



Using Action Inquiry in Engaged Research: An Organizing Guide

St. John, Edward P.; Lijana, Kim Callahan; and Musoba, Glenda D.

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Book Review

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In *Using Action Inquiry in Engaged Research*, Edward P. St. John, Kim Callahan Lijana, and Glenda D. Musoba offer readers a guide for organizing and using information for social justice in education. The authors pair a description of the Action Inquiry Method (AIM) with practices for the reader to use in his or her own context. In addition, the authors employ specific cases to explicate the relation of practitioners, institutions, partners, and researchers. Each case is followed by questions for individual or group reflection. The book includes sections written by researchers and practitioners, which models the varied roles and approaches to AIM as well as the benefits and challenges of collaboration in engaged research for social justice.

Readers are challenged by an integrated understanding of the role of education and policy in social justice. The authors beneficially emphasize the K-16 pathways and the position of underserved populations. The authors remind the reader that the context of the cases and other examples in the text do not necessarily correlate to their own context. This recognition that there is no one right answer to an educational need is underscored by an emphasis on the experimental mode. Readers are encouraged to learn from failure instead of being paralyzed. Moreover, the authors provide ways for practitioners and researchers to challenge systems and practices that prevent justice.

Indeed the tone of the book itself enables and encourages practitioners and researchers as they begin to engage AIM for the first time or collaborate in a new setting. As “an organizing guide,” *Using Action Inquiry* provides specific questions for the reader to use in assessing a situation and organizing a response. One of the possible weaknesses of this guide is that it does not provide an extensive introduction to AIM; however, the guide’s emphasis on social

justice in education would beneficially complement another introduction to AIM.

For scholars of religion and theology, *Using Action Inquiry* offers a way to question the role of university programs in relation to the pursuit of social justice. The authors outline specific ways in which programs and individuals can potentially assist underserved populations. Additionally, the structure of the guide promotes personal and group reflection. Consequently, university personnel could beneficially engage *Using Action Inquiry* as they attempt to restructure programs, recruit and retain students, and promote an institution's mission.

Moreover, the guide can be used in graduate courses to introduce students to AIM. While the text focuses on education research, those interested in other fields can apply this information to their own research context. In particular, the chapter on "Learning from Experience" offers practical suggestions for how to engage institutions and partners and to reflect on one's role as a researcher. For those introducing theology students to ethnographic methods, *Using Action Inquiry* would encourage students to reflect on the ethical questions involved in research as they seek to promote social justice.

At a time when higher education is in a state of transition, *Using Action Inquiry in Engaged Research* encourages practitioners and researchers to collaborate to recognize the needs of underserved populations, organize for change, and promote social justice in education.

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