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Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research: A Review

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Abstract

I write this review of the book, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research*, for readers, writers, and novice and veteran researchers in various social sciences disciplines and educational landscapes. The book explores using Participatory Action Research (PAR) to implement transformative education. The book argues that PAR can be used to create contextualized, sustainable, and student-centered learning environments. It offers invaluable insights from experts who have actively worked on innovative approaches to school transformation. The book also provides practical guidance and research-based strategies to help scholars effectively navigate challenges and implement transformative education. Overall, the book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in learning more about PAR and transformative education. I would highly recommend it to readers looking for ways to use research to positively impact their community of practices.

Keywords

transformative education, participatory action research, identification, solutions, challenges, implement

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Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research: A Review

Niroj Dahal

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I write this review of the book, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research*, for readers, writers, and novice and veteran researchers in various social sciences disciplines and educational landscapes. The book explores using Participatory Action Research (PAR) to implement transformative education. The book argues that PAR can be used to create contextualized, sustainable, and student-centered learning environments. It offers invaluable insights from experts who have actively worked on innovative approaches to school transformation. The book also provides practical guidance and research-based strategies to help scholars effectively navigate challenges and implement transformative education. Overall, the book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in learning more about PAR and transformative education. I would highly recommend it to readers looking for ways to use research to positively impact their community of practices.

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What Is in the Book?

The book, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research*, is a comprehensive resource for academic scholars who are looking to make a tangible impact in the field of education. The book was edited by Bal Chandra Luitel, Bhimsen Devkota, Sheri Bastien, and Bishal Kumar Sitaula and published in 2023. The book includes contributions from 32 authors representing different disciplines—STEAM education, mathematics education and health education (among others), and writing from different parts of the world—Nepal, Norway, Greece, and Mongolia. The book explores the use of PAR to transform education systems and create more equitable and inclusive learning environments through research and practice. The book is structured in 16 pivotal chapters. The first fourteen chapters are rooted in the PAR conducted as part of the Rupantaran project, supported by the NORHED project in Nepal, while two additional chapters—fifteen and sixteen extend the discourse from Mongolia and Greece. In collaboration with Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu University from Nepal, and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences from Norway, the book aims to bridge the gap between higher education and school-level education by contextualizing transformative teaching methods. For this review, I have summarized each chapter below.

Chapter 1 outlines a PAR study aimed at crafting STEAM-based teaching methods in two rural Nepalese schools. The study spanned three years and three phases of PAR, each phase focusing on different approaches like inquiry-based learning and real-world projects. The chapter gives particular attention to the "Save the Species" project implemented in the final cycle. Chapter 2 examines the struggles surrounding menstrual hygiene in rural Nepal, focusing on challenges such as limited access to sanitary pads and inadequate facilities. Through PAR, the authors taught 28 girls to create reusable pads, establishing a pad bank at their school. The

chapter underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable solutions. Chapter 3 delves into fostering healthy nutrition behaviors in Nepali schoolchildren. It outlines three strategies within the PAR framework to ensure the program's sustainability and effectiveness. The chapter aims to offer valuable insights for stakeholders involved in education and research. Chapter 4 explores the role of skills-based health education in creating stress-free learning environments for early adolescents. It details the positive impact of PAR on student mental well-being, particularly through activities like awareness-raising and classroom meditation. Chapter 5 scrutinizes the gender disparities in opportunities for professional development among female teachers in Nepal. Using a socio-cultural lens and co-generative inquiry, the authors propose context-sensitive strategies to bolster female teachers' career growth. Chapter 6 advocates for a holistic approach to professional development, arguing that spiritual, psychological, and artistic dimensions must harmonize with technological advancements. It emphasizes the importance of inner awakening for overall professional success. Chapter 7 shares success stories from a community-led school gardening project in Dapcha, a historic Newari settlement. The chapter suggests that such initiatives contribute to the revitalization of the area's social, ecological, and economic facets. Chapter 8 also further examines another school garden project, emphasizing its value as a living classroom. The garden becomes a holistic teaching tool, providing a platform for environmental stewardship and active learning for students, teachers, and parents alike.

Likewise, chapter 9 presents a case study of school transformation through creative teaching methods guided by Transformative Learning theory. The chapter identifies changes at the micro, meso, and macro levels within the school, showcasing examples like the establishment of various types of sustainable farming. Chapter 10 critiques the limitations of participatory pedagogy, arguing that it can inadvertently impose certain agendas. The chapter explores the nuances of creating sustainable behavioral changes, particularly in the context of sanitation and hygiene. Chapter 11 emphasizes the role of "ecopreneurship" in sustainable development, recommending a policy shift to include this concept in Nepal's local curricula to foster social responsibility and environmental sustainability. Chapter 12 argues for the use of transformative praxis (Luitel & Dahal, 2020) in advancing action learning, providing both theoretical and practical guidelines for educators to foster active learning through reflective research and practice. Chapter 13 offers a framework called "TRIVENI," to address challenges in implementing PAR for transformative learning. It connects PAR with transformative learning and discusses various hurdles in their application. Chapter 14 discusses participatory autoethnographic research to balance knowledge and wisdom, shedding light on the transformative journey from conventional to transformative educational practice.

Finally, chapter 15 explores the scarcity of formal educational services in rural Mongolia. A PAR program was employed to engage herder parents in their children's education, featuring both in-person meetings and an online platform for sharing developmental activities. The final chapter analyzes the long-term impact of an online professional development program on in-service teachers, underpinned by Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The study employs mixed methods and reveals a substantial shift in participants' teaching philosophies and professional practices.

Reviewer's Evaluation

In today's rapidly emerging world, academic scholars find themselves at a critical juncture where traditional educational systems—one-size-fits-all approaches (Luitel et al., 2022) and victim blaming (among others) are increasingly failing to meet the complexities of contemporary societal challenges. The urgent call for transformation in education is more than a theoretical discourse; it's a practical necessity. Addressing this urgency is the insightful book,

Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research, which serves as a beacon for academics seeking effective ways to foster meaningful changes within educational systems through research and practice. The book is rich in PAR from Nepal, Norway, Greece, and Mongolia, and acts as a comprehensive guide to leveraging the power of PAR for the creation of relevant, sustainable, and student-centric educational landscapes.

On the contrary, as a book reviewer, it is crucial to approach the text without any preconceived notions or biases (Dahal, 2023c) to provide valuable feedback for both the author and potential readers. I have considered the book's genre, target audience, purpose, and message, as well as the contributors' backgrounds, previous works, and any relevant historical or cultural contexts. I have also evaluated the book's organization, writing style, pacing, strengths, and weaknesses. From my perspective as a reader and reviewer, I found the book to be a solid foundation for practicing PAR and found it engaging, approachable, and thought-provoking for transformative education. It was fascinating. Even though writing a book review is always a challenging task for reviewers. These challenges raised critical questions for the reviewer to offer the evaluation of the book (Chenail, 2010; Dahal, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e). However, the book, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research*, is an invaluable resource for academic scholars seeking to make a tangible impact in their educational settings. The evidence collected from the research presented in the book informs that PAR works in contextualizing education at the local level, influencing policy and practice. Scholars can reimagine teaching and learning by incorporating PAR, empowering students to thrive in a rapidly changing world. This book is likely to empower scholars to contribute to advancing transformative education and creates a ripple effect that extends beyond the classroom, shaping a more inclusive, relevant, and future-ready education system. In summary, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research* is the ultimate guide for academic scholars looking to make a difference in education using PAR. It provides a roadmap for creating meaningful change in education, both at the local level and beyond. By following the principles outlined in this book, scholars can help shape a brighter future for students and society.

Above all, this review aims to further integrate PAR and transformative education discourse into the mainstream of qualitative research. PAR is increasingly being used in educational research, including at the Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal, where I am working as a lecturer. Likewise, I am writing this review as a scholar, academician, and teacher of research methods and methods to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as a supervisor and examiner, and as a user of PAR approaches and other various qualitative approaches (Dahal, 2023a; McTaggart, 1991) and a supervisor and examiner. For my Ph.D. research project in 2020, I attempted to use this novel method (see McTaggart, 1991). I am familiar with these novel methods and methodologies of PAR. As a reviewer, I found that the book, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research*, provides a solid foundation for the professions—readers, writers, and novice and veteran researchers.

Overall, this review is intended to help researchers who are using and/or planning to use PAR in the research process. PAR is becoming increasingly common in educational research (McTaggart, 1991), and I have seen this trend firsthand at my own institution—Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal. In fact, PAR researchers have had the opportunity to present their work at prestigious conferences and annual meetings around the world. Further, I read all 16 chapters of the book, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research*, carefully. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about the methods and practices of PAR in social sciences and/or educational research. Likewise, the book provides a wide range of Eastern and Western perspectives and practices on PAR and transformative education. In conclusion, *Implementing Transformative Education with Participatory Action Research* is a seminal resource for

scholars who are committed to meaningful educational transformation. The book endorses the use of PAR as a powerful tool for contextualizing and advancing educational methods. It is more than just a theoretical guideline; it is a practical manual for creating a more inclusive, contextually relevant, and future-ready educational system. The book invites scholars to join a transformative journey that will equip students to adapt to a rapidly changing world and help shape a more equitable and sustainable global society. I want to thank Luitel et al. (2023) for offering this important book. It is a valuable resource for researchers in various social sciences and educational disciplines, from novices to veteran researchers.

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