

Understanding and doing teacher research

Rama Mathew & Jason Anderson

Seminar on mentoring teacher research

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YOUR QUESTIONS?

- Please find somebody that you do not know.
- Introduce yourself and your context of work.
- Together write down a few questions that you have about **‘Understanding and doing teacher research’ (5 minutes)**.



PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF OUR TALK

1. What is the difference between teacher research and academic research?
2. How can classroom-based research benefit teachers?
3. What types of teacher research are there?
4. How can teachers start doing research?
5. What are the challenges of doing teacher research?
6. What support do teachers need while doing teacher research?
7. Useful resources and references.
8. Question check.

1. What is the difference between teacher research and academic research?



TEACHER RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

- **Teacher research**

- ✓ research into something that emanates from the teacher's own work in the classroom.
- ✓ relevant and useful to the teacher and her context.
- ✓ shared if the teacher chooses to, in a way she wants to.

Therefore teacher research is research **by** teachers, **for** teachers.

- **Academic research** may be conducted for qualifications (e.g. MA, PhD), or for public dissemination (e.g. publication).

- ✓ It *may* involve teachers (as research 'students') or scholars but is usually 'supervised' by an academic.
- ✓ It *may* or *may not* be directly useful for the classroom.

2. How can classroom-based research benefit teachers?



BENEFITS OF TEACHER RESEARCH

- Findings are directly relevant to the teacher's context
- Teacher and student empowerment
- Improved reflection and analytical skills for future
- Lead to research publications, presentations
- Preparation for higher qualifications (MA, PhD)

VIDEO: SHAMIMA'S STORY

Teachers' Voices Conference
Capturing the Dynamics of Change

EIA = English in Action (Bangladesh) TVC = Teachers' Voices Conference

3. What types of teacher research are there?



2 COMMON AREAS FOR TEACHER RESEARCH

Exploration You find out more about something to understand it better. E.g. I find out about what my students find difficult in exam tasks.

Action You make a change to something and see what impact it has. E.g. I start to add suggestions to my correction of student work.

ACTION RESEARCH

- A teacher makes some kind of change in her own practice.
- She plans for this change, carries it out, and examines its impact.
- As such, the study involves an ‘intervention’.

Example:

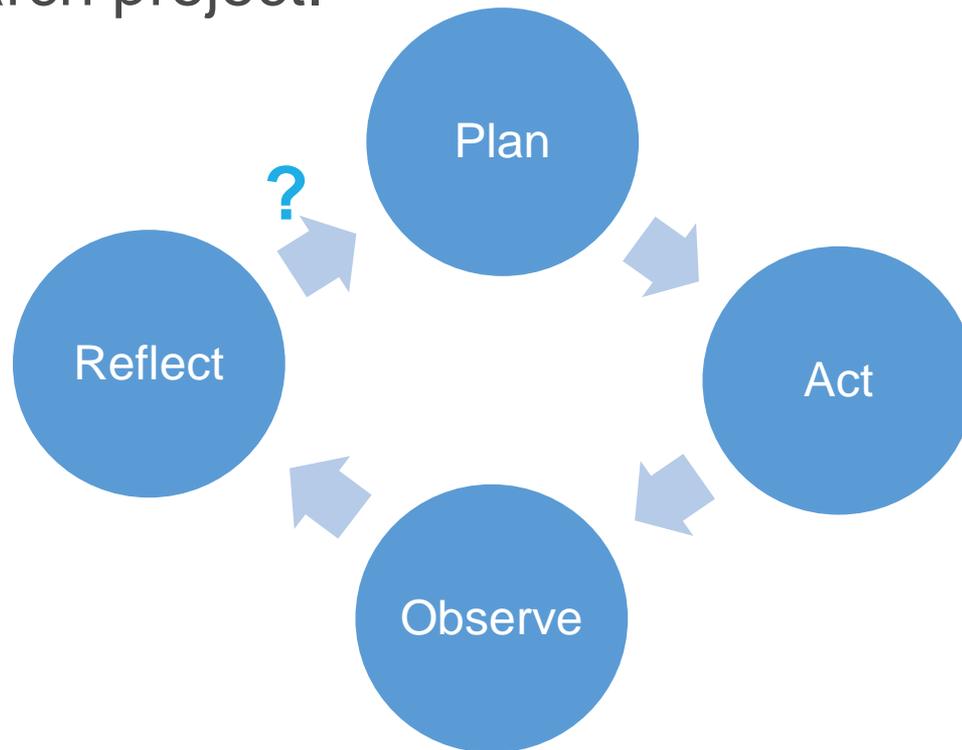
Manisha reads an article that recommends that teachers should not only correct mistakes in students’ work, but also write brief suggestions. For example,

Your answer is clear, but also remember to give a reason - Why did you like the poem?

She decides to try this out in an action research project.

ACTION RESEARCH

Manisha reads an article that recommends that teachers should not only correct mistakes in students' work, but also write brief suggestions. She decides to try this out in an action research project.



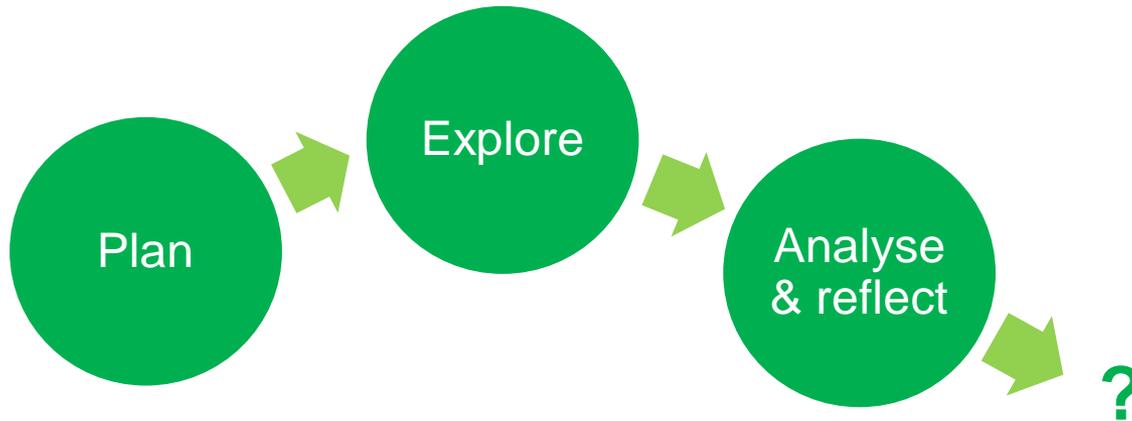
EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

- The teacher finds out more about a problem, a puzzle or an area of interest.
- The teacher carries out research to understand this area of interest.

Example:

Nitin is under pressure to improve his students' exam results. So he decides to find out more about what his students find difficult in exam tasks.

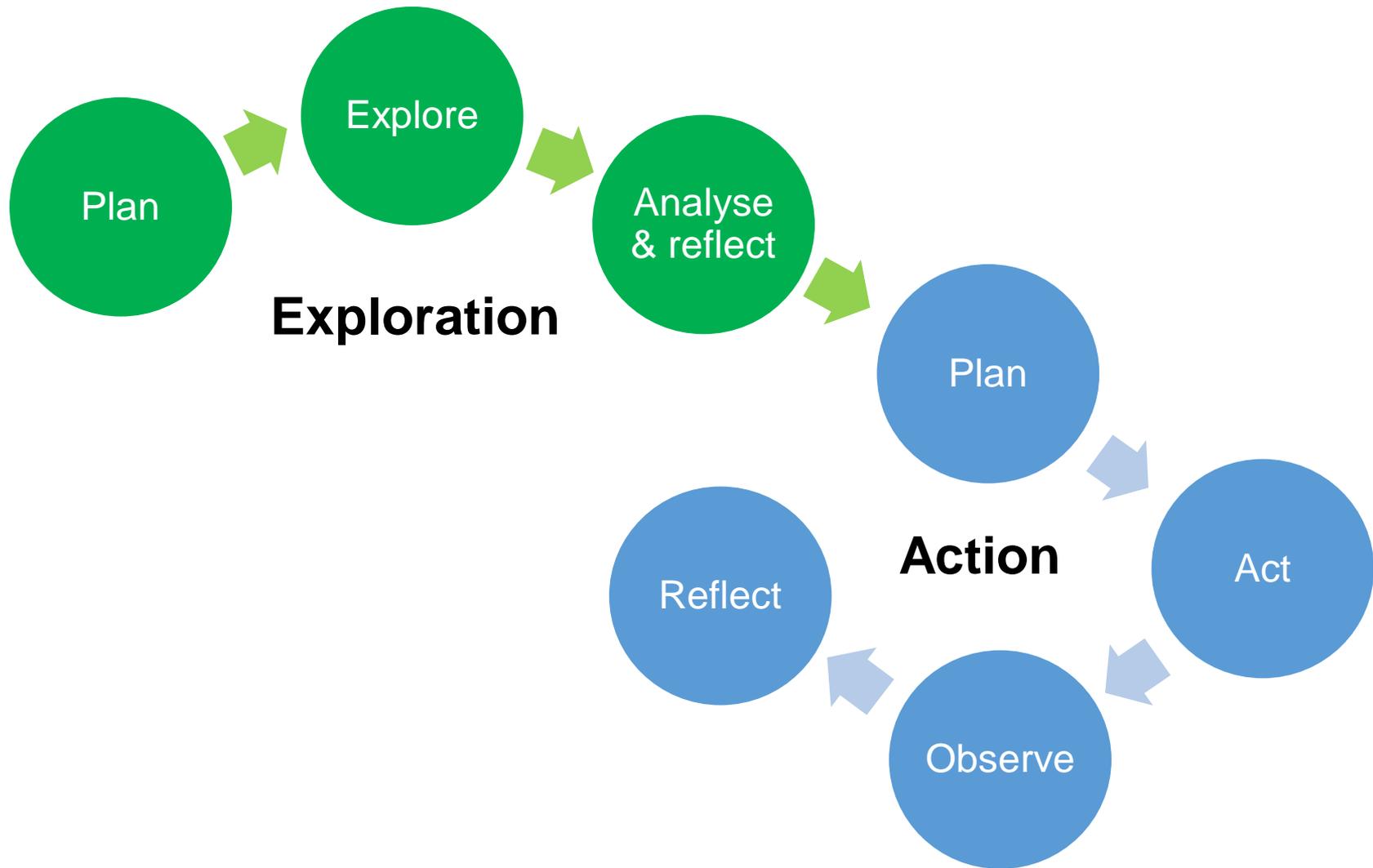
EXPLORATORY RESEARCH



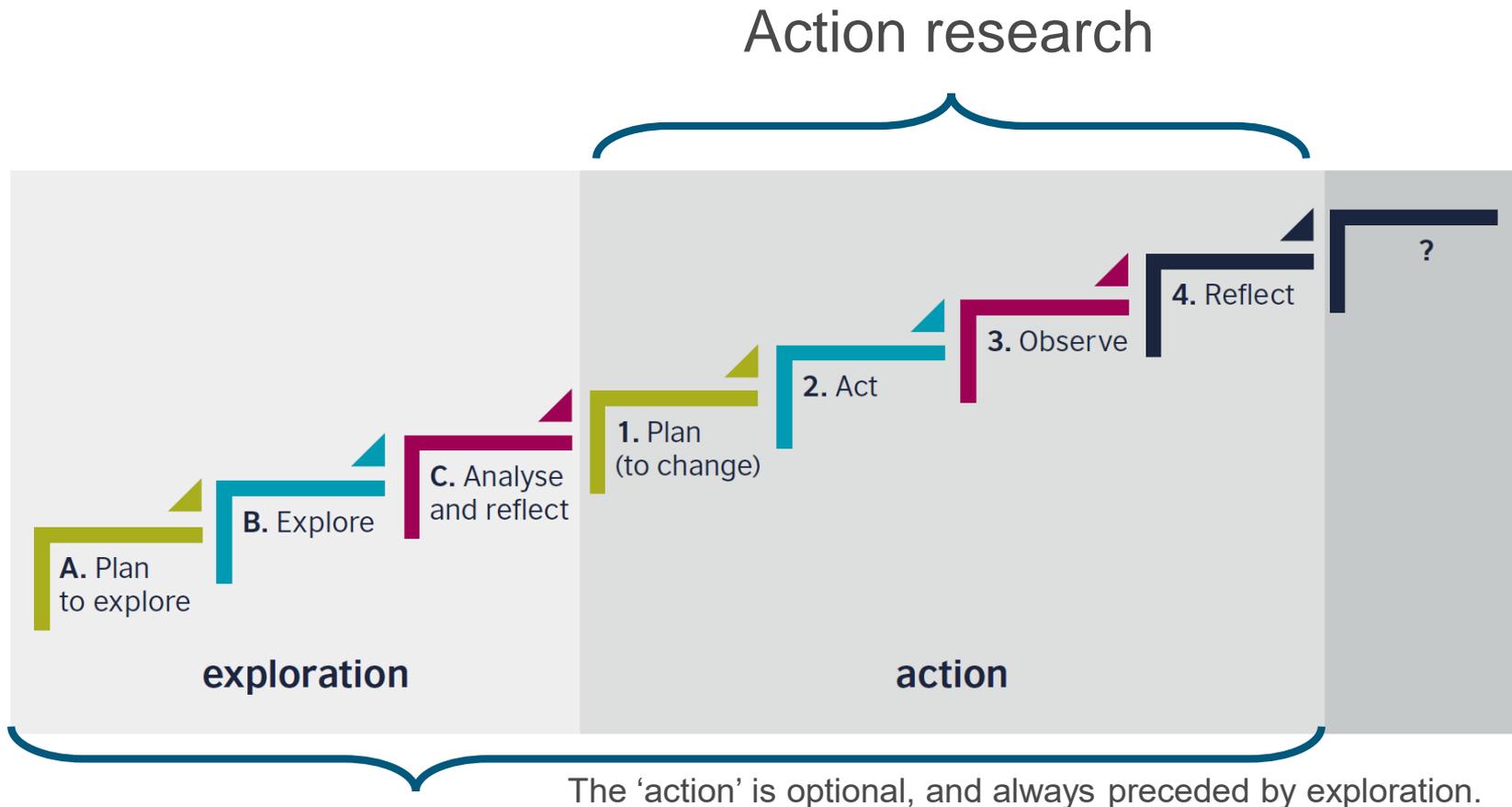
E.g. Nitin is under pressure to improve his students' exam results. So he decides to find out more about what his students find difficult in exam tasks.

When he gets to the reflect stage, he may stop his research, or he may try to make a change: 'action'.

EXPLORATORY ACTION RESEARCH



COMPARING ACTION RESEARCH AND EXPLORATORY ACTION RESEARCH



Exploratory action research (from Smith & Rebolledo, 2018)

4. How can teachers start doing research?



GETTING STARTED

- Through a local teacher association (e.g. ELTA Telangana)
- Through a district or mandal programme
- Through a local university programme (e.g. EFL-U)
- Do research as preparation for presenting it at a seminar/conference (e.g. AINET conference in Hyderabad, January 2020)
- Join a MOOC (e.g. Classroom research EVO)
- On my own / find a mentor / colleagues from a school or nearby schools

5. What are the challenges of doing teacher research?

Benefits

- Emotionally rewarding
- Having confidence you can achieve or try harder activities or contents

Difficulties

- Have to work one-by-one
- Get delayed with contents (sometimes)
- Constantly motivation to avoid frustration

CHALLENGES OF TEACHER RESEARCH

Participant challenges:

Programmatic issues:

CHALLENGES OF TEACHER RESEARCH

Participant challenges:

- **time** – both for the teacher and their mentor / facilitator
- **research methodology** – (e.g. learning new skills)
- **teacher–mentor relationship** (e.g. support needs, communication, personalities, etc.)
- **motivation** – if things get difficult, teachers can drop out

Programmatic issues:

- **participant agency** – teacher research is less effective when teachers are forced to do it
- **professional reward** – teachers often need an incentive
- **mentor skill-set** – mentors need prior experience in (teacher) research, and good interpersonal skills

6. What support do teachers need while doing teacher research?



SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- A mentor
- The school/institution head
- Colleagues in the same institution/other institutions (for carrying out collaborative research)
- A funding agency (can do research without it, though)
- Students (of course!)
- A project (e.g. English in Action in Bangladesh)
- Others ???

THE MENTOR



SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- A mentor
- The school/institution head
- Colleagues in the same institution/other institutions (for carrying out collaborative research)
- A funding agency (can do research without it, though)
- Students (of course!)
- A project (e.g. English in Action in Bangladesh)

LINE MANAGER / SCHOOL HEAD

For teacher research to be successful, the teacher also needs support from her/his line manager (e.g. head teacher/Principal).



EXAMPLE OF SIERRA LEONE TEACHER RESEARCH PROGRAMME

- The project decides to introduce ‘teacher research’ as a nationwide initiative
- Mentors are oriented to teacher research and to ways of mentoring through a short programme
- They in turn hold a workshop for teachers in different regions
- The teachers and mentors carry out research in their own contexts over a year with the ongoing f2f and online support from a ‘super-mentor’.
- They present their research studies at a national conference. (show a short video)

SIERRA LEONE TEACHERS



- How has the workshop been different from others you've participated in?
- What are some of the things you have learnt?

USEFUL RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Dikilitas, K., Smith, R. & Trotman, W. (2015). *Teacher-Researchers in Action*. Faversham, UK: IATEFL Research Special Interest Group. **Free:**

<https://tinyurl.com/yyxvwwlg>

Hanks, J. (2017). *Exploratory Practice in Language Teaching: Puzzling about Principles and Practices*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pinter, A. & Mathew, R. (2016). *Children and Teachers as Co-researchers: A Handbook of Activities*. London: British Council. **Free:**

<https://tinyurl.com/y4voyg2n>

Rebolledo, P., Smith, R. & Bullock, D. (2016). *Champion Teachers: Stories of Exploratory Action Research*. London: British Council. **Free:**

<https://tinyurl.com/lqblk84>

Smith, R. (2019). *Mentoring Teachers to Research their Classrooms: A Practical Handbook*. N. Delhi. British Council. **Available soon!**

Smith, R. & Rebolledo, P. (2018). *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research*. London: British Council. **Free:** <https://tinyurl.com/ycpjqumh>

Facebook groups:

Teachers Research! www.facebook.com/groups/teachersresearch/

IATEFL Research SIG: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/iateflresig/>

Mentoring TR: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mentoringTR/>

YOUR QUESTIONS?

- Please check:
 - ✓ Have they been answered?
 - ✓ Have any new questions arisen in your mind?
- Find someone to chat to in the coffee break, and discuss these questions with them.

