Philosophical Foundations of Educational Inquiry
ED 500
Summer, 2013
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4:30-8:30, EPASW 2417

Instructor: Dr. Theresa (Terri) Thorkildsen
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Hours: Before class or by appointment
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Purposes of the Course
This course is intended to introduce beginning doctoral students to professional conversations taking place in the educational research community. Our guiding question will be, “What do we mean by educational research?” This question will be investigated by considering different theoretical and practical contexts, including:

Professional contexts
Why is it essential for educational research to be seen as socially valuable and what might that mean in the complex world in which we live?
What does research mean in the career of a faculty member or other professional researcher when compared with the work and career of a school administrator or teacher?
Why would it be important to distinguish urban contexts from other professional environments?
How do educational researchers consider the breadth and depth of the contexts in which they live and work?
How are different forms of inquiry viewed and supported by different institutions?
What are the key differences between program evaluation and educational research?

Epistemological contexts
What are some of the major paradigms, orientations, and systems that guide educational research?
What kinds of knowledge do different forms of research generate? Why is it important to be aware of the inter-disciplinary nature of education?
What counts as knowledge? How trustworthy is such knowledge?
What are some heuristic features of educational research?
What are some algorithmic features of educational research?

Theoretical and methodological contexts
What general purposes and processes of educational research guide your particular program of study?
What are some differences between paradigms, theories, concepts, and constructs?
In your field, what constitutes a theory and how do researchers support such things?
What is the difference between methods and methodology? Where does design fall in this set of distinctions?

Political and ethical contexts
What problems of right and wrong arise when one’s quest for knowledge involves human beings as research participants?
What are some of the responsibilities of an educational researcher and how does that differ from those of a teacher, counselor, or school administrator?
What are some of the differences between the political and ethical stances taken in your field?
What procedures are involved in defining a strong research question?
Although this course covers a broad range of themes and topics, it is designed to strengthen the ability to think theoretically and analytically while identifying research questions. As the first or earliest step in a doctoral student's program of study, it is helpful to imagine and justify potential research contributions even if the actual studies are not carried out. It is also important to distinguish research designed to advance theory and that useful only in specific professional contexts even if the strongest research addresses both dimensions. We will not cover all the steps that are essential for scholarly discourse, yet we will practice actively participating in public and private conversations about educational research. We will focus most intently on those skills associated with interpreting research critically, selecting appropriate methods for addressing research questions, and preparing for such stages of the doctoral program as comprehensive exams and research proposal writing. Emphasizing the idea that scholarship is always a communal enterprise, we will also have opportunities to critique one another’s written work as such skills are practiced in professional discourse.

**Key Readings**

Most of the readings for this 6-week version of ED 500 will come from parts of different books and journals and will be made available in a designated Dropbox file. We will use jigsaw methods when working through a reading list that is far longer than anyone can reasonably manage in one semester. Nevertheless, individuals may benefit from obtaining one or more of the following works.

**Grasping the Research Enterprise**


**For Writing Style and Format**

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: APA. (Many students may need to enroll in the online courses available to teach the writing skills that are summarized very briefly in this book.)

Philosophical foundations of educational inquiry


Course Assignments

Because a central purpose of this course is to join professional discourse in the educational research community, a premium will be placed on classroom dialogue and written papers. A primary goal is to learn to speak and write using clear, understandable prose that is also well supported with evidence. The following activities will document these activities for use when assigning a grade. Students will:

*Provide a written response to the readings before class meetings* (25% of the final grade). This set of exercises is designed to give students practice responding to difficult material in writing, accepting feedback, and revising their writing to accommodate that feedback. Making direct references to the course readings, these responses may take the form of bulleted lists of ideas or questions to share with group members or summaries of important ideas found in the readings. Quality will be determined by considering students' responsiveness to the assignment, representation and use of course content, and ability to communicate ideas and arguments effectively. These will be used to guide large and small group discussions and will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis.

*Conscientiously attend and participate in regular class meetings* (25% of the final grade). This involves practicing the skills of professional discourse and involves using research evidence to support shared ideas rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence or personal opinions. This will be documented with the help of documents that allow each student to identify key educational problems and offer suggestions for how these problems might be addressed by scholars working in the fields of Curriculum Studies; Educational Psychology; Literacy, Language, and Culture; Math and Science Education; Policy Studies; and Special Education. To craft this well, it is important to listen to the ideas of class members working in varied fields as well as to think deeply about a personally selected field of study.

*Draft a research problem statement that includes a preferred practical and/or disciplinary context, epistemological stance, theoretical perspective, methodological commitments (design) and at least one research method might be use to address the problem.* (50% of the final grade). As a midterm, students will turn in the first draft of a problem statement and use feedback from that as well as other course conversations to draft a revision for the final exam. A more detailed grading rubric will be distributed before the midterm, but the problem statement can reflect personal research interests or a fictitious "thought problem". Students who would like to imagine a dissertation project should be aware that their interests may change many times over the course of a doctoral program—and beyond. Nevertheless, any strong problem statement should consist of a coherent, critical, and properly formatted essay grounded in a clearly defined problem, a statement of its importance, and detailed references that can illuminate the scope of such research. When considering the significance of the problem, it is important to articulate the professional context for this work, its epistemological value, and any relevant political and ethical concerns associated with this work.
Final Grades
Final course grades are calculated using criterion-referenced standards. This means that students' performance is compared to program expectations and is not determined by comparing an individual's performance with that of classmates. Students who wish to work toward an "A" in the course should integrate the concepts from the assigned readings, their own independent reading, and goals in their program of study. Their problem statement should demonstrate how they plan to use course material as they proceed through the doctoral program. If students create a fictitious problem for the midterm and final paper, they can still demonstrate how their problem is grounded in evidence and holds practical value to their field of study. Outstanding work generally enhances a student's curriculum vitae and writing quality should aim to align with the standards found in published outlets.

Grades of "B" will include participation in all class activities, yet an intermediate step in the process of formulating and justifying a research question. Students earning this grade may also be unable to align the course materials with their field of study well enough to repeat the question formation and justification process as they progress through the program.

A passing grade of "C" is possible if students turn in the midterm and final project, but do not consistently complete agreed upon class discussions and written preparation assignments. Similar grades are earned when students do not meet basic proficiency standards when completing assignments. (In doctoral programs, core courses of this nature, where students earn grades lower than a "B" are often retaken until students are able to perform with a high degree of proficiency.)

Honor Codes
UIC's Honor Code as well as the ethical standards of the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and Society for Research in Child Development governs all work in this and all other courses offered in the College of Education. Students are responsible for becoming familiar with these codes and standards which are available online. Especially important for this course, students should pay attention to the proper use and citations of others' work, and avoid plagiarism.

ADA Compliance
UIC strives to ensure the accessibility of programs, classes, and services to students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations can be arranged for students with various types of disabilities, such as documented learning disabilities, vision or hearing impairments, and emotional or physical disabilities. If you need accommodations for this class, be sure to register with the Office of Disability Services, 1190 SSB, 413-2183, and let your instructor know your needs.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 18th</td>
<td><strong>What is educational research?</strong> Define academic, public, and evaluative contexts for research as well as subjectivity, objectivity, and disciplined inquiry in qualitative and quantitative research. <strong>Distinguish ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspectives (paradigms), design or methodology, and methods</strong> as features of critical interpretation.</td>
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<td><em>Activity: Articulating assumptions</em></td>
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<td>June 20th</td>
<td><strong>Purposes of educational research</strong> Comparisons of research interests among members from various doctoral programs and ways of knowing as well as definitions of knowledge</td>
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<td><em>Conversation starters</em></td>
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<td><em>Activity: Defining terms</em></td>
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<td>June 25th</td>
<td><strong>What does it mean to know and experience?</strong> Distinguish epistemologies (ways of knowing) and their value to individuals and society</td>
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<td><em>Conversation starters</em></td>
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<td><em>Activity: Problem formation</em></td>
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<td>July 2nd</td>
<td><strong>Philosophies of educational research</strong> Comparing various philosophical stances and the role of truth in each</td>
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<td><em>Conversation starters</em></td>
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<td><em>Activity: Situating a research problem</em></td>
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<td>July 4th</td>
<td><strong>Paradigms and traditions of educational research</strong> Identify program specific paradigms and traditions and evaluate their strengths and limitations</td>
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<td><em>Conversation starters</em></td>
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<td><em>Activity: Problem justification</em></td>
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*July 2nd*  
**Keep reading**
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<tr>
<td>July 9th</td>
<td><strong>Is educational research scientific?</strong></td>
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<td>Distinguish scientific methodologies/design and the role of empirical</td>
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<td>evidence and causality in scientific research (e.g., experimental,</td>
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<td>quasi-experimental, and survey methods)</td>
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<td><strong>Writing guide</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Conversation starters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity: Positing a scientific question</strong></td>
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<td>July 11th</td>
<td><strong>Interpretive and critical research traditions</strong></td>
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<td>Distinguish interpretive frames and forms of critical research (e.g.,</td>
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<td>ethnography, anthropological lenses, feminism, critical race theory)</td>
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<td><strong>Conversation starters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity: Considering an alternative tradition</strong></td>
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<td><em>(First problem statement due)</em></td>
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<td>July 16th</td>
<td><strong>What does it mean to test a theory?</strong></td>
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<td>Compare the notions of models, concepts, constructs, and variables.</td>
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<td>Contrast the evaluation of theory from a scientific lens with the value</td>
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<td>of narrative inquiry as a form of scholarship</td>
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<td><strong>Conversation starters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity: Generating knowledge using theory and narratives</strong></td>
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<td>July 18th</td>
<td><strong>How does action align with practicality?</strong></td>
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<td>Define a clear, researchable problem &amp; justify its significance by</td>
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<td>articulating a philosophical, epistemological, theoretical, and</td>
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<td>methodological stance, and at least one sample method for exploring</td>
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<td>the problem</td>
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<td><strong>Conversation starters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity: Discerning the meaning of KISS</strong></td>
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<td>July 23rd</td>
<td><strong>Educational research as a historical, civic, and civil enterprise</strong></td>
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<td>Identify ethical concerns in educational research (e.g., differentiate</td>
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<td>the roles of practitioners and researchers when imagining individual</td>
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<td>rights; determining what problems are meaningful and socially</td>
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<td>valuable)</td>
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<td>Explore the role of time in educational research as well as concepts</td>
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<td>of social value (e.g., local, national, global)</td>
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<td><strong>Conversation starters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity: Considering the role of change</strong></td>
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<td>July 25th</td>
<td><strong>The problem of research design: From disquietude to focused inquiry</strong>&lt;br&gt; Distinguish methodology/design and methods (e.g., discreet methods—interview, observation, video vs. clusters of methods—case study, ethnography, action research)</td>
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<td><strong>Conversation starters</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Activity: Articulating next steps</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>July 26th</td>
<td><em>(Final problem statement due)</em></td>
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Assigned Readings

Class 1: What is educational research? (Choose at least one)
Pring, R (2004). *Philosophy of educational research* (2nd ed.). New York: Continuum. (Chapters 1-2)

Getting organized (optional)
Becoming Part of a Research Community
http://heibeck.freeshell.org/Grad_Advice/how2b/how.2b.community.html

Class 2: Purposes of educational research (Choose at least one)

Getting organized (optional)

**Class 3: What does it mean to know and experience? (Choose at least one)**


**Getting organized (optional)**


**Class 4: Philosophies of educational research (Choose at least one)**


**Getting organized (optional)**

Class 5: Does education involve one paradigm or many? *(Choose at least one)*  


A debate  


Class 6: Paradigms and traditions of educational research *(Choose at least one)*  


A debate  


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**Class 7: Is educational research scientific? (Choose at least one)**


**A debate**


**Another debate**


**Class 8: Interpretive and critical research traditions (Choose at least one)**


**A debate**


**Class 9: What does it mean to test a theory? (Choose at least one)**

**Guides**

Dialogue between 4 scholarly societies


*Philosophical foundations of educational inquiry*
Readings

Class 10: How does action align with practicality?

Two debates or one?

Class 11: Educational research as an historical, civic, and civil enterprise *(Choose at least one)*
Eckardt, N. (2007). The prevalence of qualitative methodology at AERA's annual meeting and the potential consequences. *Teachers College Record*
http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/217519/chicanas-outer-space/frederick-m-hess
http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/220580/education-research-we-need/frederick-m-hess


**A debate**


**Class 12: The problem of research design: From disquietude to focused inquiry**


*Table of contents from various design and measurement texts*


