



Digging Deeper Into Action Research: A Teacher Inquirer's Field Guide

Dana, Nancy Fichtman
Corwin Press, 2013

Book Review

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Although targeted mainly to K-12 teachers, this short and easy to read book is helpful and could serve as a companion to professors of religious studies and theology who want to better their understanding of action research for improving classroom instruction. The ideas and principles presented in the book are not difficult to translate into higher education classroom contexts.

The book consists of six chapters and begins with defining teacher research and framing the research question. Dana provides five “wondering” questions for teachers to consider: (1) Is your wondering something you are passionate about? (2) Is your wondering focused on student learning? (3) Is your wondering a real question? (4) Is your wondering focused on your practice? and (5) Is your wondering phrased as a dichotomous (yes/no) question? The author then illustrates how to reframe these initial wonderings into pointed inquiry. She believes that good ideas and thought-provoking questions can only flourish through methodical inquiry. The book ends with two chapters that are concerned with ways to present inquiry-based research to colleagues and help them to improve their own teaching and research practices. In the chapters that fall between them, Dana discusses ways to fine-tune the research plan in chapter 3 and how to analyze data in chapter 4. Chapter 3 focuses on fine-tuning the research plan, and asks a number of pointed and useful questions that would be relevant for university, college, and seminary professors: (1) Does your data collection strategies align with your wondering and all other aspects of your inquiry plan? (2) Are you using multiple forms of data to gain insight into your wondering? (3) Does one of the forms of data you will collect include literature and/or have you already used literature to frame your wondering? (4) Is the design of your study experimental? In chapter 4, Dana distinguishes between formative and summative

data analysis by giving real life vignettes from the field and also provides practical ways to avoid data analysis paralysis by way of self-guided worksheets. This might be helpful for those seeking to link teaching goals with outcomes and assessment strategies. Throughout the book, Dana inspires, reminds, and finally guides the reader through an action research process. As a result of going through this research process, readers are escorted through the process of improving their own pedagogical practices, “studying your practice empowers you to: engage learners, enable other professionals to learn from you, expand the knowledge base for teaching, express your individual identity as a teacher, and embrace all the rich complexity inherent in the act of teaching and learning” (80).

This book might initially overwhelm professors of religious studies and theology if they have not read in practitioner action research or have not used action research to improve their own pedagogical practices. However, for those with some experience using action research as a strategy for teaching, this book is a welcome resource to help improve teaching and learning practices in the classroom.

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