



Postpositivism and Educational Research

By D. C. Phillips, Nicholas C. Burbules Edward William and Jane Marr Gutgsell Professor Department of Education Policy Organization and Leadership University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

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This volume presents in a forthright and lively way, an account of the philosophical position generally identified as 'Postpositivistic' that undergirds much of mainstream research in education and the related social sciences. The discussion throughout is informed by recent developments in philosophy of science. Authors D. C. Phillips and Nicholas C. Burbules cite a number of interesting examples from the educational research and evaluation literature to illustrate the value of a scientific approach. Many educational researchers aspire to carry out rigorous or disciplined inquiry aimed at producing accurate (and generally 'truthful') accounts of educational phenomena and the causal psychological or social processes that lay behind them. However, many recent critics have argued that it is a mistake to believe that research can yield theories, or advance claims that are true, objective, and value-neutral. In other words, that researchers always work within frameworks that embody important (and often questionable) assumptions about values and the nature of human knowledge. This book argues that, while there is much to be learned from recent critiques, traditional scientific values and assumptions are not outmoded. The authors show students how to implement and benefit from the scientific method in ways that take into account recent critiques.

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Editorial Review

Review

At last an engaging and well-reasoned defense of scientific rationality. This is a powerful antidote to the myriad critics who disparage or dismiss the social sciences. (David C. Berliner, Regents' Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University)

This book is a must-read for all who are concerned with the mission and nature of educational research. (Gavriel Salomon, University of Haifa, Israel)

Phillips and Burbules, two leading philosophers of education, have produced a much needed examination of just how far the possibility for social science has been undercut by critiques intended to undercut the credibility of scientific knowledge. Their clearly written book will help educational researchers understand how effective, disciplined research is possible in a post-positivist world. The authors systematically examine the problems created by the fallibility of knowledge, the inevitable value-ladenness of research, and the existence of varying perspectives, showing how the pursuit of truth can remain a reasonable activity. The book should be required reading for those learning to do educational research, filling the gap between how-to books on research method and post-positivist accounts that embrace, or at least flirt with, relativism. By blending careful argument with concrete examples, Phillips and Burbules help students recognize the limits of research without abandoning the quest for warranted claims to knowledge. (Robert E. Floden, Michigan State University)

About the Author

D. C. Phillips is professor of education and philosophy and associate dean for academic affairs in the School of Education at Stanford University.

Nicholas C. Burbules is professor of education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is also editor of the journal *Educational Theory*.

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