



Teacher development and the role of research

14/01/2021

Mark Wyatt

What are the benefits (and challenges) of teacher research?

23/01/2021



Emily Edwards



Transforming teaching through research activities: Tools for exploring practice

30/01/2021

Kenan Dikilitas

How does doing and sharing research change who you are, and what you do?

03/02/2021



Gary Barkhuizen



How do I analyse my data? Some suggestions for qualitative and quantitative analysis

04/02/2021

Anne Burns

Teachers research! Innovative, international sharing and mentoring

13/02/2021



Richard Smith



What are the benefits and challenges of teacher research?

Dr Emily Edwards
University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Structure of this webinar

- Introductions
- What are the benefits of teacher research?
- What are the challenges of teacher research? Some tensions and possible directions

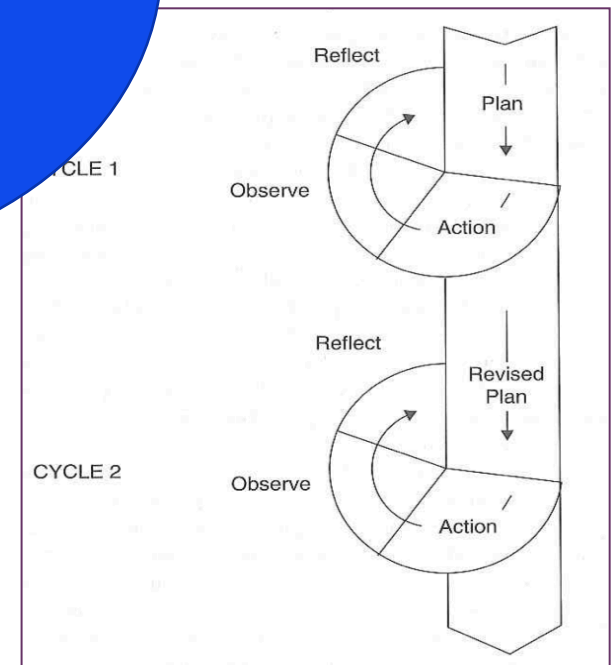
My experiences of action research (AR)



English Australia Action Research in ELICOS program:
<https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/professional-development/action-research>

Investigating a classroom issue or puzzle through strategic action, critical reflection and (ideally) collaboration, to improve practice and understandings

Kemmis & McTaggart's action research spiral (Burns, 2010, p.9)



How do you
think this
image might
relate to
teacher
research?



What are the benefits of teacher research?

What do we mean by ‘benefits’ of teacher research? => Development or transformation

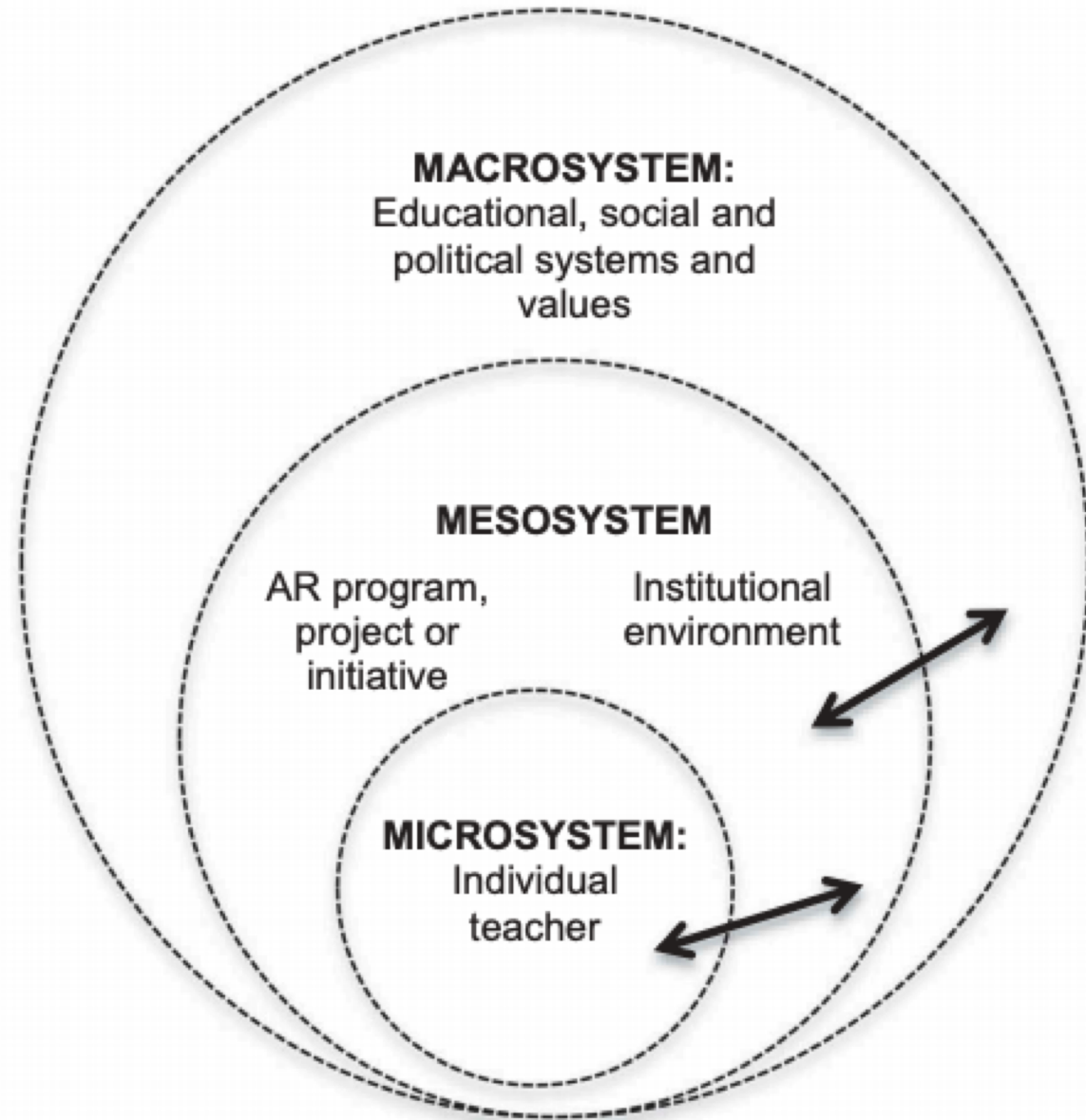
A process involving both **cognitions** – internalising new knowledge, perceptions or beliefs – and **identities** – continuously re-negotiating a sense of self (van Lier, 2008).

A long-term continuous and dynamic **process** that can be observed when teachers make “**sustained changes**” (Grimmett, 2014, p.10) to their practice, understandings, engagement with others, or sense of self

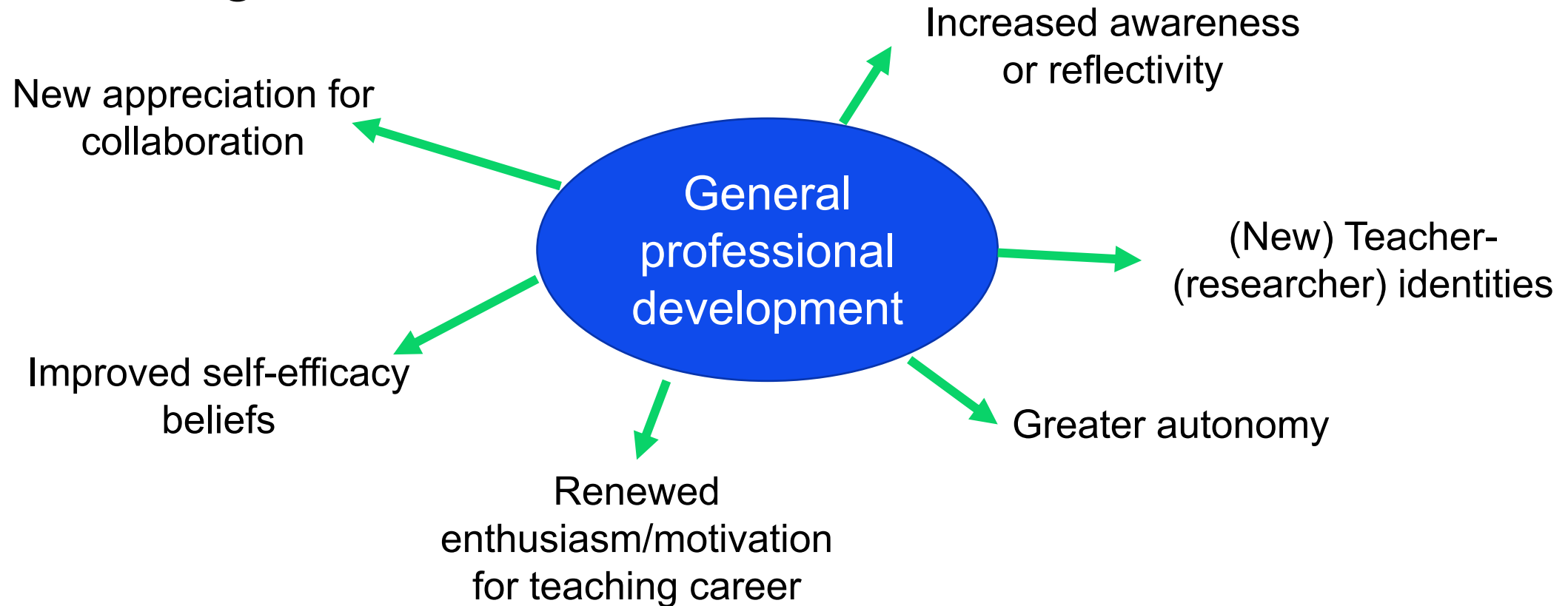
How do teachers develop or transform from conducting action research?

An ecological view.

Edwards, E. (2020). The ecological impact of action research on language teacher development: a review of the literature. *Educational Action Research*. 10.1080/09650792.2020.1718513

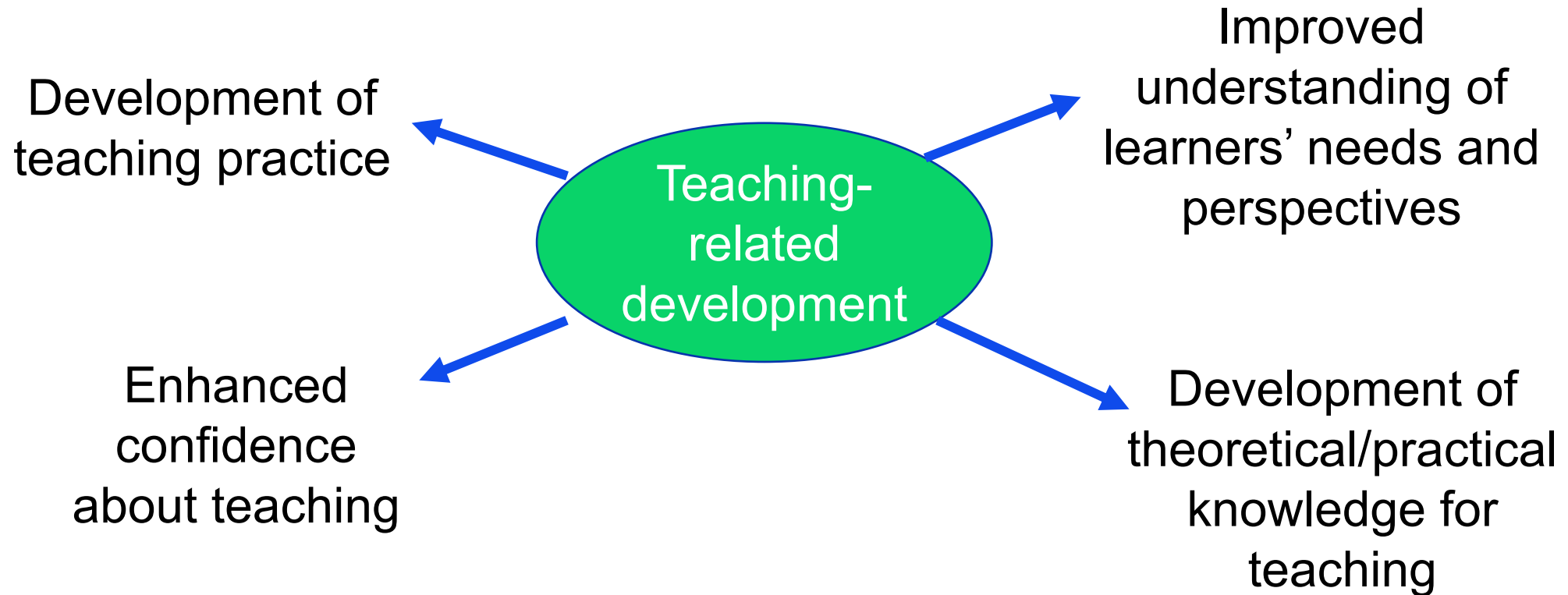


In what ways do teachers develop or transform from conducting action research?



Edwards, E. (2020). The ecological impact of action research on language teacher development: a review of the literature. *Educational Action Research*. 10.1080/09650792.2020.1718513

In what ways do teachers develop or transform from conducting action research?



(Edwards, 2020)

In what ways do teachers develop or transform from conducting action research?



(Edwards, 2020)

What are the broader benefits of teachers engaging in action research?

- Changes to institutional-level materials/curriculum/syllabus
- Stimulation of colleagues' interest in AR
- Development of a more collaborative/democratic institutional culture
- Development of a particular/focused community of practice
- Institutional recognition of achievements
- Empowerment of AR mentor
- Collaboration and the development of communities of practice across institutions
- Recognition and increased professionalism at the sector level

Discussion questions (in breakout rooms, 5 mins)

1. Can you identify with any of the benefits mentioned so far? Which ones?
2. What other benefits have you experienced from teacher research, or can you imagine you might experience?

What are the challenges of teacher research?

Some paradoxes of teacher research

1) It must be mandated	It can't be mandated
2) It must be championed by a strong principal	It can't be owned by the principal
3) There must be an outside actor	The outside actor's role is questionable
4) Teachers must learn research skills	Teachers must trust their own knowledge so they are not overwhelmed
5) Teachers' teaching changes profoundly	Teachers say their research confirms things they already knew
6) Teacher research must be woven into the fabric of the school culture	Teacher research is contrary to the culture of schools

- Are these all absolute paradoxes?
- Can you see any resolutions between the pairs of tensions?

(Berger, Boles & Troen, 2005)

Tensions found in my research (on challenges of action research in Australia)

- **Tension 1:** Reflective mindsets but no time for reflection
- **Tension 2:** Desire for positive recognition but more negative recognition
- **Tension 3:** Renewed commitment to teaching but commitment not rewarded
- **Tension 4:** Opportunities for action research materials integration but inflexible curricula

Edwards, E. (2018). Embracing action research: Current tensions and possible directions. English Australia Journal, 34(1), pp.3-21. <https://eajournal.partica.online/digital/english-australia-journal-34-1/flipbook/2/>

Tension 1: Reflective mindsets but no time for reflection

Move away from “trial and error”
approach to teaching, towards a “**frame
of mind of thoughtful reflective
teaching**”
(Teacher interview)

Action research is “almost **like a curse**,
because from here on you can never
just do something and not reflect on it.”
(Teacher interview)

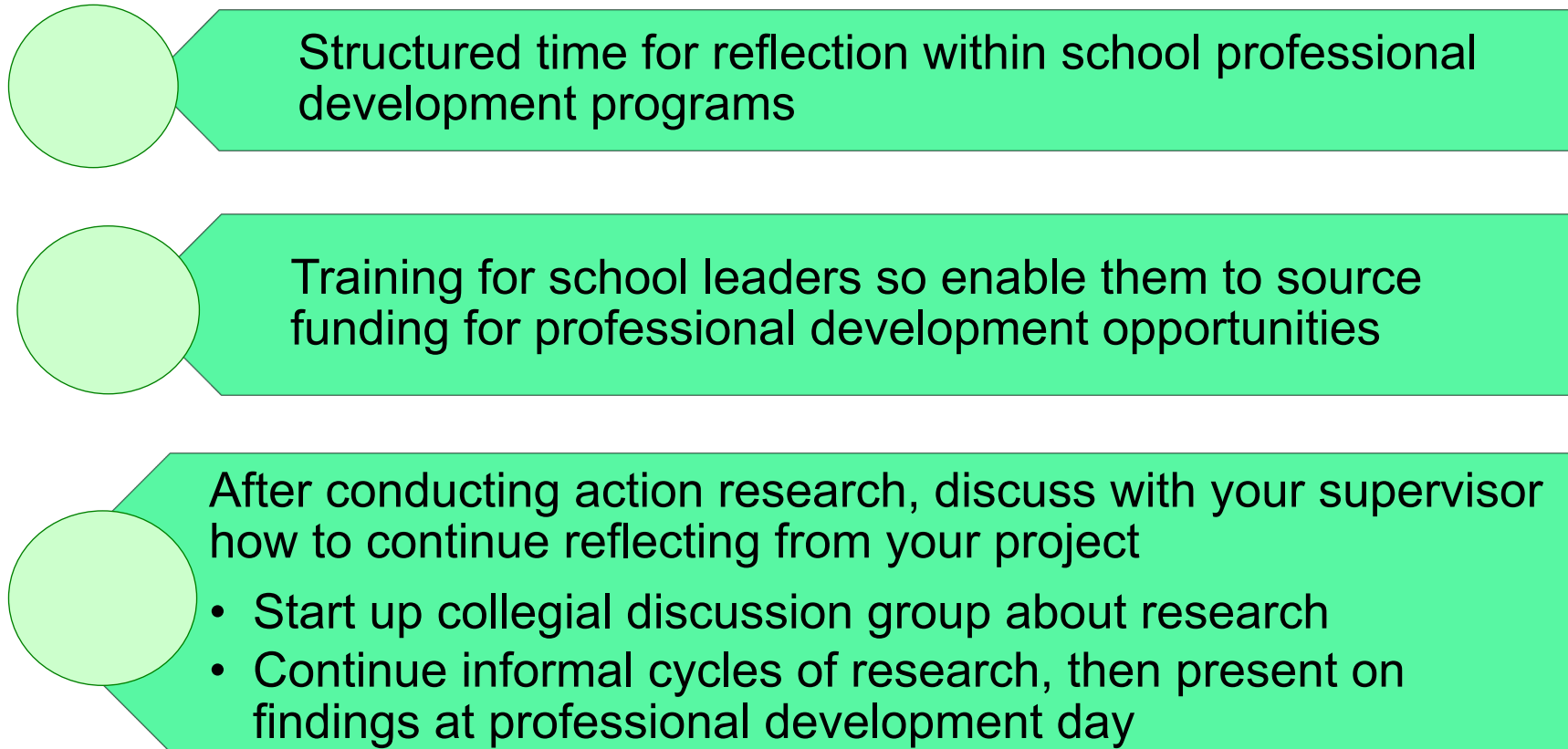


The importance of reflection

“If teachers are to be considered reflective practitioners [...] of primary importance is the need for the time to reflect; collaborate; observe other teachers; develop personal theories, curriculum, materials, and so forth. In addition, teachers need smaller classes, more hospitable classrooms, and the resources to experiment with and change their approach to teaching. In short, the day-to-day business of teaching must become more conducive to thoughtful work.” (Clarke, 1994, p. 23)

- Read this quote about the importance of reflection. To what extent do you agree or disagree with it?
- Are these suggestions feasible in your institutional context?

Tension 1 (Reflective mindsets but no time): Possible directions



Tension 2: Desire for positive recognition but more negative recognition

“They [colleagues] aren’t interested [in my action research], because **they perceive it as a mini PhD** in a short amount of time”
(Survey comment)

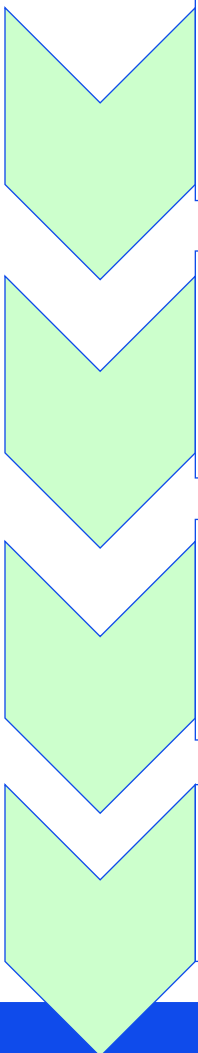
“It’s a lot of hard work and nobody [in my centre] cares, nobody was paying attention, **it was as if nothing has happened, frustrating**”
(Teacher interview)

School leaders' perceptions: do they value research?

“While having some research [conducted in our centre] is interesting, [it] is not our main bread” (Manager, University centre).

“We’re doers and we get practical, and research is often housed in that area of university and bigger things. [...] And yet we know that best practice is informed by research” (Manager, University centre).

Tension 2 (negative recognition): Possible directions

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- Schools need to recognise teachers' research achievements in sensitive ways, e.g. collaborative forum, meeting about curriculum improvement
 - Take a more critical approach – what questions are raised (rather than answered) by your research? (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015)
 - Publish your research (teaching magazine, journal, blog) and promote other teachers' research on staff development days
 - Initiate a small-scale action research program for teachers in your school (needs mentors)

Tension 3: Renewed commitment to teaching but commitment not rewarded

“Participating in the [AR] program reignited my fire for teaching and was kind of a watershed moment where I decided I am a teacher (hear me roar!) rather than I’ll do this for a while and see what happens next” (Survey comment)

AR project was largely ignored because “my Director of Studies said my centre was about profit and money” (Teacher interview)

Tension 3 (commitment not rewarded): Possible directions

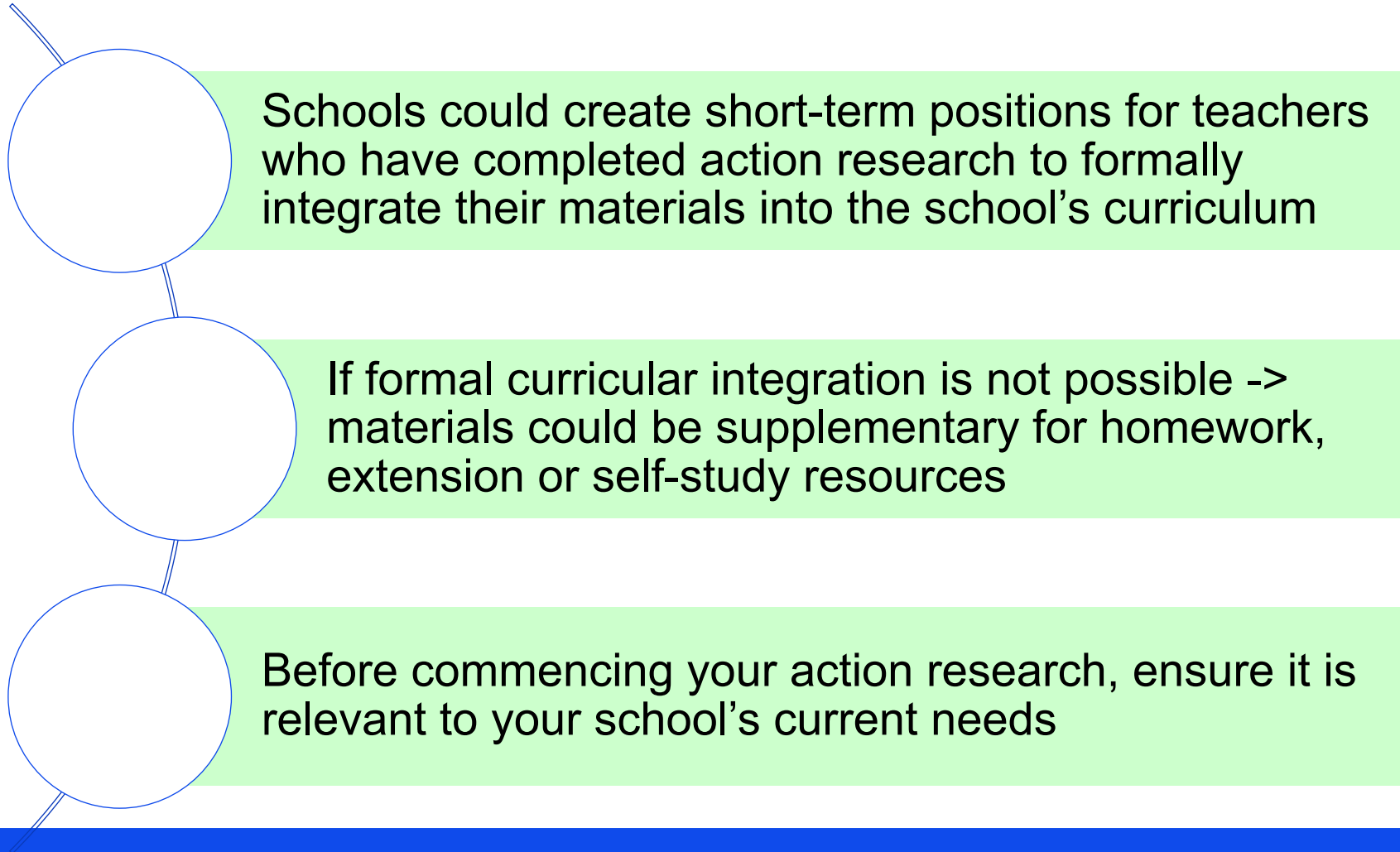
- Find ways of rewarding teachers' commitment within existing limitations
 - e.g. different roles and responsibilities within the institution (mentor, curriculum leader, discussion group leader, editor of teacher journal etc.)
- Encourage bottom-up professional development, giving teachers autonomy to decide what is important to them, but with top-down support provided

Tension 4: Opportunities for action research materials integration but inflexible curricula

Teachers using their research-based knowledge to design and improve curricula is arguably 'the core of a proper understanding of teacher professionalism' (Hammersley, 2004, p.166).

'If I listen to everyone else [the other AR participants], they have had problems with curricula that they can't change. [For me] it's just been a breeze, it's been absolutely fantastic' (Teacher interview).

Tension 3 (inflexible curricula): Possible directions



Summary of research findings

- **Action research can be very beneficial for teachers, leading to:**
 - reflective mindsets
 - opportunities for positive recognition
 - renewed commitment to profession
 - innovative teaching materials
- **Tensions or constraints can include:**
 - lack of time for on-going reflection in busy teaching schedules
 - negative/skeptical perceptions of research (in some contexts)
 - not being rewarded for commitment
 - inflexible curricula
- **Solutions are dependent on context, but there are always solutions!**

Reflecting on the tensions (in breakout rooms, 5 mins)

- 1) Which of the four tensions do you think might apply to your teaching context?
- 2) Focusing on one specific tension, which strategies do you think would work to overcome it in your context?

Tension 1: Reflective mindsets but no time for reflection

Tension 2: Desire for positive recognition but more negative recognition

Tension 3: Renewed commitment to teaching but commitment not rewarded

Tension 4: Opportunities for action research materials integration but inflexible curricula

Teacher research as a 'toolkit' for your professional development

Cycles for
on-going
reflection

Possibilities for
presenting and
publishing your
work



Process of
materials
development

Theory-
practice
integration

Leading to
wider staffroom
projects

References

Berger, Boles & Troen, 2005

Burns 2010

Edwards, E. (2020). The ecological impact of action research on language teacher development: a review of the literature. *Educational Action Research*. 10.1080/09650792.2020.1718513

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Edwards, E. & Burns, A. (2016). Language teacher action research: Achieving sustainability. *ELT Journal*, 70(1), 6-15. <https://academic.oup.com/eltj/article/70/1/6/2450159>

Grimmett, 2014

Hammersley, 2004,

Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015

van Lier, 2008