

Book review

A handbook for exploratory action research

R. Smith and P. Rebolledo, London, UK: British Council, 2018, Pp. 115, ISBN 978 0 86355 885 6
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A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research is a detailed manual written in a way which is inspirational for a wide readership of primary, secondary school teachers and teacher educators. Comprehensive in its coverage and moving from real examples taken from the Chilean Champion Teachers programme, this handbook focuses on the value and the benefits of teacher research on their own practice in their teaching contexts. Throughout the book, Smith and Rebolledo emphasize the importance of Exploratory Action Research (hereafter EAR), that is to say, teacher exploration in their own classrooms by means of data collection, analysis and subsequent reflection on the possibility of introducing change.

The authors begin the handbook with an Introduction before presenting nine chapters, which are all introduced by questions related to this kind of practitioner research, and Chapter 10 which provides not only extra material but also a detailed answer key section. In the Introduction after EAR is defined and the way in which it was developed is explained, characteristics of the style of presentation of the handbook and ways of using it are given. The introductory section concludes with acknowledgements and a self-diagnosis activity which is repeated at the end of the book.

Each of the following nine chapters is divided into a series of headings that relate to real teacher stories from the Champion Teachers programme, tasks to be solved by the readers most of which can be checked in the Answer Key section in the back of the handbook, a summary and a follow-up section. Chapter 1 introduces readers to the concepts of ‘success stories’ and ‘challenging teaching situations’ and makes them reflect on their own teacher practice. ‘Sign’ and ‘evidence’ with relation to research are also explored in this



chapter and the importance of research is stressed through the story told by a Chilean teacher. Chapter 2 deals with the significance of teacher research, a pair of misunderstandings associated with it and its differences with traditional research.

Chapter 3 addresses the value of exploration and the stages which constitute exploratory research and action research. The way to select the topic of research and how to formulate the exploratory questions are dealt with in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 introduces several sources of information and emphasizes how significant it is that the methods adopted by the teacher researcher match effectively the research questions. The conception of data analysis is examined in Chapter 6 and ways of analysing and making sense of qualitative and quantitative data are covered.

In Chapter 7 the possibility of engaging in action research is presented and readers are encouraged to go through the different stages of that process. Through several Champion Teachers stories in Chapter 8, different data collection methods and ways of interpreting that data critically are reviewed. The importance of triangulation is emphasized once more and the central changes in ‘mindset’ are also mentioned. In Chapter 9, the authors consider the question: Where do I go from here? They begin their response by making readers reflect on whether this is the beginning or the end of their journey and move on to describe different ways in which they can share their EAR findings. Finally, the extra material presented in Chapter 10 is brief but useful. For those novice teacher researchers the Answer Key section at the end of the chapter will be an enormous resource.

The clarity with which this handbook has been written and organised makes it a very user-friendly resource for all teachers, especially for those who are beginning to implement EAR even in low-resourced contexts. By emphasizing the importance of teacher research, this book makes a positive and practical contribution to a field which was unexplored by many readers as it focuses on teachers working in their own classrooms, generating practical knowledge after exploring their own unasked questions, making changes if necessary and sharing the outcomes of their research plans. In *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research*, novice teacher researchers will find new insights, teachers’ accounts from their own experiences, commentaries, tasks and new motivations.

Mariana Serra
Instituto Superior de Formación Docente y Técnica N°125,
Buenos Aires
marianaserra2@gmail.com