



Book Review: The Reflective Teacher - Case Studies of Action Research by Neeraja Raghavan; Orient Black Swan Chennai (2016), xii, 254 pages, INR 270.00

A Review by Gururaj K

“This book is very topical in the contemporary educational scenario and can be a trigger for a movement for reflective education.”

- S C Behar, Member of the Board, Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore

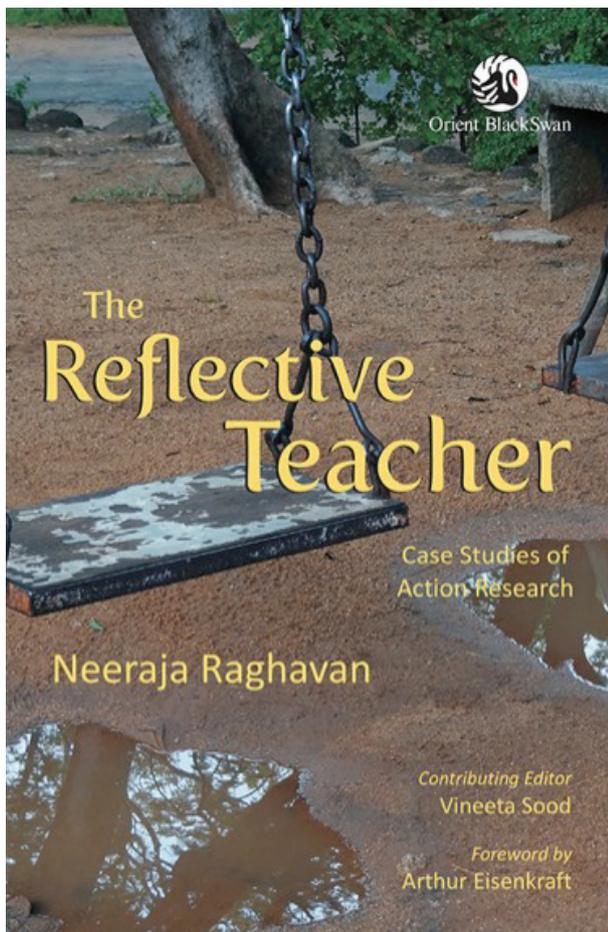
The author, Neeraja Raghavan, has for several years now pursued her passion for education and has done extensive work in teaching children and in teacher education. In this, her latest, book, she has systematically captured all the experiences and learnings that emerged during the five months (August-December 2013) of action research taken up by eight teachers and the Principal of Azim Premji School in Dineshpur, Uttarakhand. As principal investigator, she anchored this action research project, which was facilitated by members from Azim Premji Foundation.

As stated, ‘The book is intended to serve a readership of teachers, teacher educators, and students of graduate and post-graduate programmes in education, NGOs that work in the education sector, researchers and Heads of Schools. It is envisioned that the second section will meet the needs of the reader who would like to learn about practice, while the other two will be of greater interest to those who also wish to ground this practice in theory’ (Page 27).

The intent was to primarily enable the in-service teacher to blossom into a reflective practitioner, using action research as one way of assisting this emergence, the team from Azim Premji Foundation attempted to understand each teacher in some depth, observe classroom processes, facilitate each teacher’s action research, offer assistance in documentation of the action research in a systematic manner and finally, draw out from each teacher the learnings derived from conducting action research.

This book has three sections. Section I provides the reader with information about action research, reflective practice and teacher development and the criteria for choosing action research as the method to work with teachers. The author has quoted and made frequent references here to the theories of pioneers in this field such as Dewey, Schon and others. Objective of the study, the School where the study took place, profiles of teachers who took up action research, their assumptions and beliefs before they embarked on conducting action research are all covered in this section.

The chapter on teacher snapshots is very interesting. Here the teachers share their thoughts on areas such as the reason for opting for teaching as their profession, motivation, challenges and views about teaching and learning.



Section II provides a brief background of the facilitators who worked with the teachers. It is also a compilation of each teacher's individual profile and one classroom observation of that teacher (collated and observed by the facilitators) during the period of action research and contains the teachers' own documentation of the Action Research with some jottings from the facilitators' diaries. Relevant extracts from the post-action research video interview are included after transcribing and translating to English.

Section III explores the shifts in teachers' attitudes, assumptions and pedagogies during the course of action research, describes new insights gained and connects these to the teachers' prior system of beliefs and practices against the backdrop of current research in this domain.

On the question of whether reflective practice has been sustained in the school even after the study ended, the author is of the view that the aim of the study was to allow the emergence of the reflective practitioner from each teacher using action research as one possible means. It cannot therefore be deemed 'complete' with the successful completion of just one action research cycle by each teacher. Nor is it realistic to tick off the aim as ever being 'met', since reflection is an ongoing practice.

Teacher needs to be a lifelong learner and reflective practitioner

As stated, 'a classroom in a school can be regarded

as a potpourri of several elements: youth, freshness, vitality, regeneration. Thirty or forty pulsating minds, a teacher, lessons to learn and access to books – at the very least. Why, then, does teaching-learning frequently turn into a mechanical and repetitive process?

Unwittingly – and sometimes, even with awareness – the same lessons are transacted in more or less the same manner, year after year. In the daily rush to 'cover the syllabus', conduct mid-term tests and administer end-of-year examinations, teachers are often hard-pressed to find the time to address their own professional development in a regular, consistent manner' (Page 3).

Therefore to meet the ongoing, everyday challenges, to answer questions that spring from uniqueness, uncertainty and conflict, the teachers need to develop the quality of reflection.

A teacher needs to be a lifelong learner and reflective practitioner. The well documented case studies of action research, theories provided in this book would motivate and guide the Head Teachers, In-Service teachers, students studying to be teachers, NGOs in education and people concerned with learning in children to try out action research to become reflective practitioners. Guidelines towards the end of the book, questionnaires and action research template in the appendix will help carry out action research.