

# The Influence of the St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative on Teacher Professional Learning

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## Abstract

Addressing the perennial concern for teacher quality, this study responds to the evolving landscape of educational priorities, with a primary focus on empowering teachers to create dynamic learning environments. As the demand for enhanced training programs intensifies, the significance of teacher professional development becomes increasingly evident. This study explores the St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative, an Action Research Project at St. Edward's Primary School. Commencing with teachers sharing knowledge, it has evolved into data analysis and interpretation dialogues, fostering a reflective approach to teaching practices. To establish a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between teacher professional development, teacher quality, and student achievement, this study delves into the impact of teacher action research. By illuminating the connection between reflective practices and instructional effectiveness, the study contributes insights into best practices for supporting teachers and enhancing instructional methods. Practical data and facts are presented to elucidate the challenges faced by teachers, emphasizing the need for continual adaptation to meet the dynamic needs of students. Furthermore, the study reveals that teacher reflection, often considered an individual endeavor, has broader implications for the entire teaching profession. The outcomes underscore the transformative potential of initiatives like the St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative in positively influencing teachers' instructional approaches and, consequently, student learning. This study concludes by proposing practical implications based on research results, highlighting the promising role of reflective practices in fostering a vibrant and dynamic learning environment for all students.

## Keywords

Teacher Quality, Professional Development, Action Research, Reflective

## 1. Introduction

As Mahtab Narsimhan (Ivory, 2021) aptly stated, “A good education is the greatest gift you can give yourself or anyone else.” However, the bestowing of this gift comes with its own set of challenges, particularly concerning how schools can effectively nurture their teachers to build exceptional educational institutions. A prominent approach addressing this challenge is the practice of action research, a method conducted by classroom teachers that has emerged as a burgeoning trend in schools. This methodology offers a targeted means to tailor professional teacher development.

“Job-embedded” professional learning experiences, facilitated through action research, empower school principals and educators to customize their strategies for enhancing classroom instruction. This, in turn, affords teachers the autonomy to craft their own professional learning tasks. In the context of St. Edward’s Primary School in Australia, the St. Edward’s Teacher as Researcher Initiative (SETARI) stands out as a model bridging teacher professional development with elevated student achievement, concurrently cultivating and refining school culture and teaching methods.

Guided by Southern Cross University’s TeachLab, SETARI commenced with educators participating in reflective teaching sessions, enabling them to develop their individual theories on teaching and learning. This initiative provides staff with numerous opportunities for inquiry-based professional learning, allowing them to explore their practices, identify areas for growth, and collaborate more effectively with their colleagues.

This article aims to spotlight practical ideas derived from SETARI that can be embraced by other educational institutions. It serves as a guide for initiating comparable programs that promote inquiry-based professional learning. The impact of the Action Research Initiative at St. Edward’s Primary School is unmistakable in terms of enhancing teacher performance, standing as an exemplary model for other schools to emulate. As the pursuit of outstanding educational institutions continues, it is imperative that we invest in sustainable teacher capacity-building initiatives, such as SETARI.

## 2. Teacher Professional Learning for School Reform

### 2.1. Why Is Professional Learning Necessary?

A prosperous and harmonious school improvement initiative necessitates the active participation of all stakeholders, including regular classroom teachers, specialists, and school leaders. In delivering enriching learning experiences to students, each member of the school community plays an indispensable role. It is, therefore, imperative to discern the distinct needs of each teacher and provide

them with the necessary support to enhance their teaching methodologies. For instance, “novice” educators may require different learning opportunities compared to those with years of experience. Despite these differences, it is crucial for the entire school community to align on common objectives and collaboratively work towards their achievement.

To those outside the profession, the ongoing need for support for teachers, even after completing their training and certification, might seem perplexing. However, teaching is an exceptionally intricate vocation, and even the most comprehensive teacher preparation programs cannot fully equip new teachers with the broad knowledge and skills essential for their success. Similar to other professions, such as psychology or medicine, where expertise is developed over time, it is equally unreasonable to expect teachers to be experts right from the start.

Despite extensive discourse on educational reform, changes often seem to have minimal impact on students in and around their classrooms (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Broad attempts to overhaul the education system frequently fail to yield tangible benefits, fostering a sense of disillusionment among educators who may feel that their efforts do not significantly influence their students’ learning outcomes.

DuFour and Eaker (2009) highlight that the failure of these reform endeavors to generate substantial improvements has led many to adopt a cynical outlook regarding the possibility of school transformation. In response, teachers have become increasingly defensive and pessimistic. This raises a pivotal question: How can school systems create an environment that empowers teachers to enhance their capacity for learning, growth, and innovation?

The solution lies in furnishing teachers with continuous professional development opportunities that enable them to apply new knowledge and skills to elevate their teaching practices. These opportunities can take various forms, ranging from collaborative planning and reflection sessions with colleagues to participating in workshops and conferences. By providing teachers with the time, resources, and support necessary to enhance their methods, schools can nurture a culture of perpetual learning and growth that benefits both teachers and students.

## 2.2. Characteristics of High-Quality Professional Learning

Research by Guskey (2000), Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004), Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung (2008), Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), and Sims & Fletcher-Wood (2018) underscores that high-quality professional learning for teachers should embody certain attributes that can profoundly influence the improvement of student learning outcomes.

- 1) Relevant: Effective professional learning must directly address the unique needs of teachers and align with the objectives of the school or district. For instance, a program could focus on specific challenges or areas for improvement

identified by teachers or school leadership. Tailoring professional development to the specific needs of teachers and schools can have a more substantial impact on teacher practices and student learning outcomes.

2) Collaborative: In the spirit of collective efficacy, professional learning should encourage collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge among teachers and between teachers and school leaders. This may involve opportunities for joint planning and reflection, allowing teachers to enhance their professional growth and share effective practices and innovative ideas.

3) Active: Effective professional learning should involve interactive and hands-on learning activities, rather than passive lectures or presentations. Teachers should engage in simulations, role-playing, and other active learning experiences that enable them to apply new concepts and skills in practical contexts. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the material and its relevance to their teaching practices.

4) Continuous: Instead of being a one-time event, professional learning should be an ongoing process. This continuous learning approach enables teachers to build on their knowledge over time, keeping them updated with the latest developments in the field. For example, ongoing workshops or seminars could support teachers in responding to the evolving needs of their students and adjusting their teaching strategies accordingly.

5) Measurable: To ensure that professional learning has a positive impact on both teacher practice and student learning, clear goals and objectives should be established, along with a way to measure progress and effectiveness. This might involve assessing the impact of professional development on teaching practices and student outcomes, allowing for necessary adjustments. School leaders can also use measurable outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning programs and make improvements where needed.

Research, as highlighted by [Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin \(1995\)](#), underscores that professional learning is most effective when it is active and involves teaching, assessing, observing, and reflecting. To provide a clearer understanding, consider the following specific examples of active professional learning:

- Teaching: This involves actively engaging in the practice of imparting knowledge, employing various teaching methods to enhance the learning experience for students.
- Assessing: Teachers actively assess student progress through techniques like quizzes, discussions, and one-on-one conferences, allowing for dynamic adjustments to instruction ([Black, 1998](#); [Schildkamp, van der Kleij, Heitink, Kippers, & Veldkamp, 2020](#); [Torrance & Pryor, 1998](#)).
- Observing: Actively observing students' responses and behaviors in the classroom provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of teaching methods.
- Reflecting: This involves critically examining instructional practices and seeking peer support, promoting continuous improvement and professional growth.

### **2.2.1. Collaborative Professional Learning**

Collaborative professional learning, as emphasized by [DuFour & Eaker \(2009\)](#), is particularly effective when it involves peer-to-peer learning within “communities of practice.” These communities facilitate change beyond individual classrooms, providing support and guidance to all. Success in implementing changes is more likely when entire grades, schools, or systems collaborate, fostering a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking to address challenges and enhance teaching practices.

### **2.2.2. Job-Embedded Professional Learning**

In contrast to one-time workshops, job-embedded professional learning, as proposed by [Cohen and Ball \(1999\)](#), expects teachers to apply theory and best practices to real-world situations. This approach, rooted in the daily challenges of teaching, offers a more effective and sustained method to bridge the gap between research and practice.

### **2.2.3. Teacher Role Changes and Optimizing Learning**

In recent years, there has been a shift in how the role of the classroom teacher is perceived. Teachers are now expected to be reflective practitioners, engaging in communities of inquiry to achieve shared goals ([Hargreaves, 2007](#)). Today’s teachers serve various roles beyond knowledge providers, including project managers, mediators, psychologists, event planners, curriculum designers, and pedagogical leaders ([Fornari & Poznanski, 2021](#)).

Teachers continuously seek ways to enhance student learning in their classrooms through strategies such as differentiated instruction, formative assessment, student engagement, providing feedback, and supporting student independence. Consistent application of these strategies creates more productive learning environments and enhances student academic achievement, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

### **2.2.4. Enabling Professional Growth**

In today’s intricate and ever-evolving classroom setting, teachers confront unique challenges and bring a diverse array of skills to the table to cater to their students’ educational requirements. For instance, teachers may face challenges such as adapting to new technologies, addressing diverse learning styles, and navigating the complexities of individual student needs. They employ various skills, including effective communication, adaptability, and creativity, to meet these challenges and create a supportive learning environment for their students.

In this dynamic context, ongoing professional learning stands as a vital component of teacher growth and development. However, as [Nolan and Molla \(2019\)](#) aptly argue, the effectiveness of professional learning hinges on its alignment with the individual needs and objectives of teachers.

### **2.2.5. Customized Professional Learning**

Customized professional learning empowers teachers to concentrate on the spe-

cific aspects of their practice that they aim to enhance and provides them with the requisite resources and support to attain these goals. For example, a teacher facing challenges in incorporating technology into their lessons may benefit from personalized training sessions or workshops focused on integrating technology effectively. Through the provision of personalized professional development opportunities, schools and districts can ensure that teachers possess the competencies and knowledge essential for their effectiveness in the classroom, enabling them to address the diverse needs of their students.

It is imperative to recognize that there is no universal approach that suits all teachers' professional learning needs (Nolan & Molla, 2019). Consequently, schools and districts must collaborate with teachers to pinpoint areas of growth and deliver continuous support and resources to cater to these requirements. By embracing personalized professional learning, teachers can refine their teaching practices, enhance student outcomes, and ultimately contribute to the cultivation of a culture of perpetual improvement within their educational institutions.

### **3. Towards Teacher-Based Research**

Teacher research stands as a potent instrument for self-reflection, enabling educators to gain valuable insights into their effectiveness and pinpoint areas necessitating improvement. For example, a teacher engaging in research might focus on understanding the impact of differentiated instruction on students with diverse learning styles, leading to insights into personalized teaching approaches. When schools invest in teachers to undertake research on their own practice, they demonstrate a profound commitment to educator development, equipping them with a deeper comprehension of school dynamics (Fullan, 2021).

Additionally, educators must possess the ability to engage in action research or classroom inquiry to generate and assimilate knowledge while deriving meaning from their experiences and challenges. This could involve teachers collaboratively exploring the effectiveness of a new teaching method through action research, incorporating real-time adjustments based on student responses.

Teachers occupy a pivotal role in comprehending the connection between teaching and research, as they operate at the intersection of the intricate learning environment and the school community (Dadds, 2020). For instance, teachers may actively collaborate with colleagues to conduct research on the integration of technology in the classroom, contributing to both individual and collective professional growth. Active and collaborative inquiry into their practice, supported by reflective inquiry, leads to heightened understanding, elevated levels of student achievement, and more self-assured practitioners.

Structured reflection and collaboration are integral components of teacher-initiated changes in school practice, as the reflective approach acts as a conduit for exposing teachers to varied perspectives on student learning, offering insights into school and classroom practices, and fostering localized action. Teachers engaging in structured reflection might analyze student performance

data collaboratively, leading to insights into effective instructional strategies tailored to the needs of their students.

Despite the advantages, not all practicing teachers readily embrace the role of a reflective practitioner and researcher in their professional lives (Mertler, 2019a). Some educators may be skeptical about the utility of research in informing classroom practice, and data collection methods can be perceived as excessively time-consuming, especially when juggling their regular teaching responsibilities.

To address these challenges, teachers and researchers must learn to focus on research (Leuverink & Aarts, 2022). For instance, teachers might engage with concrete experiences, reflect upon them, and subsequently consider them in an abstract context, gaining valuable insights to enhance their teaching methods. Through the St. Edward's Action Research Project, teachers were able to refine themselves both personally and professionally by participating in learning activities that translated into improved student achievement when implemented in their classrooms (Mertler, 2019b).

Self-reflection through teacher research is indispensable for educators' ongoing learning and growth. Investing in teachers and furnishing them with personalized professional learning opportunities tailored to their unique needs and objectives is pivotal in ensuring that teachers possess the skills and knowledge essential for effectively meeting the diverse needs of their students in the classroom.

#### 4. Towards a Definition of Teacher Action Research at St Edward's

Action research is a potent tool often subject to misunderstandings and misconceptions within educational circles. Its meaning can be nebulous and subject to various definitions and interpretations. Nevertheless, it is crucial to grasp that action research fundamentally revolves around empowering teachers to steer their own professional growth and development. To clarify, action research is a systematic and reflective approach where teachers independently conduct research, taking ownership of their learning.

Action research is a multifaceted process characterized by a cyclical, systematic, reflective, and collaborative approach. For instance, imagine this process as a spiral of steps, following Lewin's model, wherein teachers continually reflect on their experiences and apply newfound knowledge to their practice. The collaborative facet of action research is equally vital, as teachers collaborate to identify issues, analyze data, and formulate solutions that benefit both their students and school communities. Each cycle involves the teacher-researcher following a four-step approach:

- *Step One*: Observing: Identifying what is working, what isn't, and what needs improvement.
- *Step Two*: Planning: Developing a proposed action plan that necessitates deviations from the standard approach.
- *Step Three*: Action: Implementing the plan.

- *Step Four: Reflect:* Assessing the impact of the action and adjusting future practices.

It is imperative to comprehend that action research is not a linear process but a continuous cycle of learning and improvement. Teachers must be willing to engage in self-reflection, question their assumptions and beliefs, and be open to novel ideas and approaches. By doing so, they can gain a deeper understanding of their practice, identify areas for enhancement, and formulate strategies that lead to improved student outcomes. Ultimately, action research is a potent tool for fostering teacher autonomy, collaboration, and professional development.

### **Teacher Action Research Defined**

Teacher Action Research is chiefly concerned with improvement and change centered on teacher learning. For example, a teacher might study a real school situation to enhance the quality of action and outcomes within it, refining professional judgment to attain educational goals (Schmuck, 1998). This approach offers a means to transition from current practices to more effective ones.

At St. Edward's, the staff holds a profound appreciation for the potency of action research in elevating teacher expertise and boosting student achievement. Nevertheless, for teachers to harness the full potential of this approach, they must engage in their research with purpose, collect evidence on specific topics to enhance their teaching practices, and foster significant student growth.

Donald Schön's influential work on reflective practice and action research, initially introduced in 1983, underscores the pivotal role of reflection in empowering teachers to make informed decisions and tackle situations that extend beyond their training. By cultivating a robust knowledge base, teachers can craft learning opportunities tailored to each student's unique requirements, surpassing mere content delivery.

Collaboration also stands as a fundamental aspect of action research, as co-researchers and cross-curricular discussions expand and refine different modes of understanding. The literature reviews by Candy (2019), Van den Bossche and Baktiran (2021), attest to the significance of collaborative efforts in successful action research. At St. Edward's, this collaboration manifests as peer observation and professional mentoring, grounded in trust and shared convictions about effective teaching.

While some teachers engage in action research as part of higher degree pursuits, the importance of making it a common classroom practice is pivotal to the success of school improvement. Through this cyclical, collaborative process of reflective analysis, teachers can not only enhance their practice but also contribute to the broader theoretical knowledge in their field. By embracing action research, teachers become active learners, seize control of their professional development, and instigate meaningful changes in their classrooms.

### **5. Initial Steps**

At St. Edward's, the mandated Diocesan-wide Professional Learning Plan (PLP)



has proven to be a valuable catalyst for enhancing teacher practice. The Diocesan-wide PLP is a structured initiative that empowers teachers to collaboratively develop a professional learning plan targeting specific areas of improvement, including learning completed within the classroom. To clarify, the PLP provides both formal and informal opportunities for teachers to reflect on their learning and practice with colleagues.

To encourage an inquiry-based approach to teacher practice, St. Edward's teachers were urged to engage in self-reflection and consider questions such as what is working in their classroom and teaching, who is learning and who is being left out, and how their curriculum can be improved to provide better learning opportunities. This process has led to the development of the Teacher as Researcher's idea at St. Edward's.

By revising their goals to be more action-oriented and using them as guiding questions for subsequent classroom-based action research, teachers at St Edward have taken a proactive approach to improving their practice. For example, a teacher might set a goal to enhance student engagement through interactive activities and use this as a basis for action research. This collaborative effort fosters ongoing professional growth and development, allowing teachers to continuously refine their teaching methods and enhance their student achievement.

Incorporating action research into one's practice as an educator can be an influential tool for promoting self-understanding and personal growth, as well as gaining insight into student learning and development. For instance, a teacher might conduct action research on the effectiveness of incorporating technology in the classroom, leading to personal growth and improved student outcomes. However, it is not uncommon for teachers to feel intimidated by the idea of conducting research, often believing that this is the domain of university academics. [Leuverink and Aarts \(2022\)](#) suggested that this resistance to classroom inquiry as "research" may be due to assumptions formed during teacher training programs.

To address these concerns, St. Edward is committed to providing targeted workshops and meetings with Southern Cross University staff to help teachers develop knowledge of action research processes and refine their projects. Both formal and informal progress check-ins were conducted throughout the year to ensure that the initiative ran smoothly. Leadership team members provided data on individual teachers' contributions and commitments at regular meetings, and additional aid or guidance was provided when needed.

Through St Edward's Action Research Project, which included seminars and workshops conducted by university personnel, teachers benefited from knowledge enhancement, improved school culture and teaching practice, and a reshaped curriculum design. This initiative demonstrates the transformative power of action research in fostering growth and development for educators and students.

### **5.1. Structure and Alignment of SETARI**

To gain a better understanding of how SETARI functions in practice, [Figure 1](#)

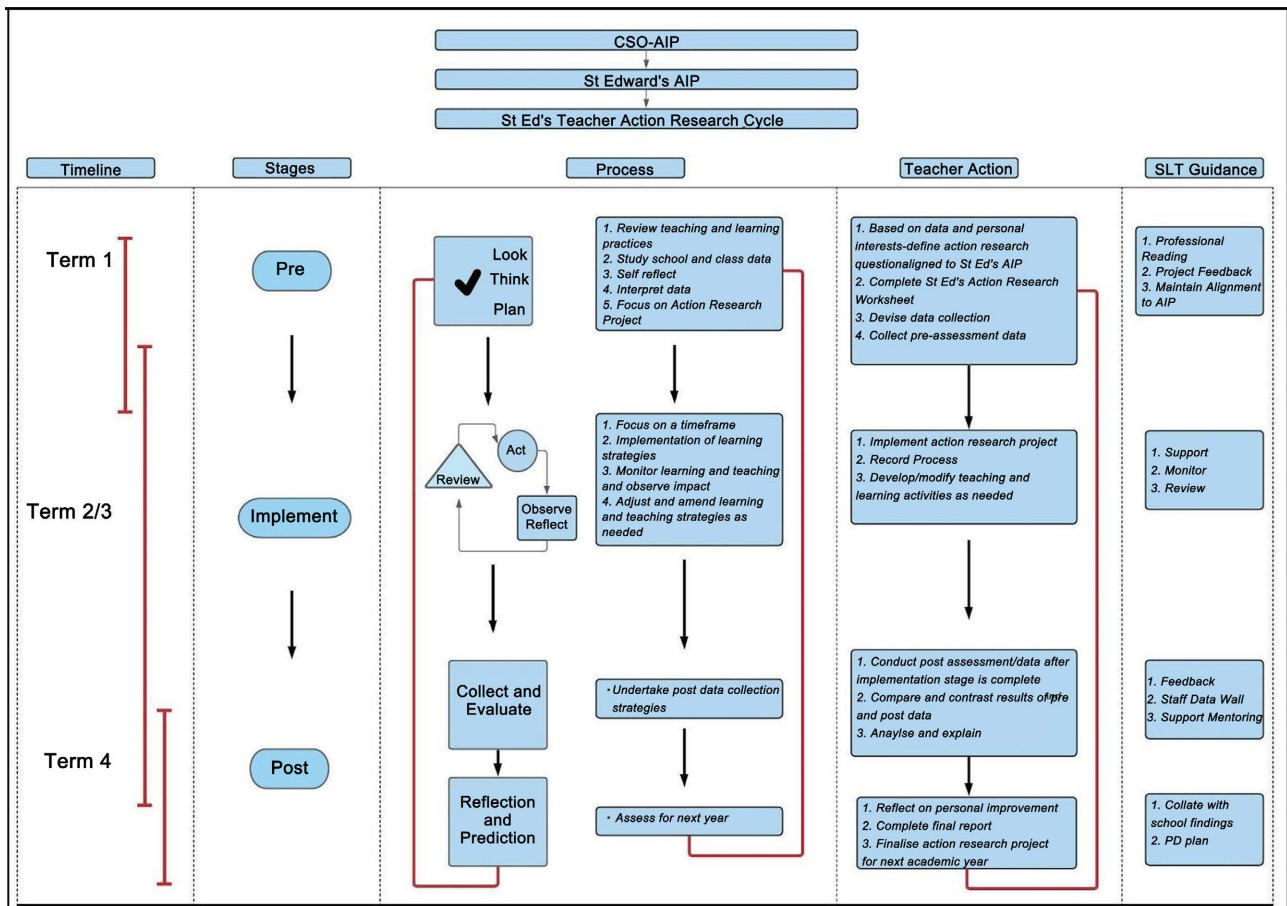


Figure 1. St Edward's SETARI schema.

illustrates its linear structure. This year-long process aligns with both the Diocesan and school strategic planning processes, requiring staff members to undertake research projects that are directly linked to an aspect of their school's annual development plan. To illustrate, teachers might embark on research projects focused on implementing innovative teaching methods or integrating technology into the curriculum, aligning with the broader goals outlined in the school's development plan. This approach ensures that research efforts are purposeful and aligned with the school's overall goals, promoting meaningful progress towards improved teaching and learning outcomes.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the SETARI framework, outlining a clear, linear path that guides teachers through each stage of the research process. This includes a timeline, procedures, and teacher actions, such as designing and implementing new teaching methods or assessing student outcomes, with guidance from the School Leadership Team. To further support teachers, mentors can provide assistance at any point in the research cycle, allowing educators to make steady progress towards their goals with increased confidence. Thus, the SETARI approach is a valuable educational improvement tool. The following are the stages to complete the action research of a teacher (as seen in Figure 1) undertaken as part of the SETARI process.

## 5.2. SETARI Steps & Questions

### 1) *Finding Your Focus:*

- What areas of personal and professional learning do I need?
- What areas do I try to improve for my students?
- What do Australian Professional Standards address?
- Which Annual Improvement Plan does it fit under?

### 2) *Refine your focus:*

- What do I know of this focus?
- What do others do in this area?
- What does the literature tell us about?
- TAR questions and strategies

### 3) *Write your PLP goal as a research question:*

- List the implementation strategies you will be undertaking.
- Establish your timeframe for implementation
- My Plan for Data Collection.

### 4) *What do I know about my students so far? (Pre-analysis before undertaking PLP goal)*

- What data evidence the need for a focus on this concept?
- How would you collect performance data?

### 5) *Analysis and Interpretation of Findings:*

- Write a short narrative of what your data were telling you.

### 6) *Rethinking and changing your practice:*

- What have you learnt?
- What have you changed?
- What is your next step?

The School Leadership Team (SLT) employs a targeted approach to the program by conducting meetings to analyze student data. The SLT, consisting of key educational leaders, collaborates to gain insight into student learning and identify areas for improvement. To enhance clarity, the SLT refers to the School Leadership Team, comprising individuals responsible for overseeing and guiding the educational program.

To enhance student learning further, mentors and mentees engage in classroom observations and provide feedback. To illustrate, mentors and mentees might collaboratively observe and analyze classroom dynamics, discussing strategies to improve student engagement or address specific learning challenges. This observation process is informed by previous discussions between mentors and mentees and focuses on specific topics identified as crucial for professional development. Using this approach, the program can optimize student learning and promote professional growth for teachers.

## 6. Results & Discussion

While the results are only preliminary, they highlight essential components of developing expertise as an inquirer. In this context, “expertise as an inquirer”

refers to the proficiency and skills teachers acquire in conducting reflective inquiry processes, engaging in research, and contributing to the continuous improvement of teaching practices.

### **6.1. Critical Factors in Teacher Growth as a Researcher**

The findings from a survey conducted with teachers on their professional mindset towards integrating research into their practice revealed three critical factors instrumental in a teacher's growth as a researcher. These factors, when combined within the SETARI context, contribute to the development of a robust community of inquiries within the school:

*Developing a Research Mindset:* This involves cultivating the necessary skills and confidence to initiate reflective inquiry processes. Teachers, when equipped with a research mindset, actively engage in questioning, investigating, and reflecting on their teaching practices.

*Building Competence and Confidence in Assessment-Influenced Climate:* Teachers need to build competence and confidence within an assessment-influenced climate. This implies being adept at utilizing assessment data to inform instructional decisions while maintaining confidence in their ability to navigate the complexities of an environment influenced by assessments.

*Empowering Teachers to Navigate School Policies:* Empowering teachers to accurately state and critique school policies and procedures is crucial. This empowers educators to actively contribute to policy discussions, ensuring that school policies align with best practices and promote a conducive learning environment.

When these factors are integrated within the SETARI context, the outcome is a process that nurtures a community of inquiries within the school, fostering a collaborative and research-oriented approach to professional development.

### **6.2. Fostering the Mindset for Action Research**

To optimize teacher improvement, it is critical to assess teachers' current pedagogical and subject knowledge levels and establish clear learning objectives. This requires an initial goal-setting survey, followed by the selection of the right mentor to assist in achieving those objectives. The subsequent establishment of an action research journey allows teachers to create a plan that will enable them to achieve their goals efficiently.

Before embarking on their action research, the teachers outlined potential steps and identified obstacles that could hinder their plans. Throughout the process, they reflected on what was successful and which areas needed improvement to make future exploration of action research more fruitful.

The St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative (SETARI) was designed to equip teachers within the school with the necessary knowledge and skills required to achieve their learning goals. Through this program, teachers were granted access to St. Edward's inquiry cycle, which enabled them to engage in

action research projects related to their specialized interests and problems. SETARI greatly improved instructional practices while simultaneously solidifying teachers' understanding of pedagogy and subject matter, making it a powerful tool for professional growth.

### **6.3. Promoting Action Research through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

The communication of action research in regular Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) helped teachers develop an open mindset regarding their research and pass on knowledge to and between colleagues. In this context, PLCs refer to collaborative groups of teachers who work together to discuss, learn, and share best practices. Through this method, they could meaningfully link theory and practice (Turner, 2011). Collective learning during PLCs provided ample growth among professionals as each could learn from and with one another, thus enhancing their understanding of action research more profoundly.

The St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative required teachers to engage in formal action research activities and illustrated yearly improvement, providing them with an excellent chance to express their understanding and motives for participating in such action-oriented research. Teachers were interested in developing their professional practice by participating in the self-directed learning process, building their subject/content knowledge and understanding, and identifying what they needed to know to focus on personal improvement (Bryant et al., 2016).

Through conversations held during professional learning team (PLT) sessions, it is clear that teachers who actively engage in action research obtain a fresh outlook on their teaching, becoming more analytical, concentrated, and thorough in their analysis. Several participants in the program reported that these habits have become ingrained within them as a result of their participation.

In the words of a teacher, action research is a means for teachers to "address problems and establish best practices within our setting." Consequently, it is essential for teachers to attain a profound level of subject knowledge pertaining to their area of content specialization to facilitate students in attaining their full potential in school.

## **7. A Process for Sharing**

In the context of the St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative (SETARI), action research projects serve as a means for teachers to learn about and apply best practices within their school. By conducting research in their areas of interest, teachers gained a deeper understanding of their subject matter as well as the opportunity to share their knowledge and collaborate with colleagues.

Promoting Collaboration through Professional Learning Team (PLT) Meetings.

Through regular Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings, teachers were

able to develop a more cooperative attitude towards improving student attainment and enhancing the culture of learning within the school. In these collaborative sessions, teachers share insights, discuss strategies, and collectively work towards common goals. This collegiality and collaboration are crucial in creating a positive school culture, which is a fundamental component of any school's success and improvement.

Moreover, through the sharing of project outcomes and report-writing, teachers were able to reflect on the benefits of their involvement in SETARI. This reflective practice resulted in improved classroom instruction, stronger student-teacher relationships, and a reduction in disciplinary referrals as the program progressed. The process not only enhanced individual teacher practices but also contributed to the overall positive transformation of the school environment.

### **Attentive to Capacity Building**

The St Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative was identified by senior leaders as a prime opportunity to foster the sharing of innovative teaching practices across different key stages at the school, ultimately increasing teacher capacity and benefiting all students. However, a significant challenge emerged concerning the perceived disconnection between educational research and classroom practices. Teachers frequently found academic research articles to be overly technical, irrelevant to their specific environment, and challenging to access. The language used in these studies was often too scientific, leading to difficulties in translating evidence-based learning into practical educational applications.

To address this challenge, the partnering university implemented a targeted professional learning approach. This involved conducting action research seminars and engaging in professional dialogue, allowing university personnel to share their knowledge with teachers in a more relatable and practical manner. As a result, teachers gained increased confidence and a more cooperative mindset in using class-based research to improve student attainment.

Moreover, the action research project facilitated collaboration among teachers across different year groups, enabling them to share their knowledge and best practices. This not only enhanced teachers' interpersonal skills but also had a transformative effect on the entire school community. Students and teachers collaborated to enhance student achievement, providing valuable insights into how collaboration can lead to greater success for everyone involved.

As the action research initiative progressed, the school's professional learning team underwent a notable transformation from an administrative approach to engaging in an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data. This shift allowed conversations to yield desired outcomes through effective implementation plans focused on each teacher's instructional practices. The St Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative emerged as a resounding success, providing a powerful example of how collaboration and research can lead to positive outcomes for teachers and students alike.

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## 8. Conclusion

Teacher action research stands as a powerful catalyst, empowering educators to delve into their teaching practices and enhance learning outcomes. The reflective nature of this process enables teachers to make informed, data-driven decisions, leading to meaningful adjustments in their instructional approaches to better support students. The profound impact of teacher action research extends to reshaping teachers' perspectives on teaching and professional learning.

Engaging in teacher action research provides educators with a unique avenue for personal growth and development. Through self-reflection and a meticulous examination of their practices, teachers identify areas for improvement and implement targeted strategies to enhance their instruction. This dynamic involvement keeps teachers actively engaged and positively influences both student learning outcomes and teacher satisfaction.

Teacher action research contributes to cultivating a culture of continuous improvement within schools. As educators share their research findings and collaborate with peers, a sense of mutual accountability for student success emerges. This collaborative ethos stimulates the development of innovative ideas and initiatives, resulting in improved teaching methods and enhanced educational outcomes for students.

Beyond these advantages, teacher action research offers invaluable insights into students' needs and learning habits. By attentively monitoring teaching approaches, teachers gain a profound understanding of effective practices and areas that require adjustment in the classroom. This knowledge is indispensable for making well-informed instructional decisions and tailoring educational strategies to meet the diverse needs of individual students.

The St. Edward's Teacher as Researcher Initiative serves as a compelling illustration of the positive outcomes derived from teacher action research. Through active participation in this program, teachers engaged in reflective practices, implementing positive changes that benefited all students. This successful initiative has empowered teachers to refine their instructional practices and elevate overall outcomes in the educational setting.

In the broader context of education, teacher action research emerges as an invaluable process, empowering educators to scrutinize and enhance their teaching practices for the benefit of student learning. However, establishing an environment conducive to the flourishing of teacher researchers presents its own set of challenges. This study underscores the difficulties faced by school leaders and university partners in fostering a culture of curiosity within educational institutions.

Creating a conducive learning atmosphere necessitates aligning teachers who embrace research as a form of inquiry and utilizing action research as a bridge to more traditional research methodologies. This involves exploring teachers' perceptions of research and providing opportunities for them to develop practical research skills. Overcoming discourse barriers in published research reports,

boosting teachers' confidence, and enhancing their skills to critically review current school policies and procedures are essential steps. Empowering teachers with the capabilities and perspectives to identify potential research opportunities within their learning environment and classrooms is crucial.

To achieve these goals, restructuring teacher education becomes imperative. Pre-service teachers need to be equipped to view their teaching role through a research lens. This implies integrating action research into teacher training programs, helping new teachers recognize the intrinsic connection between teaching and research. While this may not turn all new teachers into full-fledged researchers, it can instill an understanding of the importance of experimentation within their profession.

Structured teacher action research provides educators with the tools to deepen their understanding of students and teaching methods, challenging preconceived notions. This inquiry-based method encourages teachers to navigate the complexities of a school community and its learning environment, fostering analytical and reflective practices. As a major contributor to improving teaching practices, teacher action research, when supported by schools and districts, leads to the professional growth of educators and heightened student achievement. Recognizing and nurturing potential research projects further enhances the impact of teacher action research on education.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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