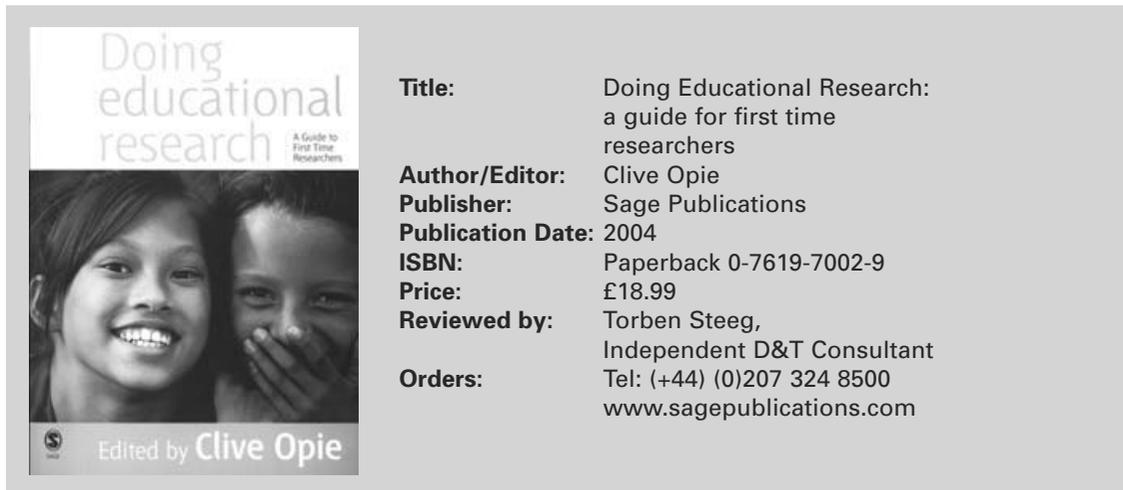


Review: Doing Educational Research: a guide for first time researchers



Content

Aimed explicitly at first time researchers (in particular those on Masters courses or at the beginning of doctoral level work), the treatment has been deliberately limited to the material that such beginners are likely to find of use. Clear rationalisations for the selection (and omission) of materials is provided throughout and copious references to further texts containing wider ranging or more 'advanced' material are provided. The bibliography is a particular strength of the book for those who wish to pursue work beyond its scope.

The first chapter provides an overview of educational research, focusing on both what it is and, through discussion of a range of possible misconceptions/misinterpretations, what it is not. This is followed by a chapter examining the relationship between methodology and methods and the impact that an individual's ontological, epistemological and social stances have on their choosing of research methods. The chapter finishes with a clear and thorough discussion of research ethics. Both this and the fourth chapter, which deals with issues of reliability, validity and general credibility of research findings, could blind with terminology and it is a measure of the effectiveness of the book in meeting the needs of its intended audience that they do not do so. Chapter Three discusses what it is that

makes a piece of writing 'academic' and how to achieve this. This pays close attention to the stylistic and structural matters that will be familiar to all markers of the writing of postgraduate students. It also provides an overview of the kinds of feedback that writers at this level are likely to receive as well as providing a description of the needs of the various consumers of academic writing.

A fifth chapter on 'Research Approaches' mainly concentrates on case studies and action research (experiments and grounded theory are also briefly covered), describing the range of possibilities and methods available in both approaches through the use of illustrative summaries of MEd research projects that the author has supervised. In the sixth chapter a range of research 'procedures' (methods) are summarised. Again the methods chosen are those deemed most likely to be suitable for Masters students: questionnaires, interviews and observation, each of which is given appropriately comprehensive cover.

The final chapters turn to aspects of data analysis. Chapter Seven is key here, providing a good introductory level overview of the analysis and presentation of quantitative data and an introduction to working with qualitative data. Chapters Eight and Nine each focus on specific software (NUD*IST and ATLAS.ti respectively)

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that aids the analysis of qualitative data and Chapter Ten is a more detailed 'glossary' of some key quantitative procedures.

Effectiveness and value to the user

This is a text that I will recommend to my own Masters students and I will be suggesting that it becomes a core text for the course that I teach on.

Strengths and weaknesses

A particular strength of this text is the attempt to engage the reader (following good constructivist style) in personal reflection on the issues in each chapter; usually at its start and often throughout. A range of textual devices are used to support this reflection and in the first chapter the pedagogic relevance of this approach is spelt out.

Throughout the text, ideas are exemplified from the authors' own experience of working with Masters level students and this experience is evident in the relevance of the topics they focus on. This not only maintains readability but also lends a reassuring air of authenticity to what they have to say.

Although the text, with justification, tends to steer students towards qualitative work, the material on quantitative data is rather better constructed: there is a clear overview in Chapter Seven backed up by the more detailed and mathematical 'glossary' in Chapter Ten. In contrast the qualitative material in Chapter Seven provides very little guidance on working with qualitative data, what there is being tied up with examples from a particular software tool, and the book also ties the more advanced Chapters (Eight and Nine) to specific software.

This seems to have two risks: firstly of becoming (or appearing to become) outdated (Chapter Eight focuses on NUD*IST which in its latest incarnation trades under a different name) and secondly of losing the wood of data analysis principles amongst the trees of software specific technical information that is best supplied in a, separate, software specific manual.

What Chapters Eight and Nine do offer are two useful and interesting descriptions of the process of pursuing a research project that can be used as case studies for MEd students to dissect and discuss.

The detailed glossary of relevant statistical terms that makes up the last chapter is a very useful way to deal with an area that often worries beginning researchers. The presence of this glossary does highlight, however, the lack of a general glossary of technical terms for first timers.

There is a small scattering of minor typographical errors which really should have been captured by the editors, but these do not get in the way of understanding.

Readability, presentation and cost

This is a highly readable text in which the authors have taken great care over both terminology and presenting quite complex material clearly and logically. A useful range of statistical definitions have been placed in a final chapter as an extended glossary of statistical terms.