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PICKARD, Alison J. *Research methods in information.* London : Facet Publishing. 2007.
329 Pages. ISBN 978-1-85604-545-2. £39.95.

Many of us have struggled to write research proposals and dissertations as undergraduates or postgraduates. As professionals, some of us have undertaken quick surveys of user opinion and then thought of better questions we could have asked. At last, here is a readable, practical text on research methods specifically for our sector which can support the student and practitioner.

Why readable? The author takes us on a clearly signposted route from research paradigms; through research methods and data collection tools; and concludes with analysis and presentation. Some research method texts can leave the reader knotted up in the terminology. This one is clear about its purpose as a guide to the research process for students and practitioners and doesn't lose sight of that purpose.

Nevertheless, Part One does not overlook the foundations of research. Pickard reminds us that the research paradigm informs and guides the decisions we go on to make in the research process. For some, her treatment of qualitative and quantitative methodologies will be too perfunctory when compared with other standard student research handbooks such as Bryman's Social Research Methods (Bryman, 2004). However, Pickard is open about her approach as "primarily concerned with the research process that is required in order to produce results" (p.5) and the brevity of this section does not damage its clarity or usefulness as an overview.

The remainder of Part One very much reads as the building blocks to development of a research proposal as part of an academic research project (as opposed to any workplace research). Literature review; defining the research aims and objectives; writing the proposal, sampling and ethics approval are all well covered. In terms of the advice on research ethics, as a practitioner who has supported colleagues doing workplace research, it was good to see the researcher reminded that simply being part of a community does not remove the need for appropriate permissions. However, the section on "Ethics online" was not as supportive to the new researcher as other sections – and the reference to later sections in the book does not enlighten further.

Part Two covers particular research methods such as case studies, surveys and ethnography. Pickard outlines why and how each method might be used and includes examples from the library and information science literature. This section is excellent in that it anticipates the readers' questions and answers them in the introduction to the relevant chapter e.g. the difference between a survey and a questionnaire or between an ethnography and a case study.

Part Three picks out the data collection techniques and, as in the previous sections, there is the same clear, balanced and accessible writing. Pickard offers

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examples, diagrams, and further suggested reading. However, the readability should not be confused as sacrificing any academic rigour. In Chapter 16, on questionnaires she is at pains to put right any superficial understanding of the commonly used Likert scale. Similarly, she puts right other sloppy assumptions about research – we are told quite clearly that the inclusion of an open ended question on a questionnaire does not automatically represent the qualitative element of a study (p.195).

Part Four, on data analysis and research presentation, is the shortest section. Whilst her explanations of qualitative and quantitative analysis are clear and useful, I wanted more information and variety in the section on presenting the research. As in Part One, the book veers toward being a core research methods text for a library school audience in this section. As a practitioner, I would like to have seen information on presenting your research for different audiences and also for publication.

However, the odd criticism shouldn't influence the overall assessment of the book as a fair, readable, informative and informed text.

Reference

Bryman, A. (2004) *Social research methods,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

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