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Book review

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Liamputtong, P. (ed.) (2017) *Research methods in health: foundations for evidence-based practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Third edition]

The arrival of this book was signalled by a pleasing and weighty thud on the doormat. Even before I had opened it I could tell I was in for some serious reading in reviewing this text. The book, now in its third edition and stretching to 27 chapters, is a collection of writings on the approaches, methods and stages of research that can underpin practice in healthcare. It is broad in scope, and is intended to guide the novice researcher in navigating world of research. It is billed as being aimed at undergraduate health /nursing students and as being what might be described as an 'entry level' text. This third edition includes a new chapter on getting started in research, and other chapters have been revised and expanded to be inclusive of the range of methods /approaches used and to be relevant to a potentially diverse healthcare practitioner readership.

The book opens with quite a lot of 'housekeeping;' by this I mean there is a detailed description about how the book is set out – including two tables of contents (brief /expanded), how to use the book, lists of the tables and figures, exemplars of tasks, exercises and signposting to additional resources for further reading, plus a detailed overview of each chapter. Once into the book proper, the methods-led chapters are topped by part 1 which introduces "Methods and principles" and tailed by part 6 which concerns "Making sense of and presenting data." The parts in between concern: "Qualitative approaches and practices;" "Quantitative approaches and practices;" "Evidence-based practice and systematic reviews;" and "Mixed methods research." There is an overall consistency to each chapter: each opens with chapter objectives and key terms, before getting into the substance of the topic. Good use is made of tables, figures and diagrams to break up what might otherwise be rather dense blocks of text. Page margins contain 'pop up' definitions of the key terms used, and every now and again the reader is asked to "STOP AND THINK" about some questions /a task, and examples of "*research in practice*" are given. Depending on the type of reader you are, these can be seen as welcome pause points to ponder what has been written or as disruptive to the flow of the narrative. I still hadn't made my mind up by chapter 27 as to whether I liked the use of yellow as the theme colour to shade boxes and highlight sections. The end of the book contains a glossary, a comprehensive reference list and a detailed index for quick reference.

The text of each chapter provides a well written and accessible discussion of the topic at hand. The majority of the chapters deal with a particular method or approach. Each typically provides an introduction /context indicating the key texts and origins, followed by an overview of 'how to do it' along with wider considerations such as debates in the field or how to analyse the data. Particular highlights for me were: first chapter 1 "The science of words and the science of numbers" which I

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found to be a very even-handed discussion of the role and value of different types of research to practitioners, depending on the purpose of the research. Second was chapter 8 “Grounded theory in health research.” Grounded theory can be poorly applied in studies, with some aspects such as constant comparison analysis being ‘cherry picked’ and used out of the context. In this chapter the evolution of the approach is presented and the nuances made clear. I was surprised however that the chapter didn’t use Glaser and Strauss’ original study *Awareness of dying* as an example of ‘research in practice.’

Turning to think about what is missing from the book, this is probably best summed up as the ‘finer grain’ of research approaches and methods where there are a range of ‘flavours’ and slightly different theoretical positions. For instance there is discussion of systematic review and meta-synthesis, yet narrative review of literature appears just once (on page 344). Similarly case study is mentioned in several places, but not discussed in the context of authors such as Yin, Stake or Golby and Parrott. Finally, methodology looms large as an underlying theme of the book, yet receives just the briefest of mentions.

This isn’t a book to read cover to cover - if the reader does a degree of overlap between chapters will be noticeable. Instead, this is more of a book to dip in and out of, guided by particular interests, and read in this way the chapters are detailed enough to stand alone. This brings me to consider the question - who will find this book useful? I think it would make a worthy addition to the bookshelves of nursing /healthcare students as billed. I think it also is a good reference text for those in clinical roles, including educators, who may be required to undertake small scale, non-clinical research or to teach about research.

References

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Stake RE (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

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