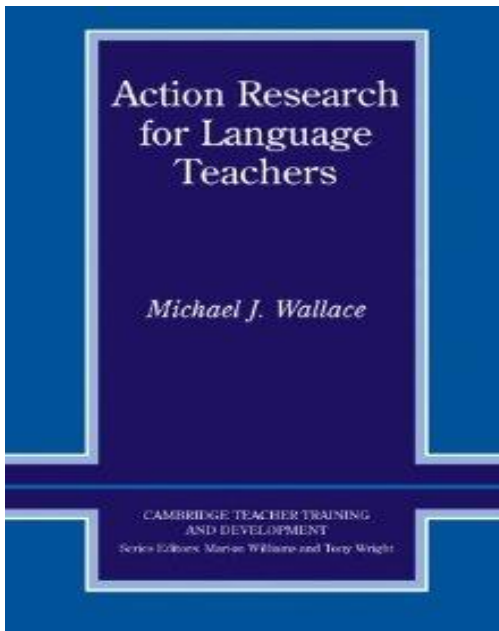


# Book Review

**Title:** Action Research for Language Teachers (Cambridge Teacher Training and Development series)  
**Editor:** Marion Williams and Tony Wright  
**Author:** Wallace, J. Michael  
**Publisher:** Cambridge University Press (2008)  
**No. of pages:** 273  
**ISBN:** 9780521555357  
**Reviewer:** Rajni Jaimini



Action research is a powerful tool of professional development that helps teachers in examining their own educational practices. It makes them overcome what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) call “the discrepancy between what is intended and what occurs” (p. 11). It helps them become better teachers by confronting their own problems and finding their solutions by using research techniques like collecting data and then analyzing that data in an objective manner. There are many books available today on action research but Michael J. Wallace’s book is exceptional. It is written

specially for “practicing teacher(s) with a keen interest in professional development” (p. 1), who have loads of work on their hands already but, who would not hesitate to invest their time if it helped them solve the problems they are facing everyday in their classrooms.

The author claims “to demonstrate a particular strategy for accelerating and enhancing (professional) development with special reference to language teaching” (p. 4). However instead of talking about “concepts and contexts of teacher research” (p. 1-2) or “Research on teaching and teacher research: the issues that divide” (p. 5-22) as Cochran-Smith and Lytle, do, the author starts the book with “Why action

research?” thereby letting the readers know how it may help them as teachers of English. The author further goes on to talk about selecting and developing a topic. The issue has been given due weightage because time given at this stage and the planning done, taking in consideration the amount of time, work, and resources involved, ensure that the project would materialize and reach its desired conclusion. After the planning come the methods of “collecting data-like field notes, logs, journals, diaries, personal accounts, verbal reports, observation techniques, recording and analyzing classroom skills, questionnaires and interviews”. The author also talks about case study approach and “some approaches to sharing ideas” (p. 207) among teachers themselves. This chapter offers several insights into how action research can lead to greater collaboration amongst peers and engender a process through which professionals may overcome their inhibitions and seek the answers to their problems not just personally but also as a collaborative exercise. The author very rightly observes that “the feedback from colleagues can be motivating and rewarding as well as providing the basis for further reflection” (p. 208).

The special feature of this book is that it is very user friendly. It presents the process of action research in a very systematic and pragmatic manner. It doesn't encourage the reader to make castles in the air but shows them how they can build the edifice of their professional expertise brick by brick. The language is easy. The ideas have been presented with great clarity and organization. Also, a conscious attempt has been made to present action research as a tool for practicing teachers and not just those who have to write academic papers for their degrees. It contains many “exemplar articles and extracts” (p. 2) that really help one in visualizing the benefits of implementing a research technique. Also, after every major concept the author has put a personal review section to give the reader a chance to personalize the issues and relate them to their own context. This section allows the reader to add his own perceptions to the issue under discussion. Not just that, after the personal review section the author has given “commentaries” which discuss some probable answers to the questions posed before. Another very special feature of the book is the “suggestions for further reading” (p. 262) on various aspects of action research like general texts, specific techniques, publication and presentation and even time management. The list is very selective and updated. The author remembers that he is writing for very busy teachers, with little time on their hands and so makes sure to give only the most discriminating and informed list.

The only drawback of this book, if at all, is that it doesn't warn the trusting teacher that the findings of their research may not always be what they expect. For action research to be successful they must be prepared to look at their own practices in a critical manner which is not always a very easy thing to do. While some writers like Millis (2003) start their book by plunging the reader headlong into the process by "providing an example of action research from a real teacher researcher" (p. 1), Wallace doesn't give a description of any research project and its outcomes in the early pages. Despite that, the book is a must in every dedicated teacher's library.

**References:**

- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1993). *Inside Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*. Columbia University: Teacher's College Press.
- Millis, G. E. (2003). *Action Research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.

**About the reviewer:**

**Rajni Jaimini** is working as a lecturer of English with the Directorate of Education, Delhi. She is a British Council trained Master Trainer in the Teaching of Communication Skills. She has also adapted Shakespeare's plays for children. She traveled to USA earlier this year for Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program as a university fellow.

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