

## Reflections on Practitioner Research: A Practical Guide for Information Professionals, edited by Lee Ann Fullington, Brandon K. West, and Frans Albarillo

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## Book Review: *Reflections on Practitioner Research: A Practical Guide for Information Professionals*

Fullington, Lee Ann, Brandon K. West, and Frans Albarillo, eds. *Reflections on Practitioner Research: A Practical Guide for Information Professionals*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2020, 304pp. \$78.00 USD.

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I would describe myself as a middle-career researcher—I’ve been involved in both group and solo research projects that varied in scope and I’ve written a handful of research protocols for institutional research boards (IRB). Not only do I wish *Reflections on Practitioner Research: A Practical Guide for Information Professionals* had been published sooner, so I could have avoided some missteps, but I am also thankful that it exists now and can help me reflect and grow for future research projects.

There are three words in the book’s title that provide a fitting description of what to expect: reflections, practical, and guide. Divided into three sections—Research Process, Research Methods, and Relationships—this book is not a how-to or step-by-step guide on how to conduct research. Rather, as the editors outline in the introduction, this book “attempts to capture the actual experience of doing research and the lessons that can be gained from that experience” (xi). Each chapter is a unique narrative with practitioner-researcher authors explaining their thought process and providing a reflection at the end as a summary of their research experience. The common thread throughout is the focus on research that was conducted in a library or information setting.

Although I read the 25 chapters sequentially, this is not what the editors recommend. They suggest that readers scan the titles and delve into the areas that interest them or that may pertain to their own research project. The titles provide enough description to determine this. Readers will need to review the introductory

paragraphs to discover the library sector (e.g., academic, public, special) where the research was conducted.

The chapters are written in first person, which provides an informal and refreshing tone that is usually missing from research project papers or presentations. This is intentional; as the editors say, they wanted the chapters to feel like “a conversation with a colleague” (xi). It succeeds. As the focus is more on the reflection of the research process, and not the research itself, there may not be results or a final product to reference (in some cases the research is forthcoming). However, that does not detract from getting some useful perspectives and tips from the researchers.

The first section, on research process, is a great gateway for the novice researcher to learn more about selecting and scaling up (or down) a research topic, as well as tips on the IRB process. Chapter 3, “Figuring Out a Research Focus,” offers simple but helpful reflections and advice that all researchers need to hear, like blocking off sufficient time in one’s schedule and selecting a space where you can focus on your research and writing. The author, Jessica Perkins Smith, ends with thoughtful advice for librarians new to research “to not think of your research as static; it will continue to evolve as you delve into your career and discover new opportunities” (27).

A stand-out chapter in this section is “Advancing a Controversial Research Agenda” (chapter 5), where Jill Barr-Walker outlines the experience of conducting research related to sexual harassment within the workplace. How to get buy-in from administrators, who may not like the findings? What are the legal implications and how can anonymity be maintained? This chapter reassures practitioner-researchers that seeking out the uncomfortable truths others may avoid discussing or researching, such as those related to sexism or racism in the library workplace, provides “an opportunity to eliminate stigma and begin conversations around issues that were previously unaddressed” (45).

Section 2 focuses on research methods, with chapters on a variety of tools including surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, mixed-methods research, and systematic reviews. Again, do not expect a how-to guide—there are recommended readings at the end of the book that outline where those looking to use a particular research method can learn more. It is helpful to read why researchers selected the method they did and what issues they experienced along the way related to design, timelines, or analysis.

In the third and final section, focusing on relationships, a number of collaborations and research connections are outlined. In many cases, large research projects require partnerships or a team. Chapters 23 and 24, which focus on partnerships with faculty and across institutions, respectively, are important, as

they provide perspective on how to connect with team members outside one's library. Common goals and interests, as well as logistical concerns (How can everyone access data? How many IRB applications are needed?) are important points to discuss at the beginning of such partnerships.

Salient advice is offered up chapter after chapter: pilot your surveys, plan out how to share your data in a collaborative project, and seek expertise along the way. Although seasoned researchers may be aware of these points, those just embarking on their first research project will benefit from hearing these tips repeated.

There are some superfluous charts and graphics in chapters that do not translate well onto the page, as they are too small to decipher. However, it is useful to see researchers' project timelines and processes, where included (for example, the figures in chapters 13 and 25), for how projects are divided up. Including more figures when mentioned, such as timelines or Gantt charts, would be helpful for outlining research processes and workflows, and it would be particularly useful for novice researchers to see a visual representation of how to plan a project.

Overall, this book provides an informative and insightful overview of the research process from a personal point of view. It is highly recommended for library practitioner-researchers beginning their first research project but may also be of interest to those already familiar with the research process and curious about others' experiences and points of view.