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A Book Review - *Voices from the Classroom: Performing Case Study Action Research*

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While reading *Voices from the Classroom: Performing Case Study Action Research* by John Sargent, I was immediately brought back to the time when I was finishing my master's thesis, while teaching full time as a first grade teacher in the Rochester Public Schools in Minnesota. My master's degree program—the Graduate Induction Program (GIP)—was designed to assist inexperienced teachers (fellows) with challenges unique to entry into the field of education. The GIP was structured so that once provided a fellowship, fellows would take a series of courses during the summer, teach one full school year while also taking night classes and attending weekly seminars, and graduate the next summer with their Master of Science in Education degree. The first summer consisted of taking two courses on action research. As a practitioner, I found the courses to be very applicable and hands-on. They centered on how to do participatory action research, something that during that time in my professional practice I was unfamiliar with, and certainly uncomfortable doing.

Voices from the Classroom is about how to perform case study action research. The book is 130 pages in length, and contains ten chapters. Written sequentially, each chapter is related to sections of an action research study. For instance, how to introduce the study (chapter 2); how to write a literature review (chapter 3); how to describe the setting, sampling, and participants (chapter 4); how to collect data (chapter 5); how to confirm the trustworthiness of the study (chapter 6); how

to analyze data (chapter 7); how to write up the results (chapter 8); and how to discuss implications of the study (chapter 9). Chapter 1 serves as an introduction of “teacher as researcher,” while the tenth chapter provides examples of two completed case study action research papers authored by Sargent's students.

Sargent's (2009) book has two strengths, mainly that it is written in a reader-friendly way, and it shares many concrete examples of case study action research done by actual teacher researchers. *Voices from the Classroom* does not address too many topics related to action research. This feature makes the book worthwhile to its readers, especially those who desire a very practical read. The last quality that sets the book apart from other books on practitioner based action research lies in the attention Sargent devotes to writing up results. As a result, chapter 8 is extremely helpful for those teachers who may be undertaking their first action research study.

But at the same time, the book has several realities that make it less than desirable. The book contains several grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors that detract from the overall readability of the text. On one hand, a strength of the book is that it is easy to read given its pragmatic tone, along with several examples of real research—such as sections taken from Sargent's (2009) dissertation, and parts of papers taken from Sargent's students. In the same breath, however, the book reads

in some ways as unprofessional. On the back cover, Sargent (2009) describes his book in the following way: “This book is designed to be used by pre-service teachers, graduate students, teachers in the classroom, and administrators who are interested in the ‘practice of teaching.’”

Despite the fact that Sargent’s (2009) book reminded me of the many concepts I learned while completing my action research thesis at Winona State University—according to the Carnegie Classification, a medium, master’s program—such as trustworthiness, triangulation, thick descriptions, and member checking, the book falls short of being able to guide and support graduate level action-research as it lacks a focus on the scholarly aspects of teacher action research; being a classroom practitioner and scholar-researcher do not have to be at odds with one another and the book would benefit from moving beyond its reliance on classroom applications to think through the scholarly applications of action research.

Voices from the Classroom provides its readers with an introductory, albeit narrow, look into how to perform case study action research. Other books written on action research that teacher researchers and/or graduate students might consider consulting include the following: Stringer’s (2007) *Action Research in Education*, Seale’s (2004) *Qualitative Research Practice*, and Johnson’s (2008) *A Short Guide to Action Research*. While I have articulated critique of the book based on Sargent’s claim to be a graduate

level text, the book is still a valuable resource for teachers. The fact that the book is self-published also embodies issues of social justice. As Sargent (2009) points out to his readers, teacher research is about “social justice and democracy” (p. 7). Some have written about the need for alternative ways to publish work given the fact that the publishing industry operates as a filter and gatekeeper to the creation and dissemination of thoughts and ideas (e.g., see Hartlep, 2010, pp. 191-192; Kailin, 2002, p. 56); thus, perhaps it is a good thing Sargent (2009) self-published his book.

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