

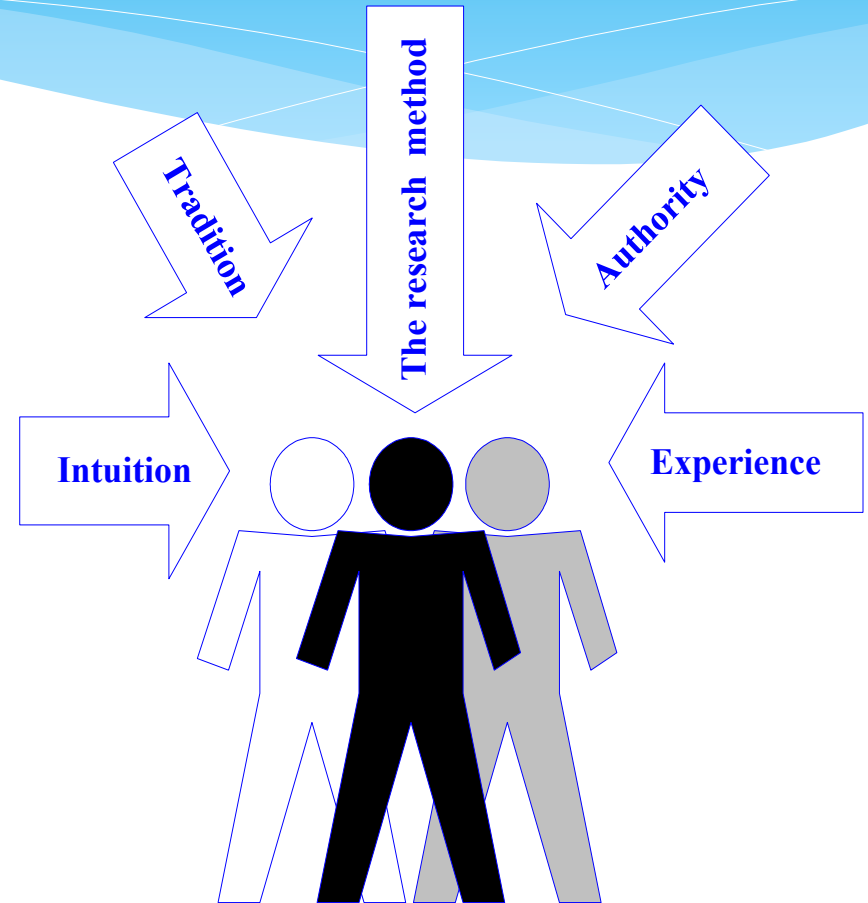
INTRODUCTION

ScWk 240 – Research Methods and Design

Session 1

HOW DO WE ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE?

- * Authority
- * Tradition
- * Experience
- * Intuition
- * Research Method



Authority

- * Knowledge that is passed down from experts or authorities (e.g., scientists, expert practitioners, master teachers) in a particular field
- * Be open to questioning the accuracy of authority figures
- * Be particularly skeptical of the media as a source of evidence

Tradition

- * Knowledge that is passed on through tradition
 - * Sometimes based on dictates of authority
 - * The accepted way of doing things, or the way that things have “always” been done
- * Differentiate between knowledge (based on facts) and beliefs (based on faith)
 - * Accept that both are neither final nor certain

Experience

- * Knowledge that is gained by doing
- * Through experience, you gain knowledge but you also gain biases

Intuition (Common Sense)

- * Knowledge that stems from a “gut” feeling or some subconscious process
- * Not to be confused with professional judgment, which is a conscious process where facts and experience are both considered to form a basis for making reasoned decisions

The Research Method

- * Knowledge is developed from scientific methods, rather than from unsubstantiated media reports, etc.
- * Features values of the research method way of knowing:
 - * *Value Awareness*
 - * *Skeptical Curiosity*
 - * *Sharing*
 - * *Honesty*

Value Awareness

- * One value of the research method is for gaining knowledge
- * Researchers must be aware of their personal values and biases, and understand how such bias affects the research process

Skeptical Curiosity

- * A second value of the research method for gaining knowledge
- * Researchers must question the findings that are derived from research studies
- * Questioning research findings will lead to more research activity (e.g., replication) aimed at finding the “truth”

Sharing

- * A third value of the research method for gaining knowledge
- * Share research with a broad audience
 - * Share the research methodology (how the study was conducted)
 - * Share the research results (what the study found)

Honesty and Ethics

- * A fourth value of the research method for gaining knowledge
- * Take special care to avoid harm to others, and share research honestly by clearly explaining what you did and what you found in your study.
- * Even when:
 - * The research results are the opposite of what was expected (hypothesized)
 - * The research results are not clear cut

Human Inquiry and Science

Experimental vs. Agreement Reality

Experimental Reality: what you know as a function of your direct experience and observation

Agreement Reality: what you consider real because you have been told so and because others agree it is real

Everything is open to question and we should keep an open mind.

The **Scientific Method** is the conscious and diligent research process based on the assumptions that the natural world is essentially orderly and that observed phenomena have some stimulus or cause.

Errors in Human Inquiry

The **Scientific Method** hopes to minimize the following and other pitfalls so that our understanding is improved:

Inaccurate Observations

Selective Observations

Ex Post Facto Hypothesizing

Premature Closing of Inquiry

Overgeneralizations

Illogical Reasoning

Mystification

Made-Up Information

Always Remember: To Err is Human!

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE: PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESSES

- * All social work activities, both practice and research, are organized around one central assumption: There is a preferred order of thinking and action.
- * 4-phase Problem Solving Process
 - * Phase 1: Defining the Problem
 - * Phase 2: Determining the Solution
 - * Phase 3: Implementation
 - * Phase 4: Evaluation

APPROACHES TO THE RESEARCH METHOD

- * Two complimentary approaches:
 - * The Quantitative Approach
 - * Data are represented in the form of numbers
 - * Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses
 - * The Qualitative Approach
 - * Data are presented in the form of words, diagrams, or drawings.
 - * Coding and thematic analyses

Skills Needed to Do Research Studies

You need to understand how to:

- * work in research contexts in social work
- * design a research study
- * collect data
- * be culturally sensitive
- * analyze data
- * write research reports and proposals
- * conduct evidence-based practice
- * evaluate social work programs

THE KNOWLEDGE-LEVEL CONTINUUM

Three Levels of Research:

- * Exploratory
- * Descriptive
- * Explanatory

Exploratory Research Studies

- * Become familiar with the basic facts, people, and concerns involved
- * Develop a well-grounded mental picture of what is occurring
- * Generate many ideas and develop tentative theories and conjectures
- * Determine the feasibility of doing additional research studies
- * Formulate questions and refine issues for more systematic inquiry
- * Develop techniques and a sense of direction for future research

Descriptive Research Studies

- * Provide an accurate profile of a group
- * Describe a process, mechanism, or relationship
- * Give a verbal or numerical picture (e.g., percentages)
- * Find information to stimulate new explanations
- * Create a set of categories or classify types
- * Clarify a sequence, set of stages, or steps
- * Document information that confirms or contradicts prior beliefs about a subject

Explanatory Research Studies

- * Determine the accuracy of a principle or theory
- * Find out which competing explanation is better
- * Link different issues or topics under a common general statement
- * Build and elaborate a theory so it becomes more complete
- * Extend a theory or principle into new areas or issues
- * Provide evidence to support or refute an explanation

PURE vs. APPLIED RESEARCH STUDIES

PURE

- * The goal of pure research studies is to develop theory and expand the social work knowledge base.
- * Produces theoretical results

APPLIED

- * The goal of applied studies is to develop solutions for problems and applications in practice.
- * Produces practical results.

RESEARCH ROLES

- * Three Major Roles that Social Workers Can Take:
 - * **Research Consumer** - Read, review, listen, learn, apply to practice
 - * **Creator and Disseminator of Knowledge** - Project investigator, research task force leader
 - * **Contributing Partner** - Record data, research task force member, assisting in research

Integrating the Three Research Roles

“If research is to be used to full advantage to advance the goals of social work, the profession needs to develop a climate in which both doing and consuming research are normal professional activities.... an ability to carry out studies at some level and the facility in using scientifically based knowledge should be an integral part of the skills that social workers have and use.” ~

(Reid & Smith, 1989)

SUMMARY

- * Knowledge is essential
- * There are many ways of knowing, one of which is the research method
- * Research can be approached in different ways
- * Research defines a preferred way of thinking and action
- * Social workers engage in three research roles: consumer, contributing partner, and creator/disseminator