

## Book reviews

### Mukherji, P. & Albon, D. (2022).

*Research methods in early childhood: An introductory guide.*

SAGE Publications. 448 pp.

Research in the field of early childhood education is a vital and constantly evolving area that requires effective and accessible tools for researchers. The work before us, *Research methods in early childhood: An introductory guide*, by Penny Mukherji and Deborah Albon, academics linked to London Metropolitan and Roehampton universities respectively, contributes to this specific need. This work has a structured and methodological focus that guides readers in the process of research in early childhood education, from conceptualisation to data analysis. Accordingly, the work's introduction lays a solid foundation by defining concepts such as basic, applied, evaluation, action, and targeted research.

Through practical examples, an accessible writing style, and a focus on ethical considerations, this book facilitates understanding of complex concepts and fosters responsible and reflective research. It also includes complementary resources such as videos and glossaries that add to its value as a fundamental text, both for students and for professionals in the field. This edition includes two new chapters on quantitative and qualitative data analysis, updating the book's content to reflect the latest methodological advances.

We will now synthesise the thematic nuclei that it covers. The book is divided into five parts addressing the essential aspects of the process of research on early childhood. The first one details the planning stages of a project, from developing a field of research to formulating questions and hypotheses, choosing an appropriate design and methods, and selecting the sample. It considers the importance of reliability and validity, and also considers probability and non-probability sampling techniques. It also explains what a research proposal is and the need of keeping a research diary and collaborating with a supervisor. Finally, this section explains the significance of doing a literature review, the elements that comprise a good review, and how to do literature reviews in both quantitative and qualitative research. It also provides strategies to identify, evaluate, and synthesise the existing literature.

The second part explores the different paradigms and principles that underpin research in early childhood education. It starts with positivist research, discussing the origins and meanings of positivism, the scientific method, and quantitative methodologies, including experimental and correlational methods. The opportunities and limitations of positivist research are considered, emphasising the need for validity and reliability. In addition to positivism, interpretative, critical, post-structuralist, and post-humanist theories are analysed, providing a broad overview of qualitative focuses. This section invites readers to consider multiple

theoretical perspectives and focusses. It also underlines the importance of maintaining ethical practices throughout the whole of the process of research, encompassing inclusive research.

The third part details various research focusses that are applicable to early childhood education. It describes how to design and use surveys, providing guidelines for designing questionnaires and interpreting results. Next, it explains the steps in carrying out ethnographic field work and discusses its possibilities and limitations. It also reviews the history, design, and methods of case studies, noting their advantages and disadvantages. Lastly, it presents the role of the researcher in action research, describing the cycle of this methodology, the methods used, and the importance of reflection and continuous improvement in educational practice.

The fourth part considers specific data-collection techniques in depth. It provides a historical overview of observation, noting that it is fundamental in educational research and discussing appropriate situations, types and methods for recording information. It describes interviews, when to use them, the different types, and how to carry them out and record them, offering tools to obtain rich qualitative data. It considers the usefulness of questionnaires as well as types of question, design and administration. It analyses the use of documents, written texts, visual resources, and digital communication in research, emphasising the evaluation of documentary sources. It explores journaling as a tool for studying the self and for self-reflection. Finally, it describes creative methods for listening to young children, such as photography, play, telling stories, and the mosaic approach. This last part is undoubtedly a significant contribution by this work compared with other manuals on educational research. Furthermore, the possibilities and limitations of each technique are discussed, and illustrative practical examples are offered.

The final section of the book centres on how to analyse and present data that has been collected, relating to the type of data and their collection method. For this reason, the book explains quantitative data analysis methods (and how to present results) as well as qualitative methods, where it describes different focuses, including discourse analysis and grounded theory, as well as possibilities for using software packages. The text describes detailed strategies for statistical analysis and creating effective visual representations, along with tools designed to facilitate the interpretation of complex qualitative data. Finally, it emphasises the importance of communicating findings clearly and effectively to diverse audiences.

In view of the above, *Research methods in early childhood: An introductory guide* is not just of undoubted value for starting researchers but is also of great value for experienced academics in the field. More than a simple guide, the book is a fundamental reference work that researchers can turn to throughout their academic careers. Its structured focus not only helps researchers navigate methodological complexities, but it also provides experienced academics with a framework for perfecting their research methodologies and tackling emerging challenges.

The book includes a solid bibliography that enriches the reader's comprehension and serves as a resource for further exploration. One especially notable section discusses case studies, where the book refers to groundbreaking works by authors such as Greig et al. (2013) or Arnold (2003), as well as more recent contributions by Denscombe (2021) and Schwandt and Gates (2017). This exhaustive compilation of references increases the text's credibility and encourages readers to examine specific topics in greater depth, fostering critical enquiry and academic rigour.

In conclusion, *Research methods in early childhood: An introductory guide* is not only of note for its up-to-date content and practical focus, but also for its relevance in a constantly changing educational context. Its consideration of the ethical dimension, inclusion of diverse paradigms and methodologies, and orientation towards a reflective practice make this work an indispensable tool. As research into early childhood education advances, meeting contemporary challenges such as cultural diversity and the integration of digital technologies, this book offers researchers a solid and adaptable base. It not only provides guidance for students who are starting out in research, but it also offers experienced researchers a resource

to deepen their knowledge and practices. In this sense, the text is a continuous reference resource that can accompany researchers throughout their careers, ensuring that their research projects are relevant and rigorous.

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## **Cantón-Mayo, I. (2024).**

*Las escuelas rurales del valle de Jamuz y la Valdería [The rural schools of the Jamuz valley and la Valdería].*

Eolas Ediciones. 354 pp.

School is children's first point of reference when they leave the family environment and it opens the door to the outside world for them. However, it has never been studied in sufficient depth or valued highly enough. The impact of the school centre on shaping children's minds is reflected in a saying attributed to Churchill: if we live in a hovel, we will act like beggars, but if we live in a palace, we will act like princes. Evidently, the school building will shape children's vision and behaviour in their earlier years, and so studying it and its physical characteristics is of particular importance for the future of the adults.

This work by Dr Cantón seeks to recover the heritage of schools that are now mainly disused in two districts in León: the Jamuz valley and la Valdería. Both areas are located close to La Bañeza and the author justifies selecting them for study by the closeness to their origins and a personal preference for reclaiming schools in an area where it seems inevitable that they will disappear.

The book opens with a chapter that summarises the context of the schools studied and references to the school architects who designed them. The context refers to the acceptance of the administrative division of the districts studied, without questioning debatable aspects of their allocation to the valleys of the rivers Jamuz and Eria where the school buildings described are physically located. The importance of the architects in the years before the Spanish civil war is noted, with the intervention of Antonio Flórez, who headed the School Construction Office of the Ministry of Education, and Andrés Sánchez Sepúlveda, with whom he cooperated in the plans for the schools in Nogarejas. After the war, architects from León stand out: Ramón Cañas del Río, Juan Torbado, Luis Aparicio Guisasola, and Daniel Calleja.

The central chapters provide an inventory of schools by council, grouping in each one the villages that they contain. So, the district of Jamuz has four councils: Alija del Infantado, Quintana del Marco, Quintana y Congosto, and Santa Elena de Jamuz. Meanwhile, the councils in the Eria Valley are: Castrocontrigo, Castrocalbon, and San Esteban de Nogales. In total, these cover 25 locations, most of which have two and some three school buildings. These locations provide a broad journey through the two districts of León on which this study focusses. The documentary recovery of various school buildings that are now gone was only possible through intensive archival work and is something that stands out.

There are significant differences in how school buildings were constructed: the oldest schools were the result of the impetus of each village's residents, who, working communally in shifts, would build a humble single-storey school building with a pitched roof and one or two classrooms to house a large group of students from the place. The case of Jiménez is striking, as to build the school in 1929, they had to lease out farmland, dispense with guards, or move forward the payments of the rent charged for communal land. Most schools from around 1900 were built by the villagers' own labour.

However, the 1930s saw the intervention of the Educational Administration, which distributed funds for building schools, with the architect Antonio Flórez (a descendent of the philanthropists from León who had founded the Santa Luisa home for the elderly) as director of the School Construction Office in Madrid. In 1931, this architect along with Andrés Sánchez Sepúlveda drew up the plans for the first school in Nogarejas and for the one in Congosto.

In 1953, the School Constructions Law was passed, which subsidised half of the costs of school building, and the majority of towns and villages made use of this, either to construct new school buildings (as in Quintana, Alija, Herreros, Pinilla, and others) or to thoroughly modify them (as in the case of Castrocalbón).

The time span of the buildings in Jamuz and la Valdería is the same as that since the establishment of public schooling in Spain: from the Quintana report of 1813, through the Moyano law of 1857, up to the 2020s. This study is always based on documentary evidence, which substantiates each school having existed or its continued survival.

So, the first schools in the area appear in documents from the Provincial Council and in the tax payments for 1900, but there are older ones. Madoz mentioned these in his study of 1857, and almost none of them remain open today, as in the cases of Nogarejas, Alija, Navianos, Quintana del Marco, Quintana y Congosto, Torneros de Jamuz, Castrocontrigo, Morla, etc. These schools, which were open for the whole academic year, mainly no longer exist, having been replaced by others in the 1930s and 1950s.

With regards to times when the schools were open, data are provided about seasonal schools that were open during the three months of winter in places such as Genestacio, Herreros de Jamuz, Santa Elena, Villanueva de Jamuz, Quintana del Marco, Castrocalbón, Pinilla, Nogarejas, etc.

In the case of villages such as Palacios de Jamuz, Tabuyuelo, Felechares, Calzada, Torneros de la Valdería, Pobladura de Yuso, and others, there is no reference to schools in Madoz's work.

In any case, the oldest school mentioned is in Nogarejas (in the photo on the cover of the book), where in 1661 Domingo Álvarez was named as the village's teacher. The newest school, which sadly has already closed, is the one in Quintana del Marco, from the 1990s, which has been categorised as an *escuela chalet* (a cottage school, as the locals call it). Owing to the decline of the villages and falling pupil numbers, no new schools have been built in the area since 2000.

The fates of the school buildings vary widely after their closure, mostly in 1981: from demolition (as in Torneros de la Valdería), and falling into disrepair (like the ones in Tabuyuelo and Quintanilla de Flórez) to disputes over restoring them to turn them into cultural centres (San Esteban, this is the smallest category), village cafes and bars (Nogarejas), medical centres (as also Nogarejas, San Esteban, Jiménez, and Palacios), and even mortuaries, as in Santa Elena with the teachers' homes. The group of schools of Castrocontrigo, which had almost 900 students, now has just 9, surviving as a rural school group where various levels are taught together. In other cases, they remain closed, awaiting a destiny that the neighbours will decide in due course.

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## **Gil Quintana, J. (2023).**

*Educación y comunicación en una sociedad postdigital. Investigación documental y análisis de perspectivas [Education and communication in a post-digital society: Documentary research and analysis of perspectives].*

Octaedro. 268 pp.

This book, which provides a well-documented overview of communication scenarios and learning environments from an educational-communicative focus, is unquestionably a work of great intellectual and human value. It is required reading for understanding the new digital paradigm shaped by the connection between people, online learning, and technology, understood as a *relational factor*. In this labyrinth, education and the values that lead to a civic-minded and engaged citizenship will be the great allies to advance decisively in the era of *netmodernity* in which we find ourselves.

Gil Quintana has a great knowledge of education and communication, and has a long academic career that enables him to position himself with regards to current needs and rigorously address the principal challenges of the post-digital society. This concept “does not seek to describe a life beyond the digital space. It is a question of detailing the current opportunity to explore the consequences of the information or communication society” (p. 63, author’s own translation). This author presents a historical approach to edu-communication framed in a context dominated by technologies. It is no longer easy to separate the analogue arena from the digital sphere. Everything comes together and mixes in the same space–time, creating new modes of participation supported by interdependent networks. In *netmodernity*, everything is connected.

This author’s new title makes a great effort to explain current frameworks of action and how they oblige us to confront everyday routines from new perspectives, where communication and education come together in a single path. It is a fact that we no longer learn how we did in earlier decades, nor do we communicate in the same ways. The figure of the teacher or instructor has become more complex; the subject and object of education have been transposed. In this reality where technology is an active and immersive part of educational processes, knowledge and critical capacity will be the foundations of an authentic humanist project that can respond to people’s role in the post-digital society.

The analysis of the results of the research that this book contains are set out in seven categories, each of which in turn is structured as a chapter. In addition to these seven chapters, there is an initial one (“Documentary research and analysis of perspectives”) that sets out the methodology used and the starting point of the study. At the end of this chapter, the author synthesises some of the key ideas as a conclusion. This is very useful as, in the great quantity of information that he provides, this final overview helps establish the key concepts of each section. This book is of undoubted academic interest, although it does require prior knowledge some of the principal theories of communication and reference authors in the matter of the history of education and the ability to handle them to enable a better understanding of its very broad itinerary. Some of the theories reviewed in it require a significant grounding in hermeneutics in some points to be able to interpret the classical focusses and how they converge in the more current frameworks in which we are positioned.

Chapter one (“Discipline communication and education: Edu-communication”) covers basic concepts, including information, communication, and digital competences, weaving them into the reality of the *ecology of communication*, *interlearning*, *connectivism*, and *endogenous and exogenous educational models*. Accordingly, it invites thorough reflection and argues in detail on the importance of media literacy and the need to understand the media “not only as a didactic resource, but also as an object of study, with the aim of creating an analytic outlook” (p. 61, author’s own translation) that critiques what surrounds us.

These initial concepts are integrated in chapter two (“Principles of edu-communication: Interactiveness, participation culture, and dialogic action”), which includes a new typology of prosumers “(EAV [exploited, stalked, and victim of the market], CD [digitally constructed], VE [emotionally linked], MM [digital and analogue dead], and I-I [interacting and interacted]), but also influencers who have positioned themselves in social networks with significant impact and influence at a social level” (p. 93, author’s own translation). These new forms of action open up parallel spaces to those that were previously known and can be in-person, virtual, or hybrid. Therefore, it is a matter of “promoting a communication and education with fewer instructors and more influencers of learning who position themselves before the market as emirecs [emitters/receptors]” (p. 94, author’s own translation).

The third chapter (“Edu-communicative methodological strategy: Media construction of reality through the image”) is constructed from a dual perspective. That is to say, the image as “de-educator” (p. 95) or as an essential tool to introduce knowledge from early childhood. Among other tools, the use of film is considered as a powerful and widely researched educational resource in regards to the impact and effects that it generates from the formative sphere. Chapter four (“Edu-communicative methodological strategy: Social networks”) takes these new learning pathways from the classroom as a model for citizen empowerment.

“Social networks are scenarios for participation, spaces for bidirectional and horizontal communication” (p. 142, author’s own translation).

Chapter five (“Edu-communicative methodological strategy: Gamification”) covers active methodologies from a historical vision and the connection between learning and play from early childhood. As learning scenarios, ludic environments are based on two principal components: “the person’s motivation and commitment to the ludic experience” (p. 144, author’s own translation). Academic interest in this innovative focus underlines its enormous impact on learning, contrasting with more traditional methods that seek student interaction and empowerment. Gamification enables “the creation of a new narrative where the concepts of interacting, sharing, participating, and collaborating connect to one another” (p. 170, author’s own translation).

Chapter six (“Massive and open edu-communicative strategy: sMOOC and tMOOC”) focuses on massive open online courses, which have emerged as an alternative to traditional systems of education. “MOOCs have become established in the second decade of the 21st century as a tool for social change and for the development of active and collaborative learning” (p. 196). The last chapter (“Future edu-communicative perspectives: Learning influencers”), as a conclusion, considers the call for people to participate in *free culture*, *collaborative action*, *critical pedagogy* and the swapping of roles between teachers and students, *communality*, *activism*... and the novelty of the concept *learning influencer*. In relation to it, the author considers its two categories: the role of *learning influencer* and the IGPEC model (incentivise, guarantee, propose, produce, and share) (p. 220, author’s own translation).

This book is an excellent reading from communication and education of these exciting directions in digital and technological reality. However, as mentioned above, a first reading will not suffice to grasp all that it contains. It is a most interesting work, but it is so comprehensive and exhaustive that we suggest taking each section separately and deliberately, and digesting it slowly to be able to understand its full potential. In this regard, Sara Osuna-Acedo who wrote the prologue to the book, very astutely mentions some of the work’s essential foundations that are worth keeping at hand. Mentioning just some of these, they include Paulo Freire’s contributions on the need to seek personalisation and humanisation in educational processes. She also notes Pierre Lévy’s ideas and concepts relating to the multiple open and virtual spaces where all information is interconnected, with post-digital literacy presents an enormous challenge for the active citizen. George Siemens completes this particular triad, as one of the fathers of connectivism theory, in relation to knowledge construction in the digital era.

Readers who are more conversant in edu-communication will gain from this work a deeper understanding of some ideas they have already acquired. For those who are less familiar with the field of communication or education, the book offers a good introduction to very current and emerging concepts that permeate post-digital society. Many of the notions and theories found in the book are in day-to-day use, but not everyone really knows the importance or origin of most of them. On this point, the author creates an excellent space to offer an illustration of the importance of these dominant elements backed by documentary evidence and to achieve a more participatory, responsible, and informed society. This work ultimately seeks to enable the reader to understand that “the post-digital society offers different and innovative possibilities in digital spaces that are progressively driving public empowerment” (p. 217, author’s own translation).

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## **Jonas, M. & Yacek, D. (2024).**

*Al borde del asiento: Lo que hacen los mejores profesores para implicar e inspirar a sus alumnos* [*On the edge of their seats: What the best teachers do to engage and inspire their students*].

Post & Lintel Books. 189 pp.



What can we do so that students do not *have to* be in class and learn, but instead *want* to be in class and learn? Can we awaken, sustain, and strengthen their interest, so that they connect to learning in general and to a subject in particular and stay connected? Mark Jonas and Douglas Yacek argue that we can. We can awaken students' interest so that they are *on the edge of their seats in class*. And this depends on the most influential factor in any class: the teacher.

In this work, the authors condense the results of recent academic research and the experience of successful teachers whom they have interviewed, observed, and monitored over years, to propose effective strategies to make the classroom a space for inspiration and engagement. They call these four strategies the hook, the pitch, the awakening, and the strengthening.

After an overview of their proposal's theoretical framework, they dedicate the subsequent chapters to each strategy's pitch with the following framework: a brief definition, description, and justification of the strategy in question; a description of the experience of teachers who have used it with success; analysis and comprehension of these experiences; the steps to follow when planning the strategy; and, finally, possible problems in the implementation. The book is very practical in nature, especially with regards to the steps to follow when planning each strategy. One very useful supplement is the questions that are asked, as a sort of guide, at the end of each step in the planning.

The first strategy that Jonas and Yacek propose is the hook. This comprises a series of actions by the teacher to capture students' attention in the first moments of the course or the class. Some chose to change the layout of the tables before the first class, others decided to decorate the room with thought-provoking quotes by celebrities from the world of sport... The key to the hook lies in its surprising character which, being unexpected, inspires students' curiosity and expectations of what is to come.

The second step or strategy is pitching the subject. In this, the teacher does certain actions with the aim of inspiring the students to value what they are expected to learn. Some teachers will choose to share their experience of and personal relationship with the subject with the students. Others will carefully choose the words to describe their subject and what relates to it. It is a matter of showing students that the subject has the potential to enrich their lives independently of any practical relevance it might have in their future. If the hook seeks to capture students' attention towards the teacher, now it is a case of fostering students' attention towards the particular subject or topic.

In chapter five, the authors go on to present the third strategy: the awakening. This involves fostering a profound intellectual and emotional experience in the students that transforms how they see themselves and the world. When this experience occurs, students find that their way of perceiving and discovering certain things up to that moment was, in a sense, limited or even erroneous. This experience and discovery are built on the positive tension produced in the previous steps: the hook and the pitch. The awakening will result in a new way for students to see the subject and, in the best cases, their lives inside and outside class. As the impact of this experience tends to fade over time, it is necessary to reinforce it with specific tasks and activities. In this way, it leads into the last of the strategies that the authors propose: the strengthening.

The specific aim of the strengthening, described in chapter six, is to consolidate awareness that the subject is of value in itself and so merits attention. The authors share the conviction that genuine commitment and engagement not only result in better academic results, but that they offer an incentive to develop virtues such as attention, diligence, persistence, and curiosity. These virtues will result in a great benefit for the student, beyond the context of the subject itself. The aim of this strategic move is not only to underline the need for learning for the future, but to help students discover the beauty and wealth of the world that surrounds them. To help them grow as people of character and purpose.

Chapter seven synthesises the four steps or strategies explained previously, in the personal experience of Katie, a literature teacher. Katie wanted her students to read for more than just to

pass the course; she also wanted them to find a source of inspiration in the books. A description is given of the actions and activities she used to put into practice the hook, the pitch, the awakening and the strengthening with the aim of her students experiencing a turning point in their personal relationship with literature.

As a conclusion, chapter eight briefly considers the usefulness of these strategies in two particular circumstances: in the preparation of an individual class and in applying them to a context of cultural diversity. In this way, the authors approach a question that, more than being strategic, is the heart of teaching as a vocation and mission. Jonas and Yacek suggest that the key to effectiveness in teaching and learning lies in the love that teachers professes for their subjects and, above all, for their students. It is this benevolence that motivates teachers to create the transformational experiences described so far. They conclude the chapter by revealing what for them comprises the key to this work: reminding teachers how enlivening teaching can be. The same task that can be perceived as difficult, frustrating, and exhausting, can also be experienced as fascinating, joyful, and profoundly fulfilling.

Finally, the last chapter serves as a sort of appendix where the authors suggest answers to questions that readers might naturally ask themselves or ask the authors: do these strategies increase the teacher's professionalism? Do they increase the students' intrinsic motivation? Do they contribute to social equality? Do they improve educational outcomes? Are they applicable in classes with special circumstances? We can already sense that the answer to each of them is positive.

This work by Mark Jonas and Douglas Yacek provides a practical guide for teachers who seek to improve their students' learning, while at the same time being philosophical and inspiring. Beyond specific strategies, it proposes profound topics for personal reflection, such as the nature of the relationship or link between teachers and students. At a time when education systems are marked by the abundance of content and the urgency of measurable results, this book reminds the reader of the transformational nature of teaching as a vocation, and the profound impact teachers can have in their students' lives, beyond the subject and beyond the school setting. It offers ideal material not just for personal reading but also for group reflection among colleagues.

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