

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus de livres

Patricia Burch and Carolyn J. Heinrich. (2015). *Mixed Methods for Policy Research and Program Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. 211 pages. ISBN: 978-1452276625.

Reviewed by Mariane Arsenault

Mixed Methods for Policy Research and Program Evaluation is a useful book to build interest and capacity in policy makers and program implementers for mixed methods work. Written by Patricia Burch and Carolyn J. Heinrich, the book is logically divided into eight chapters that go from conceptualizing mixed methods research and giving practical tools and examples of social science research to discussing opinions on the future of fully integrated mixed methods research.

The text is practical for both seasoned evaluators and policy researchers who may be early in their career, although it assumes that readers have a basic knowledge of the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research and does not define concepts nor does it provide basic information about randomization, different types of causal designs, or principles of causal inference. This can be explained by the fact that the main purpose of the book is not to provide a thorough explanation of all of the different approaches and classifications of mixed methods designs but, rather, to build on the work of scholars, applying a policy and program evaluation lens. It is designed to present collective lessons from mixed methods work through examples of projects carried out by the authors.

Burch and Heinrich relate the increasing attention on, and use of, mixed methods approaches to an increased demand for evidence-based data to inform policy and program effectiveness. However, according to the authors, the use of mixed methods still comes with roadblocks and barriers. In many instances, one of the two methods often seems preferable, and the financial implications of using a mixed methods approach may be a deterrent for some organizations. The book seeks to demonstrate that these challenges are surmountable if qualitative and quantitative research teams and processes are more tightly integrated from the very start of a research project or evaluation. It also suggests that qualitative and quantitative skills are distinct and that very few people have expertise in both. As such, the authors have taken particular care to appeal to both qualitative and quantitative researchers and to clearly explain the value of combining the two methods.

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Readers will likely appreciate the fact that the authors seek to provide multiple examples of mixed methods integration through illustrations from particular assignments they have carried out, with a particular focus on cases that appeal more to United States-based evaluators or researchers in the field of education. One example lays out mixed methods work in an international development setting in the context of the South African Child Support Grant program evaluation. Examples cited describe the time required over the years to refine the methods and to develop relevant tools that satisfied both qualitative and quantitative researchers. However, most of the examples provided in the book appear to have been pulled from multi-year programs implemented by rather large teams, and adaptations will most likely be required for smaller-scale projects for adequate mixed methods integration.

The information flows well from one chapter to the next. Even though it may not be necessary to read the entire book or to follow the chapters to understand the contents, it would be advisable to read the book from cover to cover to fully understand the information presented as each chapter logically builds on the previous one. The first chapter describes the value of integrating qualitative and quantitative methods and the demand for evidence-based policy research. The second and third chapters go over the design and implementation of mixed methods research. The fourth chapter provides practical mixed methods integration strategies, while the remaining chapters go over specific examples or illustrations. Finally, the concluding chapter goes over lessons from the field, extracted from the examples presented in the previous chapters.

Chapters and their rationale are summarized in the first few pages of each chapter. The summaries are useful to understand the reasons for highlighting examples or cases and why they were relevant to illustrate specific points. Most chapters also contain discussion questions, and examples of potential applications to the readers' work. While the questions and applications offer an opportunity for the reader to explore opinions on the use of mixed methods, these questions may be more useful in an educational setting rather than for individual evaluators who are seeking very practical additional knowledge and information on the integration of qualitative and quantitative information.

Even though the book does not provide a step-by-step process to using mixed methods—this is not the purpose of the book—it does however, provide tips and guidelines that could prove useful to researchers or program evaluators. For example, it describes how narrative vignettes could be used to put words and images behind number indicators. It also suggests ground rules for implementing a tightly linked qualitative and quantitative impact evaluation design, which could offer a sound basis for research team coordination on an assignment requiring both qualitative and quantitative researchers. Another useful tool provided in the book is an evaluation matrix, which breaks down sub-questions into specific measures, including qualitative and quantitative dimensions.

Overall, this book by Burch and Heinrich offers interesting insights into understanding the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods and the application of mixed methods in real cases. The authors make a strong case to show how mixed methods can improve the effectiveness and efficiencies in policy research or program evaluation. The lessons provided in the book will resonate with researchers, evaluators, and policy makers in search of a more complete approach to research and evaluation.