Disseminating Your Action Research: A Practical Guide to Sharing the Results of Practitioner Research

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In ELT, as in other aspects of education, teacher research is recognised as an important form of inquiry because it enables practitioners to search for answers to the questions they might have about the phenomena that occur in their own classrooms. When teachers choose to engage in research, they learn about their practices, their learners, and their professional identity. Given the organic nature of its processes and the bottom-up direction of the inquiry, teacher research is a powerful form of professional learning. Without having to rely on the direction provided by those outside the classroom, teachers can use research to generate knowledge that is meaningful for them and useful for those within the immediate learning environment, i.e., themselves and their learners. In addition, while this research-derived knowledge is primarily valuable because it is directly relevant to teachers' and learners' needs, it might also resonate with other practitioners.

While not absolutely necessary, there is value in sharing this kind of knowledge with other professionals, irrespective of whether they are colleagues at one's school or based elsewhere. This chimes with the idea that one highly effective means of engaging in professional development is learning from one's peers, particularly when that learning is based on the knowledge a teacher has distilled from their research efforts. Even though knowledge based on anecdotal evidence or experience has its merits when shared with fellow professionals, the knowledge teachers create via research is especially significant given their attempt to be systematic about the process of seeking answers to their questions (Mercer and Xerri 2018). However, despite the substantial amount of literature on doing teacher research that has been published over the years—consisting of guides and reports written by both academics and practitioners (e.g., Freeman 1998; Kuchah, Salama, and Salvi 2022; Xerri 2022)—there is a relative lack of practical guidance on the dissemination process itself. Knowing where and how to share research findings is one of the areas that are difficult for teachers and that they would benefit from support with (Cárdenas 2025), and this is where Mertler's *Disseminating Your Action Research* comes in handy for the audience of classroom practitioners it is aimed at.

Since the idea of sharing findings might immediately connote doing so in an academic way, Mertler seeks to meet the needs and expectations of different practitioners by distinguishing between 'disseminating' and 'sharing' research. The former refers to formal methods like peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations, while the latter encompasses less formal, alternative channels. Both methods serve the purpose of communicating research, but as suggested they differ mainly in their level of formality. Employing both approaches can be highly beneficial, as it allows teacher researchers to reach diverse audiences and maximise the impact of their findings. For Mertler, the ultimate goal is to present research to as many people as possible, benefiting both the researcher and the audience: 'Let us not lose sight of the (arguably) primary goal of communicating the results of research in any and all ways possible—you want to get your research work in front of the eyes of as many people as possible, not just for your benefit, but potentially (and hopefully) for their benefit, as well' (p. 23). However, it is vital for practitioners to remember that when they do research, there is no expectation for them to engage in the dissemination of results. Believing that there is such an expectation might dissuade them from doing research.

Mertler's book begins by addressing the importance of disseminating practitioner research. It highlights common misconceptions about research and emphasises the critical role of sharing research outcomes to foster educational improvement and professional empowerment. The rest of the book is divided into four sections, with the first one introducing action research and detailing its cyclical process and stages—planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. To illustrate what action research consists of, Mertler provides a vignette of a sixth-grade teacher who used a three-cycle process to investigate her students' engagement and academic performance when exposed to small-group instruction and peer feedback.

The next section explores various formats for disseminating research findings. It includes guidelines on academic writing, ethical considerations, and practical tips for crafting research reports, along with descriptions and development tips for various types of research presentations. There is also a chapter with instructions on creating effective posters, infographics, and videos to visually share research outcomes. The book's third section examines specific strategies for delivering research. It explains the process of publishing in scholarly and practitioner journals, with best practices for

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each. Educators are also given detailed advice on presenting research at conferences, local events, and through virtual fora, as well as instructed on how to utilise platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, podcasts, and personal websites to share research. The final section offers motivational insights to encourage educators to share their research. Mertler underscores the importance of setting realistic expectations and the benefits of extending the reach of one's research beyond local contexts. Each one of the book's ten chapters concludes with a list of key takeaways, making it easier for readers to home in on the most practical guidance.

While the book's focus on practical application with respect to the dissemination process ensures its relevance for its intended audience, its use of the terms 'action research' and 'practitioner research' merits some questioning. Unfortunately, Mertler employs the two terms interchangeably without fully considering that not all practitioner research consists of action research nor does it have to be as rigorous. In fact, while he believes the two terms—and such others as 'classroom research', 'teacher inquiry', etc.—to be synonyms, he admits to being willing to call them metonyms—words used in place of closely related terms—out of respect for those who might disagree with him. The differences amongst terms are as important as the similarities, though, and should not be so easily dismissed. While for him, all practitioner research originates from 'self-identified problems' and is driven by 'the purposes of seeking improvement and change with respect to the phenomenon being investigated' (p. 10), the emphasis placed on 'problems' and 'change' makes his conception of practitioner research more closely aligned with action research than with other forms of inquiry that might not be motivated by problems or geared towards effecting change in the classroom. Moreover, Mertler seems to lose sight of the fact that the rigour associated with action research might not always make it the most appropriate approach for teachers wishing to research their classrooms. Other equally effective options are available.

Mertler's lack of clarity about how action research is distinct from other kinds of practitioner research is problematic because the reader is not given a clear explanation of what its unique benefits happen to be. As one of the most popular approaches to teacher research, action research blends both action and research into a cohesive approach. According to Burns (2019), the action aspect involves implementing planned interventions, which introduce specific strategies, processes, or activities within the research setting. These interventions address identified issues, puzzles, dilemmas, or questions that individuals in the immediate social environment aim to understand, improve, modify, or resolve to achieve more favourable educational outcomes (Burns 2019). Mertler's discussion of the nature of action research is largely limited to how it is different from traditional forms of educational research conducted by academics in terms of its main objective: 'the main goal of action research is to address local-level problems with the anticipation of finding immediate answers to questions or solutions to problems' (p. 15). Apart from action research's promise of change and its potential to offer teachers solutions to the problems they encounter in the classroom, Mertler does not make a convincing case for his decision to focus on this particular approach to teacher research. For instance, the professional benefits he associates with action research (e.g., a focus on self, educator empowerment, and professional growth and learning) are applicable to other forms of practitioner inquiry as well rather than being unique to it.

Some other shortcomings of Mertler's book have to do with content whose absence can somewhat detract from the reader's experience. Although he provides a few practical examples, they might not cover the full spectrum of challenges faced by practitioners in diverse contexts. The inclusion of varied case studies would have offered broader insights. This is where the series of open access books—consisting of accounts of classroom research authored by practitioners—published by the IATEFL Research SIG are particularly useful (e.g., Bullock and Smith 2015). In addition, Mertler's book is largely a one-way guide. Incorporating interactive elements, such as reflection questions, exercises, or access to supplementary online resources, could engage readers more actively. This is content that Smith and Rebolledo (2018) capitalise on in their handbook for exploratory action research.

Having said that, however, Mertler has produced a comprehensive manual that enables educators to disseminate their research findings effectively, thus enhancing professional growth and influencing educational practice. Its clear, motivational approach makes it a must-read for educators committed to improving their practice via action research and contributing to the broader educational discourse. *Disseminating Your Action Research* is a highly practical guide that successfully bridges the gap between conducting research and sharing its outcomes, something that makes it a useful book for early career researchers as well.

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