

Book Review

***A Beginner's Guide to Doing Your Education Research Project*, by Mike Lambert (2012).** Sage Publications, 248 pages, Paperback £18.99, ISBN 9780857029812; Hardcover £60.00, ISBN 9780857029805

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Evidence-based practice has become a cornerstone to the development of many professions over the last twenty years, ranging from health and social sciences to education. Research based on reflective practice provides the impulse toward professional progress as specialists--education specialists included--are required to base their policies and practice on something more than 'just because it has always been done that way'. As Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007, p. 290), recalling Fitz-Gibbon's message, state, "The educational community needs evidence on which to base its judgments and actions."

Undergraduate student preparation for the education profession, therefore, must provide them with a basic understanding of research concepts and methodology, along with the ability to read and interpret current research. As professionals they will be expected to carry out and apply research to forward the development of their practices and profession. There is no better way to learn than by 'doing', and an excellent way to learn about research is by planning and carrying out a research project oneself.

For students and currently practicing professionals who do not have previous research experience, the idea of reading and understanding research, let alone designing and performing a research project can seem daunting. Difficulties in understanding concepts such as validity or planning processes such as writing a research question or designing a research instrument are barriers to entering the realm of research. This book is a useful guide to help students and professionals who are initiating their experience in research, but it is also an extremely useful tool for educators who teach undergraduate research courses and are responsible for the formation of new researchers, helping students to plan and carry out their first research projects.

The language which is employed is simple, making this text extremely accessible for the general reader, including those with a limited command of English. Terminology is explained using a careful mixture of informal and formal language, with frequent examples, which make the explanations clear for those readers who are unfamiliar with the world of research.

The overall structure of the book is clear and well-organized. An introductory section is followed by three major sections entitled: Learning about research, Doing research, and Analyzing and writing up. The introductory section presents the need for research within the field of education, followed by an outline of the chapter contents and special features to help consolidate learning and guide students in the process of carrying out their research project. These features include useful summary texts entitled “What will I learn from this Chapter?” at the beginning of each chapter, as well as project sheets, activities, recommendations for further reading, a glossary of research-related terms, and a useful section about referencing.

The aim of a research course is to form future researchers by offering the students the opportunity to carry out their own research successfully. When the student research project is unguided or guided incorrectly, however, students tend to waste time and energy in unproductive activities. When this happens, students do not form an image of themselves as successful researchers and the end result is frustration and rejection of the research process. One major contribution made by this book is that it divides the research process into clear, manageable and well-guided steps. The photocopiable project sheets provide a useful framework of written activities to help students focus on the steps within the research process. The projects sheets, also available online, provide written documentation of the student’s research process and are an extremely useful tool for the teacher who supervises the development of student research projects.

The activities focus on different aspects of the research process, such as writing open-ended, balanced research questions, writing a literature review, analyzing quantitative data and correcting citation errors. The presentation of model answers to these and other activities facilitates the understanding of key concepts and the production of written material for the final project paper.

The first major section of the book, entitled Learning about Research, presents an overview of what research is, along with examples of formal and informal research,

which helps demystify research for the uninitiated. In the section entitled Categorizing research, the presentation of different types of research, however, is incomplete and not clearly organized. In this section a clear distinction is not made between types of qualitative and quantitative research, and the explanations of some types of research, such as the systematic review, are incomplete. While it is true that there are numerous ways in which to classify research, none of which is definitive, the presentation of categories of research in this case is unclear. A teacher using this book in an introductory course on research may want to supplement the theoretical information about research design with material from other sources.

In this same section, a lack of emphasis is placed on the importance of paradigms. The author asserts that “you can put together a coherent and useful research project without understanding paradigms much at all” (p. 18). Although it is possible to plan and carry out a simple research project without explicitly stating the underlying paradigm, an understanding of research paradigms is fundamental in the process of planning a research project and selecting an appropriate methodology. A brief introduction to positivist and interpretivist paradigms is given, but a teacher using this book may want to expand on the information provided. The second and third parts of this section, on the other hand, provide an extremely clear outline of the research process, as well as a useful learning activity, which involves reading and analyzing a research article. An excellent model of a possible answer to the activity helps students to complete the task successfully.

The Doing Research section comprises the major part of the book. As stated above, this section subdivides the research process into manageable steps along with their corresponding activities. The choosing your topic section provides an excellent step-by-step guide to determining an appropriate research topic along with clarifying examples and project sheets. The process of writing a research question is also clearly presented with well-defined criteria and frameworks for writing research questions accompanied by activities and project sheets to help students produce an appropriate open-ended, balanced research question. The section entitled literature reviews includes instructions for a guided search of databases along with an example of one student’s search process. Well-explained criteria for evaluating the suitability of the literature are also presented. The sections designed to aid the student in the analysis of the literature

chosen for the review and the organization and writing of the review itself provide valuable, concrete advice and examples to help students to prepare a well-written, critical literature review.

A brief explanation of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data is given in the choosing your methods section, followed by a review of data collection methods including questionnaires, interviews, observation, document analysis, and testing. A useful aspect of this section is a presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of each method of data collection. A project sheet also guides students in deciding which method of data collection is most appropriate for their project. With respect to the design of instruments, instructions and corresponding project sheets are provided for the design of questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Voice recording is recommended with transcription of selected fragments, whereas video recording is not recommended for beginning researchers by the author.

Common sources of bias as well as the concepts of validity, reliability are presented in the following chapter. Triangulation, piloting and anonymity and confidentiality are presented as means to strengthen validity and reliability. A corresponding project sheet focuses students' attention on these issues.

The section on ethical approval includes a description of informed consent as well as a guide to writing a research brief for presentation for ethical approval while the final chapter in this section addresses how the student researcher can successfully contact possible research venues, and includes instructions on writing a contact letter, as well as appropriate norms of behavior when collecting data.

Section three is entitled Analyzing and Writing Up. The chapter on analyzing data provides a clear explanation of basic concepts of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis as well as examples of both types of analysis. Discourse analysis is mentioned briefly. The determination and discussion of findings as well as drawing conclusions and producing recommendations is also presented.

The final chapter of the book focuses on writing up the project. A clear, well designed framework includes pertinent sections along with specific criteria for writing each section as well as extensive instructions regarding referencing and writing style.

Overall, this manual is a thorough, practical resource for individuals who will be planning and carrying out research for the first time. It is an invaluable resource for

undergraduate students, their teachers, or educational professionals who are starting to do research. It systematically leads the reader through the steps involved in the process of performing education research. As such, it makes a valuable contribution toward the formation of education researchers. Helping students to enter the realm of research is a necessary step toward improved practice and professionalism in the field of education. This book can help achieve this goal.

References

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*, Abingdon, OX: Routledge.

Author references:

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