Book Review / Recension d’ouvrage


by Jerry Wellington
New York, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015, 384 pages

Reviewed by / Revu par

Diane P. Janes
University of Alberta

Many novice educational researchers need to understand the basics of educational research both from a theoretical perspective and from a practical perspective, the theoretical underpinnings of a research method and what it can give you as a researcher. In some cases, new researchers need a practical view of the process to help them attain some expertise before moving on to higher levels of engagement with the research process, a bit like an algorithmic approach that will over time become more heuristic in nature.


The first thing the reader sees upon exploring this text is how well the book is laid out. It comprises three parts (Issues and Approaches; Methods and their Limits; and Analysing and Presenting) with 13 chapters overall. The first section could be considered the preparation for the research. Covered here is an overview of educational research, the approaches that are possible, and a foray into the literature review, which sets the
stage for research. Part 2 focuses on the methods that might be used for research question
data collection, while Part 3 moves research into conversations about the importance of
disseminating findings. Wellington notes in his introduction “The main focus…is on qual-
itative work such as interview and case study, although survey research is discussed…”
(p. xiiv) so the intention of the book is to move the reader toward smaller, manageable
projects with a qualitative application.

Each chapter has an outline that makes the work very accessible. The reader can
either read the chapter from the beginning or jump to the section needed to review before
proceeding in your own work. The first 10 chapters all have a current case study written
for this book by a contributing author/researcher. Each case study covers the contribu-
tor’s thinking when undertaking the project. This section brings the reader to the reality
of conducting such research and allows them to see the research method or approach in
action. The chapters are littered with small asides that really add to the process that a new
researcher might not consider, and which I found quite valuable. Using examples, guide-
lines, theory summaries, and strategies all added to the conversation with the reader. Each
chapter also ended with “points to ponder”—questions and considerations to be aware of
if the reader is to use what was discussed in the chapter—again very useful for the novice
(and the experienced).

Even the end matter is valuable. Unlike a lot of other research treatises, Wel-
lington has a very different final set of appendices, which are well worth examination.
Appendix 1 is a short précis of eight older works of educational research. Wellington
indicates in the introduction to the section that these are items he has often recommended
when discussing research over the past forty-plus years (p. 329). The final two appendices
concentrate on grammar (words to watch) and punctuation (use of commas and semico-
lons for example) for the new researcher. The book also has a glossary of terms and ends
with references and future reading suggestions.

If I had a criticism, it would be the small proportion of the book devoted to the
internet and internet research. It is relegated to Chapter 10, “Other Methods for the
Researcher” under a couple of sections – namely internet research, “netnography,” and
online focus groups, which together make up about 3 pages of the 300+ pages of the
text. He does discuss electronic delivery of survey questionnaires in Chapter 8 on survey
research (p. 192–194). I do understand the author’s reluctance to venture into this area.
He acknowledges he is unsure whether to call it “…an approach, a method, or simply a
fertile ground…” (p. 237). I envision this being a growth area rather than one that will diminish over time.

I do think this book is a fine combination of the classics discussed with some of the newer works in the area. The language is accessible and for a novice researcher in education, I would recommend this book as a starting point for a discussion of their project.