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McLean, J.E. (1995). *Improving education through action research: A guide for administrators and teachers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 72 pp., softcover.

This book is one of The Practicing Administrator's Leadership Series, edited by J.J. Herman and J.L. Herman. The book and series titles, plus the editors' comments in the foreword, make it clear that the book is meant as a handbook for practicing teachers and administrators. In fact, the editors state, "here is the handbook that will demystify the research process and allow teachers and administrators to improve their teaching, schools, and school districts by using an action research approach" (p. vii). Although the author and editors have altruistic motives, the book does little to guide educators or promote action research.

This book presents a very narrow view of action research yet it implies that it provides *the* way to conduct such research. McLean suggests that action research consists of three phases: conceptualization, implementation, and interpretation. He emphasizes that this sequence cannot be altered and gives the impression that the process depends primarily upon statistical analyses of quantifiable data. This is a misrepresentation of action research and, even if it were accurate, the author fails to mention most of the limitations usually included in discussions of statistical analyses. For example, the effects of small sample sizes are not sufficiently noted even when one example used in the book demonstrates support for important curricular decisions made on the basis of comparisons between the scores of a group of 14 students and the scores of a group of 15 students. Furthermore, according to McLean, the primary new skill educators need in order to implement his model is "the ability to compare the performance levels of groups of students" (p. 7).

This claim ignores the ongoing debate of the value of comparing students and assumes, perhaps incorrectly and unreasonably, that most educators possess a relatively sophisticated knowledge of statistics.

The unfortunate image of teacher-as-factory-worker emerges on page one when McLean suggests that the role of workers in the Japanese car industry is comparable to that of teachers and principals in the development of instructional processes. McLean justifies this claim by saying that John Dewey believed that teachers are the best source of information about improved teaching. However, the book made virtually no reference to action research methodologies that would permit teachers' perceptions or observations to affect instructional improvement directly unless those views can be quantified in some way. Furthermore, any knowledge that students and parents might have that could promote instructional improvement was given little attention by the author. In fact, there is little credence given to the value of involving individuals outside of the school in action research except when, for example, McLean suggests that study results "can be used to solicit the support of parents, school boards, and the general public" (p. 3), which is far removed from active and collaborative involvement in action research by members of these groups. Despite these significant oversights, however, the author states that the results of action research can be improved instruction, teacher involvement, professional development, site adaptation of programs, and better student achievement, all excellent reasons for undertaking school-based action research. Moreover, Mclean makes the inarguable claim that action research should be based on a willingness to examine, critically, traditional educational practices.

A major limitation of this book is its reliance upon a specific statistical software package, MYSTAT. Not quite half of the main body of the book is dedicated to a discussion of how to enter numerical data into MYSTAT, what buttons to click with a computer mouse, how to interpret the results of several examples, and what basic statistical terms mean. Many readers interested in statistical software packages will lose interest quickly once they observe how the utility of so much of the book depends upon the use of MYSTAT.

The author fails to develop adequately, key concepts such as validity in action research and ethical considerations. He makes the overstatement that "the validity of action research is also dependent on following appropriate procedures such as those presented in this book" (p. 45). However, it can be argued that action research which depends so heavily upon a quantitative approach is itself invalid and that failure to triangulate by drawing upon a wide variety of qualitative research models

produces results that are of little use for decision-making purposes. Furthermore, McLean's discussion of the ethical considerations in action research consist primarily of the recommendations to "do no harm" and, if action research is contemplated in large school systems, to check to see if formal permission is required. Little or no attention was given to the issues of informed consent, confidentiality, or dissemination of results.

In summary, the author appears to have based the book on several assumptions:

- Problem solving is a straightforward, sequential process;
- All important knowledge can be quantified;
- There is no major collaborative role for students and parents in action research;
- There is little room for action research to draw upon what is known about ethnography, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, or narrative inquiry;
- Statistical comparisons of small samples can be made legitimately; and,
- Educators should rely upon MYSTAT, or at least a similar software program, when conducting statistical analyses of data.

Near the end of the book the author states that "action research is the most valid process for determining what works best in a particular situation" (p. 65). Even if readers are to assume that this statement is true, and it clearly begs clarification and qualification, this book presents action research in a narrow, overly rigid manner. Unfortunately, the book is not one that should be recommended to readers interested in expanding their understanding of action research.

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Wertsch, J.V., del Rio, P., & Alvarez, A. (Eds.). (1995). *Sociocultural studies of mind*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 252 pp., softcover.

Edited collections of conference presentations are often frustratingly heterogeneous and, at first sight, the present volume is no exception. Originating in papers presented at the First International Conference for Sociocultural Research, held in Madrid in 1992, the nine chapters that,