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Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology (3rd ed.) by Donna M. Mertens- A Book Review

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Abstract

While *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology (3rd ed.)* by Donna M. Mertens (2010) is a beginning research text, in many ways it is advanced in its approach to research design. Like any revised edition, much of the material from the earlier editions is in the present edition. What makes this book different is the call to the reader to reflect on a personal understanding of research. This is accomplished through the use of "Expand Your Thinking" blocks within the text. These brief reflections allow researchers to explore their own assumptions and beliefs and consider the impact of self or their "view of the world" on the research process.

Keywords

Research Design, Program Evaluation

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Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology (3rd ed.)
by Donna M. Mertens – A Book Review

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*While *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology (3rd ed.)* by Donna M. Mertens (2010) is a beginning research text, in many ways it is advanced in its approach to research design. Like any revised edition, much of the material from the earlier editions is in the present edition. What makes this book different is the call to the reader to reflect on a personal understanding of research. This is accomplished through the use of “Expand Your Thinking” blocks within the text. These brief reflections allow researchers to explore their own assumptions and beliefs and consider the impact of self or their “view of the world” on the research process. Key Words: Research Design and Program Evaluation*

I want to start this review by acknowledging my bias; I really like this book. Not only because, as Donna M. Mertens (2010) states in the introduction, “The goal of this book is to guide researchers in identifying their own assumptions and examining for themselves the implications of choices about research methodology based on those assumptions” (p. xviii), but because the content holds true to that commitment.

Like any revised edition, much of the material from the earlier editions is in the present edition. This is not a bad thing since the basic conceptual design is sound. What makes this book different is the call to the reader to reflect on a personal understanding of research. This is accomplished through the use of “Expand Your Thinking” blocks within the text. These brief reflections honor the integrity of the commitment to allow researchers to explore their own assumptions and beliefs and consider the impact of self or their “view of the world” on the research process.

The book follows the outline of most research books beginning with an introductory chapter discussing the definition of research. The first chapter also offers a look at research and its relationship to philosophy of science. In addition to introducing the four major paradigms (postpositive, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic) the chapter contains summaries of research studies modeling these paradigms. While Mertens (2010) discusses the viability of what she calls “merging paradigms,” she does acknowledge that the field of research is not yet ready to integrate paradigms. However, being true to her goal, each of the research methods (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) are presented through the lens of each of the four paradigms. It is this approach that encourages the reader to look within to promote good research.

Once Mertens (2010) tackles the topic of good research she shifts gears and discusses the similar yet different roles of research and evaluation. Chapter 2 is grounded in the historical evolution of the practice and looks at the role of the four paradigms in the evaluation process. In addition, the chapter contains a sample logic model, something that is missing from many of the most popular evaluation textbooks. As a long time

program evaluator, I appreciate the focus on evaluation. Many writers describe research as part of evaluation; failing to acknowledge the role of evaluation as an independent research tool. Mertens also includes the role of ethics in evaluation and the national Program Evaluation Standards in this chapter. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 provide a solid framework for the subsequent chapters where the focus shifts to the research process.

To this end, Chapter 3 addresses the importance of the literature review as a means of focusing a study. The next section of the book looks at research methods. Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 explore quantitative research designs (experimental and quasi-experimental, causal comparative and correlational, survey, and single-case research). Chapter 8 addresses qualitative methods including ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. Chapter 9 looks at historical and narrative research, and Chapter 10 presents mixed methods research. The remaining chapter of the book focuses on the construction of a research study/program evaluation. Chapter 11 looks at sampling, Chapter 12 explores data collection, and Chapter 13 concludes the book with data analysis, interpretation, and use.

While this is a beginning research text, in many ways it is advanced in its approach to research design. Exploring the major paradigms and what role these paradigms play in one's research is an important consideration. Mertens' (2010) book provides an excellent guide to assist in understanding why we do the research we do. The book is a worthy addition to the library of any novice or experienced researcher. (You can learn more about the text and read other readers' reviews at its website: <http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book233111&#tabview=title>)

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