

Donna Mertens. (2018). *Mixed Methods Design in Evaluation*. Sage. Paperback, 202 pages. (ISBN: 978-1-5063-3065-5)

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and Michelle Searle**

Mixed Methods Design in Evaluation by Donna Mertens is a useful, well-organized book that explores the numerous applications and benefits of mixed methods approaches. In the words of the volume editors, after examining published evaluation examples, Mertens “concludes with prompts that engage the reader in thinking about how mixed methods can improve social inquiry” (p. xiv). Mertens advocates that mixed methods in evaluation “strengthen the credibility of evaluation findings” (p. 3) and that they “have the potential to be responsive in a dynamic way that is reflective of the complexity found in most evaluation contexts” (p. 177). In this book, Mertens emphasizes the integration of mixed methods in evaluation throughout the text and, using numerous examples, demonstrates diverse strategies for situating mixed methods within various evaluation paradigms.

This book was prepared as part of the *Evaluation in Practice* series intended to support students, faculty, and professional evaluators interested in adopting mixed methodologies in complex evaluations. Mertens acknowledges that this book is intended for those who “are knowledgeable about quantitative and qualitative design options” (p. xv) in research but notes that beginners in the field of evaluation may also benefit from the content. A critical objective of the text is “providing the instruction and examples of more sophisticated applications of mixed methods studies in order to more effectively address complex contexts in evaluation” (p. xvi). The text contains seven chapters, each beginning with thought-provoking quotations related to the chapter content. The “Sample Study” sections in each chapter provide the reader with an opportunity to analyze various designs to explore the impact of integrating mixed methodology into the core of the study. Also included in each chapter are reflections on the examples and steps for evaluators to design projects with methodologies similar to those discussed in the examples. The chapters conclude with prompts that invite the reader to extend their thinking and apply their new knowledge in different contexts.

We offer an overview of the text to demonstrate the volume’s breadth of information regarding mixed methods evaluation designs. In the early chapters, Mertens introduces the reader to five philosophies—or branches—of evaluation that underpin major methodological decisions: methods, values, use, social justice, and dialectical pluralism. Chapters two through five provide readers with detail about how mixed methods designs can be used in different types of

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evaluations, including evaluations of interventions, instrument development, policy, and systematic reviews. In chapter six, Mertens focuses on “Variations in Mixed Methods Evaluation Designs” to provide further insight into operationalizing mixed method evaluations that are responsive to populations that include gender diversity, Indigeneity, persons with disabilities, and Deaf persons. Chapter seven extends the mixed methods in evaluation conversation by anticipating the developments, challenges, and types of questions that will become a disciplinary focus as the field evolves. This book provides evaluators with a framework for organizing knowledge about mixed methods, critically appraising existing evaluation work, and ideas to consider when integrating and mixing methods in evaluation practice. Based on the structure, textual features and details offered in each chapter, readers will find value in this book as a resource for understanding the advantages of mixed methods design in evaluation and as a reference for future evaluation planning.

Mertens uses examples effectively throughout the text, drawing attention to the underlying assumptions held by the evaluators and hinting at how these assumptions shaped the project. Mertens shares how her early evaluation learning was, at first, limited to the quantitative sphere of methods, since this was the specialty of her mentors. She observes that since “evaluation is a multidisciplinary profession . . . evaluators come with a legacy of the methodologies dominant in their disciplines” (p. 179). With a seemingly endless supply of evaluation studies (e.g. [Ackerly, 2012](#); [Cram & Phillips, 2012](#); [Daigneault & Jacob, 2014](#); [Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011](#)), Mertens showcases each of the evaluation philosophies or branches in action. The practical examples offered are valuable for novice readers who are developing their understanding and looking to make connections between evaluation theory, methods, and application. Given that the differences between each evaluation philosophy or branch can be subtle and blurry in practice, novice readers may appreciate further exploration and critiques of the logic used to make decisions throughout the evaluations. This inquiry and appraisal may be best accomplished through animated discussions between novice and experienced evaluators “who are willing to take risks and share their experiences” (p. 182). Those reading this text as part of evaluation coursework might consider examining a single example or problem through each of the five branches or philosophies of evaluation. In this respect, *Mixed Methods Design in Evaluation* provides opportunities to prompt meaningful discussions in an instructional setting.

What this book does not provide, as Mertens states in the preface, are descriptions of the types of tools that can be used within mixed methods approaches. Although Mertens indicates that full explanations of research techniques lie outside the scope of this text, the inclusion of an appendix or table of terms, concepts, and methods would be a useful addition in a future edition. A deeper exploration of randomized control trials would have been particularly helpful, since some evaluators may not know what these are or may have a very narrow understanding of their role within an evaluation setting.

Throughout the book, there are opportunities to explore logistical and practical considerations that influence evaluation design decisions, for example, time and budget constraints. Mertens's suggestions are reasonable and remind readers that evaluators must be ready to pivot and troubleshoot their evaluation projects as circumstances evolve and information emerges.

Overall, Mertens has created a useful resource for evaluation learners, instructors, and practitioners. She contextualizes diverse applications of evaluation in different domains while showcasing the versatility of mixed methods approaches. The author's inclusion of the open-ended activities at the end of each chapter provides a great tool to elicit reflection or discussion and can enable readers to imagine evaluation theory in practice. Although beginner evaluators may require supplemental resources to fully engage with the ideas throughout the book, Mertens does an excellent job of creating a rich resource to deepen thinking about mixed methods evaluations.

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