*Key issues for education researchers* is part of a series, ‘Key issues in education studies’, published by Sage Publications. The core text in the series, *Introduction to education studies* (Bartlett and Burton 2007) is written by the same authors so as a result the two books complement each other. This book is explicitly aimed at students of education studies and related subjects, those who as part of their professional development are returning to the study of education and students who are embarking on masters level research. All these students need to be able to critically evaluate and make use of research in their field of study so understanding how such research is conducted and the limitations of various types of data is vital.

The book proceeds in a logical order, starting with a simple and clear consideration of the nature and purpose of research. Then there is a short, but effective, examination of action research that moves on to a consideration of practitioner research in the British school system. This chapter follows a standard layout used in the rest of the book with an introductory summary paragraph, a number of boxes giving a ‘student activity’ distributed throughout the main body of the text and ends with a concluding paragraph. Finally, the authors present some recommended reading accompanied by a brief explanation of why those items are worth reading. For a book that will be used by students, I think this approach works well. Research paradigms and social perspectives are next considered, with a brief introduction to ontology, epistemology, the positivist and interpretivist paradigms and ethnography before a discussion of reliability, validity and triangulation. Although these are substantial topics, the authors deal with them appropriately for an introductory text and the use of an extended case study of a research practitioner helps bring these ideas into focus. Case studies are again used well in the subsequent chapter to illustrate the practical application of ethical concerns. Next, there is a chapter dedicated to ‘Getting started: Beginning a research project’, which I think works very well as there are explicit examples of the design process for research projects on ‘Student transition into higher education’ and ‘Pupil truancy’ with examples of a data collection plan and a research timeline. This chapter is followed by one on accessing and using literature, which discusses the purposes of a literature review, how to critique research studies, types of sources and how to write a literature review. Given the limited space available, the authors have provided an excellent overview that will be very useful to students who have not tackled such issues before.

Next we move on to chapters covering case studies (with three examples of case studies examined), experiments, questionnaires, interviews, observation and an informative chapter on research biographies and logs. These are very strong, although I think restricting the discussion of the experimental approach to just one page is an opportunity missed as the strengths of such an approach are consequently overlooked. Examples (such as transcript codes, an extract from an interview transcript and a student teacher weekly reflective log) are used to bring the other methods to life and I think students will find these very helpful in understanding how they might apply these methods. Indeed, the chapter on the use of existing documents has one example – the report of a pupil from a primary school in a town in the West Midlands in 2003 – that spans almost seven pages. The final chapter is on writing up and refers back to relevant chapters to help students in this task. Finally, there is an extensive bibliography detailing appropriate reading that more advanced students will find very useful to identify their further reading.

Overall, the book is a success and a remarkable achievement for what is a relatively short introductory text. However, students will have to ensure that they take advantage of the further reading to ensure that they fully understand the relevant issues in education research. *Causation in educational research* is a contrast to *Key issues for education researchers* with engagement with philosophical theory and more advanced research designs. In the preface, Morrison states that:

*… this book provides an introduction to causation, sets out key debates, and, above all, seeks to raise practical and theoretical matters, problems and their solutions in understanding causation. It is strongly practical in intent. If it makes researchers cautious of having any sense of certainty at all about causation, then this small volume will have done its work.*

Morrison achieves these aims with a book that focuses on the practical while still engaging with the theoretical. After a brief introductory chapter of four and a half pages, there are five substantive chapters: ‘Tools for understanding causation’, ‘Probabilistic causation’, ‘Approaching cause and effect’, ‘Determining the effects of causes’ and ‘Determining causes from effects’. The final chapter provides an overview of the argument in the book together with prospects and challenges under the heading ‘Causation: Effective, inconsequential or a lost cause?’ The first of these five chapters, ‘Tools for understanding causation’, makes use of the work of philosophers such as Hume, Mill and Russell as well as worked examples and a number of clear figures to help the reader better understand the issues relating to causation. A particularly nice, and effective, touch is that each section in these chapters is followed by a box listing ‘Implications for researchers’.

The next chapter on ‘Probabilistic causation’ begins with a worked example of small class teaching before exploring various aspects of probability. This chapter includes seven examples exploring the use of control and two other examples on qualitative and ethnographic research. With such a great deal of content it is no surprise that the chapter is almost 80 pages long, but this length is not a problem. Instead, the chapter provides a coherent body of work that will tax some readers but will help them to understand the issues if they persevere with it. The chapter on ‘Approaching cause and effect’ explains the stages in identifying causation with good use of worked examples and a particularly strong section that looks at alternative explanations of results. The subsequent chapter on ‘Determining the effects of causes’ provides the detail that is missing from the previous book in this review with an extensive consideration of experimental methods as well as a few pages on action research. The last of the five substantive chapters, ‘Determining causes from effects’, focuses on case studies and detailed examples with the emphasis on the role of intervention.

Morrison deserves a great deal of praise for this book as he has attempted to produce an intellectually demanding text that rewards the careful student; fortunately, he has succeeded. In a very practical book, he has managed to introduce some complicated philosophical concepts and ensured that their relevance is clear to the reader. I would hope that students who have mastered Burton and Bartlett’s text would find Morrison’s book to be the next step in their development as critical researchers in education. I also hope that more established academics will take the time to work through Morrison’s book. Doing so will enable them to reflect on their practice through the lens of causation to understand how they might improve as researchers.

**Reference**

Bartlett, S., and D. Burton. 2007. *Introduction to education studies.* 2nd ed. London: Sage.