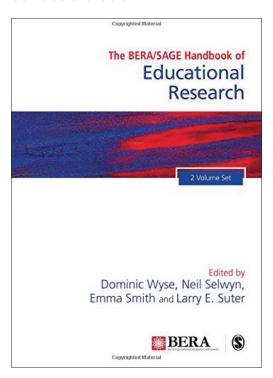# Book review

Charlotte Vidal-Hall* – *UCL Institute of Education, UK*
Richard Race – *Roehampton University, UK*

The BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research (vols 1–2), edited by Dominic Wyse, Neil Selwyn, Emma Smith and Larry E. Suter

In the final line of their introduction to the *BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research* the editors attest to wanting their account of educational research to be 'compelling, thought provoking and practically useful'. More than half a century since educational studies emerged as a distinctive field in the Western world (Menter, 2017), Wyse *et al.* have put together a collection that guides readers through all stages of the research process, from why do educational research, to disseminating its findings. This two-volume collection of 51 peer-reviewed chapters contains an impressive list of international researchers who offer methodological support to those engaged in educational research whatever their experience. The contributors have knowledge of the field's diversity as well as its specialities, and collectively they establish education as a discipline within its own right and with its own methods and methodologies. Wyse *et al.* aim to provide an overview of the methodological issues relevant to different educational research methods and approaches *and* practical guidance on how to use

them. The two volumes give researchers an in-depth analysis and discussion of the philosophy and theory of educational research woven in with real examples.

Although relevant to those at any stage of their career, this Handbook will be of particular value to new and emerging researchers, including doctoral students. As a student in the final stages of doctoral thesis writing, one of us found the combination of theory and practice backed up by real world examples pertinent to each stage of their research. Reading this Handbook, the reader begins to appreciate how educational research has developed as a discipline historically, academically and practically. The household names writing many of the chapters highlight the depth and diversity of educational research and address the debates that make educational research a vibrant and challenging field to be working in. This differentiates it from methodology text books familiar to most PhD students. The Handbook bridges the gap between social science methodology textbooks and specialist volumes focused on one methodological approach or method. It is the focus on education and the bringing together of ways of conducting educational research that marks these volumes out from books such as *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) and *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods* (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2003).

Each time we opened one of these two volumes we found something that challenged our thinking and added depth to our writing. Consequently, references from these two volumes found their way into several chapters of the doctoral thesis. As a qualified teacher and, more recently, a researcher with Ofsted, one of us was drawn first and foremost to the final section of the two volumes titled 'Reporting, Disseminating and Evaluating'. Chapters 46 to 51 in this section address the gap between research findings and getting the message across to the end-user whether practitioners or policymakers. End user engagement with research is addressed in the final chapter of this section, in which Brown engages with the debate about research-informed policy and the challenges in linking research to practice. More than 20 years ago, Hargreaves (1996) noted the weak link between educational research and practice. Brown returns to this debate with a renewed call for academics engaged in research to make their knowledge accessible to teachers, and he details how organizations such as the Education Endowment Fund are beginning to make this happen. Engagement with practitioners, and their role in educational research, is an important theme that threads its way through several chapters in this Handbook. In Chapter 27, Hardman and Hardman conclude that teachers should be seen as participants in research through their involvement in the analysis of classroom observation data. This theme is picked up by Rickinson (Chapter 48), who argues that teachers should be involved in discussing emerging findings of research and their implications for practice. In Chapter 28, Berry and Taylor draw on their personal experience of conducting practitioner research to further the debate on teacher-led research and the ways in which practitioners can contribute to evidence-informed practice and not just be its end users. The active involvement of practitioners at all stages of the research process is an important consideration for those new to educational research, given the increased focus on evidence-informed practice and the move towards teachers and schools being producers of knowledge.

Researchers who have wrestled with the seemingly straightforward process of writing research questions that adequately describe a research project in fewer than a dozen or so words will appreciate what White (Chapter 8) has to say in a chapter devoted to research questions. In keeping with the depth of knowledge the Handbook draws on, and its desire to provoke debate, White asks whether research should be

led by methods or questions, and questions how much research is led by a preference for a particular method of data collection or analysis. This challenges researchers to question their own use of questions versus methods in their research design. This kind of thought-provoking debate, which challenged our own thinking on several issues, is present throughout the Handbook. The authors' ability to pose questions and challenge researchers to address them is invaluable to new researchers who may not yet have come across these debates in what is a fast-growing field.

Wyse *et al.* also address more recent innovations in educational research with chapters exploring pragmatism in mixed methods research (Chapter 12) and research in digital environments (Chapter 25). However, there is no mention of some of the methodological challenges facing researchers and the innovations that have been developed in response to some of these challenges. Innovation is needed to answer new research questions and generate new forms of data and analysis in the face of rapid change. Such challenges include keeping up with and exploiting technology, creative methods and arts-based research, collaborative research with partners beyond academia and interdisciplinary research (Crow, 2013). These are all areas of innovation that address the future direction of educational research and the research chapters yet to be written.

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