

# Do you know...

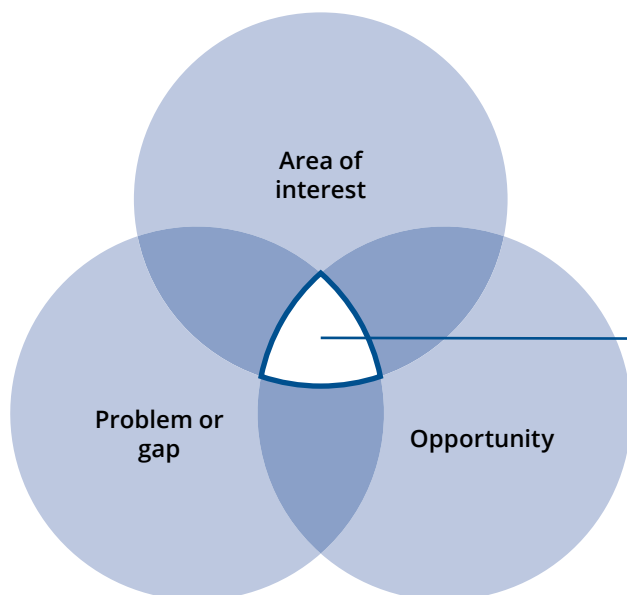
## how to get started with research in health professional education

Are you curious about understanding more about education in a way that will have an impact on your practice as a teacher? Did something work surprisingly well or surprisingly badly? Did something unexpected happen? Figuring out why that might have happened can be a great way to think about a research question. Research will allow you to build on your local interest in education while making a difference to how others understand education more generally.

### What is health professions education research?

Health professions education (HPE) research encompasses the systematic study of everything that relates to helping people become effective health professionals. This may occur in a variety of different contexts such as undergraduate education, postgraduate training, and continuing professional development. Common topics studied include teaching and learning on clinical placements or in simulation, curriculum design, assessment, professionalism, transitions and career development, and well-being.

### How do I get started?



Sweet spot where health professions education research can flourish

Three main ingredients to getting started with health professions education research are:

1. exploring an area of interest,
2. identifying a problem or gap, and
3. creating an opportunity to investigate.

#### Strategies to help find the sweet spot:

- Reflect on your experiences as an educator. Ask yourself, “What interests me?” “What concerns me?” “What puzzles me?”
- Have a conversation with an expert. Notice what they are talking about. They might have suggestions for a research project.
- Join a key HPE organisation and/or read education journals to notice hot topics and current debates that need answers. Identify what is known about your topic of interest and where the gaps in knowledge might be.
- Attend an education research presentation and notice what theory or conceptual framework they might be using. You might be interested in seeing how a theory or concept might apply to your educational context.
- Discuss possible research questions with a colleague. Your research question identifies a problem about an education topic or a gap in our knowledge about education so it can be addressed using systematic methods of investigation.

### Evaluate your study ideas and approach by asking yourself about:

- Relevance: *Will others think the findings from my study are interesting and important?*
- Making a link between theory and practice: *What view of education is framing my study? How does this perspective help me to explain education practices around me?*
- Originality or novelty: *What will my study add to what is already known?*
- Focus: *Is my research question specific or narrow enough that I can consider possible methods to study the topic or problem?*
- Rigor: *What are the most appropriate methods to answer this question? Will the methods generate data that are aligned to the question?*
- Feasibility: *Do I have the expertise and sufficient time to conduct this study? Do I have access to resources and participants?*
- Ethics: *Will my participants be safe? Is this study worth the time and resources that it will consume?*

### What types of health professions education research are possible?

The types of HPE research that have the most general interest are those projects that ask the 'why' or 'how' questions, not just the 'if' questions. "If we did this, this happened" is a common framing of clinical research but carries less interest in education. This is because 'doing this intentional intervention' almost always results in some benefit on learning. There are some interventions that cause harm (e.g. bullying) but even these come as little surprise to others. Instead, if we focus on "why did this work?", "how did this work?" or "under what circumstances do these things happen?", it makes it easier for others to consider how your research might apply in their contexts.



A great resource for Health Professional Research is KeyLime podcasts:  
[keylimepodcast.libsyn.com](http://keylimepodcast.libsyn.com)

This weekly podcast covers **Key Literature in Medical Education (KeyLIME)**. The main points of a medical education article and the methodology are covered in under half an hour! Important, innovative articles are discussed that impact on educational practice.

### FURTHER READING

- Cleland, J. A., Jamieson, S., Kusurkar, R. A., Ramani, S., Wilkinson, T. J., & van Schalkwyk, S. (2021). Redefining scholarship for health professions education: AMEE Guide No. 142. *Medical Teacher*, 43(7), 824-838. Doi: [10.1080/0142159X.2021.1900555](https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2021.1900555)
- Ringsted, C., Hodges, B., & Scherpbier, A. (2011). 'The research compass': An introduction to research in medical education: AMEE Guide No. 56. *Medical Teacher*, 33(9), 695-709. Doi: [10.3109/0142159X.2011.595436](https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2011.595436)
- Varpio, L., Paradis, E., Uijtdehaage, S., & Young, M. (2020). The distinctions between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. *Academic Medicine*, 95(7), 989-994. Doi: [10.1097/ACM.0000000000003075](https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003075)

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