

Practice-Led Research vs. Practice-Based Research

MDC's Doctor of Practical Theology is distinct from other professional degrees like the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) because of its emphasis on "practice-led" research as opposed to "practice-based" research. Practice-based research is dependent on the development and results usually only in the development of artifacts—that is some kind of an object created by students during the course of research. In a typical DMin program this may be a curriculum that is developed, a series of sermons that result, a pastoral evaluation tool that is created or a video resource that is produced.

While these outcomes are certainly valid, practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. The primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice. Practice-led research is led by the intention to produce knowledge that impacts practice. Like all practice-led research, it emanates from enquiry and moves toward the goal of providing new thinking that addresses the theory that is under consideration. Also like all research that is informed by practice, practice-led research must be rooted in the context of the researcher's work (professional or volunteer) and include robust and meaningful reflection upon practice and how the researcher relates to the context they are addressing.

Practice-led research moves from practice to theory with a clear goal that the result will make a tangible, theoretical contribution to the field of practice. In the context of practical theology, the researcher starts with an identifiable area of exploration in their field of interest. The area of concentration is then brought into conversation with existing practice and theoretical advancement in the field. Ultimately the research provides a response that is rooted in the development of new theories and offers insight into new practices.

A practice-led doctorate is distinct from a practice-based doctorate (like most DMin's) primarily by the fact that it is essentially a written work that seeks to offer overarching theoretical contributions to the practice of ministry, but does not require a creative element or artefact as part of its successful completion (although this may be a component). At the heart of professional doctorates like the DPT is a dynamic relationship between theory and practice. The goal of the DPT is to generate new understandings of ministry that inform and enhance the understanding of, and options for, action in a particular professional/institutional context.