

organisations that provide catalogues and other useful resources; however, it is only useful for US readers.

The appendices provide further helpful information, including a bibliography of print and non-print resources for adults and children, as well as an excellent guide to developmental milestones for children aged from birth to five years.

This excellent and unique manual can be read from cover to cover by anyone wanting a general overview of this subject or can serve as a useful reference for librarians needing information about a specific area. Not every children's librarian will feel comfortable implementing some of the far-reaching programs outlined; however, this manual should raise awareness of the needs of pre-school children with disabilities and give all library staff the confidence to introduce inclusive programs and services for all pre-schoolers.

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Research Methods for Students and Professionals: Information Management and Systems

Kirsty Williamson with Amanda Bow and others
 Topics in Australasian Library and Information Studies, 16
 Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University
 Wagga Wagga
 2000
 342 pp.
 ISBN 0-949060-89-5
 A\$50.00 (softback)

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Teachers of research methods in both library and information science and information systems frequently complain that there are few textbooks specific to research in their fields. In library and information science, only one generic textbook (Powell, 1997) has been published in recent years. The small number of books on information systems research published during the past decade are either method-specific (Lee *et al.*, 1997) or more suitable as guides for students conducting research projects at Honours or higher level rather than for students undertaking a first course in research methods (Cornford and Smithson, 1996). Several of the major works published in the 1980s and early 1990s remain in print and on current text book lists (Busha

and Harter, 1980; Galliers, 1992; McClure and Hemon, 1991; Mumford *et al.*, 1985), confirmation that the information fields are yet to find modern texts to replace their classics.

Paradoxically, the last decade has seen understanding of both research itself and the role of research in professional practice develop significantly. The information professions have acknowledged the value of research conducted by practitioners as well as that of academic researchers. At the same time, there has been wider acceptance of approaches to research, which acknowledge and value the researcher's involvement as an actor or subjective interpreter of observations. We have developed a better understanding of when to gather data intensively from a small number of cases, when to use techniques that allow data to be gathered from a wider group of participants with less depth, and when to combine both intensive and extensive techniques. We are also building a body of research which extends our understanding of the ways in which different methods of systematic enquiry can help both advance the information fields and improve professional practice within them.

While the research environment has become richer, the teaching environment in many universities has become more complex. Several universities, including Charles Sturt University in Australia, the source of this new book, have brought teachers and researchers in both library and information science and information systems into a single administrative unit. The first course in research methods for students in these combined schools is required to address generic research methods for the information professions, as well as those (such as the role of system development in research) which may be specific to the field in which the research is undertaken. This is a difficult undertaking because the research traditions of information systems and library and information science have seldom intersected over the past 30 years, and each field has its own journals, its own methodological history, and its own understanding of what is "good" research.

Faced with incorporating these many changes in their first courses in research methods, many teachers have adopted some of the excellent new works on research methods in the social sciences (particularly those published by Sage) to provide modern coverage, relying on supplementation from the classic works and journal articles to bring research methods in the information

professions to life. Williamson and her colleagues have taken a different approach; they have prepared a book that introduces and summarises modern methods for new researchers (both students and practitioner-researchers) in the information professions.

The book consists primarily of 17 chapters arranged in four sections: introduction to research methods (three chapters), description of the methods themselves (eight chapters), data collection techniques (four chapters), and data analysis and evaluation of published research (two chapters). This arrangement provides an opportunity to distinguish the overall approach to a research study from the techniques used to collect and analyse data, and has the potential to remind researchers that both quantitative and qualitative techniques can (and should) contribute to much research.

In just over 300 pages of text, coverage of a wide range of methods and techniques is an ambitious undertaking. The authors respond by writing clearly and concisely. Unfortunately, this strength is also the major weakness of the book. The chapters are simply too concise. While some (particularly in the introductory section) are so concise that they over-simplify important philosophical foundations of different approaches to research, others (such as the chapter on ethnography) deal well with these foundations but gloss over applications of methods in information research, and others (most notably in the sections on data collection and data analysis techniques) are too short to cover sufficient material accurately. The sparse production style of the book (it has been printed in black-and-white from word-processed copy) limits material primarily to short paragraphs with many dot-points and a relatively small number of boxed examples and illustrations.

The authors of this book are experienced and well-regarded teachers and researchers. Nonetheless, this work is not the new text that teachers are seeking, and I would not recommend its use by students or practitioner-researchers without the guidance of an experienced researcher. It will, however, be a good source book for experienced teachers of research methods in library and information science. The lists of readings and references serve as prompts to the more important generic works on research methods, and the chapters written from an information systems perspective introduce important research literature from a related field. The topics

covered are relevant and the structure in which they are brought together is most valuable.

On reflection, it seems that the range of potential research methods and techniques has widened so far that it is time to reconsider how we introduce research methods to new researchers. All researchers (and readers of research) need to know that researchers select methods that fit the historical tradition of the field, the philosophical stance of the researcher, the research problem, and available resources – but once students understand this, is it realistic to try to develop understanding and skills across the full range of methods and technologies? Furthermore, does it really make sense to combine introductions to research for practitioner-researchers with those for scholarly researchers (or do we talk about practitioner research at universities only because we are trying to interest students in courses that have lost their vitality as they try to cover too much ground)? Practitioner-researchers may get most value from short training courses supported by texts which describe a specific approach or technique in depth. At universities, teachers should concentrate on developing informed researchers who know of (and fully appreciate) the range of approaches to research, who know when and how to select a suitable approach to fit a new research situation, but who are experts only in those methods and technologies in which the school has particular strengths (these might, of course, include research in professional practice). Such courses would be well-supported by a good generic text on social science research, supplemented perhaps by a method-specific text, but most importantly by reading from the best research literature of the field.

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Practical Strategies for Library Managers

Joan Giesecke

American Library Association

Chicago

2001

144 pp.

ISBN 0-8389-0793-8

\$US32.00, paperback

Keywords Libraries, Management techniques, Career development

Individuals moving up to “middle management” in our field have to look long and hard to find material that will assist them during the early days of their new management responsibilities. The vast majority of our professional management literature is directed to either beginners or senior managers. This slim volume, 103 pages counting the index and author biography page, will provide a starting point for individuals seeking guidance as they move upward in management. Although the focus is clearly US practice and operating environments, it is sufficiently general that readers in other countries will find some useful information. The style is informal and easy to read, making the volume a very quick read.

The overall tone of the volume is set in the opening lines of chapter two, The changing environment for middle managers, where the author asks, “Why don’t the tried and true rules of management work anymore?” (p. 7). Her essential position is that very little of what one knows or thought one knew about management is not valid any longer. That position seems a little extreme for a volume that does not have space to go into depth on any topic and make clear why the author’s view is correct.

This reviewer also found the following troubling given the book’s length. The author is writing about leadership in the USA. “In this

environment, people are retreating into their electronic worlds . . . and losing any sense of community. People are not trying to make society better nor is society interested in doing better. . . . At work, we want to know what the institution will do for us. We are less interested in what we can be doing to advance the overall goals of the institution” (p. 10). Such sweeping generalisations, without supporting evidence, may leave the reader a little sceptical about other generalisations in the volume.

The text is divided into ten short chapters; On becoming a manager, The changing environment of middle managers, New roles for middle managers, Taking charge of your department, Mentoring and managing professionals, Planning skills, Decision making skills, Communication skills, Structuring your department: From bureaucracies to teams, and Putting it all together. Given the opening two chapters’ emphasis on the need for doing things differently – “New managers also need to understand that tried and true management theories of the past will not be effective today” (p. 1) – one might expect later chapters addressing basic management activities would reflect little of “the past.” However, many of the old theories are revisited, sometimes with a slight modification and sometimes they stand alone.

The above somewhat critical comments are not to suggest the book lacks value. It can be a good starting point for someone just moving into a middle management position. To be successful one would need to review some of the references cited in the chapters as well as spend some time reviewing the current management literature in journals.

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Training Skills for Information and Library Staff

Barbara Allan

Library Association Publishing

London

2000

224 pp.

ISBN 1-85604-372-X

£34.95, paperback

Keywords Libraries, Training techniques, Employees

It is not often that a book on training activities makes me laugh out loud. This volume