

## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus de livres

**Edmonds, W. A., & Kennedy, T. D. (2012).**

***An Applied Reference Guide to Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 213 pages.  
Available in paperback (ISBN 978-1-4522-0509-0).**

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**Reviewed by Barbara Szijarto**

As a graduate student studying program evaluation, I find my coursework strong on evaluation theory, measurement, and data analysis. Research design has been treated with a light touch: often alluded to, seldom the focus. As stated in *An Applied Reference Guide to Research Designs*, “in graduate programs we find many classes on statistics but few on design. It is important to remember that it is the *design* and *not* the statistic that is the basis for inference, making the study of design of vital importance” (p. xvii).

This book is an effort to address this gap, and is intended for students and researchers in education and the social and behavioural sciences. The authors also speak about program evaluation, and there is much here to interest us. Acknowledging the differences between research and evaluation, they point to areas of overlap and the desirability for strong design in both pursuits. The authors intend this as an applied text covering common, practical designs, and they direct the reader to the approaches most appropriate to evaluation. They identify mixed methods as the method of choice for evaluators, and refer the reader to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) for further reading. The authors cite several theorists familiar to us from C. A. Christie and M. C. Alkin’s (2008) “evaluation theory tree,” for example: D. T. Campbell, T. D. Cook (methods branch); M. Patton, D. L. Stufflebeam, and D. M. Fetterman (use branch); and E. G. Guba & Y. S. Lincoln (valuing branch). A review of the book by D. L. Stufflebeam appears on the back cover.

The four parts of this book cover quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Three appendices offer additional design options and definitions, followed by references and two indices.

The introduction outlines the scientific method, and touches briefly on validity threats, considerations for control, comparison groups, and sampling techniques, organized to be a useful reference.

Parts I–IV form the core of the book. Part I covers experimental and quasi-experimental quantitative methods, Part II nonexperimental quantitative methods, and Parts III and IV qualitative and mixed methods respectively.

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Each part opens with a short introduction to the method, followed by chapters dedicated to particular approaches or families of designs. Grounded theory approach and exploratory-sequential approach each have their own chapters, as examples.

Each design is introduced with an overview of particular strengths and considerations for application, along with clarification of terms. Synonymous terms—for example, parallel-databases design, triangulation design, and convergence design—are also well cross-referenced in the index, as an added bonus to a reader attempting to navigate language.

There are visual depictions of 83 research designs in this book, the majority quantitative (46), as well as 13 qualitative and 13 mixed methods. There are a further 11 experimental and quasi-experimental designs diagrammed in Appendix A. It is an impressive collection.

In each chapter, the authors touch on multiple designs in narrative, and then revisit each with a diagram and at least one reference to a published example of its use. The various diagrams are tightly juxtaposed and multiple synonymous terms are provided. This can make presentation at times bewildering to someone unfamiliar with the content. Physical separation of design diagrams and references from their respective narratives can also be confusing, exacerbated by suboptimal use of headers which sometimes visually include a diagram with an unrelated narrative. This said, the diagrams on their own are extremely clear and excellent for comprehension and comparison.

This book is especially rich for the references provided, offering the reader examples of the designs in action. Over 130 articles and books are cited, the majority recently published, covering a remarkable range of topics from dozens of journals including from the program evaluation field. A reader could use this text to expeditiously review numerous options for design within an overall approach, compare various related designs, and then follow the references to dig deeper into a design of choice.

The authors revisit evaluation in their concluding chapter. They repeat their assertion that although designs should be adapted to fit context, they should be parsimonious. They describe Cook and Campbell's (1979) criteria for establishing cause and effect, and assert that while these may not always be the focus, they should be understood. They appeal for clarity and consistency when describing designs in papers for publication.

Appendix A lists some less common designs that may be useful in situations where random assignment is not feasible. Regression point-displacement design is included here, and the authors draw attention to it as useful in the field of evaluation.

In keeping with the authors' desire to untangle terminology, Appendices B and C present definitions of the terms used by Creswell (2012) and Yin (2012) for case study and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) for mixed methods designs.

These authors take it as their mission to teach accurate use of terms. Unfortunately, the emphasis on clarity and structure is not matched with equal care in

the finishing elements of this book. Oddities in layout impede understanding. The two tables of contents are mostly redundant, strange in this otherwise very succinct book. The ink could have been put to better use elsewhere where descriptions are so sparing. Specialized terms are sometimes not defined. There are some long sentences in passive voice with multiple nested parentheses that are at best distracting and at worst a hard slog for someone still learning terms and content.

The authors' stated purpose includes improving understanding and conceptualization of research designs. In truth this book is more of a catalogue than a primer. While there is sufficient detail to support the application of designs, the text is light on theory and context. Its strength is in the assemblage of so many designs in one place, together with the illustrations that make rapid comparison across designs possible. With this book, the reader begins with the design and then follows the many references for deeper understanding. I have no doubt that I will refer back to this book again and again for this purpose.

## REFERENCES

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