REVIEW ESSAY


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This book is especially written for preservice teachers by two professors in Education. It intends to navigate them through an action research journey, from understanding action research, investigating data, designing research method, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, to communicating the results to others. The purpose is to transform a novice teacher and researcher to an expert in his/her teaching area. In the introduction section, Phillips and Carr view trustworthy action research as "a process", "a way of thinking", and "a way of practicing teaching" in which the teacher researcher is the subject of the study. There should be four key elements: 1) a strong sense of connection between the teacher, the context, study design and literature base; 2) quality data; 3) evidence of self-reflexivity; and 4) meaningful results. A figure is included to display the whole process of becoming a teacher through action research.

Chapter One defines action research for preservice teachers as a "learning process", "communicating with others", “critical thinking”, "negotiating with the political system" and "growing in one’s identity of teacher". It discusses the construct of “destruction” which the authors define as looking at different ideas, destructing one’s own assumption about teaching and learning, and obtaining a real understanding of the identity as a teacher. It also introduces three types of research: quantitative research, qualitative research and mixed research.

Chapter Two focuses on how to explore areas of interest and details the steps involved at this stage: researching one’s own issues; looking at something meaningful in the teaching practice; problematizing other teachers’ practice; problematizing one’s own practice and setting; and finally, formulating a critical question through a literature review. The authors highlight the importance of the context (classroom, school and the community of teaching practice) and discuss ways to collect data, such as creating a classroom map, conducting interviews, and making class observations, as well as others. Chapter Three informs and
expands on how to gather trustworthy data. The tools listed include observations, interviews, artifacts, and document analyses. Tips for data compilation are offered. The authors list these as examples to illustrate how multiple sources are needed for triangulation; sought after data include those which meet research and teaching purposes. According to the authors action researchers should include data that are able to reveal insights and tell personal teacher stories. The authors also remind novice researchers of the importance of seeking ethical approval for their project and getting informed consent from participants. In addition, they encourage preservice teachers to learn from others' teaching practice and involve other teachers who serve as mentors or critical colleagues in their project.

Chapter Four provides a model of research design which includes the following steps: 1) a description of the context; 2) a literature review (aiming to provide a framework supporting the critical question); 3) methodology (involving data collection, compilation, analysis and participant confidentiality); 4) an evaluation of research design in terms of connections between the context and literature base; 5) triangulation of data and manageability; and finally, 6) a revision of research design from the perspective of cultural proficiency, since being a culturally proficient teacher is critical in an educational setting involving students with different cultural backgrounds and life stories.

Chapter Five provides detailed instruction on ongoing data analysis. The authors recommend that novice researchers conduct data analysis at least three times so that they can refine the critical question, connect data to literature, identify emerging themes and questions, and adapt their teaching and lesson plans. Techniques regarding how to organize qualitative and quantitative data are discussed. The use of note-taking and analytic memo is also illustrated by charts and samples.

Chapter Six focuses on final data interpretation, which the authors claim has the purpose of provoking. Phillips and Carr present a framework involving six steps: synthesizing data; creating tentative categories; adding the perspectives of others; applying questions for interpretation; and synthesizing the findings. It is important to achieve trustworthiness which they define as providing evidence of becoming (a teacher), practicing self-reflexivity, examining things from multiple perspectives, having a strong sense of connection, and result in meaning actions. In addition to qualitative research methods, this section also introduces empirical research and the way to read, interpret, and deconstruct quantitative data.

Chapter Seven is about how to tell and share the learned story to others. According to the authors, stories to be told can include personal struggles of being a teacher, conflicts in the process and results, and moments of chaos, joy and mistakes. They can be told in a personal and professional writing style and voice. They provide a guideline for the nine sections of a project report, namely, an abstract, an introduction, a literature review, research design, procedures, lessons learned or the story of the project, further reflections and questions, reference and appendices. Additionally, this section justifies the use of art forms to represent the story, and details the requirements for creating professional research posters and brochures at professional conferences.
The last chapter, Chapter Eight, encourages the student-teacher to look back and review what has been learnt: major themes, research techniques, passion and personal evolution as a teacher. Then the task of beginning again starts. At the end of the book, rich and useful resources are provided in the appendix. For the reader’s information and reference, these include checklists, scales, tables, charts, templates and examples. Another bonus is a glossary of the important constructs relating to action research.

In conclusion, the book has adopted a holistic and comprehensive approach exploring action research. It is a practical and powerful handbook for preservice teachers of children and adolescents, teachers who intend to improve their teaching by doing action research, and those who hope to learn about action research and to improve academic writing. Unfortunately, I was unable to access the companion website of the book which is claimed to provide downloadable templates and additional resources.