

Book Review



Research Methods and Methodologies in Education

Edited by James Arthur, Michael Waring, Robert Coe and Larry Hedges

London: Sage Publications (2012)

Paperback £26.99 (ISBN: 9780857020390)

Reviewed by **Lisha Liu**

Covering a broad range of methodological approaches and research techniques tends to be a dominant writing model among many introductory publications of educational research. *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education* is not an exception. Even so, this book can still be counted as an essential textbook for all educational postgraduate research training courses. It seeks to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of theoretical and practical knowledge in educational research. Structurally, it comprises forty-six chapters contributed by authoritative academics in the field of educational studies from all over the world. Each chapter contains a section of 'Questions for further investigation', which lecturers can use as a classroom activity to develop students' critical evaluation of some key research issues. In addition, the language is very accessible to the reader and the majority of the chapters are no more than eight pages. However, the brevity of the chapters means that this book is unlikely to cover all key research issues in sufficient depth for some readers. Therefore, considering the depth of doctoral research projects, its use may be limited to an introduction to the various methods.

There are three parts to this book. Part one includes three chapters, critically analysing the theoretical nature of educational research. As a starting point, Arthur's chapter clearly sketches out how this book will help postgraduate students with their educational research. Subsequently, Coe's chapter presents different views about the nature of educational research. Finally, Waring's chapter discusses the relationships between the four 'building blocks' of research (i.e. ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods). For early researchers, engaging with abstract and complex philosophical interpretations of educational research may cause frustration. This part simplifies the philosophical concepts using tables, diagrams and key phrases in order to help avoid this and improve readability.

Compared with Part one, Part two is more straightforward and practical. Its four chapters demonstrate how postgraduate students should conduct their empirical research from design to dissemination. Readers can easily identify the suggestions that they need for their own research. Lecturers can also use this step-by-step approach in teaching to build their students' research capacity. However, in this part, discussions of the research procedure in education seem to stay only at the level of knowledge provision, not dig into the rationale of this procedure. For instance, in Hedges' chapter, he claims that different problems require different research designs, but how research problems indicate their research design is not articulated in detail. A more explicit guide would be more helpful for those postgraduate students with little research experience to understand how to choose the most workable design for their own research.

Part three moves on to discuss the use of research methods, which I believe is the core component of this book. The rest thirty-nine chapters are divided into three dimensions (i.e. research designs, data collection tools and analysis methods). In my view, there are two

sparkling highlights in this part. The first is that it does not stress the differences between quantitative and qualitative research but focuses on their compatibility and combinability. Such a feature is not only reflected by introducing the mixed-method design, but also the use of data collection instruments. In addition, another highlight of this part is that it highly emphasises the application of IT in research data collection and analysis. The chapters 'Internet-based methods', 'Doing blog research', 'Software and qualitative data analysis' and 'Statistical analysis tools' all indicate that computer-assisted data process has become an inexorable march of progress in educational research. To some extent, this is a very brave attempt in research-method book writing and indeed does provide innovative work that has not been produced by other similar books in several editions. However, if this part could include more qualitative research approaches (e.g. phenomenology, generic qualitative methods), it would widen the scope of this book and add more authority to its text.

In terms of the extra supporting resources of this book, the publisher's website (<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book235020>) provides many useful additional online materials. Its 'Sample materials' section includes a supplementary reading list for most chapters. All sample materials are followed by brief summaries of their contents, which can better guide postgraduate students' independent learning of educational research methods. However, if the editors could design some interactive online exercises for each chapter, such as research case analysis, students may have a better understanding of educational research methodologies and benefit from their own hands-on experience.

Overall, all the contributors have tried their utmost to convey enlightening views in a jargon-free way. This book is very user-friendly and primarily suitable for Masters-level students. It provides them with an extensive range of techniques and methodologies in educational research. Although this introductory book has some deficiencies for in-depth interpretation of its listed research methods, it should still be on the reading list of all doctoral students' research training programmes in consideration of its succinct summaries and exemplary texts.