

Reflections on Being an Intelligent Consumer of Research

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EDIT 590

Fall 2014

This class reminded me of what I learned to quite an extensive degree as a student of science many years ago. I did countless experiments for which I wrote hypotheses, explained methods, collected data, and drew conclusions. I felt like this background laid the groundwork for my understanding of the material in this class.

It also made me stop to remember that, with the seemingly limitless spins the media and advertising companies can put on purported research, it is important to check the validity and reliability of the research before putting any faith or trust in their results. As an educator, it would be unethical and unprofessional to neglect doing so before subscribing to any research-based ideas because the term "research-based" alone does not necessarily imply that the research is trustworthy.

As a former classroom teacher, I had many of my own experiences that shaped my practices and beliefs. MacMillan reminded me that, while personal experience can certainly be a valid route to knowledge, it is impractical and quite impossible to depend on it as the sole route. The experience of others can be just as informative, but there needs to be a standardized framework for it to follow so that it can, indeed, be trusted. He pointed out that tradition does not necessarily make something correct, that experts can disagree, the logic can be flawed, but that research with its disciplined approach to inquiry can lead to much more trustworthy results.

I was reminded of the importance of asking clear questions when doing research, especially research of an experimental nature. This relates directly to the importance of clearly identifying the independent and dependent variables. To accurately answer one's questions, the dependent variable needs to directly correlate with the question. Additionally, independent variables need to be carefully identified and any mitigating or external factors need to be monitored and addressed before any accurate conclusions can be drawn.

I was also reminded of the importance of conducting a thorough literature review. This can sometimes answer my questions directly or give me an indication of what may have been done previously that relates to my question.

As I near the completion of my degree and begin my new career as an Instructional Designer/Educational Consultant, I realize that I need to know the research I intend to reference well so that I can answer questions about it and convey a sense of integrity and trustworthiness to my future clients. This class has helped me more fully understand what to look for when reviewing a study. This will give me the basis I will need for evaluating studies I may encounter in the future. I learned to watch for sampling bias, participant motivation, problems with sample size, and the inherent hazards of volunteer samples. I also learned to look carefully at how the data is analyzed and to evaluate whether it is truly generalizable to the population before unilaterally declaring to be so.

This class has been quite a journey for me. I appreciate the opportunity to think deeply about research and its potential impact on the personal and professional decisions I may make.