

Preface

Teacher as researcher, action research, school-based research— these ideas have been discussed and proposed in education for many years. Some of the earliest efforts to encourage educators to gather information to enhance their work came out of Great Britain (e.g., Lawrence Stenhouse). The notion is logical. It makes sense that people who teach or administer teachers in schools would want to learn from their personal experiences, evaluations, *and* research and would then make improvements based on what they learned.

However, although action research and internal evaluation may be more frequently practiced in some schools, the predominant focus of inquiry in education continues to be by people from outside of schools— by professional researchers and external evaluators who use schools as their data sources and write to one another about what they find. Though they sometimes share the results with school people in abbreviated form, external evaluators and researchers usually focus on testing theories, building models, or completing evaluation studies for external funders.

For research and evaluation to have a lasting influence on educational practice, educators have to be involved in *doing* studies too. They have to be asking questions and completing a variety of tasks to answer those questions. Although a few authors seem to agree with this idea, the dominant practice in education is still for teachers to teach, administrators to manage, external evaluators to evaluate and researchers to research.

Most good educators naturally inquire is part of their pedagogy, which provides excellent starting points for encouraging them and others to become fully engaged in inquiry in their settings. Teachers and other educators are better learners if they are also working toward being good inquirers. This book is intended to substantiate and expand that claim.

The book is organized around stories about several teachers, student teachers, public school students, administrators, and a university professor (the author) who explore the idea of educator as learner, using qualitative inquiry concepts and strategies, while engaged in various activities of education. These stories are intended to demonstrate that there are many different ways to use qualitative inquiry while conducting studies and simultaneously doing the work of schooling. All of the participants (teachers, students, administrators, and others) are learners, teachers, evaluators and researchers at the same time. Their activities in these four dimensions are compatible and actually enhance their performance in all three areas. It is obvious that they are learning to combine these roles as they go. This should inspire confidence in readers that they too can learn and inquire *while* they educate!





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