SELF-STUDY THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH*

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the ways in which action research is and is not related to self-study. The many approaches to action research are outlined through comparing and contrasting the nature of action research with that of self-study of teacher education practices. The authors argue that what distinguishes self-study from action research is its methodology rather than the methods used. They suggest three methodological features that would be present in self-studies: 1) A self-study would bring to the forefront the importance of self; 2) it would make the experience of teacher educators a resource for research; and 3) it would urge those who engage in self-study to be critical of themselves and their roles as researchers and teacher educators. The authors explore these features through an analysis of the stories of their own journey to self-study and an analysis of three self-study reports.

Our purpose in writing this chapter is to discuss the ways that action research is and is not related to self-study. In doing so we examine the many approaches to action research to compare and contrast it with the self-study of teacher education practices. We do this in three ways. First, we review the varieties of practitioner research, relying primarily on the chapter by Kenneth Zeichner and Susan Noffke (2001) in the fourth \textit{Handbook of Research on Teaching} (Richardson, 2001). We then, using a narrative approach, tell several stories that relate action research to self-study. Third, we turn to a structural analysis of the methods and methodologies of the two forms of inquiry. We end the chapter by looking closely at a set of action research and self-study reports, using them to further our comparison.

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In much of what follows in this chapter there will be a tendency to see self-study as an outgrowth of action research. This bias arises from our professional biographies in which we first had experience with action research and then became involved with self-study. Therefore, we believe that it is important for us to acknowledge that while our paths may be a common one for self-study researchers, they are not the only ones. For example, there are those who began from other methods and methodologies, such as ethnography, performance, life history and biography, and portfolios (see other chapters in this handbook for examples). From these perspectives, the connection between action research and self-study is not the linear evolutionary one that we present in this chapter. Rather, to stick with the biological metaphor, the relationship is more like convergent or parallel evolution in which very different species look and act the same because they occupy the same niche. Knowing that there are multiple ways to compare action research and self-study, we invite our readers to accept our teleological metaphor as one way to understand the relationship between the two forms of inquiry.

**A Taxonomy of Practitioner Research**

In their chapter “Practitioner Research” Zeichner and Noffke (2001) develop a taxonomy of the variety of ways that teachers and others study their own practice. By examining the personal, professional, and political purposes of the research (Noffke, 1997), they divide the domain of practitioner research into what they refer to as “five major traditions” (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). These include traditional action research, the teacher-as-researcher movement, the North American teacher research movement, participatory research, and self-study research. In this chapter we use the term “practitioner research” to refer to all these traditions, and “action research” when we want to include only traditional action research, the teacher-as-researcher movement, and the North American movements.

*Traditional Action Research*

In their chapter Zeichner and Noffke (2001) develop the history of the action research tradition from the first use of the term by Kurt Lewin and John Collier in the 1930s through the work of the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute for School Experimentation under the direction of Stephen Corey, Dean of Teachers College Columbia University, in the post-war period. Corey was a strong advocate of a scientific version of action research in which teachers engaged in hypothesis formulation and testing (Corey, 1953). This variety of action research continues to be practiced in a formulaic manner, often as a form of inservice education, but more often as an assignment for preservice teachers.

This variety of action research can also be seen in taxonomies developed by James McKernan (1988) and Geoff Mills (2000), one of the authors of this chapter. To McKernan, this “traditional countenance of action research” is