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Unleashing the Hidden Goldmine of Practitioner Insight

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ABSTRACT

An argument that practitioner research is a hidden goldmine, rich in clarity, lived experience, emotional truth, and real-world rigor, and deserving of full visibility within the scholarly ecosystem.

Keywords: practitioner scholarship, lived experience, pragmatic rigor, emotional truth, dissertation visibility, action research, practitioner-scholar identity

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> *"The deepest gold in this goldmine is not the data, the clarity, or the applied relevance. It is the dignity of people whose work has been overlooked for decades."*

For decades, a quiet assumption has shaped the academic ecosystem: that the most valuable knowledge comes from prestige institutions, theoretical frameworks, and traditional scholarly pathways. This assumption has been documented and critiqued across multiple strands of educational and organizational research, including work by Lochmiller and Lester (2017) and Robey, Taylor, and Grabowski (2018), both of whom argue that practitioner inquiry represents a legitimate and often overlooked form of scholarly rigor. Meanwhile, practitioner scholars — leaders, managers, public-sector professionals, community organizers, and frontline supervisors — have been producing rigorous, applied, deeply relevant research that almost no one ever sees. Their work does not disappear because it lacks merit. It disappears because it lacks visibility. Once you begin to examine it closely, you realize that this overlooked body of work is not a footnote at all. It is a hidden goldmine.

The gold within practitioner scholarship is tangible. It begins with the clarity of real-world definition. Practitioner scholars describe the world as it actually is, not as theory abstracts it to be. They write about small-business leaders navigating organizational resilience (Ohaya, 2026), SME managers confronting external barriers to growth (Miller, 2026), and public-sector supervisors whose citizenship behaviors sustain entire agencies (Menakaya, 2026). These are not conceptual categories. They are lived contexts. This level of specificity is not merely descriptive. It is analytical. It is the kind of clarity policymakers, leaders, and organizations desperately need, and it is the kind of clarity academic literature often struggles to produce. Lochmiller and Lester (2017) argue that practitioner inquiry is grounded in localized problems of practice, and that its value emerges from deep contextual understanding rather than abstraction. Their work affirms what practitioner scholars demonstrate every day: clarity is not a stylistic choice, but a methodological strength.

The gold continues in the form of lived experience. Academia frequently treats lived experience as anecdotal, yet practitioners treat it as evidence. Their research is grounded in direct observation, operational reality, and consequences they have personally witnessed. This is rigor of a different kind, one that emerges from proximity to the problem rather than distance from it. Robey, Taylor, and Grabowski (2018) describe this as pragmatic rigor, a form of scholarly discipline that evaluates knowledge by its capacity to improve real settings and address stakeholder needs. Their analysis reinforces the idea that practitioner scholarship is not a diluted version of academic research. It is a distinct and legitimate form of rigor.

There is also a form of emotional truth embedded in practitioner research that academic writing often filters out. Practitioners write about fear, burnout, resilience, leadership failure, community struggle, and human consequences. These emotional dimensions are not distractions from the research. They are part of the research. Emotion provides context. Emotion conveys meaning. Emotion is data. Emotion is quintessential qualitative data, and it is also penultimate qualitative data — sitting directly beneath lived experience and revealing the stakes, meaning, and human consequences practitioners encounter every day. Anderson and Herr (1999) argue that practitioners' personal stake and emotional investment in their own inquiry — often dismissed by traditional research paradigms as disqualifying bias — are in fact central to the validity and force of practitioner knowledge. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) similarly describe practitioner knowledge as embodied, narrative, and relational, shaped by a practitioner's own values and lived experience. Together, their work affirms that emotional truth and human consequence are central to practitioner insight, not peripheral to it.

Practitioner scholarship is grounded in the human condition — the lived realities, emotions, constraints, and consequences that shape how people actually experience work, leadership, and organizational life. Traditional academic scholarship, by contrast, has historically been grounded in the theoretical condition, emphasizing abstraction, distance, and generalizable models. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue, practitioner knowledge emerges from experience and context, revealing how ideas behave when they collide with real people and real consequences.

The human condition and the theoretical condition operate as a flywheel of knowledge, with each informing, refining, and accelerating the other. Practitioner insight grounds theory in lived reality, and theory, in turn, sharpens the practitioner's understanding of the world they navigate. Each rotation strengthens the next, creating a self-reinforcing engine of clarity, rigor, and insight.

A prevailing view within parts of traditional academia has questioned whether practitioner scholarship constitutes a goldmine at all, raising concerns about rigor, generalizability, and what Anderson and Herr (1999) describe as analytic distance, the expectation that researchers remain detached from the settings they study. Yet this view reflects a paradigm in which distance is equated with rigor. Modern scholarship has moved beyond this assumption, recognizing that proximity to real problems often produces insight that theory alone cannot. The movement from theory into practice is what ultimately makes knowledge actionable, measurable, and capable of improving the lives and systems it touches. More recent scholarship affirms this shift, positioning practitioner inquiry as a form of pragmatic rigor grounded in real-world impact (Robey et al., 2018; Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

Practitioner dissertations do not require special justification. They require visibility. These studies are supervised, structured, defended, and archived, and they often address problems with real consequences. Once they are brought into the public domain, the scholarly community can examine them, debate them, challenge them, or validate them. Knowledge advances through transparency, not gatekeeping. We are building on the shoulders of all the giants who came before us, expanding the scholarly ecosystem so that practitioner insight can stand alongside traditional research rather than beneath it. The researchers unveiled through Undeterred become members of what we call the Giants Class, scholars whose work now stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the giants who shaped the fields they are advancing.[1]

Something extraordinary happens when you begin to unseal this vault. Practitioner scholars step forward. Leaders pay attention. Unexpected readers engage. Global thinkers, including people far outside your expected orbit, begin to notice. Suppressed insight rises. Overlooked voices find dignity. The ecosystem begins to shift. It feels like pressure releasing. It feels like something waking up. It feels like a force that was always present, waiting for someone to open the door.

The deepest gold in this goldmine is not the data, the clarity, or the applied relevance. It is the dignity of people whose work has been overlooked for decades. Practitioner scholars have solved real problems, led real teams, served real communities, navigated real crises, and generated real insight, often without recognition. Publishing their work is not merely an academic act. It is a restorative one. It says that your experience matters, your insight is rigorous, and your voice deserves to be heard.

We are only at the beginning of this work, yet the early signals are unmistakable. Practitioner scholars are stepping forward. Leaders are responding. Global thinkers are noticing. The prestige narrative is cracking. The ecosystem is shifting. The goldmine is no longer hidden. As this insight begins to surface, something larger becomes visible. We are witnessing what appears to be a modern-day gold rush. Not

of land or minerals, but of ideas and research, of clarity long suppressed, of wisdom long overlooked, and of rigor long underestimated. Once this kind of insight rises into public view, it does not return to the archives. It expands. It accelerates. It transforms.

This is the work of Undeterred Press. This is the movement we are building. This is the gold we are releasing into the world.

Footnote

[1] Giants Class is a term introduced by Schulte (2026) to designate practitioner scholars whose applied research contributes foundational insight comparable to the canonical giants of their disciplines. ↩

AI DISCLOSURE — LEVEL 3 AI-primary drafting, with human direction throughout. The author verifies every claim and holds full intellectual responsibility for the result.

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