Action research is a common journey for graduate students in education and other human science fields. This book attempts to meet the needs of graduate students, in-service teachers, and any other educators interested in action research and/or self-study. The chapters of this book draw on our collective experiences as educators in a variety of educational contexts, and our roles guiding educator/researchers in various settings. All of our experiences have enabled us to question and refine our own understanding of action research as a process and means for pedagogical improvement.

The primary purpose of this book is to offer clear steps and practical guidance to those who intend to carry out action research for the first time. As educators begin their action research journey, we feel it is vital to pose four questions:

- What is action research, and how is it distinct from other educational research?
- When is it appropriate for an educator to conduct an action research project in their context?
- How does an educator conduct an action research project?
- What does an educator do with the data once the action research project has been conducted?

We have attempted to address all four questions in the chapters of this book. However, to preempt these four questions, it might be appropriate to consider why an educator would undertake an action research project.

We approach the purpose of action research from a critical and reflective practitioner standpoint. Engaging in action research sparks evaluation and reflection to address and implement necessary changes in practice, for both an individual educator and collaboratively within an institution. Conducting action research helps educators makes changes in practice with increased
knowledge and confidence. Conducting action research can be especially important for educators as they face new initiatives from state departments, district offices, or their own administrators as they have to make decisions among considering their personal viewpoints, doubts, and dilemmas. Action research helps educators explore new initiatives, or even strategies, with an openness to learning, evaluating, and reflecting. Frequent self-evaluating and reflecting are vital acts in an applied field like education because it helps educators achieve professional agency and accountability.

Our book addresses the needs of two distinct groups of educator/researchers, who are at different points in their careers:

Current, in-service, educators who want to conduct small-scale research into an aspect of their current or future practice. Our book would provide these educators guidance regarding the processes involved in conducting an action research project. Our book will also help educators approach the issues in depth by demonstrating how to collect and analyze the data to implement new ideas or change their practices.

Students – both undergraduate and graduate who want to conduct research as part of their program courses. Most graduate programs – especially masters degrees – in education require action research as part of their program of study, which often means the students are also in-service educators from the first category.

We are hopeful that all educators will find the guidance provided in our book useful in improving and fine-tuning their practice. We believe that conducting action research is rooted in ones' sincere interest to develop their own knowledge by asking questions, engaging in inquiry, observing, listening, and analyzing for the purpose of constructing new knowledge. Therefore, we want to aid educators in the creation of new knowledge and experiences to inform their future professional learning and agency. Working alongside educators who engaged in action research in various educational contexts has provided us with a great deal of
encouragement and insights. We hope you will benefit from what we have experienced by utilizing this book.
About the Authors

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J. Spencer Clark is an Associate Professor of Curriculum Studies at Kansas State University. He has used action research methodology for the past 17 years, in K-12 schools and higher education. More recently, for the past 10 years he has taught action research methods to teachers in graduate and licensure degree programs. He also has led secondary student action research projects in Indiana, Utah, and Kansas. Clark also utilizes action research methodology in his own research. Much of his research has focused on understanding and developing teacher agency through clinical and professional learning experiences that utilize aspects of digital communication, inquiry, collaboration, and personalized learning. He has published in a variety of journals and edited books on teacher education, technology, inquiry-based learning, and curriculum development.

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Suzanne Porath has been an English Language Arts, history, and humanities classroom teacher and reading teacher for 13 years before becoming a teacher educator. She has taught in Wisconsin and American international schools in Brazil, Lithuania, and Aruba when she conducted her own action research projects. Before accepting her current position as an assistant professor at Kansas State University in Curriculum and Instruction, she taught at Concordia University and Edgewood College in Wisconsin. She has taught action research methods at the graduate level and facilitated professional development through action research in school districts. She is the lead editor of Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research https://newprairiepress.org/networks/.

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