REVIEW ESSAY


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In order to foster an environment of reflective practice, some colleges and universities are requiring that preservice teachers conduct action research projects in place of larger essay assignments. Costello’s book was written to meet the demands of undergraduate students completing these kinds of assignments. Preservice teachers who may have had limited exposure to conducting research would benefit from using this book as a class textbook. Although Costello has designed the book for preservice teachers, he signals that it may be used in other instructional environments such as management or public relations where action research is frequently employed (p. 1).

The book is organized into ten chapters which outline the action research process in a step-by-step fashion. Rather than use the traditional approach of explaining the theory behind action research projects first, Costello opts for a more direct approach beginning with definitions and models of action research (Chapter 1) and explaining why people use it (Chapter 2). In Chapters 3 through 6, he scaffolds the beginning researcher through the researcher process while providing basic definitions and concepts such as literature searches (p. 33) and validity, reliability and generalizability (p. 54). Costello discusses in Chapter 7 how action research projects can be evaluated and how they can be published (Chapter 8). And for those preservice teachers who wish to know more about action research, Costello gives a reading list of other topics in chapter nine and an explanation of theory in the final chapter.

There are many reasons why this book would make a good undergraduate class text. Costello writes in easy-to-understand language and is systematic in his approach to conducting an action research project. He provides preservice teachers with just enough
information without bombarding them with choices. He has designed the book for effective classroom use. He has included class discussion questions in each chapter, a guide for working with your professor (p. 35), general guidelines for submitting a project for ethics approval (pp. 48-51), and instructional information on grading projects. In addition, a companion website for the student and the professor is available. Furthermore, the book covers a lot of information in a small number of pages and it is reasonably priced. All of these reasons make it a good choice for an undergraduate class.

There are minor misgivings that I have with this book. The first involves a personal pet-hate. Costello did not include a list of commonly used acronyms in the book. Most of the acronyms are listed after their term in the index, but I was unable to find one particular one- HEI. For those who are not familiar with the British educational system and like to flip through the book before reading it, this can be mildly annoying. The second involves Costello’s choice of case studies. He gives three examples of action research projects: one devoted to a school’s administration, one directed at development of questioning in organizations, and one focusing on thinking skills in an elementary school. I feel it would have been better to include three potential case studies that occur in any school, such as inclusion of “English as a Second Language” learners, creating positive communication with the larger community, or improving programs with technology. If the examples addressed more situations like these, preservice teachers as well as those in other fields would be able to imagine how they could relate to these situations and adapt projects for their own circumstances.

Overall, the book is a good text for a beginning action researcher in an undergraduate class.