as global education, culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and habits of the mind/soft skills with the goal of helping them brainstorm for the proposal. This project connects the curriculum content with the research proposal and allows students to gain knowledge and skills for their dissertation.

What sections are typically in chapter one of a proposal and how do I write them?

Terrell's (2016) first two chapters provide an overview of the content students typically include in chapter one of a proposal or dissertation. For example, students will learn about problem statements, purpose statements, research questions, hypotheses, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and definitions of terms. Terrell provides just enough information to assist students in these sections to help students understand how to write chapter one of a proposal. However, this is one area where the author could expand on the content in future editions helping students understand the differences among chapter one in quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and mixed methods. A strength of this book is Terrell's use of key words/phrases and review questions at the end of each chapter. More importantly, the author guides students on how to write a proposal by having students apply the new knowledge gained in each chapter. For example, Terrell (2016, p. 19) in chapter one states, "I want you to start actually writing a proposal; you'll expand it as we move through each chapter by adding the material that was the focus of that chapter."

What is the purpose of the review of literature?

Although Terrell (2016) addresses the purpose of the literature review and the different steps of writing a literature review, I usually provide students additional resources on this topic because many students struggle understanding a review of literature. Students in my course benefit greatly from his literature maps on page 59 and the sample literature review in the back of the book. The literature maps encourage students to synthesize their review and to visually see the different sections that will be included in their review of literature. Terrell (2016, p. 59) uses the research problem, "What factors contribute to gender differences in interest in technology?" The major topics that align with this research problem include learning style, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, socioeconomic status, and home environment. The author extends on this learning by teaching students that the topic self-efficacy could be placed under intrinsic motivation, and socioeconomic status could be a part of the home environment section. The visual maps along with the explanations help students understand how to apply it to their own topic. The sample review of literature on pages 233-235 assists students in writing and synthesizing literature based on topics from their literature map. Despite adding some additional resources when you teach the review of literature part of the proposal, Terrell's (2016) book is a wonderful foundation for graduate students.

How do I begin chapter three of my research proposal?

Terrell (2016) covers the different research designs and how to properly write a methodology chapter very well. In chapter four, the author thoroughly covers sampling with

figures and a detailed explanation of various types of sampling such as random, simple random, cluster, stratified, systematic, nonrandom, convenience, quota, purposive, and snowball. Terrell summarizes the information by including a table with type, approach, and description. My students have found this table to be very helpful when comparing and contrasting different sampling methods. Chapter four also covers other important topics for chapter three of a research proposal including instruments, reliability, validity, and ethical considerations. Because of my background in qualitative research, I provide students a resource on trustworthiness when reviewing this section. We compare and contrast trustworthiness with reliability and validity. I do hope that Terrell will include this concept in future editions of this book.

How do quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research designs differ and which should I use for my research proposal?

Because students explained their research problem and purpose and wrote their research questions in chapter one, we discuss which research methods would best answer their research questions. Terrell (2016) wrote a chapter on each research method: quantitative (chapter five), qualitative (chapter six), and mixed methods (chapter 7). Because most of my students are new to research and are still coping with the idea of writing a research proposal in a content course, I have them focus on the research methodology that they need for their proposal, which allows them to go deeper in one area and gain new knowledge and skills without overwhelming them. All students will eventually have a research course or more on each method. The book ends with a sample research proposal using each method and answers to the review questions for each chapter. Terrell's book provides the necessary content for graduate students to successfully finish their research proposal and have an introductory knowledge base of research.

Final Thoughts

There are many great books on writing a research proposal, but I have yet to find one that covers the material more succinctly and thoroughly than Terrell's (2016) book titled *Writing a Proposal for Your Dissertation: Guidelines and Examples*. This book provides students with an overview of the research process and how to write chapters one, two, and three of a dissertation. I would highly recommend this book for introductory research courses, research proposal courses, and content courses that embed research. If you are teaching students with more advanced research skills, there are probably more effective books for your students' needs. Since I teach students for more than one curriculum course in the program, and I serve on dissertation committees, I have seen where students reference Terrell's book in future courses and in their dissertation. In addition, students have left positive feedback in the course evaluation about the book. For these reasons, I will continue to use Terrell's book for my course and highly recommend you to consider the book as well.

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Author Note

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