CONDUCTING GRADUATE LEVEL RESEARCH:
CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL OVERVIEWS

Bart Lenart, PhD, MLIS
Libraries and Cultural Resources

July 23, 2021
A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW
THE RESEARCH MINDSET

- Aristotle wrote of virtues (or character traits) that enable a moral agent to live a flourishing life.

- Similarly, there are traits and mindsets that successful, flourishing researchers possess.

- These will not only make research easier, but also grad school generally (hopefully) more enjoyable!
THE 3 VIRTUES (MINDSETS)

▪ Be Playful
  ▪ Have fun! Love your research! Be intrigued by it!

▪ Be Organized
  ▪ Track your journey! (be systematic about it)

▪ Be Social
  ▪ Don’t forget your support network!
BE PLAYFUL
FUN CAN BE CHALLENGING

- Keep in mind that research is always a bit chaotic!
- After all, if there is already a clean, definitive answer to your research question out there, then there is no reason for you to engage with the research!
All good research questions are going to:
1. Have you stumble through the dark a bit
2. Have you scratching your head a lot
3. (Sometimes) Keep you up at night

But that’s what it’s supposed to feel like!
So enjoy it!!

... and choose a research question you’re really interested in!
TIPS ON “BEING PLAYFUL”

- Be willing to play with ideas, resources, etc.
- Don’t be afraid to explore and take risks
- Be creative ... have fun!
TIPS ON “BEING PLAYFUL”

- Playfulness is how you enter into your research question. Ask yourself:
  1. What is my research question? What do I find interesting? What excites me?
  2. Next, write out your research question (as fully and in as much detail as you can) … it can take some time to get to this point
TIPS ON “BEING PLAYFUL”

• … in the meantime … read adventurously since you never know what treasures you might stumble across!

3. Once you have your research question written out in detail, analyze it and digest it into searchable concepts and related synonyms
RESOURCES ON CREATING A STARTER SEARCH STRATEGY

- Developing Search Terms:
  https://library.ucalgary.ca/c.php?g=715125&p=5098714

- Getting Started with Research in Education:
  https://yuja.ucalgary.ca/V/Video?v=246314&a=802077586
TIPS ON “BEING PLAYFUL”

- At this point, you will have your starter search strategy!
- But remember: this isn’t your final search
  - It’s the first step to refining both the search and your research question
TIPS ON “BEING PLAYFUL”

4. Collect literature
   - As you collect your literature, look up keywords and subject headings and add the relevant ones to your search while deleting those that tend to produce “noise” (irrelevant results)
TIPS ON “BEING PLAYFUL”

5. Read what you collect
   - As you are reading through the literature you’ve collected, think about how you might refocus your research question
   - This will, in turn, reshape your search strategy

   - This can be an intellectually turbulent, but also very satisfying process
   - **NOTE:** This process is also iterative
RESOURCES FOR A CONCEPTUAL INTRODUCTION TO CONDUCTING RESEARCH

- Effective Searching for Your Research in Education:
  https://yuja.ucalgary.ca/V/Video?v=246318&a=1222450073
TIPS ON “BEING ORGANIZED”

- Once your research question is somewhat focused, your level of content expertise will also be deeper.

- At this stage in the process, you’re leaving what I call the “reading adventurously” stage and embarking on what I like to think of as the “I’m in the secret club” phase.
  - At this point, you will have become familiar with the jargon used to describe your topic.
At this stage of the process, you will have collected several highly relevant papers and you will have a better idea about what precisely you’re looking for.

6. Gather your highly relevant papers and analyze them for keywords and subject headings
   ▪ Keep track of these! They are your KEY to finding other highly relevant papers
   ▪ The idea is to create a search strategy that will discover those highly relevant papers (and others like them)
TIPS ON “BEING ORGANIZED”

7. Run your refined and focused search in the databases you’re working with
   ▪ Keep track of your searches
   ▪ If you need help figuring out which databases are useful for your topic, contact your subject librarian!
RESOURCES FOR USING DATABASES

- Databases for Your Research in Education:
  https://yuja.ucalgary.ca/V/Video?v=246316&a=1246393848
BE SOCIAL
When you face starting your research, the prospect may be quite daunting, but the first thing you need to remember is that you are not alone!

So remember that you have a support network!
  - It’s actually much wider than you think!

I like to think of this as the “I know people in all the right places” mindset!
TIPS ON “BEING SOCIAL”

8. Remember that: you have a supervisor, instructor, or academic coordinator who is there to guide you (they are content experts you already have access to)
9. Remember that: there are other content experts out there.

- When you’re stuck, one strategies is to reach out to authors of highly relevant papers you already discovered
  - Remember: they’re all human and quite likely will be thrilled to hear from young scholars working on their topics
Remember that: librarians can help you digest your research question and organize it into a starter search strategy

- they might ask you to provide things such as (1) more details on your project, (2) search terms you’ve already used, (3) any highly relevant articles you might have already found
11. Remember that: you have peers. Get to know them!

- If someone is working on a related topic, a conversation might be the breakthrough you were looking for!
TIPS ON "BEING SOCIAL"

12. Don’t forget about those who came before you.

- While they may not be a part of your network, their theses and dissertations are part of your scholarly ecosystem. Don’t forget to explore them!
- If you can find a thesis or dissertation that is relevant to your topic, you will have discovered a gold mine of relevant citations.
TIPS ON “BEING SOCIAL”

- AND don’t forget to cite them and all the literature you’ve collected!
RESOURCES ON CITING USING APA 7

- Citing Your Research in Education:
  https://yuja.ucalgary.ca/V/Video?v=246312&a=1459208429

- APA 7 Research Guide:
  https://library.ucalgary.ca/guides/education-apa
A PRACTICAL OVERVIEW
OVERVIEW

- Developing a Search Strategy
- Searching in ERIC
SEARCHING FOR LITERATURE

Great starting places to begin searching for relevant scholarship are:

- Databases
  - ERIC
  - Education Research Complete
  - Academic Search Complete
  - APA PsycInfo (for Educational Psychology)
DEVELOPING A SEARCH STRATEGY

Example Research Question: “How does the positive psychology movement contribute to teacher well-being?”

There are 3 main concepts in this question: positive psychology, teacher, & well-being, but these key concepts will generate several useful search terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept</th>
<th>positive psychology</th>
<th>teacher</th>
<th>well-being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synonym 1</td>
<td>positive emotions</td>
<td>educator</td>
<td>happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonym 2</td>
<td>resilience</td>
<td>instructor</td>
<td>flourishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonym 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>professor</td>
<td>mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonym 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>eudaemonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From: “Education – Teacher Well-Being” LibGuide by Bart Lenart
https://library.ucalgary.ca/c.php?g=701149&p=4960841
**BOOLEAN OPERATORS**

**AND**
Using AND, this search would only retrieves results with Peanut Butter and Jelly.

**OR**
Using OR, this search would retrieves results with peanut butter, with jelly, and with both.

**OR:** helps you find at least one of the expressions of your concept

**AND:** helps you find items that contain ALL your concepts

All  At Least One
DEVELOPING A SEARCH STRATEGY

Positive Psychology
OR
positive emotions
OR
resilience

Teacher
OR
educator
OR
instructor

AND

Well-Being
OR
happiness
OR
flourishing

Choosing Databases
Databases

12 Databases found for Education

Best Bets!

**ERIC (EBSCO)**
- To set up Google Scholar to detect UoC subscribed resources, refer to Google Scholar.

**Google Scholar**
- more...

**Research Starters - Education**
- more...

**Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)**
- more...

**APA PsycInfo**
- more...

**Bibliography of Native North Americans**
- more...
CONTACT

• **Bart Lenart**, PhD, MLIS
  Research and Learning Librarian (Education and Philosophy)
  University of Calgary | Doucette Library | E-mail: bartlomiej.lenart@ucalgary.ca
  Telephone: 403-220-8358