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*Article*

# Action Research at the Interface: Personal-Professional Reflections on the First 20 Years

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**Abstract**
This is a personal-professional reflection on 20 years of doing Action Research (AR), based on which AR is positioned as being at three different interfaces: the personal-professional; the theory-practice; and the quantitative-qualitative interface. In addition to AR being at those three interfaces, a number of additional key questions are contemplated in this article; questions which appear to have been largely overlooked – or at least under-researched – in spite of their importance. For example, rather than simply assuming that research is an inherently 'good thing' to be doing, the question of why we do research is considered, as a valid research question in its own right. Following on from that question, the question of why teachers should become action researchers is also considered. Another key question that is rarely asked but which is explored here relates to time, specifically how much time research requires, and how much time a busy classroom teacher can give to their research. In relation to the collaborative nature of AR, the question of trust is highlighted, as well as the question of who will benefit from the research and how.

**Keywords**
Action research, interface, teacher development

## 1 Introduction

Tempus fugit is one of those loan phrases from Latin that came into English unchanged, and it is most commonly translated as 'time flies.' That phrase came to mind as I recently re-read my first published piece on AR in *The Language Teacher*, one of the long-standing publications of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). The piece, titled 'Connecting the Hand, the Head, and the Heart: Reflective Practice and Action Research in the Classroom', was published more than 20 years ago now, back in 1999. It is a humbling experience to look back over decades at our earlier work and see if that work has stood the test of time, and if so, how well – or not – it has aged. Fortunately for me, re-reading my JALT piece from 1999 did not make me wince, but it did remind me of some important aspects of AR. One of the questions I asked in 1999 was "Are we teachers or researchers?" to which I answered emphatically 'Yes!', followed by this explanation:

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> Of the many good attempts to define teaching, my favorites are the ones about teaching being a series of endless, moment-to-moment decisions made by the teachers and learners in a particular teaching-learning context. In the same way that we cannot really separate one language skill or modality from another, in the same way we cannot really separate learning from teaching, we cannot separate teaching from research. (Curtis, 1999a, para. 4)

Back then, in my eagerness to help teachers develop their research interests and skills, I may have overstated the case, as it is, of course, possible to teach without doing research, and to do research without teaching. However, the point I was trying to make at that time was that: “the main value of classroom-based research [is] to enable us to view our classrooms, our learners, and our professional selves through fresh eyes; to see things that are there now that perhaps were not before and vice versa” (Curtis, 1999a, para. 6). In 1999, I explained that, in my experience, the word ‘research’ often evoked negative reactions in busy classroom teachers who already had their hands full with preparing, teaching, marking, etc. Therefore, instead of ‘research’, I proposed a number of alternatives, including Classroom-Based Enquiry, Classroom-Based Exploration, and Classroom-Based Problem (or Puzzle) Solving. None of those phrases really caught on, as replacements for ‘research’, but they did help some teachers to see AR in a different light.

In that same year, 1999, I published a chapter titled, ‘Using Action Research in Exploring the Use of Spoken English in Hong’, in a book *Language Instructional Issues in Asian Classrooms* (Mee & Moi, 1999) published by the International Reading Association. A couple of years later, in 2001, I published a paper titled ‘Hong Kong Secondary School Teachers’ First Experiences of Action Research’ in the first volume and first issue of the *Journal of the Pan-Asian Consortium*. Although the words ‘Action Research’ have not appeared as often in the titles of my published works in the intervening two decades, I have always drawn on AR principles, practices and procedures in my work with classroom language teachers. That is not to suggest that AR is the only or the best way to carry out language teaching and learning research, as that depends on the context and the purpose of the research. But for me, AR has emerged as an essential interface, connecting the personal and the professional, connecting theory and practice, connecting quantitative and qualitative approaches, and making other connections as well. Furthermore, AR has forced me and the teachers I work with to address questions that are often ignored or overlooked, such as: Why am I doing research? Why am I doing AR? Who will benefit from this research and how? In the rest of this article, I will (re)consider those interfaces and those questions.

### 1.1 Action research at the personal-professional interface

For better and for worse, teaching is simply not one of those jobs that fits into the nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday work week that is thought of as the norm in many European countries. Even in countries, where, for example, Friday is the day off work, many jobs are defined by days and hours. If teaching were that kind of a fixed-time job, then teacher burnout would not be the decades-long problem that is still leading to high teacher turnover (see Dworkin, 1986 for early work on teacher burnout, and see Lee, 2019 for more recent research in that area). The fact is that teaching is not a job. Teaching is a calling. Teaching is a vocation (Cunningham, 2016). Consequently, teaching may be one of the professions most prone to its practitioners bringing their work home with them (Orgad, 2019). Being unable and/or unwilling to leave our work at our workplace is part of what positions AR at the Personal-Professional Interface (PPI). In addition, to be effective teachers, we must also be lifelong learners – learning more about the language(s) we teach, the methodologies, the technologies, etc. It is possible that all professions require their members to be lifelong learners, but when it comes to teachers and teaching, that may be especially true.

The idea of working at the PPI is not common, but neither is it new, and it has been used in other areas, such as medical studies (Steven, Oxley & Fleming, 2008) and healthcare. For example, writing in the *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, Elizabeth Ash (1992) explored the relationships between reflective practice and the PPI. She started her paper by stating: "There is conflict inherent in writing on this topic, particularly in a learned professional journal … it is not possible for me to write on this subject without drawing upon my own personal, as well as professional, experience, but this may be read as self-indulgent or self-aggrandizing" (Ash, 1992, p. 261). Nearly 30 years after Ash's paper, the boundaries between our personal and professional lives may have been further eroded by the development of mobile technologies in the last two decades. For example, Campbell, Harmer and Intezari (2015) report on how such technologies have affected the integration of our working lives and our private lives. The authors found that: "mobile technology use blurs the boundaries between work and private life, making traditional time and place distinctions less relevant … We also observed an effect rarely discussed in the literature – the way personal and professional aspirations affect how work and private life are integrated" (Campbell, Harmer & Intezari, 2015, p. 1). And in Ash's (1992) paper, highlighting the PPI, she asked: "What is the 'personal' in the 'professional'? What is the difference between 'personal' and 'professional'? What do we mean when we say 'personally speaking . . .' and 'professionally speaking . . .'? Trying to answer these questions leads into murky waters; the more one seeks clarity of definition, the more confused become the boundaries" (p. 262).

In spite of the "murky waters" described by Ash (1992), it is necessary for us to wade into those waters, as AR is a good example of the overlap between our personal and our professional lives. Perhaps one of the most common situations described to me, in interviews with English language teachers around the world, involves what could be referred to as an Action Research 'action replay' of a moment in a lesson. 'Action replay' is a term used in sports commentating, and refers to seeing a high-speed moment re-watched in slow-motion, for example, in the finals of an international tennis match, to see if the ball crossed the line, in which case the point goes to the opposing player. In the language classroom, the stakes may not be as high, but it is true that a teacher's decision, made in a fraction of a second, could change the course of an entire lesson. As a result, many teachers have told me about a moment that occurred in one of their English language classes that they continue to think about and ruminate on long after the lesson has finished. Days, weeks, months – even years – later, teachers have reflected on a particular moment that has stayed with them. Sometimes that moment is one of joy and happiness, at an unexpectedly positive outcome; sometimes a moment of sadness at the memory of decision they still regret. Reflections on such moments are an essential aspect of our lifelong personal-professional growth and development, and AR may be especially well suited to systematically exploring those times, especially when they occur at the PPI. In the section below, two other AR interfaces are considered, in terms of the relationships between theory and practice, and between quantitative and qualitative approaches.

### 1.2 Action research at the theory-practice interface and at the quantitative-qualitative interface

Action Research is research that is to be acted on. It may, therefore, be no coincidence that, when writing quickly on a white board one time, many years ago, I accidentally missed the 'i' and wrote it up as 'act on research'. Ironically, in relation to the seeing eye, the missing 'i' allowed me to see more clearly what distinguishes AR from many other kinds of research. In theory, all research should have some practical purpose. However, in practice, a great deal of research is published in pursuit of employment, promotion and tenure within universities (and to a lesser extent, in colleges). For example, as Alan Miller and Mark De Rond put it clearly and concisely, in their 2015 article titled 'Publish or Perish: Bane or Boon of Academic Life?': "There are few more familiar aphorisms in the academic community than 'publish or perish.' Venerated by many and dreaded by more" (p. 321). As a result of this pressure to publish for academic, employment-related purposes, a significant volume of what is published may be of limited

practical use. That may even apply to publications in education journals, which are supposed to be all about the classroom, the learners and the teachers, but that is not always the case. Therefore, the publish-perish pressure may be one reason for a disconnect between theory and practice. AR can help bridge that gap, as AR is located at that Theory-Practice Interface (TPI). Indeed, AR may be one of the most effective ways of interfacing education theory and practice, by closely connecting the two. A simple, two-word book sub-title that captures that relationship succinctly is *Action Research: Living Theory* (2006) by Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff. That is not to suggest that some theories are 'dead', but the notion of AR as a "living theory" embodies the organic, dynamic, multidirectional nature of AR in ways that few other two-word phrases could capture so concisely. Regarding the embedding of theory within practice, Whitehead and McNiff explain that: "the whole idea of action research is that the kind of theory that is most appropriate for explaining its purpose is already within the practice" (2006, p. 2). However, for Whitehead and McNiff (2006), AR is more than just an approach to classroom-based research; AR can be transformative, life-changing even, as they believe that AR can: "transform the values that inspire our work and give meaning to our lives … [AR] is eminently practical" (p. 2).

In terms of AR being at the Quantitative-Qualitative Interface (QQI), Hilary Huang, at the University of Southern California in the USA asked, in the title of her 2010 paper: 'What is good action research?' Huang proposed five qualities and characteristics of 'good' AR, as follows: "1. proceeds from a praxis of participation; 2. is guided by practitioners' concerns for practicality; 3. is inclusive of stakeholders' ways of knowing; 4. helps to build capacity for ongoing change efforts, and 5. engage[s] with those issues people might consider significant" (p. 99). Here we can see some of the recurring themes in the AR literature, including the participatory nature of AR and the practical focus on addressing pressing issues within a particular context, in order to bring about positive change. Huang also addressed the relationships between qualitative and quantitative research in AR, explaining that: "both qualitative and quantitative methods augment and help develop results of AR inquiry" (p. 106) and that: "Ultimately, the relationship with quantitative work depends on what is relevant to a particular project" (p. 94). Regarding the relationship between AR and qualitative research methods, Huang stated that: "Action research does bear resemblance to, and frequently draws from the methods of, qualitative research in that both are richly contextualized in the local knowledge of practitioners" (p. 94). Therefore, in the same way that theory and practice need to be connected, another key question that teacher-researchers need to ask is: *How will my AR project make use of both qualitative and quantitative data-gathering?* However, before getting to that question, we need to step back and consider why already-busy classroom teachers should even consider taking on the roles of classroom researchers, which is the focus of the next section.

## 2 Why Do Research?

If one consults the search engine Google Scholar, using the search term/question, 'How to do research?', more than 7,000,000 (seven million) 'hits' are shown, going back at least 125 years, to 1895, when Edna Walter published a paper in the journal *Nature*, titled 'Research in Education'. However, the same search engine shows far fewer matches for the search terms/questions, 'Why do research?', 'Why do we do research? or 'Why should we do research?' In fact, only one paper was found (Nevin, 2006) that specifically addresses the question of why we do research in its title. And even that paper was a keynote conference presentation, and not published in an academic or scholarly journal. One possible conclusion that can be drawn from this brief glance at the published literature is this: We do not ask often enough – or perhaps not even ask at all – why we do research. That would seem to be an especially important question for busy classroom teachers, who may already be overloaded with preparing, teaching, marking, etc. In my research methods courses, for teachers and graduate students in Hong Kong, the USA, Canada and elsewhere, the course participants are asked to 'Question the Question', to encourage them to dive deeper and to see what is behind or underlying the question – before they try to answer the question. My name for

this tendency – which is normal and natural – to want to solve the problem and answer the question before the problem or the question is fully understood – is 'premature evaluation', which can be a messy business, and which leads to all kinds of erroneous outcomes. Therefore, my trainee researchers are asked to 'step back' from the question, so they can see the question more clearly, paradoxically, from being further away.

In this case, the question is: Why are there so many publications on how to do research when there are so few on why we do research? Or, to put it another more memorably alliterative way: Why so much about the method and so little about the motivation? One answer to that question is: We do not all know how to do research, but we all know why we do research – either because we have to or because we want to. That distinction is important, as extrinsic or instrumental motivation to do research – doing it because you have to – leads to different outcomes from research that is intrinsically or integratively motivated – doing it because you want to. As we know, the same applies to our students who are learning a second or foreign language because they have no choice, which results in different outcomes for the students learning the language because they have chosen to do so (Hong & Ganapthy, 2017). In addition, it is important to take a continuum view of the have to/want to distinction rather than a dichotomous view (Curtis, 2017), as there may be mixed motivations, in which a language teacher undertakes a research project for both reasons. For example, some years ago, a language teacher came to me with two problems. First, her students seemed uninterested and unmotivated in their English language learning lessons. Second, her boss had recently attended a workshop on the wonders of teacher research, and even though her boss was neither a teacher nor a researcher (her boss was a senior administrator) he had decided that all teachers had to become researchers – just like that. No extensive research methods training courses followed by on-going mentoring with experienced researchers. The edict had been issued: 'thou shalt go forth, and become researchers' – presumably with some divine intervention along the way.

At this point it is helpful to consider the only paper found that addressed that question of why we do research specifically in its title. That paper was presented as a keynote address by Ann Nevin, a professor at a teacher's college within Arizona State University in the USA, at a research conference held at Barry University in Florida, USA. According to Nevin, her audience included attendees in one or more of the following roles: "classroom teacher, administrator, teacher educator, in-service trainer, doctoral or master's degree candidate, subjects of a research study, currently involved in a research project at the present time, seeker of funds to support research, and consumer of research information to make data-based decisions" (Nevin, 2006, p. 8). Nevin carried out an initial informal survey of ten teacher education researchers, and asked them, in an email: "What are 3 reasons you 'do' research?" (p. 4). She received 30 responses from her colleagues, based on which she identified four recurring themes in answer to her question: "1. To meet needs of children, teachers and classrooms; 2. To fulfill personal needs; 3. Because of other people; 4. To add to the knowledge base" (Nevin, 2006, p. 4).

Fortunately, Nevin used her presentation to gather another set of data from her keynote attendees, 47 of whom responded (out of 65 attendees, making a high response rate of approximately 72%), who wrote down a total of 84 response items under the four headings. Such data-gathering is sometimes referred to as 'opportunistic', which can carry the negative connotation of 'taking advantage of someone or of a situation'. However, given the conspicuous scarcity of published research looking at why we do research, compared with the mountain of literature on how to do research, it is indeed fortunate that Nevin took the opportunity to gather more data on this key but apparently largely overlooked question. Each attendee was asked to respond to one or more of the four headings Nevin had generated from her original informal survey of ten participants. The largest number of responses were given under the heading "To fulfil personal needs", under which 29 comments were made, out of a total of 84 comments (34.5%). Some of those comments illustrate the problem-solving nature of teaching and learning and of research, for example: "I enjoy looking at parts and pieces of a puzzle and putting the pieces together" and "To solve problems I encounter on a daily basis" (Nevin, 2006, p. 7). Other comments under this heading show how the personal and the professional overlap, as noted above in the discussion of AR at the PPI, for

example: “To gain rank and promotion”, “To improve myself professionally”, and “To stay competitive in my field” (Nevin, 2006, p. 7).

The second most responded to heading was “To add to the knowledge base”, under which 22 comments were made (26.2%). Some of the comments show the practical nature of classroom-based research, and the theory-practice relationship, for example, “To discover what works and what does not”, “To learn new things and to help change old things”, and “To inform practice”. The third group, by number of comments, came under the heading “To meet needs of children, teachers and classrooms”, with 19 comments (22.6%). The most common verbs under that heading are ‘to help’ and ‘to improve’, sometimes combined, for example: “To help teachers improve student learning”. One of the most notable comments under this heading is: “To use research procedures that give those without a voice, a voice to be heard” (Nevin, 2006, p. 7). That respondent may have been referring to the voices of their learners, their colleagues or to others, such as the parents of their learners (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg & Pollio, 2017). But whoever’s voices were being referred to, that comment in Nevin’s paper harkens all the way back to beginnings of AR, with Kurt Lewin’s seminal 1946 paper titled ‘Action Research and Minority Problems’. In that paper, which is credited as being the first paper to be published on AR, Lewin (1946, p. 35) wrote that:

> The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice.

When Lewin wrote about “social management”, “social engineering” and “social action”, he too was referring to the voices of those who were not being heard at that time. In the 1940s in the USA, the unheard voices at that time were those of African Americans and Jewish Americans. As Lewin put it: “In recent years we have started to realize that so-called minority problems are in fact majority problems, that the Negro problem is the problem of the white, that the Jewish problem is the problem of the non-Jew, and so on” (Lewin, 1946, p. 44). Looking at the USA today, it is tremendously troubling and deeply disheartening to see that the racial divisions that Lewin was seeking to bridge, through AR, appear to be as prevalent and as problematic in the USA now as they were nearly 75 years ago, when Lewin published his seminal paper.

To return to Nevin’s (2006) paper, the smallest group of 14 comments (16.7%) came under the heading “Because of other people”. Some of the comments were in line with the discussion above, about having to do research because of some more extrinsic motivation, including “To complete assignments”, “To fulfill an assignment for class” and “To earn credit in my research class”. However, some other-people reasons were of a more altruistic nature, for example: “To improve the lives of others”, “To help people achieve the best for them”, and “To help people solve problems” (Nevin, 2006, p. 7). As we can see from Nevin’s short but illuminating study, there are many different reasons for teachers to carry out research. However, before an already-busy teacher takes on the additional role of classroom researcher, it is essential that she is clear on why she is taking on this role. Whatever the reason(s), clarity of purpose will lead to a more positive process, and to more productive outcomes.

## 3 Why Do Action Research?

In the first issue of the first volume of the journal *Action Research*, launched in 2003, the journal’s editors asked their editorial board to respond to a number of questions related to AR: “Why do you choose to do action research? What brought you to this practice? What keeps you involved? … What issues, values, experiences, personal characteristics or other factors underlie your commitment to action research and shape your practice?” (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 10). In defining AR, the journal

editors start with the definition given by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury in their 2001 *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*: "a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes … It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1). In addition to stating what something is, it can also be helpful to state what it is not, which is what the editors of the newly launched AR journal did when they clarified their position that: "Action research rejects the notion of an objective, value-free approach to knowledge generation in favor of an explicitly political, socially engaged, and democratic practice" (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 13). Instead, the editors of the new AR journal wrote that AR researcher should: "provide people with the support and resources to do things in ways that will fit their own cultural context and their own lifestyles" (p. 14), which recognizes the fact that every teaching and learning context is unique, because every learner and every teacher is unique (Curtis, 2017).

The first and last parts of the Reason and Bradbury (2001) definition refer to a "participatory … process" and "in participation with others", which makes it clear that AR cannot and should not be carried out by teachers working in isolation. The teacher-researcher should be working with other teachers and/or with the learners, and there may be other parties involved as well, such as education administrators. However, collaboration between those two groups – teachers and education administrators – is relatively rare, which is unfortunate as the decisions made by such administrators can have a direct and substantial effect on teachers' lives. For example, Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb and Wyckoff (2011) looked at the "most important aspect of [the] job influencing decisions to leave teaching for former and current teachers" (p. 326). Boyd et al (2011) gathered data from nearly 2,000 former and current teachers (386 and 1,587, respectively) and found that: "Hardly any teachers cited dissatisfaction with colleagues, autonomy over the classroom, school facilities, respect from students and/or parents, ability to help students, emphasis on student testing, school safety, teaching assignment, teaching philosophy, or district policies as the primary reason for leaving or considering leaving" (p. 327). However, Boyd et al (2011) found that the single most influential reason for teachers leaving their position was "dissatisfaction with administration" (p. 327). Such studies show how important it is for teachers and education administrators to work together, which includes carrying out AR projects together. The same applies to AR projects between teachers and the parents of the learners in their classroom, which is similarly rare. Also, given the fact that AR is an inherently collaborative process, another key question that teacher-researchers need to ask themselves is: *Who do I know well enough and trust enough to work together with as classroom co-researchers?*(See Farrell, 2020, p.69 for a discussion of trusted critical friends.)

One example of education research involving parents as education stakeholders is Gill Crozier and Jane Davies' (2007) research on why Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents of children in schools in the north of England were not more actively involved in their children's schooling. However, even though the parents, their children and the schools were the sources of data for Crozier and Davies (2007), the study was not able to involve those parties as partners in the research. Furthermore, although the authors found that the schools needed to do more to reach out to the parents, it is not at all clear if any of those parties – the parents, their children or the schools – actually benefited in any way from the research. In fact, it was found that: "The primary schools overall made more effort to engage the parents of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage but in doing so were ironically *more disparaging*; the secondary schools, however, displayed, overall, *indifference*" (p. 311, emphases added). Therefore, two more key AR questions should be: *Who will benefit from this research and how will they benefit?* As discussed above, Kurt Lewin noted nearly 75 years ago: "Research that produces nothing but books [or research articles] will not suffice" (1946, p. 35). In other words, if the only people to benefit from the research are the researchers, who can add another item to their list of publications, to build-up their resume, then that should not be considered AR.

Another important part of the Reason and Bradbury (2001) definition highlights the importance of AR bringing together, "action and reflection, theory and practice" (p. 1). In relation to AR being at the TPI, as discussed above, the theory-practice relationship was another one of the recurring themes in the editorial of the newly-launched AR journal, in which the editors cited Kurt Lewin's observation that: "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (1951, p. 169). The editors also acknowledged that: "We all know the great difficulties action researchers face to bridge the two worlds of theory and praxis" (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 19). However, the AR journal editors went further and stated that: "But action research goes beyond the notion that theory can inform practice, to a recognition that theory can and should be generated through practice, and … that theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused on achieving positive social change" (p. 15). Therefore, another key question in AR that also does not appear to be asked as often as it perhaps should be is: *How will this AR project help to connect theory and practice in ways that inform each other?*

The last question in this paper, like the first one, is also of critical importance but is also very rarely asked: *How much time do I have to do this AR project?*(See Farrell, 2020, p.48 for a discussion of time needed for RP.) Another way of phrasing the question would be to ask: How much time would I need to do this AR project well? As the editors of the AR journal wrote: "action research is not merely about 'doing good', it is also about doing things well" (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 25). As with the question above, about why we do research, publications on how much time is needed to do research are rare. That scarcity of research on the time requirements of research may be explained by the catch-all answer 'it depends', as the amount of time needed will be different for each piece of research, depending on a wide range of variables. Those variables include the different types of data and how much data is to be collected, how that data will be analyzed, how the findings will be presented, etc. However, in my 20 years of working with language teachers to help them develop their AR projects, in schools, colleges and universities around the world, one of the recurring time-related factors has been that more time is needed than is initially realized. For example, if a teacher wants to carry out a larger scale AR project, they might need far more time than they have available for such a project. Therefore, we look closely at the teacher's daily and weekly teaching and non-teaching schedule, to see how much time she has left to do AR, at the end of the day – as it usually is during evenings, weekends and public holidays when such teacher research can be carried out. At that point, we can 'reverse engineer' the question, and change it from: 'How much time do I have to do this AR project?' and 'How much time would I need to do this AR project well?' to: 'What kind of AR project can be done, and done well, in the (very) limited time I have available?' In that way, we are then talking about what AR is feasible, rather than what would be ideal, as the ideal conditions hardly ever exist in the real world, especially in education.

One of the only examples found of a published paper that addresses the question of time needed to do professional, workplace research is a paper in the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, titled 'Not enough time for research? Use of supported funding to promote allied health research activity' (Wenke, Weir, Noble, Mahoney & Mickan, 2018). Wenke et al. looked at a group referred to as 'allied health professions', which includes medical support staff such as dietitians, occupational therapists, respiratory therapists and speech-language pathologists. The authors found that: "the research culture of AH [allied health] clinicians within health care has considerable room for improvement and is 'associated with a lack of time, skills, resources, team and organisation support and organisational structure. Indeed, 'lack of time' has been identified as the most common barrier to AH clinicians participating in research" (p. 270). As a way of addressing the problems of limited time for such research, Wenke et al (2018) suggested that: "research could be integrated into a clinician's role description or their professional performance plan, so that additional time and resources may be able to be allocated for clinicians to undertake such tasks within their regular working time" (p. 276). Such an arrangement would also be of tremendous benefit to busy classroom language teachers preparing to take on the role of classroom researchers.

## 4 Concluding Comments

One of the best-known poems by the American-born British author T.S. Eliot (188-1965) is Four Quartets, published in 1943. Some of the most oft-quoted lines from that poem are: “We shall not cease from exploration; And the end of all our exploring; Will be to arrive where we started; And know the place for the first time.” That seems like a fitting note on which to end this reflection, because in AR, we are “the place” that is referred to by Eliot. AR enables us to know our personal-professional selves in ways that we may not have known before, to see what is there in our classrooms that was not there before, or conversely, to see what is no longer there anymore. AR is one powerful way of connecting the hand, the head and the heart – what we do, what we think, and what we feel, respectively – and at the heart of all teaching and learning is Change. Therefore, AR can help us to be life-long learner-teachers, constantly changing, growing and developing, as we lead and follow our learners, journeying together.

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