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Book Reviews

Research Methods in Information (2nd edition)

Alison Jane Pickard

Facet (2013)

Review by Alan Bullimore

This recently republished volume is a valuable and timely addition to what the author refers to as the research methods journey. Information professionals like the writer are of course experts in this field. However, this may be a Greek gift for them. Habits learnt a while ago require constant updating as technology advances. This is unlikely to be the final edition. The research journey is one undertaken without the aid of a SatNav to predict future developments in research strategy, or an estimated time of arrival.

The author's use of the first person throughout the text helps to give a friendly feel whilst introducing some complicated concepts. The nine page glossary helped to clarify some of the terms used, although inevitably some of the definitions only caused me further confusion. Although I now know that hermeneutics concerns dualistic cognitive theory I am not confident that I understand the concept any better.

The practical exercises included in the book at the end of each chapter (and the associated pencil icon) are a useful tool to help the reader think about the concepts introduced in previous pages. I found myself re-reading some of the book as if revising for an exam. In terms of digesting material this proved to be helpful, particularly when instructed, as in one case, that this overview should take up no more than two sides of A4.

Twenty four chapters on a variety of subjects means that each chapter is of a digestible length, providing an overview of the topic without going into the level of detail which would bamboozle the lay reader. This is particularly the case with the chapter on quantitative analysis. I could not claim to understand frequency polygons after reading these pages, but might at least recognise one in a student dissertation. I would also have a much better idea about when it would be appropriate to use one, and be aware of sources of further information.

The book includes over 50 references from 2007 onwards (the date of the original edition). I wrongly imagined that these would be largely about advances in information technology. Although this was sometimes the case there are also citations to several new overview texts about research methods being published, and a pleasing number of articles about research ethics, which appears to be a hot topic in academia currently. The reference list also reinforces the range of academic disciplines covered in the book, from nursing to computer sciences, Latino Street gangs and all points in-between.

Threshold Concepts: From Personal Practice to Communities of Practice
Catherine O'Mahony, Avril Buchanan, Mary O'Rourke & Bettie Higgs (eds.)

The Irish National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (2014)
Review by Eve Rapley

The January 2014 NAIRTL (National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning) Threshold Concepts conference papers provide both breadth and depth, capturing and articulating both the essence and substance of Threshold Concepts. The span of papers ensures that both the largely uninitiated, and those with more knowledge and interest in this area of higher education pedagogy, are equally catered for. With a range of academic disciplines from geology, history, art, mathematics and engineering in which to contextualise underlying concepts, the papers and vignettes successfully tread the path between inaccessible and esoteric theory, and an atheoretical 'dummies guide' approach.

In addition to the breadth of disciplines featured, papers focus on undergraduate, postgraduate and international students and cases, as well as those from our own shores and those further afield. With a spectrum of methodological diversity from the 'tried and tested', to those championing the evolutionary nature of Threshold Concepts, the proceedings present a veritable smorgasbord of approaches and angles. Sensibly put together into five clearly orientated sections, the proceedings are logically ordered, with each paper being short, yet, on the whole, packing a punch. It is perhaps this snappy writing approach which makes the collection so entirely readable and worth any HE teacher taking a look at.

As an HE teacher, I am well acquainted with the difficulties oft cited and experienced by students as they grapple, often with difficulty, with the notion of moving towards and through liminal spaces; spaces where students encounter 'troublesome knowledge' and find themselves unable to move beyond it; a 'stuck place'. I have seen firsthand, genuine discomfort and confusion from students as they begin to face the