Reviewed by Kathleen E. Fite
Texas State University
United States

Jon Swain, editor of *Designing Research in Education: Concepts and Methodologies*, tells his readers that this book is primarily about conceptualizing and designing doctoral research in the field of education. He says it will help you understand the philosophical foundations of your work, conceptualize and refine your research question, pick the right methodology for your research, and embed ethical considerations throughout your research. He meets his objectives in a well-written text that gives the reader the fundamental knowledge and tools to become a good researcher. The book provides the reader with a better understanding of the basics of research, including why it is important and how to design and manage a research project and function as a researcher.

Incoming graduate and doctoral students do not always see themselves as researchers and are uncertain how they can contribute to their area of study. This book helps the reader—students, early career scholars, and even veteran researchers
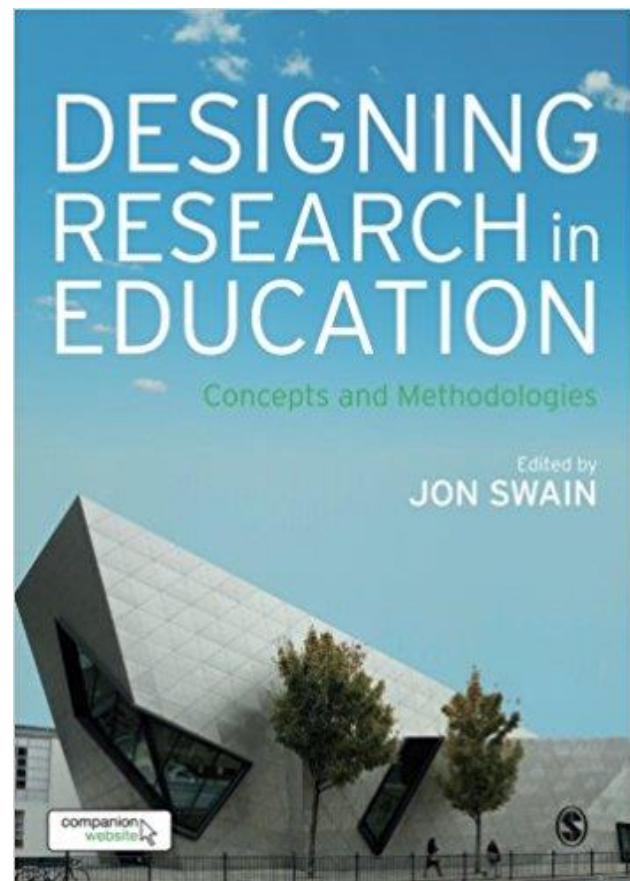
embarking on a new topic of research—internalize how research findings can contribute new knowledge to a field of study. One example described a student's EdD research, in which the researcher studied the broad concept of home schooling but with a focus on autistic children. Researching homeschooling is not uncommon; however, addressing the home schooling of autistic children added new information and filled a needed gap in the current research.

The introduction to the book describes the pedagogical features for each chapter. As you peruse the text, what comes to your attention is the well-designed layout. Though it is an edited book with multiple chapters and authors, it is unified by a crisp organization and a clear description of how the pieces of the research process fit together. The authors, all of whom work at the University College London, Institute of Education (UCL/IOE), show a sensitivity to the beginning researcher and are careful to situate their research experiences, and that of others, throughout the book and provide the reader with examples of how research journeys are similar and yet unique and varied. Giving detailed and personal examples of research makes the process seem more authentic, transparent, and achievable.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one addresses the concepts and philosophical issues that contribute to the research design and part two addresses using the research design. Each chapter includes an overview, detailed content, and relevant graphics and highlights various examples of studies, including the journey of doctoral students and other researchers and what was learned from their experiences. For example, specific chapters provide tips for key challenges for student researchers, such as time management and how to work with primary and secondary supervisors.

In the introduction, Swain also underscores how the doctoral research experience should be transformative for the student (p. 10). This is an important point because graduate students may consider the completion of a doctorate as simply the fulfillment of an academic requirement or an accumulation of additional hours. This point emphasizes that the experience of taking these classes and completing a dissertation can take them to a higher level of knowledge and performance as they engage in deep inquiry, study, reflection, and application.

Many support features provided alongside the text, such as tables, figures, and other graphics will appeal to the new scholar because of their content presentation and to the experienced academician because of their clarity. For example, one figure presents the flow of a classic research design (p. 34), simply visualizing the process of conducting research from developing a research question to the end product of the thesis and its potential for impact. Those seeking to learn more about process may be interested in one of the book's figures that clearly shows three decisions informing a mixed methods study (p. 201). Throughout the text, bullets points clearly display key introductory, processing, and concluding information, and these are especially helpful at the end of each chapter to highlight main ideas of the chapter.

Practical documentation examples are included, such as a brief introduction to consent forms for participation in research studies. The novice researcher may find these especially helpful, because he or she may not have yet developed or used an opt-in consent form to identify participants and to seek their approval for inclusion in a study. Swain explains how the opt-out form can have implied consent, meaning the researcher tells the potential participant that unless notified to the contrary, he or she assumes consent. Typically required by the research review board of the supervising institution, consent forms are essential to ensure procedures are followed and the rights of participants are protected. Points for discussion, an annotated

bibliography, and suggestions for further reading are also provided in each chapter to encourage study beyond the text. A companion website at https://study.sagepub.com/swain gives auxiliary support such as case studies, group activities, links to other articles, and annotated research proposals.

The dissertation or thesis can seem like a monumental task to the novice researcher, and sometimes to the experienced one as well. Doctoral students need to learn how to develop a research agenda so they can divide the task into more manageable components. Simply selecting a research question can seem overwhelming. Even if you have refined your research question, you must learn how to function within a particular research design and figure out how to best progress with your chosen methodology, how to address ethical considerations, and how to use specialized language. For example, learning about epistemologies and how theories about knowledge can inform research may offer new and helpful insights and perspectives.

In addition to covering the basics of research, the contributing authors demystify advanced graduate degrees in general by discussing the nature and purpose of doctoral degrees and how graduate programs may differ in contents, expectations, or timelines. The differences between the EdD and the PhD are explained, as is a general course of progression through a doctoral program. Swain notes that although both usually require a bound thesis of findings and an oral examination to defend the study, the EdD is often sought to enhance practice in a defined professional area whereas the PhD is often sought as entry and credibility into an academic career. I found it interesting to read Swain's description of what constitutes a doctorate and how programs vary. For example, the length of the PhD report, which he refers to as a thesis, can vary among institutions. At the University College London, Institute of Education (CUCL/IOE), he reports 80,000 words is generally the maximum length for this product (his thesis was about 100,000 words); however, some institutions may allow longer versions (p. 28). Common expectations for the PhD and the EdD, such as an expectation of originality and contribution to a designated field of study, are also stressed.

Based on my experience conducting my own research and helping students and other novice researchers work, I think the book would serve well as a general text to help guide students engaging in research at the graduate and postgraduate levels as well as a useful reference for experienced practitioners, mentors, and supervisors. This book is comprehensive, well organized, and informative, and Swain and the book's contributors have done a good job of addressing an enterprise that some consider difficult: designing research in education. By presenting philosophical principles, practical strategies and personal examples, the text explains key components that help graduate students to better understand the what, why, and how of a sound research approach. The hope is that the reader will cultivate an appreciation of the ongoing process involved in constructing a research design and engage in their research with confidence.

About the Reviewer

Kathleen E. Fite, PhD, is a Professor of Education at Texas State University. Dr. Fite is an active researcher and has taught undergraduate through doctoral level university courses.