

BOOK REVIEW

ACTION RESEARCH IN TEACHING AND LEARNING: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CONDUCTING PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH IN UNIVERSITIES. LIN. S. NORTON (2009)

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Professor Lin Norton explores the practical aspects of performing pedagogical research through Action research methodology in HE. It is designed as a step by step guide for anyone working in HE who wants to research their own practice. The book takes a pedagogical view point but the methods can easily be transferred across many areas. The book is organised into eleven chapters which each deal with a specific area of focus from research context and background to research methods and practical applications. These are presented in a logical order, each with a summary at the end to illustrate the key points made in the chapter. The book includes case studies throughout to illustrate key examples of research practice or a problem to be solved, and an extensive appendix with many useful resources. This makes the book accessible when seeking specific guidance.

The book sets out the university context in the first chapter. It includes the pressures and constraints of university life balanced with the benefits of Pedagogical Action Research (PAR). It uses case studies to identify a pedagogical issue and uses these examples in other chapters to show how the researcher can develop PAR to solve the problem. Chapter two gives an important introduction to reflective practice and what it means to be a reflective practitioner recognising the value of reflection to action research processes. It gives insight into how and why reflective practice works with more case study examples. Chapter three talks about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL), its background and application and why it is important and relevant to HE. Chapter four makes the case for PAR. It gives a breakdown of the major principles, and addresses the criticisms. It also looks into the application of PAR and briefly looks at disseminating findings. Chapter five focuses on the reader, providing prompts for starting out with a PAR (Pedagogical Action Research), study and suggests an action research cycle. The ITDEM acronym (**I**dentifying a problem/paradox/issue/difficulty; **T**hinking of ways to tackle the problem; **D**oing it; **E**valuating it; **M**odifying future teaching), is used to explain the stages of a PAR study. This chapter also examines examples of PAR from an interpretivist approach and a positivist approach using the ITDEM acronym to break down each part of the study.

Chapter six looks at suitable research methodologies and gives a more detailed analysis of appropriate ways to research a problem. It gives the advantages and disadvantages of each method discussed and also looks at some of the ethical issues of the approaches. Chapter seven specifically examines Qualitative data. It discusses positivist and the arts paradigms and gives a case for mixed methodologies. It presents examples of when it should be used and detailed instructions on how to undertake thematic analysis, and content analysis and gives references for further reading. Chapter eight looks more closely at Quantitative data, again giving examples of when it is appropriate to be used, along with a detailed breakdown of descriptive statistics and the three main types of methods used in inferential statistics. The book outlines sample calculations for dealing with simpler statistics and makes recommendations to statistical software packages for the more difficult ones.

The last three chapters focus on specific issues around PAR such as how to develop and adapt pedagogical research tools, ethical issues, and dissemination. Chapter nine talks about developing and adapting pedagogical research tools. The key tools used in PAR and some background is discussed as well as examples of how to use and adapt these tools for the readers own research. Chapter ten provides a particularly useful discussion of ethical issues starting with the context and politics of PAR, and then offering a breakdown of types of research and the principles of ethical research. Finally, chapter eleven explores how to disseminate research findings using different media, it talks about small scale internal dissemination and larger scale external dissemination in conferences and journals. It also has a brief section on research funding and how to further develop your PAR cycle. The appendix has plenty of resources to support the chapters' content, along with more case study examples (e.g. combining qualitative and quantitative data) reflective practice methods, examples of research protocols, experimental measures, relevant templates, and successful conference abstracts.

Overall this book was easy to read, accessible and relevant to anyone doing pedagogical research and wishing to engage specifically in PAR. Much of the information could easily be transferred over to other research approaches. The only flaw was limiting itself to just the area of action research, which might put people off reading it, and prevent them benefitting from the broader relevance of the book to pedagogic research. With the addition of a section about other approaches like appreciative inquiry and phenomenology, it would be an ideal text book for anyone thinking of undertaking pedagogical research.

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