

Groundwork

What fundamental understandings do we need to talk about education research?



Many research textbooks will jump right away into the nuts and bolts of doing research. That might seem appealing — after all, you're probably reading this because you were required to take a class, you want to do a specific study, you want to get published, or you just want to graduate, and all of those are good goals — but it's somewhat akin to embarking on a hike only to be blindfolded and dropped off by a stranger halfway up a mountain. Sure, it might be easier to get to the top, but you don't know where you are, how you got there, or even if you're heading up the mountain you had planned on.

So, in order to make sure that you don't waste your time, don't harm anyone, and don't wake up months or years down the road realizing that you have been short-sighted, misdirected, or unaware in your research, I think it's important for us to lay some groundwork first in a few key areas. Let's get our bearings, identify our goals, and make sure that we're getting there together.

In this section, we'll explore some fundamental aspects of research that may initially seem basic but are nonetheless essential to uncover in a thoughtful manner. This includes such topics as what is the [nature of knowledge](#), what constitutes [ethical behavior](#), and what [socioeconomic factors have influenced education research throughout history](#) and even today. I'll approach each of these (and other) topics in a fairly cursory manner but will do so to operationalize important terms and concepts that will be used throughout the rest of the book. I will then close this section with some structured guidance on how to select a [research problem](#) and how to write effective [research questions](#), both of which are essential for moving forward with a study.

By going through this process, I hope to spark a desire in you to be self-aware and to grapple with some of these deeper issues in your work (such as the ethics of what we do) so that you will help encourage the field toward becoming more

critical of our assumptions and thoughtful about our impacts on the world.

No one wants to slow you down. If you want to do research, then let's get you doing research as soon as possible. But an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and by laying just a bit of groundwork here at the outset, my hope is that you can approach your research in a more reflective manner from day one and avoid some of the pitfalls that even seasoned researchers occasionally fall into.

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