

Book Review


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THE ACTION RESEARCH PLANNER – DOING CRITICAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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The Action Research Planner by Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon is an insightful and comprehensive guide for researchers, educators, and professionals seeking to engage in critical participatory action research (CPAR). This updated edition retains the foundational strengths of the earlier works while expanding its theoretical scope and practical applications to align with contemporary educational and social contexts.

The book is structured around a step-by-step framework, taking readers from conceptualizing an action research project to implementing and evaluating it. Drawing from Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere and the idea of practice architectures, the authors emphasize collaboration, democratic participation, and critical reflection as cornerstones of effective action research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Action Research Planner is organized into seven core chapters, each designed to guide readers through the conceptual foundations and practical steps of critical participatory action research (CPAR). The structure flows logically from theory to application, supporting readers at every stage of their research journey.

Chapter 1: Introducing Critical Participatory Action Research

This chapter sets the stage by introducing CPAR as a distinct form of action research. It explores its historical development, theoretical underpinnings, and its emphasis on democratic participation and social transformation. The authors explain how CPAR

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differs from traditional action research by prioritizing collective reflection and action within communities and institutions.

Chapter 2: A New View of Participation – Participation in Public Spheres

Here, the authors expand on the concept of participation, drawing from Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere. The chapter explores how participation in CPAR involves engaging diverse voices and perspectives in collaborative dialogue. It emphasizes creating spaces where participants can contribute equally to shaping research agendas and outcomes.

Chapter 3: A New View of Practice – Practices Held in Place by Practice Architectures

This chapter introduces the concept of practice architectures, which refers to the cultural, material, and social arrangements that shape and sustain practices. The authors argue that understanding these architectures is crucial for action researchers seeking to change practices in schools, workplaces, or communities.

Chapter 4: A New View of Research – Research Within Practice Traditions

This chapter reconceptualizes research as an embedded and ongoing process within professional practices. The authors present research as a collective endeavor where inquiry and reflection are integral to improving practice, rather than external evaluations imposed from outside.

Chapter 5: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research – The ‘Planner’ Part

The centerpiece of the book, this chapter provides a practical roadmap for conducting CPAR. It covers essential elements such as forming research groups, identifying shared concerns, setting goals, developing action plans, and evaluating progress. Clear protocols and strategies are provided for navigating the complexities of collaborative research.

Chapter 6: Examples of Critical Participatory Action Research

This chapter presents five extended case studies of CPAR projects. These examples demonstrate how the theoretical and practical tools outlined earlier can be applied in real-world educational and organizational contexts. The diversity of settings highlights CPAR's adaptability across cultures and disciplines.

Chapter 7: Resources for Critical Participatory Action Researchers

The final chapter offers practical resources for researchers, including checklists, templates, ethical guidelines, and advice on documenting and reporting CPAR studies. These tools are designed to support both new and experienced action researchers in planning and implementing their projects.

Summary of the Structure

The book's progression from theory (Chapters 1–4) to practice (Chapters 5–7) ensures that readers develop both a conceptual understanding and practical competence. Each chapter builds on the previous one, reinforcing the idea that critical participatory action research is not just a method but a way of thinking and working collaboratively for social change.

Critical Evaluation

A major strength of this book lies in its integration of theory and practice. The authors successfully bridge philosophical perspectives with hands-on tools, making it accessible to both novice and experienced researchers. The inclusion of illustrative examples and practical resources, such as protocols for group collaboration and ethical guidelines, enhances its usability in diverse settings.

However, one limitation is that the book's strong focus on critical participatory paradigms may not resonate equally with readers seeking a more traditional or positivist approach to action research. Additionally, some readers might find the conceptual discussions—particularly on practice architectures—dense without prior exposure to critical theory.

Despite these minor drawbacks, the book's emphasis on reflexivity and social transformation makes it particularly valuable for educational researchers aiming to create meaningful change. It challenges readers to not only conduct research but also reconsider their roles as practitioners and participants in broader social processes.

CONCLUSION

The Action Research Planner is more than a methodological manual; it is a philosophical and practical roadmap for conducting research that is ethical, collaborative, and transformative. It is highly recommended for educators, academic researchers, and social science professionals committed to participatory approaches and critical inquiry.