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BOOK REVIEW

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Development Field Work: A Practical Guide

Regina Scheyvens (editor)

Second Edition, February 2014, published by Sage Publications Ltd, London, UK. 312 pages. Hardcover: ISBN 9781446254769, price $130, £85. Paperback: ISBN 9781446254776, price $50, £27.95. E-book: ISBN 9781446297452, price $57, £34.

There have been several texts on issues related to development as the world strives to generate and apply knowledge on development. The quest for development in all spheres of human life has led to several approaches, techniques and practitioners in a seeming maze that is yet to deliver the desired development or at best serendipitous results on development efforts. A major step out of this jungle of practices and attempts is this delivery of a practical approach and learning from practitioners' experiences, albeit not a one-cap-fits-all prescription. The focus on the methodology of implementing all forms of development research both in philosophical and practical terms is very intriguing and educative.

The book is organised into four parts with 13 chapters. The introductory chapter preceding the 13 chapters describes 'the field' as a socio-political and/or geographical site where a researcher spends time collecting data to gain a deeper understanding of development issues. It establishes the fact that where researchers are well-prepared for 'the field' and sensitive to the local context and culture, development fieldwork can be a valuable experience for both the researcher and their research participants. It emphasises that to prepare well for development fieldwork the researcher must give due consideration to practical, methodological and ethical issues.

Part One, described as 'Methodology' consists of Chapters 2, Designing Development Research; 3, Quantitative Research; 4, Qualitative Research and 5, Something Old, Something New: Research Using Archives, Texts and Virtual Data. This section states that philosophical issues are important in research design, particularly matters relating to world- views and epistemology; development researchers should therefore interrogate their starting points and reflect on these issues throughout their research. Good research design helps put in place important fixed elements for research, mainly a clear focus, direction and research question. However, in practice this clear vision and rigid framework need to be balanced by flexibility during the research process to respond to unforeseen obstacles and new opportunities. This section on methods states that quantitative data analysis is usually best used in conjunction with some qualitative techniques when conducting social science research in developing countries, and that no matter the level of sophistication of methods of analysis and complexity of statistical techniques, the results will be worthless if the raw data is flawed. The highlights of the Part include the fact that qualitative approaches typically seek depth rather than breadth of understanding; that co-construction of knowledge, positionality, reflexivity and the relationships between the researchers and researched are critical to qualitative research; and that participatory methods increasingly see communities involved in the co-construction of knowledge and the research process. The discourse on Something Old, Something New: Research Using Archives, Texts and Virtual Data emphasises that archival and internet-based research can be seen as both an extension of the traditional fieldwork and as a field location of themselves, which is as political and as much a part of the 'social terrain' (with all pertaining power inequalities) as the traditional field site and that gatekeepers are of particular importance to archival and virtual research. Identifying the best person to give access to a locked storeroom or private online forum, and approaching them appropriately, can make or break a research project.

Part Two, depicted as 'Preparation for the Field' comprises Chapters 6, Practical Issues; and 7, Personal Issues. The highlights of Chapter 6 include choice of location and timing of fieldwork by weighing up academic enquiry and methodology with practical, health and safety issues as well as ethical considerations, especially when planning on using visual methods, such as photography or filming. Chapter 7 considers the ethical implications with cultural and personal circumstances, as well as issues of representation and context, to avoid possible harm. It is important to note that desirable personal traits for those conducting fieldwork in developing countries include empathy, tolerance, patience, open-mindedness, courtesy, discretion and a willingness to learn.

Part 3, titled 'In the Field', consists of Chapters 8, Entering the Field; 9, Ethical Issues; and 10, Working with Marginalised, Vulnerable or Privileged Groups. Here the book claims not to be a guide as such but a description of practical steps based on experiences of the writers to educate fellow development researchers that culture shock is common amongst fieldworkers, both those going into new environments and those returning to do research at home. This is a normal reaction, and plans to cope with it include time out, contact with loved ones and keeping a personal diary; and since the notion of 'appropriate behaviour' is complex and culturally constructed, a polite, friendly demeanour and careful thought to off-duty and online behaviour will go a long way towards smoothing the fieldwork experience. The 'gold standard' for researchers is full language skills but this is unrealistic for many researchers. It is, however, both respectful and advantageous to learn some of the local vernacular, and to choose an interpreter who speaks the local language as their first language as the researchers strive to ensure that the research process ensures participants' dignity, privacy and safety, and 'gives back' to them in some ways– 'ethics from the bottom up'. Development researchers need to be self-aware and reflexive, especially when working across ethnic, language, class, age and gender lines. Ethical issues often arise due to the potential for misunderstanding in cross-cultural contexts, and the

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unequal power relations between the researcher and many participants as ethical issues are brought to the fore in research with children, the poor, women and ethnic minorities. Thorough research planning is needed to ensure rewarding experiences for both researcher and participants, with marginalised groups treated as active subjects rather than passive objects of the research.

Part Four, titled 'Leaving the Field', consists of Chapters 11, Anything to Declare? The Politics and Practicalities of Leaving the Field; and 12, Returning to University and Writing the Field. Here the book points out that the experiences of leaving are interwoven with all other phases of research, which have pragmatic, emotional and ethical dimensions that influence field experiences and can generate helpful insights for writing. There is therefore the need to develop appropriate leaving strategies for different relationships and cultural contexts–important to meet ethical responsibilities to participants, others in the field site and to future researchers. This will help development researchers to engage with the ethics and politics of how they choose to represent participants and connect personal experiences with wider social issues while paying attention to questions of positionality and reflexivity. Chapter 13, 'Ways Forward' concludes the book with an exploration of the possibilities of the future of development research.

The writers through the 'gift of the gab' and brilliant advocacy in the temple of development have forged useful approaches in the furnace of practical experiences for the benefit of new, upcoming, emerging and established development researchers.

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