

Book Review

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EXPLICATION OF THE BOOK ACTION RESEARCH AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

(Jelena Maksimovic, *Akciona istraživanja i refleksivna praksa*, University, Nis, 2017, p.104)

Action research is a desiderium of educational practice. It portrays the practice as it is, with the view to create the best of it and removing everything that hinders dissemination of innovations regarding students' personality, teaching, school system and education policy develop. The importance of action research has been recognized by Jelena Maksimovic, associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nis. Jelena Maksimovic has contributed to the scientific community with her long-term work on this subject. Her books are aimed at experts and beginners in the area of education and upbringing, as well as practitioners who work in public institutions. Some of her significant works include: *Различити методолошки приступи у истраживању школског неуспеха* (2009), *Akciona istraživanja u pedagoškoj teoriji i praksi* (2012), in co-authorship with Prof. Boris Kozuh *Obrada podataka u pedagoškim istraživanjima* (2009), *Deskriptivna statistika u pedagoškim istraživanjima* (2011), *Metoda uzorka u pedagoškim istraživanjima* (2012), *Upotreba PSPP programa u pedagoškim istraživanjima* (2013), as well as hundreds of published papers in journals.

The book *Akciona istraživanja i refleksivna praksa* enables insight into the relationship of action research with the reflexivity of teachers as practitioners. It was published at the end of 2017 by the University of Nis. It was a product of work on the project Master program in Educational Leadership (EdLead), within the TEMPUS IV program funded by the European Commission. The reviewers of the book were Ph.D. Grozdanka Gojkov and Ph.D. Veljko Bandjur from the Teacher Education Faculty in Belgrade, as well as Ph.D. Bisera Jevtic from the Faculty of Philosophy in Nis.

The structure of the book consists of the introduction, theoretical part with subtitles: 1. Action research and reflexive practice through historical dimensions, 2. Reflexive practice, reflexion and teachers' reflexion, 3. The influence of reflexive practice on students and learning, 4. The need for methodological and statistical education of teachers, methodology of research, analysis and interpretation of the results of research, concluding considerations, reference. The book contains 4 appendices: 1. Evaluation scale Teachers as action researchers, 2. Methodology of pedagogical research test TM1, 3. Pedagogical statistics test TS1, 4. Articles on *Leadership in education*.

In the introductory part of the book, the significance of research work of teachers with the aim of innovating their own teaching practice is emphasized, as well as continuous professional improvement, and the cooperation and exchange of information in a school collective. The autonomy of teachers, as well as other participants of research, self-evaluation and critical examination of the existing, and reaching new findings, are encouraged by action research.

The central part of the book comprises of a blend of theory and empirical research, that is, three chapters which consist of theoretical approach to the subject, methodological part, and the analysis and interpretation of the results of the research. A contemporary school context, aside from transferring knowledge and realization of the teaching program, requires teachers to take on the role of an action reflexive practitioner. Reflexive practitioners are experts that accept teaching as a process which is a variable category, where there are not the same rules that exist in their beliefs, but dozens of rules that we get to know as we implement the teaching. An action teacher is a free, flexible researcher in practice, he/she is methodologically and statistically competent to plan, implement research, to analyse results and evaluate them. Action research enables a flexible plan of reconsideration of practice, implementing innovations, overviewing the results, changing the initial bases of the very actions if they do not prove efficient, in a word, it enables reflexion.

In the theoretical part of the book, the author primarily looks back at the historical dimension and terminological clarification of action research and reflexive practice. The significance of Dewey, Lewin and Schön is emphasized, as the founders of action and reflexion, as well as other authors who wrote about changes with knowing and knowing through changes. Reflexion enables a teacher to become more precise in making proper decisions and directs him towards innovation as opposed to traditionalism. The teacher learns best from his/her own experience, and reflexion and action enables him/her to acquire new experiences. The results of action research cannot be negative for the teacher and the school; they rather represent a positive shift towards the road to improvement of the education and upbringing processes. What is primary in their realization is the initial methodological and statistical education of teachers, as well as continuous professional development. The objective of action research is not research itself, but also an automatic application of results.

A methodological part of the book encompasses all the important elements of proper research, and these are: problem, subject, objective, tasks and hypotheses, variables, sample, methods, techniques and instruments, organization and course, as well as the statistical processing of research data. The issue that the author deals with is action-reflexive and methodological statistical competence of teachers. The objective of the research is to determine the role of action research and the familiarisation with methodology and statistics. The research was conducted throughout 2016 and 2017. Descriptive and survey methods were used as methods of the research, and scaling and testing as techniques of the research. Remarkable results were achieved with the adequate instrumentarium comprised of assessment scale AIN consisting of 70 items with 9 subscales (1. Participation of teachers in research, 2. Participants of action research, 3. Incentive for implementation of research, 4. Evaluation of methodology and methodical knowledge, 5. The advantages of action research, 6. The shortcomings of action research, 7. Critical friend in action research, 8. Factors that influence motivation for carrying out action research, 9. The areas of implementation of action research), and accuracy of 0.94 (Cronbach's Alpha test), tests of methodology of pedagogical research TM1 (20 questions), and pedagogical statistics test TS1 (20 questions), as well as a representative sample which comprises of 402 respondents, categorized according to gender, years of service, place of university, grade point average and length of study.

The analysis and interpretation of the results of the research, which consists of 12 segments, is a part in which hypotheses were interpreted, that is, confirmed or refuted. In the first segment 'Participation of teachers in research on teaching practice', the author points the

positivity of teachers' attitudes towards participation in action research, as well as the fact that independent variables, such as gender, the length of service, place of study and university, and the grade point average, do not affect differences in opinion. In the second segment 'Participants in action research' the significance of the existence of a critical friend in research is emphasized, as well as the fact that teachers do not have a clear attitude on their competence for implementing action research. The aforementioned independent variables do not influence differences in opinion. The third segment 'Incentives for implementing action research' shows that teachers are encouraged to implement this research, that is, that there is intrinsic motivation, but the opportunities for that are small, since teachers are not autonomous and flexible enough. It was shown that female respondents were more encouraged to implement research. The fourth segment 'Methodology in educational work of teachers' confirms that teachers are aware of the need to know the methodology of pedagogy to implement research. The fifth segment 'Advantages of action research' indicates that teachers with fewer years of service have more positive attitudes regarding the advantages of action research. The sixth segment 'The shortcomings of action research' indicates the need for self-criticism for action research to be successful, as well as the fact that teachers are aware of shortcomings which disable the realization of this research. It has been shown that the length of study does not affect the attitudes of teachers. The seventh segment 'Critical friend in action research' portrays results according to which teachers are uncertain whether the principal, teacher, expert associate, or educational counselor should have the role of a critical friend, the one that counsels, helps and directs. The eighth segment of the book, 'Factors of providing motivation for implementing action research' confirms that methodological education, research competence, computer literacy, are the factors of teachers' motivation. The length of study and years of service affect reflexions on factors of motivation. A part of 'Areas of implementation of action research' indicates the possibility of applying action research in many areas, but it has been shown that teachers are indecisive in which areas to implement them. Practical experience of teachers influences the openness towards research. In the part 'Teachers on action research' the author revealed the results which showed that female respondents were more motivated to implement action research, and that they value methodology and methodological knowledge more. The length of service affects teachers' attitudes on the shortcomings of action research, whereas the length of study affects the participation of teachers in research and motivation for implementing research. The place of study also influences the attitudes on involvement and implementation of action research. The grade point average at the university affects the attitudes of teachers on factors that influence motivation for research. The eleventh segment 'Methodological and statistical awareness of teachers' indicates insufficient knowledge of methodology and statistics, since a small number of teachers completed the test of knowledge correctly. In the last segment 'The relationship between teachers' attitudes and action research and methodological and statistical knowledge' the author suggests that teachers who do not have enough knowledge in methodology and statistics can implement research if they are motivated for that, and that the lack of knowledge can always be compensated.

Summing all the results, Jelena Maksimovic concludes that action research is insufficiently represented in teachers' practice, but there are still positive attitudes on the implementation of this research with some support.

In appendices, aside from instruments of the research, readers can see articles about the project *Leadership in education*, as well as the author's contribution to this program whose

goal is the promotion of principles and other leaders' competence in the areas of education and culture.

Although significant, action research is still unknown to many practitioners, it is necessary to affirm its implementation. With this research, the author wanted to determine whether teachers are methodologically and statistically capable of implementing action research, whether they understand its significance, follow published research, and whether they have professional trainings. Moreover, all participants of educational process, not only some courageous and dedicated researchers, indicated the need for raising awareness for the entire expert public to implement action research. The results of action research can refer to a particular school, subject, students, but that does not mean that they should not be placed further, pointing to possible means of solving particular problems. The network of cooperation must exist if we want high-quality education.

The book is aimed at all courageous and autonomous researchers of their own practice since it indicates what action research is and why the existence of reflection is necessary. A teacher who faces different problems in work must not stay mute and blind before them, but it is necessary to solve them with planning actions, with reflexiveness, continuous evaluation and changing beliefs and means of work. A 21st-century teacher has to be methodologically and statistically enabled, a critic of his\her own practice, to be enthusiastic about research, and thus justify the reasons of choosing the teacher's calling as his\her life journey.

The need for constant emphasis of action research is more than apparent, especially in the age of rapid society development. We cannot develop competent individuals on whose work the progress of society depends, without the development of education. The achieved goal of this exceptionally important book is only one in a series of past endeavors of Jelena Maksimovic to establish activity and reflexiveness of teachers as unavoidable competencies of a contemporary educator.

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More important works:

Stanisavljević Petrović, Z., Cvetković, M. i Jovanović, A. (2012): Humanization of School According to the Idea of Paulo Freire. *Facta universitatis - series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, vol. 11, N^o. 1, pp. 33-42. UDC 37.014. ISSN 1820-8495 (Print); ISSN 1820-8509 (Online).

Kostadinović, M. i Jovanović, A. (2017). Safety of Adolescents in the Digital Age. In: Pralica, D. i Šinković, N. (ed.). *Digitalne medijske tehnologije i društveno-obrazovne promene 7*, (pp. 111-123), Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet. UDC 004.738.5-053.81, ISBN 978-86-6065-450-4, COBISS.SR-ID 322094599.