

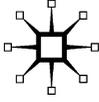
Action Research Methods

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Plain and Simple

Edited by
Sheri R. Klein

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ACTION RESEARCH METHODS

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Preface

Action Research Methods: Plain and Simple provides a balanced overview of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and methods for conducting action research within a variety of educational environments and community-based settings. The breadth and range of chapter topics, from program evaluation to social justice action research, speaks to the diverse approaches that are available to action researchers. The overarching aim for this text is to address the complexities inherent in action research in terms as plain and simple as possible, while not oversimplifying.

The cover image, *Moments and Minutes and Hours and Days and Months and Years* (2007) by artist Elizabeth Knowles, depicts a space defined by layers, and varying lines and shapes, that converge and overlap to produce an intricate visual web of connected forms suggestive of lace, the night constellations, or a microscopic view of a living organism. It speaks to particular and intimate ways of seeing as well as distant viewing. It is a visual reminder that the action research process requires both ways of seeing: close viewing for discovering details and nuances, crafting the research, and analyzing data, and a more distant viewing for seeing the “whole picture” and connecting disparate pieces of data into a holistic understanding about a phenomenon.

The chapter authors are experienced educators, administrators and researchers who have a broad range of teaching and research experiences in the public schools, in higher education, and in international contexts. Chapters include a discussion of key terms and definitions related to the methodologies and methods, and a discussion of data collection and analysis strategies using examples from theory and practice. Overall, the text aims to provide a balanced coverage of theoretical, ethical, and practical concerns related to conducting action research.

Chapter 1, “Action Research: Before You Dive In, Read This!” provides a historical overview of action research and discusses the process of such research; myths about action research; the roles of the researcher; considerations in beginning action research; understanding links between theory, research methodologies, methods, and aims; selecting a design; developing research questions; collecting and analyzing data; crafting the research; and reporting and disseminating findings. Chapter 2, “Interviews,” suggests that this method is more than just “asking some questions”; rather, it entails an understanding of ethics, power dynamics, gaining access to participants, selecting participants, theoretical framing and developing questions, as well as practical considerations such as interviewing special populations, arranging meetings, and using technology. The chapter details how to prepare for and conduct an interview, as well as how to approach the transcription and analysis of interviews. Chapter 3, “Participant Observation,” covers many issues in observation, such as selecting a research stance, meeting and discussing research objectives with stakeholders, protecting the integrity of the study, determining methods for data collection and analysis, and considerations in creating and using observation forms, checklists, and rating scales. Observation as a method for conducting action research in classroom and school settings is emphasized through sample research scenarios. Chapter 4, “A Case for Case Study Research in Education,” addresses case study methodology for action research. Theoretical, practical, and ethical issues as well as limitations in using case study methodology are explored. Chapter 5, “Visual Research, Visual Data,” addresses visual research as a methodology for action research. The chapter covers what constitutes visual research, visual data, as well as methods for visual data collection and analysis that draw upon critical theory, semiotics, material culture studies, and sample research studies. Chapter 6, “Arts-Based Research: Data Are Constructed, Not Found,” examines the historical and philosophical foundations of arts-based research, the methodologies of arts-based educational research, ethical considerations, and data collection and analysis factors. Excerpts from an arts-based research study that utilizes the methodology *a/r/tography* are included to provide insights into the research process and method. Chapter 7, “The Value of Portfolio Data in Action Research,” addresses the relevance and benefits of portfolio data in action research and how action researchers can successfully gather, organize, interpret, and judge student portfolio data,

specifically student artworks, in both traditional paper and digital formats. Other important issues relevant to collecting, storing, viewing and analyzing visual portfolio data using quantitative and qualitative methods are discussed. Chapter 8, “Quantitative Methods in Action Research,” explores a rationale for using quantitative data in action research and practical and ethical issues in conducting quantitative research. Specifically, this chapter addresses how to conduct surveys, find or develop a questionnaire, create or use observation instruments, and use extant data in research. Methods for analysis are discussed using sample research questions and scenarios. Chapter 9, “Program Evaluation Research,” discusses how action research can take the form of evaluation research for the purposes of assessing the efficacy, value, or merit of an educational program. The chapter discusses various practical and ethical issues, such as, developing questions, understanding stakeholders, identifying and analyzing data, and reporting the findings. Chapter 10, “Critique, Advocacy, and Dissemination: I’ve Got the Data and the Findings, Now What?” explores strategies for conducting action research as a path to social change. Drawing on the arts and cross-cultural and international exemplars, social justice as action research is explored as pedagogy that extends beyond localized contexts and interventions, and that is intended to both illuminate and alter how we teach, learn, and live.

End-of-chapter activities aim to reinforce key terms and chapter themes, engage readers in critical reflection, and facilitate a deeper understanding of action research through individual and collaborative skill-building activities. Ultimately, the text is intended to increase awareness about action research and to assist teacher-researchers in making informed choices about their research.

The primary audiences for this book are graduate students and faculty in education and education-related fields and practicing K–12 teachers. Undergraduates conducting class research projects/honors theses may also be an audience for this text. Other professionals in the fields of arts administration, arts education, educational administration, health and human services, library science, and organizational leadership as well as teacher-researchers and/or administrators who are members of informal communities of practice and are engaged in professional development may also find this text useful. The text is likely to be utilized and read sequentially by those reading it in the context of graduate study; however, some chapters might be read together. If the text is used independently, it is recommended that the

end-of-chapter activities be completed and shared with a colleague or mentor for feedback. It is my hope that this text can stimulate thinking about the possibilities for action research, provoke dialogue and collaboration among colleagues, and provide some guidance for crafting and implementing action research studies that are both meaningful and timely.

SHERI R. KLEIN, PhD

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