BOOK REVIEW

Buckelew, M., & Ewing, J. (2019). *Action research for English language arts teachers: Invitation to inquiry*. New York and London: Routledge.

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What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
-Judy Sorum Brown

In her poem, “Fire,” Brown (2007) explores the paradox of building a fire, which “requires attention / to the spaces in between, / as much as to the wood” to “see how / it is fuel, and absence of the fuel / together, that make fire possible” (as cited in Buckelew & Ewing, p. 104). Buckelew and Ewing’s (2019) book, *Action Research for English Language Arts Teachers: Invitation to Inquiry*, is an invitation to learn how to pay attention to the spaces between—the paradox of teaching that is the ability “to build / open spaces / in the same way / we have learned / to pile on the logs” (p. 104). In teaching English Language Arts (ELA), much attention is paid to the fuel—to making decisions about the texts, activities, and assignments in our classrooms. With Brown’s poetic language, Buckelew and Ewing caution us that “too many logs / packed in too tight / can douse the flames / almost as surely / as a pail of water would” (p. 104). They remind us that “what makes a fire burn / is space between the logs, / a breathing space” (p. 104). In this book, they have created that breathing space for ELA teachers.

Drawing on the rich legacies of teacher research, Action Research, and practitioner inquiry, Buckelew and Ewing have developed a resourceful guide specific to teacher inquiry in English Language Arts. New and experienced teachers, as well as teacher educators, advisors, teacher researchers, and school leaders, will find this to be a valuable resource. What they will also discover, by virtue of the multiple scenarios of teacher researchers featured in this book, is an opportunity to explore a wide range of research questions and topics highly relevant to ELA classrooms today—from reading

and motivation, to writing and research on sustainability, to supporting English Language Learners. Ultimately, the book invites readers to become better teachers (Lytle, 2008), to view the ELA classroom “as an ongoing site for research” (Buckelew & Ewing, 2019, p. 5) in order to “meet our ultimate goal in the ELA classroom—student empowerment and growth” (p. vii).

The invitation to inquiry that Buckelew and Ewing extend is to “view the practice of inquiry and reflection as an integral part of the teacher’s identity and mission of the school, rather than an add-on” (2019, p. vii). Through the metaphor of the teacher/Action Researcher as explorer, the authors argue that our students and schools need the “critical habit[s] of mind (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and “way[s] of knowing” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) afforded by teachers taking up inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in their practice. Action Research is teaching as exploration, a journey of learning through professional curiosity and question-posing sparked by teachers’ close observations of their students and contexts. The uncertainty of the terrain requires teachers to “live in a space of decision making”, and while ELA teaching is a field with deep professional “knowledge to draw on,” this book is a timely reminder to educators, as well as to the public and educational policy makers, that teaching and learning occurs in “contexts that are always unpredictable and shifting” (Schutz & Hoffman, as cited in Buckelew & Ewing, 2019, p. 8). Responsive and responsible pedagogy “can never be anticipated by a prescribed program” (Schutz & Hoffman, as cited in Buckelew & Ewing, 2019, p. 8)—that is, by decisions that have been made *for* teachers *outside* of the spaces they inhabit with their students. Thus, Buckelew and Ewing argue that “educators who approach the classroom space with an inquiry stance and an understanding of teacher/action research are better able to make decisions regarding classroom practices”, to embrace the uniqueness of the students they teach and the ecosystems in which they learn, to “*see* the students in our classrooms first—before any program, rubric, or test,” and to “*invite* students” into meaningful relationships and spaces of “inquiry and learning” (2019, p. 8-9; italics in original).

The authors also extend an invitation to teachers to “use inquiry as stance to develop or reclaim their belief systems and take action as they re-see their classrooms as places of inquiry, research, reflection, and learning for all” (p. 12). Although the book does not take a critical inquiry approach, the authors invoke Freire’s problem-posing approach as desirable of the kinds of classroom spaces that cultivate student voice and agency. The scenarios also illustrate the importance of teacher inquiry communities for creating contexts for professional problem-posing that cultivate *teachers’* voice and agency in pedagogical decision-making. The authors acknowledge that Action Research requires courage. The scenarios highlight the complex factors that shape teaching and learning in classrooms, but also illustrate Buckelew and Ewing’s claim that action research offers an opportunity for educators “to impact their world” (2019, p. 21).

If the teacher/Action Researcher is an explorer, Buckelew and Ewing are the sort of seasoned guides that those new to exploration would be grateful to meet. The authors begin by orientating explorers to the “compass” of Action Research: developing an inquiry stance; discovering community; finding an entry point; developing a question; collecting data; analyzing data; growing community; and sharing findings. Each of these way-finding points are addressed in the six chapters of the book, which are organized into three larger sections: 1) cultivating an inquiry identity; 2) using inquiry protocols

and strategies (making a plan); and 3) exploring the landscape of publication. Buckelew and Ewing also suggest tools and practices explorers will find useful for the journey, for example, having a notebook for note-taking, anecdotal record-keeping, or fieldnote-writing; creating a portfolio for organizing artefacts and documentation; and using technology to share research and resources.

Buckelew and Ewing are keen companions and fellow travelers. The multiple scenarios they have written about journeys of pre-service and inservice teachers contribute to the reader's sense that they are part of a larger community of Action Researchers. As the stories of these teacher researchers unfold in each chapter, Buckelew and Ewing frequently invite readers to stop, pause, and consider. They model an inquiry stance by posing questions to "reflect", "connect", and "apply." Readers are prompted to zoom in and look closely, noticing specific details about the scenarios, as well as to zoom out, and consider what they are thinking in relationship to their own inquiries. For readers who wish to learn more about the themes explored in the scenarios, the questions that follow each "scene" can be used to prompt further research and reading. Explorers reading the book to further develop their own inquiry stance will find it more helpful to focus instead on the more open-ended questions. Whatever their purpose, readers are encouraged to develop a practice of reflection, and depending on where they are in their travels, to refine their focus from reflection *for* action, to reflection *in* action, to reflection *on* action (Schon, 1987).

The book is well suited for pre-service teacher education and professional coursework in university settings or for formal or informal communities of teacher inquiry. The embedded scenarios and questions invite dialogue, and while readers will find the questions valuable for individual writing and reflection, they are especially well designed for discussions in inquiry-based learning communities. Of particular value are the activities at the end of each chapter. These well-designed invitations can support readers in enacting aspects of Action Research relevant to each chapter (e.g., to practice observation skills, consider the ethical implications of teacher research, conduct a literature review, design questions, explore writing in various genres, conduct mini-inquiries). Well-selected poems invite teacher researchers to explore arts-based lenses in action research. Buckelew and Ewing's creativity as teachers and writing project leaders inform these experiential activities, aimed at developing the practices and habits of mind of action research and inquiry.

This is a book that I have already suggested to ELA teacher researchers who are taking up Action Research as a methodological and pedagogical stance in their classrooms. It's an important text to read with pre-service teachers beginning their professional journeys with an inquiry stance, with examples and strategies for developing responsive and sustaining pedagogies in ELA. Buckelew and Ewing have anticipated readers' questions and concerns, with "ideas and strategies...[both] practical and easily tailored to suit their own contexts" (2019, p. vii). Readers will find resources for designing questions, collecting and analyzing data, and integrating Action Research into the day-to-day activities of their classrooms. Importantly, Buckelew and Ewing emphasize the significant role of professional inquiry communities, and readers will find research and resources to advocate for creating "breathing spaces" of teacher inquiry with their colleagues. Ultimately, and most timely, the authors illustrate that Action Research re-centers students and teachers in pedagogical decision-making, where

A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.

- Judy Sorum Brown

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