**REVIEW ESSAY**


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Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher, and Kearney’s nine chapter volume introduces their vision of action research which they call participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). They describe PALAR as “holistic, inclusive, and participative to enable transformative improvement in human living conditions (p. 2)”. The creation of this methodology provided the authors with an opportunity to define their epistemological and ontological stances. They state that they subscribe to the critical realist perspectives and prioritize research which is humanitarian and which is empowering. Their methods are informed by a multitude of theoretical perspectives such as hope theory, complexity theory, experiential learning, negative dialects, living theory, grounded theory, critical theory, and phenomenology. In Chapter Two professional learning is described as a body-brain-mind dynamic which requires attention and reflection. Critical reflection as it relates to action research is discussed in Chapter Three. The authors propose a multilevel reflective process. In the last chapter of this section the authors address action research itself and introduce the “action research family” which includes different forms of action research. It is here that PALAR is thoroughly explained as a unique form of action research. Its philosophy, methodology, theory, process, and model are outlined.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven are case studies conducted by the authors in which they use the methods outlined in the first section of the book. In the first of these three examples, the researchers investigated professional learning (their preferred term to professional development) among academics in South Africa using a meta-action research process and adaptive planning. Three forms of reflection throughout the meta-action research project allowed for theory building about what constitutes successful professional learning programs. In the second of the three case studies, the authors investigated professional learning with leaders working in poverty reduction across six different African countries. In this chapter, the authors critically examined what it meant to reflect as researchers.
They examine meta-reflection, a process in which they push past their own biases by examining not only what they learned, but also how they learned it using different lenses of reflection. As they state, “it is important to recognize that knowledge from hindsight needs to first be made explicit through reflection, then to be nurtured and finally to be acted and re-acted upon” (p. 193). In the final chapter of this section, the authors examined professional learning in Australian community-university partnerships with academics and marginalized, migrant populations. The researchers conclude that they have “develop[ed] a sustainable learning community” (p. 215) with the aim of building the community.

In the final section of the book, there are two chapters. In the first, there are guidelines for conducting an action research PhD thesis which looks at real word problems and looks for real world solutions. These kinds of PhD projects are gaining legitimacy; however, conducting a project still requires rigour, knowledgeable academic supervisors, and criteria for assessing quality work. The authors provide these guiding criteria and help bridge the gap of understanding between positivist researchers who assess research based on one’s original contributions to knowledge and participatory action researchers who look for answers to questions and who by the very nature of their work must involve others in their research. PhD writers need to capitalize on multiple levels of reflection to build their action research projects into theory. The final chapter contains conclusions on what has been learned throughout the book.

PALAR is described as a methodology in depth from every angle from core beliefs to methodology to case study examples to criteria for assessing rigour and quality. Academics interested in action research; experienced community professional-learning facilitators; and graduate students planning an action research PhD project will find this book invaluable. In order to profit from this book, readers should have an understanding of both conducting research and offering professional learning. For those considering writing a participatory action research PhD thesis, this book will lay the foundation for a strong methodology chapter.

Theory building through action research is the main theme of this book and the authors explore many ways to make this happen. The authors shed light on how they conceived of their processes in developing their methods. Meta-action research projects coupled with meta-reflection are in depth practices which move action research projects from question & answers to theory building. I highly recommend Professional leadership in higher education and communities: Towards a vision for action research for those who research leadership in universities and within community-university partnerships.