
Book Reviews

**Smith, R. & Rebolledo, P. (2018). *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research*. London: The British Council. (108 pages)
ISBN: 978-0863558856**

Reviewed by Tulika Kakkar

Action research is one of the significantly important domains of ELT which reinforces teaching and learning pedagogy. In the Indian sub-context, action research gets scant attention partly because of misinformed ideas related to action research and lack of ancillary support needed for it. The book by Richard Smith and Paulo Rebolledo *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research* is exactly what many teachers need to go through to get a clear vision about action research. It demystifies ideas related to classroom research and provides realistic goals. Written in a “non-academic, teacher-friendly style” (p. 2), the book investigates classroom challenges pertaining to the ESL/EFL context and their prospective solutions from the point of view of teachers without delving into the jargon of pedagogy.

The book which is little over 100 pages in length is more like a “workbook” for ESL/EFL teachers, as the authors themselves call it “a practical handbook” (p. 2). It deals exclusively with case studies and classroom experiences of teachers from the Chilean Champion Teachers Project; although most of the examples could have parallels with Indian classrooms and would also be true of other ESL/EFL classrooms. The highlight of the book is that it solves the puzzle of action research by exploring classroom situations and challenges faced by many Chilean teachers with their students. The book to a major extent focuses on the exploratory phase of action research and deems it important for every teacher to regularly question their teaching-learning process.

The book consistently demands that the readers gauge their responses (exploratory questions given in the book for readers) and evaluate their teaching context through their experience at various stages of action

research. It asks the reader to record their responses in columns, tables and grids presented throughout the book with model answers given at the end. It is divided into ten chapters, the first six of which provide extensive examples of how Chilean Champion Teachers went about researching their classroom contexts, from asking question to analysis of data and finally sharing of research findings, the book succinctly completes the cycle of action research.

In order to simplify the approach towards action research and thereby prevent getting lost in the barrage of possible topics, the book suggests the MUSE approach which stands for Manageable, Urgent, Significant, Engaging (p. 31). A major problem for many action research teachers is to weigh one significantly important topic against another; hence the MUSE approach gives practical direction as to which topic is sustainable and fits the criteria.

An important aspect of the book is it vividly differentiates “signs” from “evidence”. Signs are what any teacher might see, feel and hear in a classroom, whereas evidence is information accessed through research. This idea helps teachers and educators to clearly distinguish between common sensory perception of classroom challenges and information gathered through an objective scientific study. The most common, observable signs might not hold true or give complete information and therefore require further study. It is at this juncture, that the exploratory phase of action research becomes crucial.

Deciding on the feasibility of the best data collection method(s) has posed a constant challenge for teachers. Adoption of the right methodology for data collection is a prerequisite for classroom action research. The book does a great job in underlying advantages and drawbacks of several methods. For instance, when trying to assess information related to low-speaking response in a classroom, the teacher is presented with numerous methods of data collection. The book implicitly reflects on various methods and likewise debates if reflective writing would give more detailed information than interviews or if open-ended, anonymous questionnaires would perhaps be more suitable for fair and uninhibited information than interviews.

Chapter 6 of the book is particularly interesting as it gives meticulous information on how to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. It suggests the “coding” approach (p. 58) to evaluate qualitative data

which assigns a certain code to the data. These codes can be further put in “bigger codes” or “categories” which in itself is a homogeneous category. This kind of categorization helps in sorting information/data and interpreting the information based on concrete larger parameters.

In addition, the writers have taken into cognizance the fact that many action research projects might not yield anticipated results or could possibly demand a series of “action research cycle” (p. 72) to be undertaken. In a nutshell, the book demands that ESL/EFL teachers should critically reflect their teaching practices and simultaneously engage in action research. The book is a valuable tool for in-service secondary school teachers who would like to continue researching their classroom and pursue continued professional development.

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Saint, T.K. & Verso, F. (Eds.). (2020). *Avatar - अवतार : Contemporary Indian Science Fiction. Fantascienza Contemporanea Indiana. Roma: Future Fiction. (312 pages). ISBN: 978-8832077117, ₹ 1300 (Hardbound), ₹ 249 (Kindle)*

Reviewed by Sumita Sharma

Speculative fiction may not be everyone’s cup of tea, till it is or should be. Especially when the introduction to a new anthology gently nudges tentative readers away from Golden-Agish hard-SF expectations towards something which reads like a future’s history of the rise of the techno-governmental (or corporate- their boundaries increasingly blurred), or of the shift away from anthropocentric and hierarchical thinking and towards multi-speciesism and versions of network thinking.

In his 2016 book *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*, Peter Frase blends the tools of social science with those of speculative fiction to create what he calls “a type of social science fiction.” What we find in Tarun K. Saint