REVIEW ESSAY


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This book is one in a series conducted by Nancy Dana, professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida. Specifically, this book comes as a practical complement to her previous book *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry* (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008) which is a comprehensive introduction. The title of the book briefly describes what the book is about. For example, the concept digging deeper and ‘field guide’ suggest a topic related to nature. Actually, according to Merriam Webster’s ‘field guide’ mainly refers to a manual to explore nature (Merriam-webster.com). The title also talks about ‘action research’ and ‘teacher inquirer’. Thus, the title of this book as a whole refers to a manual that will guide teacher researchers as they explore action research. This is an easy-to-read, instructive book which is mainly intended for school teachers. However, the advice for action research provided here can also be used for post-secondary level education. Since the main goal of this book is to provide guidance and useful tips for either novice teacher researchers or more experienced ones, this book does not contain a great deal of research field related terminology. Dana’s book is suitable for both novice and experienced researchers.

Having the idea of a manual in mind, it is not surprising to see that this book provides methodic guidance as if it were a manual for conducting action research. For example, this book contains several activities that invite the reader to reflect at each stage of the research process, and in addition, it is also complemented with a DVD. The DVD is a very convenient tool which provides a more appealing perspective towards inquiry. The companion DVD contains six clips. These not only further portray action research and invite the reader to reflect on inquiry, but also provide examples of action research experiences. Thus, this tool may eventually work as an inspiration for teachers who have a burning desire to research a
personal question, but do not know yet where to start. In the context of guidance, Dana also
draws the reader’s attention to several of her other books published in the field of action
research. For instance, in several chapters, she invites the reader to explore certain
research topics more deeply and for this she suggests other books to find more in-depth
details.

Because of the way this book is organized, it can be used as a textbook to instruct teachers
or student-teachers on how to conduct action research. It can also be used as an instruction
guide due to its didactic way of presenting the contents. For example, the book consists of
six very well organized chapters that present action research from its foundations in
chapter one, through the wondering, the plan, the data collection and data analysis in
chapters 2, 3 and 4, to the presentation of research in chapter 5.

In the context of the didactic characteristic of the book, Dana, as a good teacher, invites the
readers to reflect on their teaching practice and elaborate their wondering in every
chapter. In addition, as a way of helping the reader to make the action research strong and
accurate, in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, Dana suggests the teacher researchers to assess their a) 
wondering, b) research plan, c) data analysis, and d) the presentation of the research. To
make the teacher-researcher aware of the importance of assessing every step in research,
she uses the 'Litmus test', as a metaphor. The assessment consists of reflecting and
answering a set of question designed for each stage.

The organization of the chapters allows the reader to follow every stage of research in
detail. Chapter One defines teacher research and explains how research develops through a
series of steps: taking action on a particular problem, sharing the experience with other,
continuing to reflect, collecting and analyzing data, and finally taking action again. Chapter
Two focuses on the ‘wondering’. Dana adds definitions and explains how research evolves
as teachers talk, brainstorm, and share. Dana invites the teacher-researchers to begin by
talking about their teaching problems in a constructive way, then brainstorming ideas on
how to solve these problems. The next step involves reading professional literature related
to action research to better understand the problems that may arise and to think about
how to improve the teaching environment through research. In chapter Three, Dana
outlines the ‘research plan’ and guides the reader in developing it by brainstorming data
collection strategies. Chapter Four defines data analysis by distinguishing between
quantitative and qualitative research. She also guides the teacher-researcher through the
journey of analyzing and interpreting formative and summative data. In chapter Five Dana
explains how a ‘presentation of research’ should be prepared and presented through highly
useful advice.

Finally, in Chapter Six the author emphasizes the term inquiry stance and shares that
teachers should not only do research to improve a specific problem at a particular time, but
should see inquiry as a continuous circle- one that is never-ending. She also explains that if
teachers adopt an inquiry stance as a way of their teaching-lives then they will be able to
influence others. Dana also makes it clear that action research should not be limited to
finding solutions for teaching practice since intrapersonal relationships or behavior issues
may also be addressed through research.
References
