



Stuck Improving: Racial Equity and School Leadership

For Education Researchers

This book study guidance document is designed for **education researchers and graduate students** who want to learn about, design, and lead research projects that accomplish the dual aims of producing knowledge and advancing racial equity in educational settings.

To conduct the research that forms the basis for “Stuck Improving: Racial Equity and School Leadership,” Irby and his colleagues used participatory action research as the guiding methodology that informed all data collection and analysis activities. Participatory Action Research disrupts many standard conventions of academic research, such as efforts at political neutrality, assumptions of objectivity, one-way extraction of knowledge from insider-participants.

Participatory Action Research is grounded in commitments to reciprocity and mutual benefit; collaboration; action, exploration, and experimentation; and a willingness to name and wrestle with questions of power. Finally, it has clear political goals that emphasize the importance of taking action to solve problems and changing the conditions to benefit people who are on the margins of a given society or community.

Starter Questions: Sharing Your Reading Experience

1. What did you expect to learn coming into the book? How did your experience reading the book match or deviate from your expectations? In what ways?
2. What was your favorite part (chapter, section, or passage) of the book? Why?



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3. What do you consider the top 3 takeaways from the book?
4. As you read the book, what surprised you?
5. If you could ask Dr. Irby one question about the book, what would it be and why?

Text Analysis Activity for Groups

Step 1. Circle three words that you consider the most powerful words in the book. Write the words below:

Word 1:

Word 2:

Word 3:

Step 2. Underline three sentences that you think reflect the challenges or opportunities of the research project the book recounts. Write the page and paragraph of the sentences in the space below.

Sentence 1:

Sentence 2:

Sentence 3:



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Step 3. Highlight three passages that are important for educational researchers to take into consideration when designing or conducting participatory research partnership with education practitioners. Write the page numbers of the passages below:

Passage 1:

Passage 2:

Passage 3:

Step 4. Without talking or interrupting, have each person share word 1. After each person has shared their word without interruption, ask each person to read aloud, without interruption, the sentence they selected.

Step 5. Use the words, sentences, or passages to initiate a discussion about why the selected passages were identified as important.

Repeat steps 4 and 5 as necessary.



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Research Discussion

The Stuck Improving Research project was collaboratively co-designed and co-led by academic researchers and school-based leaders and educators. Studying Stuck Improving with a lens toward the research project design and implementation offers ample opportunities for scholars to explore the ethics and dilemmas of research collaborations, ranging from negotiating the start of the project to reporting.

1. What are some research dilemmas that the research team faced? How well did they handle the dilemmas? What would you have done differently and why?
2. What do you think are the affordances and constraints that the different participants' identities placed on the research process?
3. What role did researcher identity and positionality play in the research project?
4. How might the project have been different if [we] conducted the study?



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5. If I designed this type of study (either as a researcher or practitioner), what would I do differently? What are steps, conversations, or action I would initiate early in the project to ensure its long-term success?

6. What lessons or insights from Stuck Improving can help advance research and the systematic study of leadership for racial equity?

7. What are some of the theories you think underpin the research project? How does Irby's use of theory shape the approach to research and writing about racism? Organizational change?

8. What lessons or insights from Stuck Improving can help advance teaching leadership for racial equity? How can researchers produce scholarship that helps practitioners understand and improve their leadership practice (without being prescriptive)?

9. What lessons of insights from Stuck Improving are useful for understanding researcher positionalities and ethics? How does reading Stuck Improving help us think about the potential role of academic researchers and scholars as participants in racial equity leadership?



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Deepening the Conversation with Your Own Questions

Develop 2-3 questions that you would like to explore with your book study group. Write the questions below and place them in a hat or knapsack. Pick a question from the sack. Present it to the group and discuss it.

[Empty rounded rectangular box for writing a question]

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[Empty rounded rectangular box for writing a question]

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Thank you for engaging in a "Stuck Improving" book study. We invite you to keep the conversation going.

Do you have a question that was not addressed in the study guide? Ask Dr. Irby by tagging @stuckimproving on X.

