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Professor Tony Brown's Inaugural Address
Special Section on Theorising Pedagogy

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SPECIAL SECTION 2004: *Bodies in Motion*

Submission Deadline: March 5, 2004

This special section focuses on the roles of physical education, health, dance, physical activity and sport within education settings. Manuscripts of 4000-5000 words should be submitted to either of the Special Section Editors (Clive Pope or Toni Bruce) at the email or land addresses below. Manuscripts on a variety of topics are welcome and may include reviews of knowledge in the field, theoretical approaches to research, critiques of recent curriculum developments, pedagogical innovations and recent research findings. As well as traditional manuscripts, the authors welcome submissions in other formats such as short stories, poetry and cartoons. Please note that the *Waikato Journal of Education* publishes material of general interest to a range of academics and teachers.

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RICHARD J. M. SMITH

Book Review

The Researcher's Toolkit: The Complete Guide to Practitioner Research

DAVID WILKINSON (Ed.) (2000).

London: Routledge Falmer.

136 pages

Cynicism is raised by any research methods publication which purports to be a 'complete guide' to the field. However, this slim volume manages to encapsulate some very useful insights and advice for, in particular, novice researchers, and is extensive in its coverage of research methods and approaches. This book is very much a practical edition which is in the 'how to' stable of conducting educational research. It contains eight chapters by seven UK academics in the fields of education, health and public policy. It provides a broad overview of the research field and is a rich source of data on practitioner-based research approaches for both beginning researchers and more experienced practitioners.

Two strengths of the text are its readability and its practical advice. It has a chatty, easy to read and informal tone, which is jargon-free (where possible) and provides useful tips and examples for novice researchers. One novel approach adopted in the text at the beginning of each chapter is a useful box which provides details and an overview of the chapter with associated headings, contents and page numbers. I found this a particularly helpful and quick reference point.

The focus, whilst almost exclusively qualitative in approach, does contain some excellent and practical advice for researchers using more quantitative methods, particularly in Chapter Six – Analysing the Data (pp. 77-96). This data analysis chapter by David Wilkinson is comprehensive in its coverage of both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and is particularly helpful in explaining and demystifying the use of statistics for those without expertise in this area.

Chapter One, by Margaret Scanlon, provides an excellent overview of various methodologies and also some limited coverage of paradigms in research. Chapter Three (by Peter Birmingham) deals with reviewing the literature and is extensive in suggesting how to analyse and appraise literature. Furthermore, it provides a useful brief example of a literature review.

The chapter by Lesley Gray (Chapter Five) on finding and locating information, utilises various media, and is particularly useful for readers in providing widespread coverage and useful advice for the uninitiated, in particular, in its critiques of web-based and search engine research techniques. The penultimate chapter (Seven, by Christine Gough) on completing the project offers useful practical advice for overcoming some of the barriers associated with the successful completion of long-term research projects. Some excellent suggestions on both submission and subsequent publication are proffered. Drawing the book to its inevitable conclusion is a chapter for practitioners about conducting research in schools using the case study method (Chapter Eight, by Jane Lovey).

The text is mainly data and process-driven (and by design geared towards practitioners), and whilst it makes no claims about the philosophy or theory of research, this is perhaps one of its biggest oversights. There is no theoretical discussion of epistemology or ontology (which are well covered in Scott & Usher, 1999). Similarly, there is no extensive coverage of the various perspectives and history of social science and educational research (compared to May, 1997).

Furthermore, important critical approaches to research are not traversed in this text (although these fields are covered in detail in Scott & Usher, 1999 and also, to a lesser extent, in Wellington, 2000).

A criticism of this text is its cursory treatment of ethics which is, in this reviewer's opinion, a major flaw. Ethics is listed only once in the index, and ethical issues are covered in merely half a page (p. 11) which outlines ten questionable practices in social science research. Most contemporary texts on social science/educational research offer much more guidance on ethical issues and other texts typically have full chapters devoted to this important issue. For example, May (1999, Chapter Three, pp. 42-62) calls his chapter 'value and ethics in the research process', Scott and Usher (1999, Chapter 11, pp. 127-134) is called 'ethics and educational research', whilst Wellington (2000) refers to ethical issues in his book with a chapter entitled 'the researcher's role and responsibility' (Chapter Four, pp. 40-67).

The Researcher's Toolkit makes no pretensions to be anything other than a good guide for practice for practitioners, and in this role it succeeds admirably. It could not be recommended as a text for understanding the history or philosophical and theoretical traditions underpinning social science and educational research. However, this is not its stated purpose nor its target market.

The publication is a small yet valuable addition to the burgeoning research methods literature and is a beneficial resource for postgraduate research students (and their supervisors). Whilst it understandably draws upon UK examples, these can be translated into an (Anglicised, western paradigm) Aotearoa New Zealand context and readily be replaced with NZ examples.

I strongly recommend the text as a helpful guide for postgraduate tertiary research methods courses and also for use by practitioners engaged in research at the whiteboard.

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