

Book Review

Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators, Fourth Edition

Craig A. Mertler

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Although action research has become one of the major methods employed in educational research, there has always been a scarcity of solid informational textbooks and journal articles outlining and giving in-depth information about this trendy research methodology. However, it is a well-accepted research methodology and has become one of the most critical research approaches that can be used by educators in order to improve their knowledge and practices (Tekin & Kotaman, 2013). Therefore, it is considered a method of inquiry especially suitable for practicing teachers.

Today's teachers are not only expected to teach students but also to act in many areas related to education. They are burdened with many responsibilities such as administrative tasks, advocacy for children, and fundraising. Beyond these duties, teachers have been increasingly seen as researchers as they are expected to constantly improve their teaching practices for the benefit of children's education. Therefore, action research provides them with a methodology they can use while they are working on their regular duties as it is a practical approach conducted with a focus on the teaching and learning process. They can blend research and practice since the researchers draw their findings and conclusions predominantly on their own experiences and observations from their practices. As the author states, "A main focus of action research is the improvement of classroom practice" (p. 23). Therefore, this research experience can contribute to teachers' own and other teachers' practices when they design and revise curriculum. It can also help them make the whole educational process more meaningful for themselves, students, and the school community. The author also identifies clear pathways that have the potential to improve teachers' practices, such as systematic reflections about how teachers would improve their practices with action research methodology. Any research approach excluding the related practitioners' perspectives and contributions should not be seen as a complete process since it is the practitioners who are expected to apply the implications and suggestions drawn by the studies. Action research methodology provides these opportunities and fills a huge gap that needs attention in educational research.

To benefit from this experiential methodology, teachers should understand the action research approach. Action research books currently on the market contain too much theoretical information and have a philosophical background, which makes it hard for a practicing teacher to understand. They also provide too few meaningful examples. Most books about action research also suffer from a lack of good quality organization, which can make curious future

researchers confused.

However, Craig Mertler provides solid and in-depth information about the action research method. In his nine-chapter book, he is able to deliver his knowledge and experience on action research in a very comprehensive, practical, and simple manner. This book shares every detail that an action researcher needs to conduct a study. The most apparent advantage of this book is that he provides step-by-step information about action research, that is, from planning a project with an action research methodology to writing and submitting the report. Mertler's work can also be used as a valuable resource for different groups of people interested in action research. Thus, its audience is not only limited to teachers. College of education students, faculty members, independent researchers, administrators, and even policy makers can use this book as a guide for their research studies or as a textbook for their courses.

The present book does not include any technical complexity. Any interested person can easily follow the book until the end and make use of it. It is composed of four parts. In the first part, *What Is Action Research?*, Mertler introduces action research and provides an overview of the action research process. In the second part, *How Do I Begin My Action Research Study?*, Mertler gives detailed information about planning for action research and developing a research plan. The third part, *What Do I Do with All these Data?*, addresses the collection and analysis of data. Lastly, the fourth part, *I've Got Results! ... Now What?*, contains the chapters "Next Steps and Future Cycles: Developing an Action Plan," "Writing an Action Research Report," and "Sharing and Reflecting." Definitions are made clear, and tables and figures make the information easy to understand. The potentially confusing points that researchers can encounter during the action research journey, such as identification of appropriate research questions associated with their topics, are also considered and addressed very well by Mertler's work as he provides representative examples with tables. While focusing on the practical part of action research, its theoretical background is also addressed and explained to deliver the rationale behind action research, which is critical to act on a more solid ground. This characteristic is embedded in all sections throughout the book. For instance, Mertler is able to deliver the reasons for communicating the results of action research by explaining the advantages of teachers' "voices" in their practices that would allow other educators to see. Furthermore, the organization of the book is simple, useful, and logical in sequence. It simply follows the steps of researching a topic with an action research methodology, from brainstorming possible research topics to sharing the report.

The action research portraits, in which related parts of two action research studies from beginning to end are highlighted; checklists, and summaries in the book's chapters make the information more organized and provide readers clear, meaningful, and practical opportunities to connect what they read and learn to what they already know and more importantly, to their experiences. Mertler also supports the information he provides in the book with his own useful web sites. Anyone who wants to learn about and conduct research with an action research method would not face any difficulty about how to do it provided that this book is followed and used as a guide. Examples of forms and letters that a researcher would need to prepare before conducting the actual research are also made available, and that would help graduate students and junior faculty researchers planning to use the action research as a methodology in their dissertations and other investigations. Another unique part of this book is that the glossary section clarifies action research related jargon.

To conclude, Mertler provides a very thorough book for teachers, faculty researchers, graduate students, college of education students, policy makers, and independent researchers.

The book might be used as a complete guide to conduct research with an action research method from the first to last step of the inquiry. Mertler delivers almost everything one needs to know about action research in this piece of academic work, which can be seen as the outcome of his expertise in the field.

Reference

Tekin, A. K., & Kotaman, H. (2013). The epistemological perspectives on action research. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 3, 81–97. doi: 10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n1p81

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