

## Review

### **ACTION RESEARCH FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE: A Step-by-Step Guide**

by Valsa Koshy  
Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 2010

I hope the author does not take my opening comment the wrong way, but this book could just as easily have been called *Action Research for Dummies*. I mean no offense by saying this. In fact, I intend it to be a compliment. So often books on Action Research get bogged down in why's and what's of this research technique and its philosophy rather than examining the how's. As a change, Professor Koshy from Brunel University, has written a short paper-back (176-pages) that is both affordable (around \$30) and easy to follow.

As the title states explicitly, Koshy takes the reader on a step-by-step approach to the action research technique. And, like a good sermonizer, she starts out by telling you what she's going to tell you. By **Chapter 1** (*What is Action Research?*), she devotes some description to the "what" question. However, she does not set up camp in this area for very long, as she chooses her preferred models (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Elliot, 1991; O'Leary, 2004) and keeps marching. She covers definition and theoretical underpinnings without breaking stride.

By **Chapter 2** (*Getting Started*), Koshy has shifted gears to the pragmatic, and discusses how to plan an action research project, first steps, working collaboratively, scope, identifying a topic (as well as offering many sample topics if the reader has none), and so on. By **Chapter 3** (*Reviewing the Literature*), she takes us through the sometimes esoteric, minutiae-creating world of literature reviews that has been the downfall of many a project. She discusses what makes some literature relevant and others irrelevant, various sources of literature, what gives it validity, and finally how to write it all up.

In a formulaic fashion, **Chapter 4** (*Planning Action*) and **Chapter 5** (*Gathering Data*) outline for potential researchers how to create an action plan, discuss case studies illustrating how things could go wrong, and show ways in which a research may collect data (questionnaires, surveys, field notes, interviews, diaries). By **Chapter 6** (*Analysing Data and Generating Evidence*) Koshy discusses the nuts and bolts of coding, computer software, organizing and representing data, validation, and making conclusions. From here, it is only a hop, skip, and jump to **Chapter 7** (*Writing up your Action Research*) and **Chapter 8** (*Publishing your Action Research and Planning the Next Steps*). It all seems so easy and so inevitable. With this lock-step approach, anything else would be unthinkable.

Of course, anyone who has waded through the swamps of action research knows that this is a bit of a mechanistic fairy tale to help Master's students get sleep at night as they think of doctoral research. It certainly isn't advanced stuff or enlightening to the disappointments that lie coiled just overhead. That being said, I will be the first to state that this book does serve its purpose. Master's students (who, I think, this book is ultimately geared towards) will cherish this how-to book of instructions as a guiding star for their dissertations; probably the first serious research project that they have stumbled into.

The problem would be if researchers never went beyond this level and performed all their studies using this manual. To overcome this issue, which Koshy must have seen herself, she has included a number of websites and references throughout the book to guide researchers to a higher plane. In that way, I would recommend this book as a good stepping-stone for graduate students who are approaching this form of research and would like some hard-nosed guidance for their first tentative steps.

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