Philosophical Traditions and Educational Research

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Common Epistemological Stances

**Objectivist**—Meaning and reality are independent of consciousness. Researchers discover meaning that awaits them; truth and reality are to be discovered.

**Constructionist**—Meaning and reality are invented. Researchers construct meaning by fully engaging in subject-object relations; truth and meaning emerge from subject-object relations.

**Subjectivist**—Meaning is imposed on objects by a subject and comes from intangible sources such as dreams, spirituality, or the unconscious. Researchers explore meaning by considering ideas in relation to one another rather than in relation to a tangible “reality”.

*Crotty, 1998*
What epistemological stances are commonly evident in educational research?

Some evidence exists for all three stances, but there are marked differences across program areas.
Philosophy entails the broad meaning-making enterprise used to make sense of the world.
Where does philosophy fall in the broader scheme of educational research?

Is it a separate stance?

Is it a broad name given to the combination of epistemological, ethical, theoretical, and methodological stances?
Epistemological stance

Ethical stance

Theoretical stance

Methodological stance
A well-crafted research problem shows coherence in how different stances are simultaneously addressed.

Such problems are also aligned with the broader agendas operating in the field of research.

Educational research, because of its particular role in society, ultimately grounds these ideas in time and place.
Various philosophical traditions differ in whether they distinguish epistemology, ethics, theory, and methodology, and/or in how they balance these dimensions of the overall meaning-making process.
Your philosophical stance should ideally fall within a single research tradition or field, and be grounded with a clear purpose.

Try to anticipate *why* it is important or helpful to know what you plan to discover/address when you pose a research question.
AN IMPORTANT CAUTION

Some define a philosophy as an entire collection of stances whereas others note a difference between meaning-making and the generation of knowledge.

Various philosophical traditions differ in whether and how they incorporate questions of epistemology, ethics, theory, and methodology, yet research communities address all four either implicitly or explicitly.
If all epistemological, ethical, theoretical, and methodological decisions implicitly or explicitly convey a philosophical stance, why do some scholars scoff at the idea that science can be grounded in philosophy?

**Thought Experiment**

A utilitarian would focus on the practical uses for any new knowledge within a pre-defined setting. A humanist, in contrast, would look to see how research captures what it means to enhance human dignity and how settings both help and undermine dignity.

Will they gather the same sorts of data?
Embedded in a strong research problem is a statement or representation of the potential social value and/or use of the knowledge researchers hope to generate.

Try to name or otherwise build a representation of the social value of the knowledge you hope to generate as an educational researcher. You may want to begin by interviewing faculty in your program of study to see how they answer such questions.
Click on the photo for a list of sample philosophical traditions.
Thanks for Listening!!!!