

Research Problems and Purposes

Stephen Petrina

1. Topic (**what**)- General area of inquiry or study (e.g., deforestation in the Great Bear Rainforest; immigrant women's rights and independence; second language literacy; addiction and needle exchange programs; technology habits of pre-K children)
2. Purpose (**why**)- Statement of intent or objective in conducting the research. The statement of purpose tells the audience what the research is likely to accomplish. Research typically involves one of seven major purposes: *to describe (depict), explain, evaluate, interpret, deconstruct, or predict (or confirm or discriminate)*. *To explore* is also a viable purpose, as is *to emancipate*, especially in qualitative research.
3. Problem Statement, Hypothesis or Question(s) (**what**)- Articulates and focuses the problem to be addressed in a researchable way. Questions have an advantage of sharpening or focusing the topic but declarative statements are more common.
 - Avoid overly broad problems (i.e., distinguish between the research *topic* v. problem), overly narrow, local, or trivial problems, and hortatory problems (i.e., urging specific people to take a specific course of action).
 - Remember, you will not *prove* anything in research. You may, however, discover, find, construct, create, contradict, resolve, test, etc. things.
 - The goal is, then, to persuade people through the generation and expression of knowledge.
 - And good research requires a shift from a proof & prescriptive mindset to a contingent & variant mindset.
4. Rationale (**why**)- Provides a justification for the research, based on personal interests and desires, institutional needs, and, especially, existing research and current theory. In this way, the significance of the research is provided as well. Typically, the rationale suggests your contribution to existing research literature by identifying the significance for practice, policy, action, or theory.

Examples of Research Purposes and Problems

Purpose	Problem
<p>Exploratory The purpose is to investigate the little understood phenomenon of... The purpose is to explore categories of meaning in... The purpose is to generate hypotheses for further research related to...</p>	<p>What is happening in Surrey's intervention for sexuality education? What are the salient themes and categories of meaning for participants in Surrey's intervention for sexuality education? How are the patterns in teachers utilization of Surrey's sexuality education materials related to sexuality education programs in other jurisdictions?</p>
<p>Explanatory The purpose is to explain patterns related to... The purpose is to identify plausible relationships shaping...</p>	<p>What are the attitudes and beliefs that Surrey secondary school teachers bring to sexuality education? How are unpreparedness and phobias interacting to create the patterns underlying the use of Surrey's sexuality education materials?</p>
<p>Descriptive The purpose is to document and describe...</p>	<p>What are the salient methods that teachers adopt in Surrey's sexuality education program?</p>
<p>Interpretive The purpose is to interpret the meaning of...</p>	<p>What does sexuality education mean to students? What feelings surface for teachers as they teach about sexuality?</p>
<p>Emancipatory The purpose is to create opportunities and the will to take up action related to...</p>	<p>How can pro-Gay and Lesbian videos, such as <i>Out</i>, empower teachers to help LGBTQ+ students? How can teachers assist in accepting and celebrating same sex parents?</p>
<p>Expressive The purpose is to express various relationships among...</p>	<p>How are identities manifested within eight visual portraits of sexuality?</p>
<p>Prediction The purpose is to predict the relationship between...</p>	<p>What is the effect of Surrey's sexuality education program on students' understanding of sexuality?</p>
<p>Deconstruction The purpose is to deconstruct (undermine, contradict, etc.) the binaries of...</p>	<p>What are the messages embedded in Surrey's sexuality education materials?</p>