



Meanwhile, the writing style is always clear and accessible. This has always been one of David's strengths so that the presentation is logical and thus the argument flows well. In fact David has an easy, personal style that is easy to follow.

In addition, the author has achieved an appropriate balance between theory and practical relevance throughout the text. This is one of the book's positive aspects whereby the presentation of each abstract concept and idea is followed by real examples. Indeed, it is evident that David has drawn on his extensive prior experience as a senior researcher at the Australian Institute of Family Studies to provide these. Consequently, the examples are of general interest, whatever the discipline of the reader.

Examples are also portrayed through the use of graphs and tables. These are clear and relate

strongly to the text. As a result, the author often 'talks' us through them so that we understand clearly what he is trying to convey.

Related to the text and graphics, the layout is well spaced and fairly appealing to the reader. Splitting the book into different parts is also helpful. The only thing that might assist with the text design is to introduce some colour into the graphics (although this might be uneconomic for the publisher).

Overall, the book is quite advanced and so would be useful to post-graduate students and to the many professional evaluators undertaking large-scale or survey-based evaluations. It should also be in academic and other libraries. It just needs a different title or to concentrate more on qualitative designs!

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### **SUCCESSFUL QUALITATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH: A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION**

**Emily C Hansen**

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2006, ISBN 1-74114-678-X, paperback, AU\$39-95, 210 pages

This book is aimed particularly at novice qualitative researchers working or interested in the health domain. So, it joins a number of similar works concerned with qualitative health research that have appeared during the past few years (including those by overseas authors Crabtree and Miller (1999), Gantley (1999), Green and Thorogood (2004), Morse and Field (1995) and Pope and Mays (1999), as well as those by Australian authors such as Grbich (1999) and Rice and Ezzy (1999).

The main aim of the text is said to be to provide 'user friendly practical and theoretical advice' for those needing to design a qualitative health project, collect data, analyse it and report appropriately. These aims are certainly met because there are sections on each aforementioned aspect, the writing is clear and there are many helpful tips for those entering qualitative research for the first time.

More specifically, the volume begins with a chapter that sets the scene by talking about: the differences between qualitative and quantitative

methods; mixed methods; and the link between qualitative research and academic theory. Other chapters deal with planning a piece of research, qualitative research design, participant observation, interviewing, focus groups, analysis and writing.

As the above list indicates, though, there are some gaps in the content. For instance, there are few details about document analysis and none at all about the use of the visual medium as data. However, on the positive side there are excellent, quite detailed sections on ethics (where there are quite detailed considerations of informed consent, right to privacy, protection from harm, covert fieldwork and vulnerable participants) and rigour and these sections are worth looking at, even if the reader is more experienced in qualitative work. Not surprisingly then, the book professes to: 'sit in the middle ground between basic QM books and the more abstract style of writing and discussion found in books for more advanced audiences' (p xi).

Particularly positive aspects of the presentation include that:

- more attention is paid to various types of data analysis and to matters associated with writing than in many other qualitative research texts
- there is a mixture of historical material as well as reportage of more recent studies
- summaries are provided at the end of each chapter
- a useful and comprehensive glossary is provided before the index.

But perhaps one of the best and most innovative features is that five chapters end with detailed examples of how the chapter content has been applied. These have been written by experienced and well-respected Australian and New Zealand health researchers who work in public health, nursing, health program evaluation and the sociology of health. These real applications bring the preceding theoretical and practical ideas to life for the reader.

Nevertheless, there are a few weaknesses. One is that the presentation is restricted to prose only so that there are no figures, tables or any other devices to break up the text. Therefore, flicking through the book may be off-putting to a novice.

Another concern is that, although extra reading is suggested at the end of each chapter, much of it is rather dated. For instance, the most recent of the five texts suggested for participant observation/fieldwork was written in 1996 and yet there have been excellent, more recent volumes such as those by DeLaine (2000) and Dewalt and Dewalt (2002). The same is true for readings for focus groups (all listed appeared in the 1990s), while there have been several well-written tomes since 2000, for example Bloor (2000), Fern (2001) and Krueger (2000) (all possible as Hansen has listed books as late as 2005 in the final references).

Overall, though, this is a readable, thorough and useful book that novices should acquire. Note that I do not say 'novices carrying out health research and evaluation', as this book would be of interest to *all* disciplines because the examples are understandable and applicable to the lay researcher/evaluator as well as to those within the health sector.

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