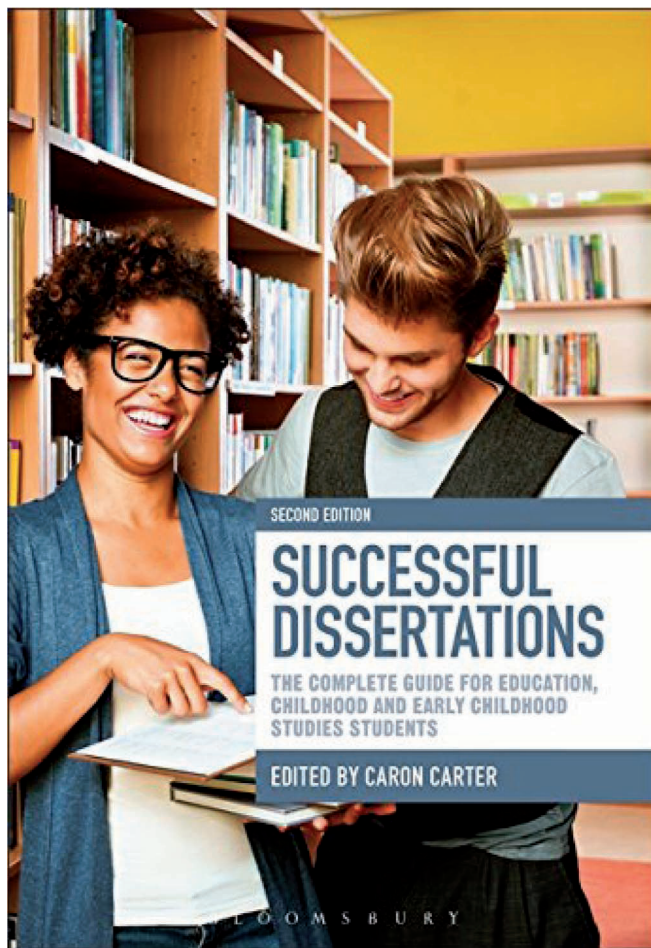


Book review

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Successful Dissertations: The complete guide for education, childhood and early childhood studies students, edited by Caron Carter

London: Bloomsbury Academic; 2018; 257pp; ISBN: 978-1-350-00486-3 (pbk); ISBN: 978-1-350-00487-0 (hbk); ISBN: 978-1-35-000489-4 (ebk)



It is clear that the intended audience of the book is childhood and early childhood studies students, as stated in the title. The co-authors are five lecturers at Britain's Sheffield Hallam University and Birmingham City University. The strategies and practices they explain are derived from their own experience of supervising dissertations at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. For this reason, while this book was written for undergraduate students in the field of education, the strategies and information it offers are useful and practical for students in other academic fields.

The book consists of nine chapters: 1. An Introduction to the Process of Enquiry and Research; 2. Choosing Your Research Question and Getting Organized; 3. Adopting an Ethical Approach to Your Research; 4. Doing Your Literature Review; 5. Research Methodologies; 6. Data Collection Using Qualitative Methods; 7. Data Collection Using Quantitative Methods; 8. Data Analysis; 9. Writing Your Dissertation.

All research projects start from a range of inquiries, and many researchers struggle with choosing, developing and refining a relevant topic. One of the most helpful aspects of this book is that the nine chapters in this volume provide a step-by-step overview of a dissertation project, from deciding a research question, reviewing the literature, considering the methodology and ethics, collecting data and analysing data, and ultimately to writing a dissertation. Moreover, the book is organized in a way that allows the reader to identify the topic that most interests them, thereby making the content more accessible.

Kay (Chapter 4) does a superb job explaining the value of literature reviews, which tend to be poorly understood by novice researchers. Kay states that managing a time for reading and analysing relevant resources is crucial to determine the overall development of the dissertation project. My understanding of a good literature review is that it is meant to not only help refine a research question but also to stand me in good stead when I start to analyse my data. In this chapter, the author provides numerous useful reading strategies such as a 'literature map', which is a visual or diagrammatic representation of the themes within the relevant existing research (p. 101) and guidance and checklists for 'reading efficiently and critically' (pp. 95–6). Many researchers think that they have to read every existing study regarding their dissertation topic, so it is necessary to make a reading plan for each research stage.

In Chapter 5, Wainwright further develops explanations on research methodologies, qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, and data analysis by using a wealth of comprehensive examples, templates and case studies. In terms of research methodologies, it enables readers to understand how to design research methodology by explaining both philosophical approaches and common methodological approaches, including experimental design, ethnography, phenomenological research, grounded theory, action research, narrative research and case studies.

Kay and Wainwright (Chapter 6) and Dewis (Chapter 7) provide two data analysis methods with a balance of qualitative and quantitative data analysis respectively. As these approaches are very practical, the book guides the reader through the data analysis process by using charts and diagrams as a means of summarizing quantitative data. Kay and Wainwright use their own experiences of supervising a project, namely 'Vikash's project' (p. 208), to provide an interesting overview of thematic qualitative analysis in order to demonstrate the analytical process in a step-by-step manner.

This edition has two significant omissions: it neglects to mention the great potential of using technologies and lacks a detailed explanation on note taking techniques. As Margolis and Zunjarwad (2018, p. 622) point out, 'technology advances to produce well-rounded, robust, and implicit analytical frameworks'. Numerous technologies are commonly used as research methods today; however, they are not fully examined. Although several good examples of managing projects and using social media as a means of data collection are suggested, such as writing a dissertation journal (p. 39), the book does not clearly explain how to manage the research project or how to take notes using a variety of digital platforms.

Dissertation writing, as observed by Chiappetta-Swanson and Watt (2011), involves considerable challenges for many students because of their underdeveloped

strategies for academic writing. Thus, it is necessary to learn how to write systematically. In this sense, O'Hara (Chapter 9) discusses the appropriate techniques and rules of academic writing, such as proper form, style, language, and following citation guidelines; however, the explanations given are very broad and general, and it would have been more helpful if he had considered the needs of novice researchers in terms of dissertation writing. For instance, many researchers struggle with writing chapter conclusions. Hence, it is imperative that they learn how to illustrate those conclusions, providing a concise and effective ending to a qualitative study or a quantitative study more specifically.

Notwithstanding, all chapters are highly accessible, informative and follow a logical structure, making it easy to understand for all students, whether at undergraduate, masters or doctoral level, regardless of what stage they are at in their dissertation project. The book will also serve as a valuable teaching resource. The first edition was published in 2011, and the second edition's new features include new discussions on research methods and analysis methods, such as visual research methods (p. 162) and the use of social media research data (p. 73). In addition, excellent features at the end of each chapter include a summary of key points, a reflective task, a companion website providing useful checklists and templates related to managing research projects, a variety of sample guidance and further sources of information. Overall, this is a must-read book for all students who are preparing a dissertation. Its major contribution lies in its easy-to-follow guidance on how to plan, research and write a dissertation, a comprehensive introduction to research methodology and methods using qualitative and quantitative techniques and instruments, and the practical and relevant examples and case studies that are included.

References

- Chiappetta-Swanson, C. and Watt, S. (2011) *Good Practice in the Supervision and Mentoring of Postgraduate Students*. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University.
- Margolis, E. and Zunjarwad, R. (2018) 'Visual research'. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 600–25.