

Creativity, Challengability and Sustainability in Action Research

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Research - Trends, Successes and Debates

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Creativity in AR

1. Democratizes research to include classroom practitioners
2. Encompasses transformative notions of second language teacher education (SLTE)
3. Offers flexible and diverse processes/approaches for practitioner investigation

Creativity in AR

- Contributes (potentially) to knowledge base of SLT
- Underpins (potentially) desired(able) changes in thinking, beliefs, practices about SLT
- Offers (potentially) more engaging, collaborative and contextually relevant forms of PD

Creativity in AR

I began with an individualistic attitude of “my class, my problem, my responsibility” and an instrumental approach focused on identifying a problem and implementing a solution. Over time, influenced by the CAR model... I moved towards a broader understanding that the circumstances of classroom teaching are a shared responsibility among institutions, researchers, managers, and teachers. My reflection became less focused on solutions...and more focused on how my own and other teachers’ beliefs and experiences could influence my response to issues in my class.

(McPherson, in Burns & Burton, 2008, p. 131)

Claims made for impact action researchers are more:

- conscious of “problematizing”
- explicit about naming “problem”
- planned and deliberate about inquiry
- systematic and rigorous
- careful in documenting and recording
- intensive and comprehensive in reflecting on teaching

Claims made for impact action researchers are more:

- self-sceptical about assumptions
- interested in developing deeper understanding and theorization of practice
- open to changing actions and investigating them further

(Adapted from Wadsworth (1994, p.4)

Challengability in AR

Certainly research by teachers, for teachers, on their processes of teaching can only be a good thing. But if obtaining a clearer understanding of teaching processes requires care and rigour in other modes of research, there is no good argument for AR producing less care and rigour unless it is less concerned with clear understanding which it is not.

(Brumfit & Mitchell, 1989, p. 9)

AR: Critiques and questions

- How rigorous is it?
- What are the standards for judging AR?
- Should it conform to existing research criteria?
- What ethical considerations are implicit in AR?
- How should it be reported?
- What tensions exist between quality of AR and sustainability by practitioners?
- Are teachers (untrained researchers) the most appropriate people to do AR?

Sustainability in AR

Democratization...

We as ESL practitioners, can look at our field of work and easily say, "It's hopeless!" The inadequacies in the field are great: in recognition of the needs for ESL service for adults, in funding for service delivery.... However, we can just as easily say, "It's wide open!" There's so much room for improvement that small actions towards building political visibility can be significant. Any expertise we gain is valuable. Any progress we make is laudable.

(Ferguson, 1998, p. 13)

Sustainability in AR

...versus compliance

Do you think that we could just turn into another form, an acceptable form of empowerment? Well what I mean is that nothing would please some administrators...more than to think that we are doing 'research' on their terms. That's what scares me about the phrase 'teacher-as-researcher'... - too packaged. People buy into the very system that shuts them down. That immediately eliminates the critical perspectives that we're working on, I'm afraid. But I am still convinced that if enough people do this, we could get to a point of seeing at least a bigger clearing for us.
(Miller, 1990, p. 114)

Sustainability: Key questions for AR situations

- Where should AR be located? (PD, in-service, pre-service, tertiary, individual classrooms, whole schools)
- How should it be facilitated and by whom?
- Who should do it?
- Why should they do it?
- How should they do it and how long should they continue it?

Sustainability: Key questions for AR situations

- What forms of sustainability should participation in AR take (more AR?)
- How can sustainability be mainstreamed? Should it be?
- What acts against sustainability?

(Adapted from Crookes, 1989, Burns, 2000)

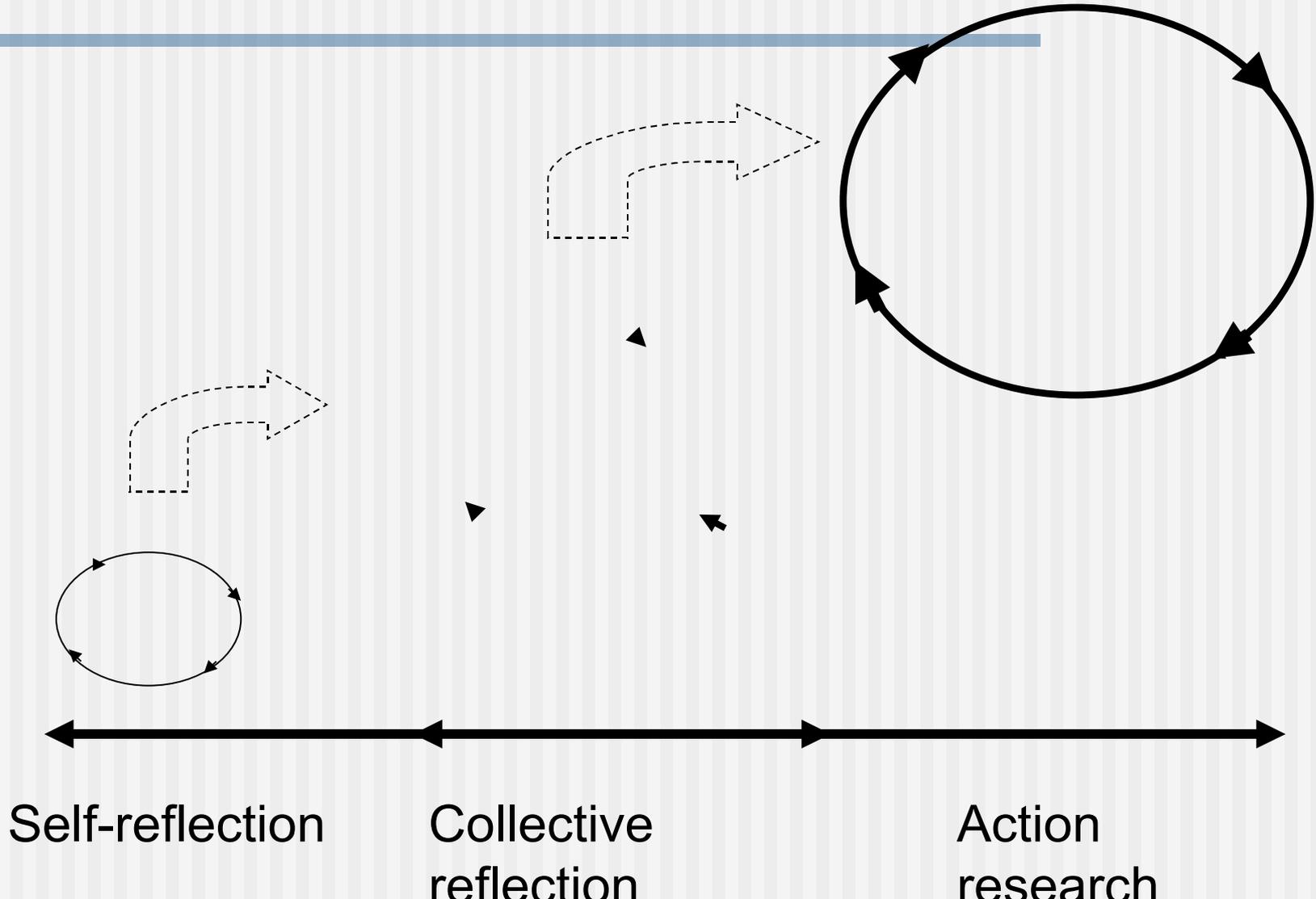
Factors sustaining AR

- Strong support, approval (and direct involvement?) of administrators
- Communities of ARs who sustain each other (CAR communities of practice)
- Equal but complimentary partnerships between facilitators and teachers
- On-site “drivers” who sustain the momentum and mentor participants

Factors sustaining AR

- Program(s) of regular workshops and meetings on conducting AR
- Access to “just-in-time” professional resources
- Clear statements of participants commitments (time, “action”, expectations, deadlines)
- “Perks” for practitioners (e.g. refreshments at workshops, teaching-release, presentation/publication opportunities)

'Levels' in action research



Thank you!

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