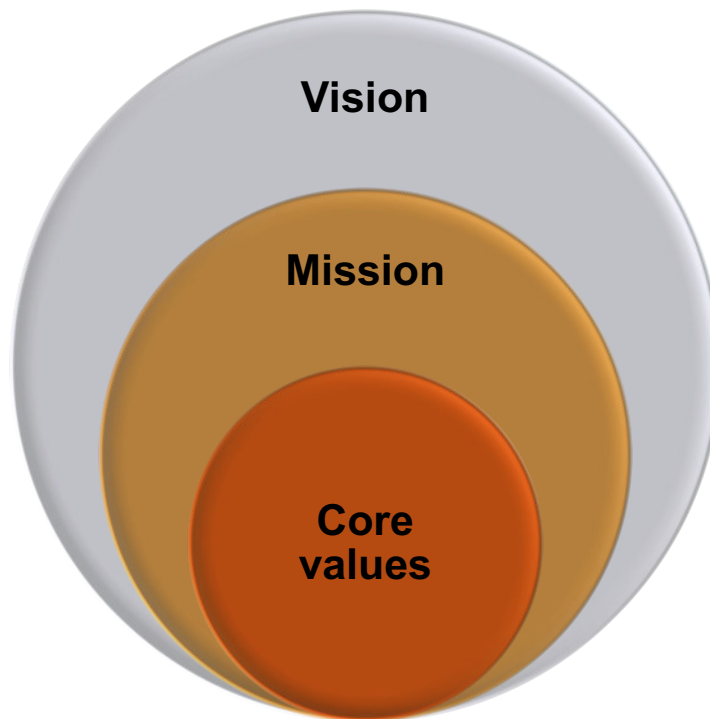


# PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Business philosophies have a vision, a mission, and core values. In the same way, a personal philosophy has a vision of what contributions and improvements the world can benefit from. An individual can have one's own mission that explains how he or she can become part of that vision. The guiding principles of the mission are called core values. As the diagram illustrates, the vision is the first concept to be developed and is the most general. After the vision is the mission, which is more specific to the individual. The core values are at the center of the mission and vision.



An individual who develops a personal philosophy in education research that defines a vision statement, mission statement, and core values, can periodically do self-evaluation to see if his or her work has been aligned to those statements and values.

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## Vision

My vision is for American institutions of higher education to be driven by the desire to discover and disseminate absolute truth by means of empirical or historical evidence. My vision is for these institutions to employ faculty members who will contextualize truth in order to impart practical knowledge, skills and behavioral competencies that enable individuals to become self-governing, economically productive, and principled contributors to the local community and larger society.

The first term in my vision statement that may need defining is *truth*. Truth has multiple meanings. Pontius Pilate implored Jesus Christ to explain to him what Truth was, in the metaphysical sense (John 18:38). The character Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee in *A Few Good Men* demanded Colonel Nathan R. Jessep to reveal the truth of a specific event (Brown, 1992): “I want the truth.” Academic truth tends to be grounded in concrete concepts that faculty and students can learn from scientific or historical research, especially in the hard sciences. Though the idea of what truth is may alter over time through further testing, academics commit to research in order to come closer to the truth of their hypothesis or model. Acknowledgement of error and a willingness to change does not equate to the relativism of postmodernism but demonstrates a commitment to discover and accept absolute truth. The acquiring of knowledge through research should lead to change and growth. Walter Lippmann (1922) artfully described the tendency to subjectivity in research:

We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange as sharply alien. They are aroused by small signs, which may vary from a true index to a vague analogy. Aroused, they flood fresh vision with older images, and project into the world what has been resurrected in memory. (p. 90)

To the researcher, truth should be the constant, while the one doing the research should be the relative variable.

Contextualization of instruction during the dissemination of information is a critical responsibility for educators. Placing information into a real-to-life and practical context so the student can acquire knowledge goes beyond simple data collection and collation. Contextualization requires relating to and understanding the learner. To provide a simplified example, one math problem

dealing with the dimensions of an aquarium had an unlikely solution as such a design for the aquarium would be impractical and may be impossible; this affected student answers (Bleiler, Baxter, Stephens, & Barlow, 2015). As another simplified example, English as a Second Language (ESL) books often lack contextualization. Asian children and adults who are not native English speakers learn English as a second language in school or in evening language centers. The materials are predominantly written and published in Europe, giving a European context to all illustrations, learning activities, and assignments. Teaching English through contextual scenarios that involve a bounced bank check, car insurance, or privacy of health information is necessary for adults; but in a country that does not have bank checks, car insurance, or privacy of health information, those scenarios often require a great deal of pre-teaching and preparation even before learning the language can begin.

### **Mission**

My mission is to be an honest and highly objective educator who possesses a reputation of integrity and a commitment to ethics. I resolve to impart practical knowledge, skills, and behavioral competencies that enable individuals to become self-governing, economically productive, and principled contributors to the local community and larger society.

The pursuit of truth requires honesty and objectivity. Errors that exist in one's perspective on the subject at hand may influence that person's investigation of the subject matter and result in an alternative conclusion that does not reflect objective reality. Errors of perspective include absolutism, relativism, either/or outlook, unwarranted assumptions, mindless conformity, and poverty of aspect (Ruggiero, 2009, pp. 144-146). The researcher must be honest with himself and others by admitting when such subjectivity exists.

Ethical qualities include honesty and, to some extent, objectivity; but to define a person's character as *ethical* requires much more. Discovering truth in the hard or natural sciences, and even in historical science, can be accomplished given enough time and tools for research. Regarding abstract truth, researchers may not be able to determine what exactly it is, but at least they have the notion. Questions of ethics are different. What ethical qualities are appropriate for academic research? How can ethical questions be answered?

From the naturalist perspective, a person may determine what is ethical by assessing a situation with three criteria: (1) obligations; (2) ideals; (3) consequences (Ruggiero, 2009, p. 62). Fulfilling

contractual and social obligations is a common sentiment that can be considered ethical. These obligations may exist in our relationships with friends, family, business partners, or even society. Universal ideals that everyone considers to be ethical can be considered as such; these qualities include honesty, justice, and fairness, to name only a few. Finally, actions that do not negatively affect other individuals or that do not have consequences upon society can be ethical. By using the three criteria, a researcher can employ ethical standards in his work.

Ethical qualities derived from a religious philosophy can be equally acceptable, if not more so. Until the sixteenth century, Plato and Aristotle's belief in both the physical and spiritual nature of humankind affected the Western world, including the philosophical foundation of education (Dupuis, 1966, p. 9). President John Quincy Adams wrote, "There are three points of doctrine the belief of which forms the foundation of all morality. The first is the existence of God; the second is the immortality of the human soul; and the third is a future state of rewards and punishments" (Adams, 1850, p. 22). While a religious worldview is certainly not required to employ ethical standards in education research and realize the vision that has been previously stated in this paper, I have personally committed to be bound by the principles of ethics in Judeo-Christian literature. The most fundamental of the ethical qualities necessary to conduct research is objectivity. Those adhering to Judeo-Christian literature have an obligation to emulate the character of God, whose objectivity the prophet expressed: "And he will judge the world in righteousness; he will execute judgment for the peoples with equity" (Psalm 9:7-9). To be objective, those conducting research must check their incentives. Incentives can come in a variety of forms, but are commonly monetary in nature, such as research grants. The research community needs to conduct an assessment for possible conflicts of interest and should ask questions such as, "Do the researchers feel obligated to the grantor to produce a specific set of results? Might this affect the research itself?" Apostle Paul originally penned the common phrase "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10); Moses warned against judicial bribery (Exodus 23:8). It is incumbent on me to maintain objectivity.

### **Core values**

My core values are: (1) ethics; (2) objectivity; (3) self-government; (4) economy. I have already described the values of ethics and objectivity. While these first two values apply primarily to the researcher, the last two values apply to the learner. The purpose for ethical and objective research

is to provide students with knowledge, skills, and behavioral competencies that enable them to be self-governed and contribute to society.

Self-government comprises both the ability to provide and care for oneself as well as the fortitude to restrain oneself. Focusing on self-restraint, it is possible to conduct one's life ethically by adhering to the three criteria previously listed, being obligations, ideals, and consequences. Yet, a religious philosophy can aid in self-government. In a liberal democracy, people are self-governed. The people have great freedom resulting in great responsibility and the need for self-restraint. President John Adams wrote that the U.S. Constitution "was made only for a moral and religious people" and that it was "wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (Adams, 1854, p. 229). Fisher Ames (1800) stated that liberty was based on ethics and religion, and that it depends on education, laws, and habits (Ames, 1800, p. 23).

The core value of economy generally refers to contributions that students can make for the improvement of society and specifically refers to value added to the economy. Having ethics and self-government, students can determine how and to what extent they are able to devote themselves to charity. With a professional degree or vocational training, graduates can supply human capital in the sectors where the market demands as well as build their own future.

### **Conclusion**

Researchers and educators are responsible for maintaining moral standards while discovering true and accurate information. The source of my ethics comes from a religious code from which I apply the principles of objectivity in research and equity for all. We should communicate knowledge to students in a context that they understand and encourage graduates to employ what they have learned to improve themselves and society.

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