

Book Reviews

Action Research in Health

Ernie Stringer and William J. Genat

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2004. 204 pp.

ISBN 0-13-098578-3

Reviewed by Nazilla Khanlou

Action Research in Health is a new work by Stringer and Genat that will be of great value for students, educators, and practitioners of action research (AR). The book's intended audience is health professionals, with nurses being a central focus of discussion. In a reader-friendly format, the book addresses the why and how of AR in the health field. Recognizing the transformational value of research, the authors pay heed to both technical and human dimensions of AR throughout the volume.

The first two of nine chapters provide background information on AR, its purpose as a systematic and cyclical process of inquiry, and issues of underlying research paradigm (positivistic, naturalistic) and method (quantitative, qualitative). Stringer and Genat articulate their approach to AR as one that comprises participatory and interpretive features. In Chapter 3 they discuss preliminary steps in conducting AR. This chapter has several creative and unique aspects. For example, the human dimensions of AR are discussed under a section titled "With Head, Heart and Hand." In addition to standard criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of data, participatory and pragmatic validity are considered. An index of engagement considers issues of resistance, apathy, interest, and excitement by participants in AR.

The subsequent chapters are organized around the "Look-Think-Act" cycle of AR that is introduced in Chapter 3. The "Look" (information) feature concerns gathering information from stakeholders. To this end, Chapter 4 discusses in detail qualitative gathering procedures, emphasizing the interview as the starting point for inquiry. The "Think" (reflection) aspect, addressed in Chapter 5, relates to data analysis. Particular attention is given to analyzing epiphanies. The "Act" (action) feature distinguishes this book in terms of the breadth of information it provides on communication and planning activities as part of the research process. For example, Chapter 6 addresses the importance of communication in AR through such means as reports, presentations, and performances. Stringer and Genat argue that in AR reports one attempts to

“produce evocative accounts, conveying accurate insights into the impact of events on people’s lives” (p. 119). Chapter 7 examines the relevance of AR for various health frameworks, including the nursing process, in improving professional practice. Because of the number of frameworks considered, the authors present parts of this chapter in a list format instead of as an in-depth discussion of the implications for practice. However, the particular relevance of AR to primary health care is insightful. The last two chapters, which could have been labelled appendices, provide a wealth of AR resources: Chapter 8 presents case studies in which AR has been used in various health contexts; Chapter 9 concludes the book with information on online resources on AR as well as related topics such as women’s health, community/government/international organizations, and university programs.

Because Stringer and Genat consider AR an interpretive approach to qualitative inquiry, *Action Research in Health* provides a more in-depth discussion of naturalistic inquiry than of positivist research. However, this perspective is not shared by everyone. It can be argued that AR may entail qualitative, quantitative, or integrated approaches, depending on the focus of inquiry. What brings AR closer to the naturalist paradigm is (1) theoretical congruency between AR and critical inquiry, and (2) methodological congruency between AR’s cyclical nature and emergent designs arising from qualitative research. In addition, missing from the discussions in the early chapters of the book is situating AR in relation to participatory research and participatory action research (see Brown & Tandon, 1983; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003).

Among the many strengths of this book is the humanist and passionate voice that the authors use in discussing the practice of AR. Through the use of box inserts, Stringer and Genat draw from their own AR experiences in various health contexts. The information is clearly presented throughout. Where relevant, figures and diagrams are used to augment the text. Methodological chapters begin with an overview of the concepts to be addressed and conclude with a summary of the content discussed. Other pedagogical strengths include the juxtaposition of the Look-Think-Act cycle and an AR Sequence conceptual framework and the substance of the various chapters.

Overall, *Action Research in Health* is a valuable book for diverse audiences. In education, it can be used by educators to teach a new generation of students about AR. In practice, the book provides detailed information on AR and interpretive qualitative methods for nurses to consider applying AR in various health-care settings.

References

- Brown, L. D., & Tandon, R. (1983). Ideology and political economy in inquiry: Action research and participatory research. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 19(3), 277–294.
- Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2003). The conceptual, historical, and practice roots of community based participatory research and related participatory traditions. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 27–52). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nazilla Khanlou, RN, PhD, is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Nursing and Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She is Course Coordinator for the undergraduate course Nursing Research and Scholarship and teaches its Participatory Action Research Stream.

***Reading, Understanding, and Applying Nursing Research:
A Text and Workbook, 2nd ed.***

James A. Fain
Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 2004. 439 pp.
ISBN 0-8036-1112-9

Reviewed by Joan Rosen Bloch

In *Reading, Understanding, and Applying Nursing Research: A Text and Workbook*, James A. Fain provides an interesting textbook for nursing research students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Although easy to read, this work is comprehensive rather than a superficial survey of key research topics. Fain presents a creative collection of materials from a variety of sources that support the theme of his book: evaluating and integrating research findings into practice. The figures, excerpts from other documents, and summary tables are interesting, substantive, clinically relevant, and practical; therefore, it is applicable to nursing practice. For example, Table 3.2 (p. 51) succinctly lists the purposes of a literature review. Yet Table 3.3 (p. 52) gives lengthy, thorough instructions in conducting a search of the literature. Then, Fain discusses various sources of information (p. 53) and includes a small table of nursing journals appropriate for literature reviews. After reading this, the reader is clear on how to evaluate and conduct a literature review for nursing research and practice.

The book is organized into three parts. Part 1 discusses the importance of research. Part 2 focuses on planning a research study. Part 3 provides excellent strategies for evaluating, critiquing, and utilizing research in nursing practice; however, tips and questions to consider when critiquing research are woven throughout the book, appearing in each chapter, not just in Part 3. Each chapter opens with learning objectives and a glossary of key items, then closes with a summary of key ideas followed by learning activities.

This revised second edition includes two new chapters. The first of these, "Applying Appropriate Theories and Conceptual Models," is appropriately titled, for Fain shows the reader how to apply theory in research — a difficult connection to explain to nursing students. The discussion of theories is interesting and easy to understand, and puts theory into a practical perspective for nurses concerned more with practice than with the theoretical development of the discipline of nursing. The second new chapter focuses solely on evidence-based practice (EBP). After thor-

oughly discussing EBP for nursing practice, Fain provides tips on how to seek the best evidence for nursing practice.

Chapters 9 and 10, which cover data collection methods and data analysis, are the book's only weakness. They are incomplete, and therefore *Reading, Understanding, and Applying Nursing Research* should not be relied upon as the main textbook on these topics. This reader found misleading statements regarding some of the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods in Chapter 9. However, Chapters 12, 13, and 14, on phenomenological, ethnographic, and grounded theory research, are excellent. They are in-depth and extremely interesting, sure to captivate both students and instructors.

The problem with Chapter 10, "Analyzing the Data," is that multivariate tests of analyses, such as multiple and logistic regression, are not mentioned. These statistical tests are commonly used in clinically significant health-care research and should be included. Additionally, the term "odds ratio," a common one in health-care research, is not mentioned. Despite this particular shortcoming, the book is worthwhile. Instructors can provide supplementary materials.

In conclusion, this volume focuses on providing students with the skills they need to become educated and wise consumers of research in their clinical practice. Fain has provided an important resource for those of us who teach research to nursing students. It is a challenge to get students excited about research. Yet this book holds promise. It is geared to nurses who are focused on developing excellence in clinical practice. The breadth and depth of the research examples are substantive enough to pique students' interest in nursing research and to ensure that they understand and respect it. I highly recommend *Reading, Understanding, and Applying Nursing Research* as a required textbook for nursing research.

Joan Rosen Bloch, PhD, CRNP, is Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey, USA.