Title:

Facilitated Practice-based Research: A model of empowerment to reduce research anxiety in social work practitioner researchers and reframe cultural capital

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Abstract:

This paper presents initial findings from an ongoing Action Research Project, and aims to understand the problem of why, despite attempts to address this through, for example, Social Work Practice Research, practitioners still experience research anxiety. One way to understand this is through Bourdieu's field theory: social work students, practitioners and educators have essential research skills and knowledge, but do not possess the symbolic capital to reframe these in the field of social work research and are habituated into research anxiety.

The Participatory Action Research approach taken questioned: how can we bridge the gap between social work research and practice? An empowerment model was developed and tested, collaborating with a local charity, as a potential solution: Facilitated Practice-based Research. This is a research programme conducted in practice, about practice, using practice terminology. Findings from two focus groups participating in this approach suggest practitioners do habituate research anxiety; they can conduct research but name it differently, and their research confidence needs development, through recognising it and beginning to name their work as research.

It is concluded that if research anxiety in practitioners is not addressed by reframing their capital, opportunities could be missed for embedding research into social work practice.

5 key words: research anxiety; practice research; symbolic capital; empowerment; reflexivity.