

4-22-2010

Book Review: Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies

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Recommended Citation

Tardrew, Karen. (2010). Book Review: Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies. *i.e.: inquiry in education: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 4.*

Retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol1/iss1/4>

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i.e.: inquiry in education is published by the Center for Practitioner Research at the National College of Education, National-Louis University, Chicago, IL.

Book Review

Pine, Gerald. (2009). *Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies*. California: Sage. 396 pages.

Reviewed by Karen F. Tardrew
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Gerald J. Pine is a professor emeritus of education in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. “*Teacher Action Research: Building Knowledge Democracies* is a text written for graduate students, experienced teachers, and administrators” (Pine, 2009, p. x). It was intended to be a resource for a wide variety of teacher education research courses. In addition, it was developed for use in professional development venues in school settings. It is a comprehensive book regarding teacher action research.

In part one, Pine helps us in “Understanding Action Research,” first defining action research, providing the complex historical context for this research paradigm, and then unraveling the layers of the action research process. In this section, he connects the growth of action research with historical paradigm shifts, such as the empirical-positivistic-quantitative and the shift to critical theory-postmodern-praxis paradigm. He explores themes of practice, voice, and outcomes across educational contexts. He describes the variety of approaches that are used in teacher action research, including: collaborative action research, teacher as researcher, participatory action research, school wide action research, and self-study research. Finally, he explains the paradigm of action research and how it relates to other research paradigms, highlighting the characteristics of action research. These include:

- reflective critique and intersubjectivity,
- axiology,
- context,
- ongoing tentativeness,
- recursion,
- dialectical critique,
- collaboration,
- risk,
- plurality,
- connotation,
- moral/political ethos and purpose, and
- embrace of emotion.

Pine deconstructs each characteristic and his definitions are both articulate and concise. For example, intersubjectivity “allows for several teachers to discuss what they have experienced subjectively and to determine what in their experience is shared in a similar way” (Pine, 2009, p. 70). He explores issues of axiology, which concerns itself with the possible intrinsic values of research topics. He highlights the importance of plurality, defined as a “multiplicity of views” (p. 74) regarding research. When he discusses connotation, he is referring to the range of constantly changing conditions in a school setting and its effect on action research.

In the next section, “The Validity of Action Research,” Pine continues by exploring the “soundness” of action research and the components of triangulation. He explains how validity is a process of inquiry. He describes multiple ways to validate action research. He compares and contrasts the components required to build trustworthy knowledge.

The following section features the power of teacher action research as professional development. Pine’s voice and his forty years of experience with action research are felt in his narrative. His depth of understanding aids in clearly describing the power and the process involved in teacher action research as professional development. He emphasizes several professional development stories, one of transformation involving an English teacher from Ontario, Canada.

The second part of the book highlights “Collaborative Action Research: Foundation for Knowledge Democracies.” Pine explores the historical importance of collaborative research, providing many examples of important collaborative teacher action research projects. He discusses the impact of teachers as change agents as a result of their collaborative study. He continues by describing the conditions required for building such a “knowledge democracy.” His depth of experiences is featured here, and he is honest and thoughtful about the real working conditions required for such teacher action research. He summarizes this section by providing examples of knowledge democracies that are professional development schools.

The final section, Part III, is “Practicing Action Research.” This section of the book gets into the nuts and bolts of teacher action research practices. Unfortunately, many teacher action research books start here. Therefore, it can be difficult for teacher researchers to comprehend the paradigm shift and new processes, which provide an important perspective in implementing action research. Instead, at this point of the book, Pine has built our deep knowledge and understanding of conducting teacher action research. Now, he clearly and carefully describes the “fundamental” processes of practicing teacher action research, and preservice and/or in-service teachers new to action research will be ready to give these processes a try. These steps include:

- reflection,
- dialogue,
- documentation,

- observations,
- journal writing, and
- reflection.

Pine also provides many ideas for case study action research. Pine believes that case studies are an excellent match for action research and educational research, due to the in-depth and multifaceted approach for study. They also allow for the complexities of educational settings to be revealed.

He concludes his book with a rich set of appendixes. The first appendix provides three detailed and authentic action research projects. Appendix B is a comprehensive list of annotated teacher action research websites, and Appendix C shares useful curriculum and instruction websites.

This is an ambitious and powerful book regarding teacher action research. It is one of the richest books I have discovered for unpacking the depth and complexities of teacher action research. Pine's years of experience shine through as he describes the realistic journey of teacher action research. Further, his text bridges the gap of understanding that often persists between those who undertake traditional classroom research and those who embrace teacher action research. As a professor who teaches teachers conducting action research, I found Pine's narrative to be both informative and inspirational.

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