

BOOK REVIEW

Turning Ideas into Research: Theory, Design and Practice

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Sage, London 2015
ISBN: 978-1-4462-6671-7, pp. 172, Paperback. AUD \$56.

As a teacher and supervisor of social work students undertaking research projects, as well as being a PhD student myself, being offered the opportunity to review this text on research was timely and I was sure it was going to be helpful. What I did not anticipate was just how useful it was going to be. I found this text to be a practical, accessible, and practitioner-researcher-student friendly guide to turning ideas into research. It is a veritable gold-mine, providing an overview of the research process with many excellent tips, tables, and reflections, comprehensive references, along with a fabulous index of key concepts and authors. The authors state, “we wondered what more could be said about doing research. It is indeed a crowded field of publications concerning the ways to conduct research, in-depth books on methodology and research proficiency, and the minutiae of the task from the first step to the last” (p. 150). But this text provides a “new lens through which research can be explored and successfully undertaken” (p. 150).

The authors are political in their stance that consideration must be made of how to maximise the impact of research. They encourage the reader to think about research as having a clarity of purpose, a commitment to identify clear inextricable links to policy and practice and also to reflect the moral purpose of the endeavour. They clearly want to encourage practitioners and beginning researchers to turn their good ideas into transformational research that makes a difference. They encourage readers to consider the research process as very ‘doable’ yet, at the same time, they highlight the need for rigour, trustworthiness and attention to detail in research projects. The text considers the importance of clarifying theoretical research perspectives and frameworks, strategy and orientation, design, and methods as well as the participation of key stakeholders in order to design, conduct, and disseminate useful research. The authors specifically consider three main themes: world-views and understandings of knowledge and theoretical frameworks; inclusivity and participation; and thirdly, maximising the impact of research in relation to policy-to-practice and practice-to-policy domains.

The book has three parts: in Part 1 the authors introduce research with a discussion about its purpose, partnerships in research, and ethical considerations. The key purpose

of research is described as making a difference which fits closely with the ethics and values of the social work profession, even though the text is aimed at a wider audience of health and social care practitioners and researchers. Research is described as a dynamic activity with complex networks and dimensions of power to be negotiated and managed within social, cultural, political, and ethical agendas. Ethical considerations including utilitarian and principles approaches are discussed with consideration given to inclusivity, diversity, and different ways of knowing, all of which challenge systemic discrimination.

In Part 2, the authors provide an overview of different forms of researching, clarifying ontology and epistemology which, in turn, helps decide research strategy, design, and method. They state “that in order to produce useful research in the social arena, researchers have to operate reflectively and reflexively and to acknowledge there are many ways of knowing, all influenced by prevailing values and cultures” (p. 44). The remainder of Part 2 focuses on different aspects of a research project providing a clear, concise overview of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method strategies. A brief overview of methods within each strategy is also provided, as well as various forms of data analysis. There is a chapter devoted to evaluative researching where the authors promote evaluation as a key method of research that is inherently political in that it concerns making judgements that have consequences for the actors. The final chapter in this section focuses on critically appraising research, considering what constitutes evidence, rigour and trustworthiness and linking research back to moral and ethical decision-making.

The final part of the book is devoted to discussing the dissemination of research and building an imperative to ‘make a difference’ into the research from the outset. The last chapter, on common pitfalls that might be avoided, and dilemmas, that have several possible, appropriate ethical courses of action but with only one option able to be pursued, provides useful advice in setting up relationships and supports for research including developing effective research supervisory relationships and building effective research infrastructures. The authors discuss a range of possible pitfalls at all stages of the research process and provide practical advice for avoiding them including: developing a research plan; piloting research instruments; considering research protocols including the size and scope of the project; dealing with disagreements and conflict; contemplating processes to ensure the safety of researchers in the field; methodological issues; researching ethically including the issue of renegotiating consent post-interview; communicating research findings; articulating theoretical frameworks; theorising practice and developing communities of practice. These issues are often not thought of until they happen and considering them prior to undertaking the project gives researchers a chance to avoid them, or at least have a plan of action if they do arise.

This book is very readable, following a logical format and mirroring the research process. It has an interactive style with researcher reflections for readers to consider as well as examples of innovative research interspersed throughout the chapters from a number of disciplines and fields of inquiry to illustrate ‘successful’ research. It is written in an encouraging and supportive manner, demystifying the research process and providing an overview while, at the same time, providing depth of referencing to guide a reader to further resources for enhancing understandings of concepts. Overall, a very useful guide to the purpose and process of researching. I recommend it as an excellent text for considering research

evidence within social work decision-making, as well as for a social work or social science research methods paper, and for students undertaking postgraduate social science research projects.

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