Introduction to Handbook of Action Research, 2015. Skills. Dusty Embury.

Working with Hilary on editing this section has been a tremendous learning experience. As a relative newcomer to the field of action research I sometimes find myself a bit intimidated as I wander through the stacks of important books and pioneering papers, and somewhat lost in my searching for and learning about communities of practice. My wandering through written words and the World Wide Web as well as word of mouth is, perhaps, all just a part of the experience of learning to appreciate and understand the very real need for action research in this time and place. Through this work of co-editing, however, I have gained a much greater appreciation than I thought possible for the diversity of methodologies within action research and the seemingly limitless potential contexts for conducting action research. I also now have an even clearer understanding of just how much I still have to learn about action research. I, and others new to action research, have a need for a clear explanation of the necessary tools, understandings, and the actual "how to" of the hard and soft skills required to facilitate, create, and analyze real change through action research—whether in ourselves, our work, our communities, or in working with others in sacred places.

While this third edition of the Handbook offers a snapshot of where action research is in *this particular moment* of our shared history, the skills section in particular offers readers an intimate view of frameworks and tools that support our conduct of meaningful and ethical action research in the contemporary world. However, it should be noted that none of these chapters offer a recipe for a particular skill. Rather, the chapters within this section each introduce a skill area the way I might introduce two friends who

do not know one another: by creating a context for how we know one another, sharing a story or two, and then letting the two individuals get to know one another.

In the skills section, the authors present us with a skill (or sometimes skills) and introduce us like an old friend—with stories of history, context, and experiences. As readers, we have the opportunity to *get to know* the skill with deliberate and well-thought explanation of how and why these skills are necessary skills for the action research practitioner. The types of friends, or skills, to whom these authors introduce us fall into three categories: more general skills necessary for all AR, specific skills that can be used in AR, and skills related specifically to teaching and growing new action researchers.

Skills necessary for all AR:

1. *Widening the Circle: Ethical Reflection in Action Research and the Practice of Structured Ethical Reflection*
2. *From Research "On" to Research "With": Developing Skills for Research with Sex Workers*
3. *Care When Using Theories and Frameworks in Client Consulting*
4. *Radical epistemology as caffeine for social change*
5. *Shared inquiry capabilities and differing inquiry preferences: Navigating 'full cycle' iterations of action research*
6. *Unlocking the Secrets of Personal and Systemic Power: The Power Lab and Action Inquiry in the Classroom*

Some of the skills presented in the skills section are over arching skills that, regardless of the context, are necessary for meaningful AR. Skills addressed in the above chapters reinforce ideas and skills necessary for all types of action research methodologies, contexts, participants, and goals. As readers we are introduced and then challenged to consider our own understandings of topics as we approach action research. The authors ask us to consider questions such as: How do we address ethics, and can we do it in a systematic way? Who creates knowledge and where? Where does power lie? What steps

can I take when using theories and frameworks, how do I maintain establish a foundation

for AR that focuses on the value of the participant as researcher, and how can I assess my

own inquiry preferences to become a more complementary practitioner?

Specific Skills for conducting AR

7. *Nurturing Creative Destruction: Bringing Management Mindsets and Influence Skillsets to Healthcare*
8. *Designerly Ways for Action Research*
9. *Practice of Mindful Intuition: Bi-Directional Openness: The Skill of Expressing And Sensing Leadership That Serves a Group*
10. *Mediated dialogue in action research*
11. *Cultivating Intention (As we enter the fray): The Practice of Embodying Presence, Awareness, and Purpose as Action Researchers*
12. *A cross-cultural approach with East-Asian epistemology: Developing soft skills in action research*
13. *Clearing Obstacles: An Exercise to Expand a Person's Repertoire of Action*
14. *Feelings in first person action research*
15. *You Better Check Your Method Before You Wreck Your Method: Challenging and Transforming Photovoice*
16. *The Skillful Means of Engaged Research*

The skills needed for action research are not static and as the practice of action research

continues to evolve and to expand as a powerful alternative to social science, the skills

necessary to conduct action research also develop and new skills arise. In this section,

authors introduce a skill in a detailed way, sharing stories of how the skill or skills have

been used, their relevance to research, community, culture, and individuals, and call on us

to consider how to use these new skills in our own practices. The authors of these

chapters demonstrate that the skills and skill sets of action researchers are fluid, animate,

and are not confined to a single domain.

Skills related to developing action researchers

17. *Teaching and Learning Reflective Practice in the Action Science/Action Inquiry Tradition*
18. *Teaching The Heart of Action Research Skills: Breaking Free in the Classroom*

19. *Discovering Philosophical Assumptions That Guide Action Research: The Reflexive Toolbox Approach*

Action research is so intertwined with teaching and learning that it is not easy, perhaps not possible at all, to separate AR from teaching and learning as any sort of separate component. When we consider AR as means for discovery and change, teaching and learning occur as a part of the action and reflection processes. The skills necessary to practice AR are also the skills necessary to teach others how to practice AR. In chapters that address the skills needed to successfully introduce others to action research, the authors share experiences, strategies, and recommendations for teaching action research and AR skills to others.

These chapters provide a warm introduction to some new friends and a cheerful reintroduction to some old friends. You are invited to get to know them, interact with them, and practice these skills in your own context.

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