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Book Review

Action Learning and Action Research: Genres and Approaches by Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Lesley Wood (Eds.)

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The book, *Action Learning and Action Research: Genres and Approaches*, provides space for leading scholars of action learning (AL) and action research (AR) to explain and demonstrate their respective genres for AL/AR. The authors address the what, why, and how of their specific genres, emphasising the importance of AL/AR in the complex global challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. Within the learning and research paradigms of social sciences, these authors illustrate how AL/AR approaches in this era are ideal for solving the complexity of personal, professional, and organisational problems, as well as for community development, sustainability, and learning through experience. Most importantly, the book discusses how to circumvent the potential threats and challenges of AL/AR. The success of AL/AR is largely rooted in the fact that all participants in the projects are experts of their own lives and coresearchers who are actively involved in the creation of knowledge regarding sustainable learning outcomes encompassing knowledge and understanding. In the words of Zuber-Skerritt and Wood, referring to things done in the past that affect our insight today, “action is almost an all-embracing term” (p. 3). The knowledge gained enables us to plan so that we can act accordingly in the future.

Research conducted around AL/AR methodologies has gradually progressed over time. This edition emits the main AL/AR methods discussed by the participating authors in this book. The chapters are neatly grouped together in parts, namely, Part I, which is action learning and Part II, action research—both imparting knowledge and understanding on values that encourage inclusion and principles of social justice. The introduction (Chapter 1) is led by Zuber-Skerritt and Wood. Part 1 of the book comprises Chapters 2 to 5 and focuses on action learning. Hurst and Marquardt (Chapter 2) theorise AL as a model of problem solving in three stages towards a situation analysis. Richard Teare (Chapter 3) demonstrates how shared knowledge can lead to emancipation, social transformation, and change. Passfield (Chapter 4) links AL with mindfulness for dealing with issues of mental health in the workplace. In Chapter 5, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt integrates action learning with action research (ALAR).

Part 2 engages the reader in the commonly used action research genres. Coghlan (Chapter 6) demystifies action research. Whitehead (Chapter 7) incorporates the principles of AR for self-study and living-educational-theories. Rauch, Zehetmeier, and Posch (Chapter 8) present an overview of

collaborative action research in education. Burns (Chapter 9) empowers coresearchers in becoming the change agents they want to see, endorsing and reproducing anticipated outcomes. Dick (Chapter 10) presents action science and discusses the latest developments in the AR genre. Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, and Giovanna Vianello (Chapter 11) present appreciative inquiry to affirm AR for encouraging scholarship and innovation. Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (Chapter 12) explicate the principles of a critical participatory action research paradigm. Wood (Chapter 13) shares some informative principles of the participatory paradigm for community engagement, namely, participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). Zuber-Skerritt and Wood conclude by providing valuable reflections in Chapter 14.

The reflection in Chapter 14 provides a tabulated, insightful and informative summary of all the genres with definitions and their specialties in the larger context of scholarship procedures, and how they are similar or different from each other. Each genre encompasses vital components that distinguish it from other research methodological approaches. All genres encourage the development of critical consciousness and emancipation for both researchers and the coresearchers, transformation of societal structures, and relationships. The aims are to establish and elicit equal power relations, fairness, freedom, and hope. The model skilfully illustrates the principles and processes of action learning and action research that point to improved educational conditions. That is, action research creates a conducive space for change and then, action learning influences the change process through reflection. All authors explicitly illustrate the focus on the niche expressed by the editors. They emphasise, differently, that action and understanding are each embodied in the other. Thus, AL and AR methodologies are best for solving the complexities of individuals, experts, structural, community development, and sustainability problems, as well as learning through their lived experience. Throughout the book, edited extracts from real case studies are used to bring out the richness of lived experiences.

This book projects insightful information that enforces researchers and academics to critically think about how their work aligns with other methodological approaches. The writing is clear and accessible and, most importantly, relevant for both novice and experienced researchers and academics. The book would be useful for research methodologies courses because it provides clear and tangible examples of the authors' lived experiences. By providing notes for further reading materials and questions to provoke discussion, the book encourages researchers to think critically about their use of action research. The authors in this book openly acknowledge that AL/AR is explicitly and actively participative. By way of research and projects that are conducted with, for, and by people's lived experiences rather than on people as objects, AL/AR assists participants to bring about relevant change. This publication summarises the different genres of AL/AR and contributes to knowledge creation by connecting theory and practice. Each author expresses the feasibility and usefulness of their genre to both emerging and experienced educational researchers and emphasise the empowering effect of the actively engaging participants. This compilation of scholarly work will empower educators to create new insightful knowledge regarding their teaching and learning techniques in the classroom, as well as promote collaborative inquiry that emphasises practice and understanding.