

Book review

Lukenchuk, A. (2013) (Ed) *Paradigms of research for the 21st Century: Perspectives and examples from practice*. Peter Lang: New York.

http://www.peterlang.com/download/datasheet/64478/datasheet_311802.pdf

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Too often, books dealing with research methodology are prescriptive and make demands on researchers to fit a proscribed method to the detriment of the research taking place. This can be helpful in clarifying what and how to organise data, facts, and classify events in order to understand our world. In this context it is also helpful to have researchers develop books on methods and paradigms that ask us to think about those methods and paradigms more deeply. Rather than proscribe, this book asks us to do just that: think about what it means to do research, and what it means to choose various methods and paradigms when we do that.

In the introduction, the book begins with a set of stated aims that, among others, seeks to advocate ‘epistemological and methodological pluralism’ and expand ‘the definition of paradigm and its alternatives for educational research’ (p. xxiv). A good start indeed! In the context of a plethora of quantitative research around education it is vital that researchers think about the foundational aspects of their work.

This book is clearly a labour of love for the contributors, and it shows. Nicely crafted chapters with pieces on various aspects of hermeneutics, epistemologies, and phenomenological approaches to understanding educational research, provide the reader with a myriad of ways to think about research. It is very much a ‘spiritual quest’ in articulating the thirst for knowledge that researchers have, and taken as a whole, the work is asking us to engage with that part of the research, questioning what we do and why we do it.

However, I do not wish to mislead readers of this review, as the book is also quite strongly grounded in practical experience, with excellent illustrations of the practical manifestations of educational research. There are a number of chapters that engage with the various ‘ground level’ concerns that researchers have and how they obtain their results. Chapters 4, 5, and 6, all discuss in detail aspects of ethnographic work that demonstrates practical implications of doing this kind of research. Trostin’s autoethnographic piece (Ch. 4) is a concise piece on educational philosophy and is an exemplar for how to go about exploring such avenues. Woolsey’s discussion (Ch. 5) has some specific insights in to using ethnography as a methodology and how that links with the data of research. Hernandez-Rodriguez (Ch. 6) develops a nuanced approach to qualitative methodology that demonstrates the stages and processes for researchers engaged in this kind of inquiry.

Perry and Bentley in Chapter 9 also develop some practical insights in to how to collect data and present findings. This might seem like a mundane task but remember the purpose of the book is to think about the research and the ways that we go about doing it. This is a handy chapter to use when making the links between our data and findings.

The Duncan chapter (Ch 14) is particularly evocative. The research around ‘uncovering meaning’ and developing sets of connections about disability and disability studies is wonderful piece of qualitative research broadly construed. Beautifully critiquing the ‘medical model’ of disability, and questioning the foundational categories of how we characterise our fellow human beings, this chapter should be mandatory reading for anyone seeking to go in to the teaching profession. The chapter also serves as an exemplar for helping us to think about how to resist these categories (see p. 242) and demonstrates how a researcher can weave in personal stories of individuals involved in their research. The ‘research subjects’ are humanised, and they become part of our collective humanity, not merely abstract beings that we seek to manipulate for our own mundane research purposes. Duncan’s chapter achieves a major shift in thinking about how we can do this at a most practical level.

Duncan’s chapter does what Lukenchuk and Kolich claim in Chapter 3:

Our purpose is to establish a chain of interrelated links between epistemological and methodological questions that can lead to a more integrated and broader view of educational research (p. 61).

In Chapter 3, Lukenchuk and Kolich do a brilliant job of setting up the various chapters (4 through 14) that deal with the different paradigms used in the book. Table 3.1 on page 67-8 gives us a typology of paradigms along with the associated methods and approaches. This table offers a perfect starting point for researchers looking to remind themselves of where the paradigms are situated. Figure 3.1 on page 69 gives us a clear diagram of the conceptual relationships among the various paradigms. Then on page 77-9, Table 3.2 situates each chapter within the particular paradigms, illustrates the design instruments and the theories used, and gives us an inter-relational overview of the research conducted throughout the book. If an illustrative figure on methodology can be called whimsical, then Figure 3.2 on page 85 is just that. Linking with the theme in the introduction and conclusion, a kind of ‘pathway to the wonder of research’ is developed in Figure 3.2 and is supremely helpful in showing how these various paradigms and approaches can weave together to help us to reach a greater understanding of research.

In sum, all of the chapters provide something useful for the contemporary researcher. Moving away from the proscriptive demands and setting up a situation in which we as researchers are thinking about what we do, while always remaining grounded in our research, is fundamental to our task. This book is an important addition to the literature, and an important part of our critical enterprise. For researchers at all levels, from undergraduate to postgraduate, from lay persons to professional academics, this book really does make an attempt to reach out to people engaged in a critical enterprise of

thinking about the world. Readers will find it both engaging and complex, as well as interesting and ambitious, and will feel enriched after reading it.

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