

Concretizing Applied SLA: Design-Based Research as a Methodological Starting Point

Remy Decorte, Fanny Meunier, Eloy
Romero Muñoz

AppLing 2025



Quick question!

- What's the easiest way to fix a slow elevator?



Designers often add a mirror.
They change the *experience*, not the motor.

The research-practice gap

- **Misalignment** between researcher goals (theoretical generalizability) and teacher needs (situated solutions)
- L2 Teachers often view **research as abstract or inaccessible** (Borg, 2009; Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017)
- Belgian FW-B context: teachers and policymakers lack access to evidence and to tools for using it (Dachet & Baye, 2021)

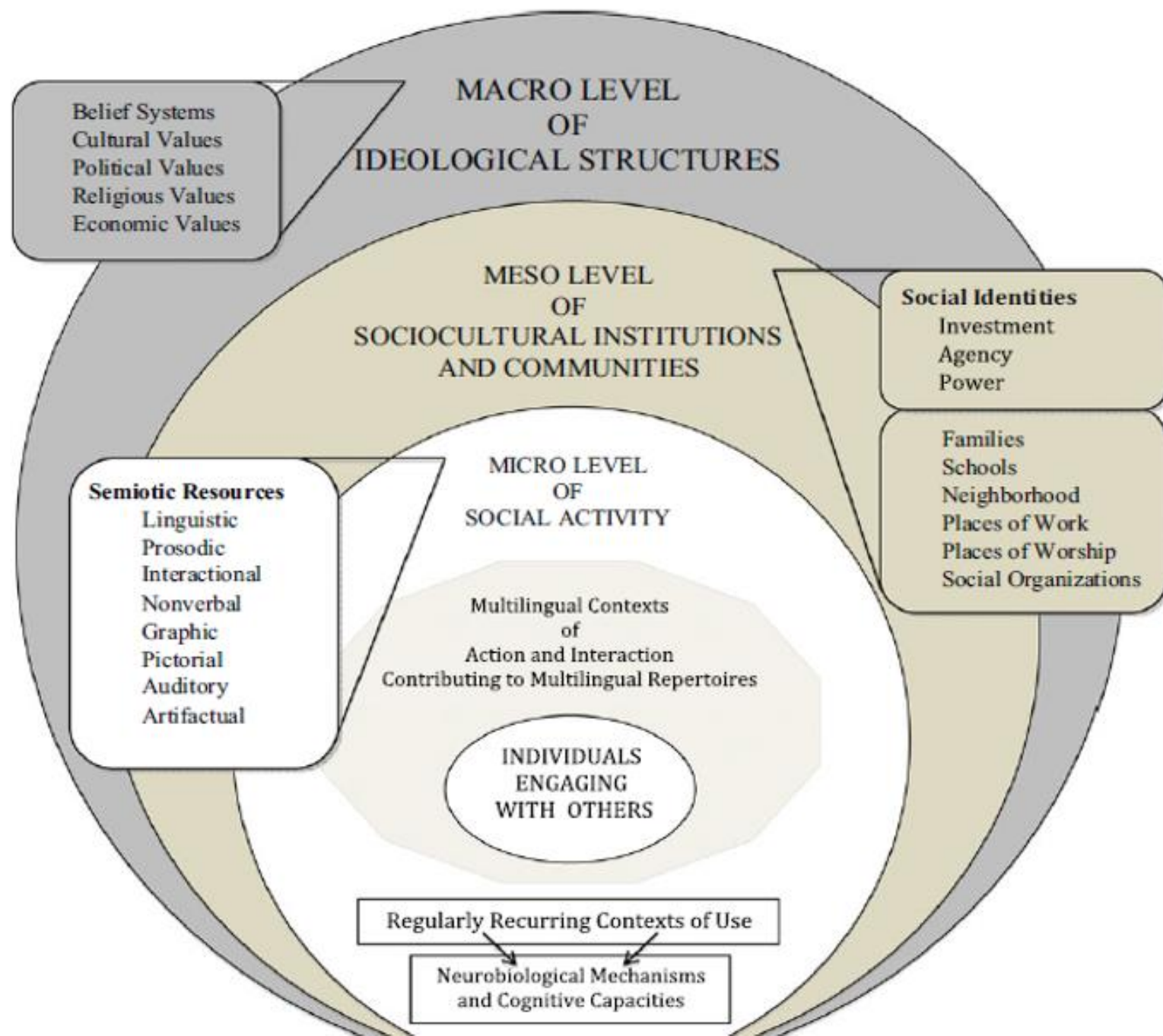
The ASLA rationale (Han, 2016)

- **FSLA:** FSLA represents basic/*fundamental* research aimed at uncovering core phenomena in SLA, typically with a psycholinguistic or cognitive focus. Little regard for how the insights and findings might translate into practical ideas or solutions.
- **ISLA:** classroom-based but often prioritizes internal validity over ecological validity.
- Persistent **theory-practice divide** (Clarke, 1994; Nassaji, 2012, Sato & Loewen, 2022).
- **ASLA** : real life educational concerns front and center; responds to critiques of ecological validity in SLA (Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Han, 2016).

Applied SLA (Han, 2016) or... SLD (Han, 2020)?

- Calls for research embedded in **authentic contexts**
- **Micro-meso-macro** analysis (Douglas Fir Group, 2016)
- Knowledge **co-constructed** with practitioners
- Moves beyond intervention testing toward **contextual understanding**
- **Complex Dynamic Systems Theory** (CDST; Larsen-Freeman, 2020)

The Douglas Fir Group (2016). A Transdisciplinary Framework for SLA in a Multilingual World. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100 (Supplement 2016), 19–47.



Why ASLA remains underdeveloped



BLURRED BOUNDARIES WITH FSLA
AND ISLA



LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO
CONDUCT ASLA RESEARCH

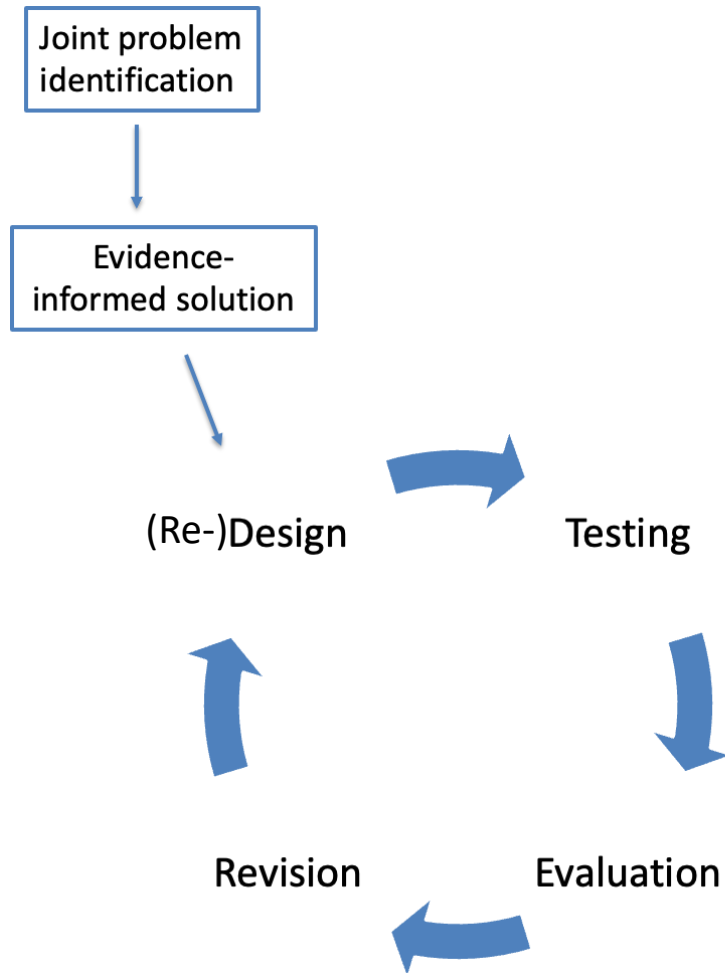


ACADEMIC REWARD STRUCTURES
FAVOR THEORY OVER PRACTICE-
RELEVANT INQUIRY

Why DBR?

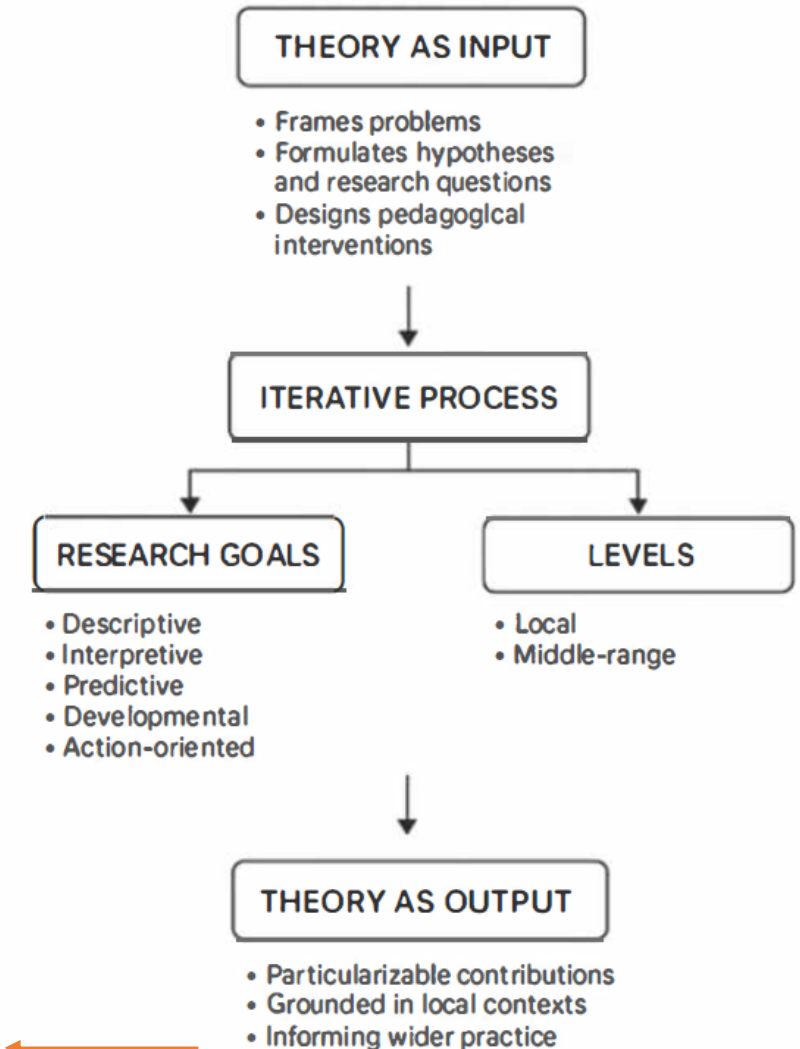
- DBR methodology defined as **iterative, collaborative** design in **real settings** (The DBR Collective, 2003; Wang & Hannafin, 2005)
- Simultaneously solves **practical problems** AND generates **theoretical insights**
- Respects **contextual complexity**
- Clear **epistemic roles** and **functional complementarity** which supports teacher agency.
- So... concretely?

DBR steps (adapted from Plomp, 2013 and Herrington et al., 2007)



"If you want to design intervention X for the purpose/function Y in context Z, then you are best advised to give that intervention the characteristics A, B, and C, and to do that via procedures K, L, and M, because of arguments P, Q, and R." (van den Akker, 1999, p.9)

Theory in DBR (inspired by McKenney and Reeves, 2018)



DBR as ecological methodology

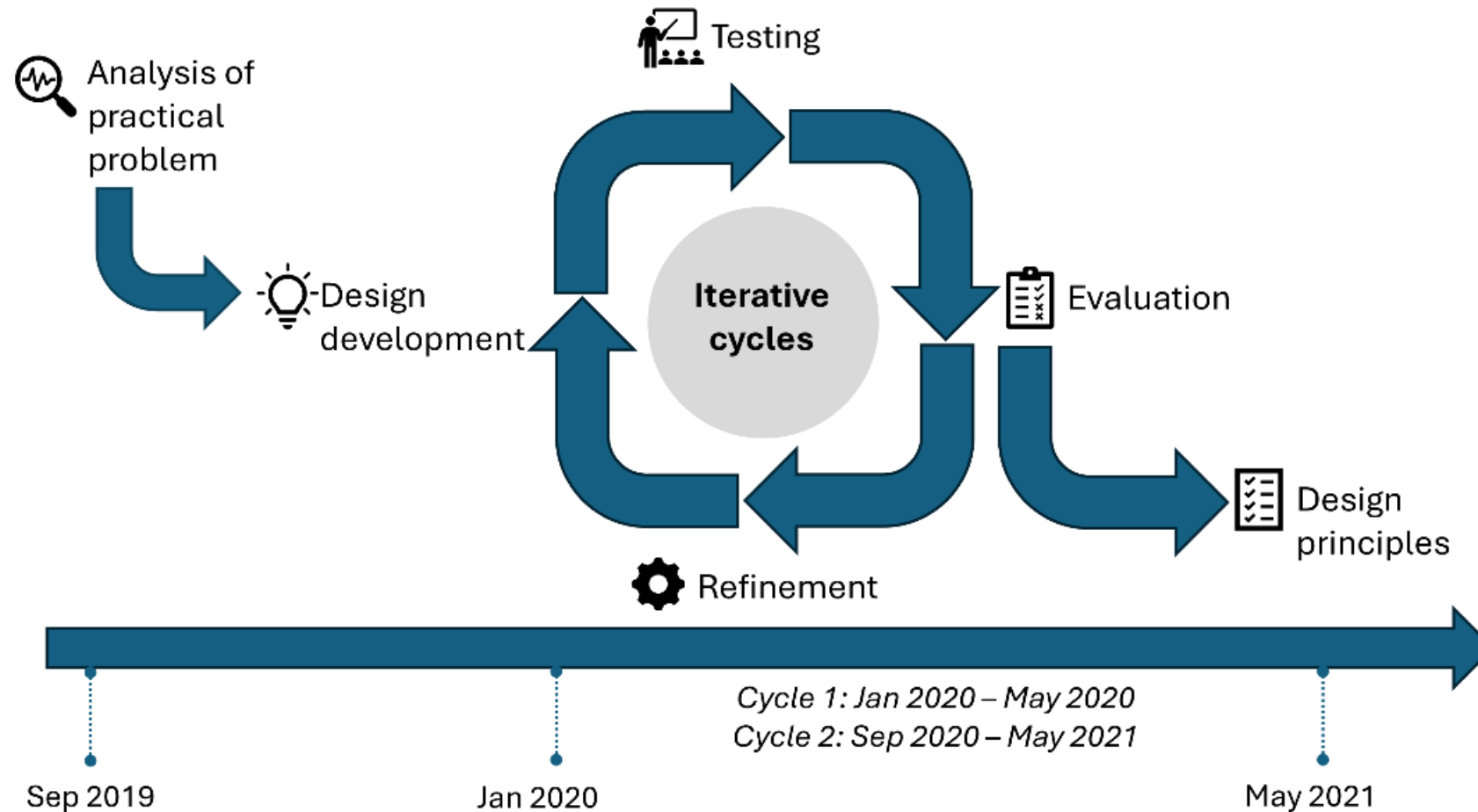
- **Iterative:** Captures emergent, nonlinear learning processes (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008)
- **Generates ‘particularizable’ principles** (Romero-Muñoz & Decorte, *submitted*) in the sense of ‘particularizable knowledge’ (as introduced by Clarke, 1994; Spada, 2019), rather than **generalizable knowledge**
- Makes visible structural and ideological factors influencing practice
- Fits FW-B reality and its current large-scale curricular reform:
Le Pacte pour un enseignement d’excellence

Illustration: DBR Project (FW-B)

- Two-year DBR project + one-year follow-up
- Co-design of Metacognitive Oracy Instruction (MOI)
- Mixed-methods: questionnaires, interviews, learner artifacts
- Embedded in reform emphasizing metacognition (FW-B, 2017)

The case of MOI (MSI and Journal) in the FW-B

(Decorte et al., *accepted*)



- RQ 1: How did L2 teachers' perceptions of the DBR process and MOI evolve over the two years?
- RQ 2: What were the teachers' reported effects of DBR on their practices a year later?

Findings

- **Increased perceived usefulness and feasibility of MOI** (Years 1–2)
- Metacognitive journals: **initial skepticism → later acceptance**
- Collaboration with researchers viewed as supportive and empowering
- **Teachers sustained MOI** (with different levels of ownership) one year later

Multilevel insights via DBR

- **Micro:** material adaptation, learner difficulties, pedagogical routines
- **Meso:** institutional constraints (curriculum, time, evaluation)
- **Macro:** reform discourses, ideologies of evidence (generalizability vs. particularizability), teacher autonomy
- **DBR reveals dynamic interactions across levels**

DBR and the AI Turn

- AI integration involves a paradigm shift (Meunier & Decorte, *in press*) that requires studying **acceptance, resistance, reinterpretation**
- DBR enables **tracing how teachers reshape AI-inspired innovations** to fit their own context (micro-level)
- Generates **particularizable principles** that can inform other contexts (meso) and policies (macro)
- Avoids treating AI tools as isolated interventions



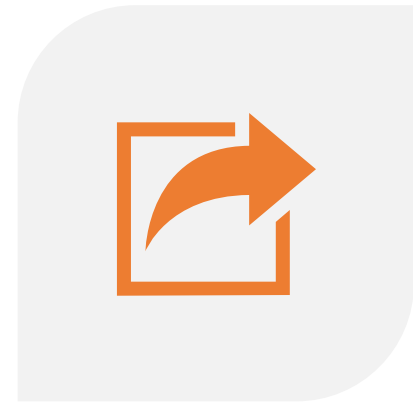
If you want to conduct ASLA research, DBR is a viable option, because...



DBR CONCRETIZES ASLA BY
OPERATIONALIZING ECOLOGICAL
VALIDITY



STRENGTHENS TEACHER AGENCY
AND RESEARCH-PRACTICE
RECIPROCITY



GENERATES USEFUL, TRANSFERABLE
DESIGN PRINCIPLES GROUNDED IN
CONTEXT

Ready to discuss this
further with you!

Reference list

- Borg, S. (2009). English Language Teachers' Conceptions of Research. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(3), 358-388. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amp007>
- Clarke, M. A. (1994). The dysfunctions of the theory/practice discourse. *Tesol Quarterly*, 28(1), 9-26.
- Dachet, D., & Baye, A. (2021). Evidence-Based Education : The (not so simple) case of French-speaking Belgium. *ECNU review of Education*, 4(1), 164-189.
- Decorte, R., Colognesi, S., & Meunier, F. (*in press*). Conducting Design-Based Research on Metacognitive Strategy Instruction in L2 Listening: Teachers' Perspectives.
- Decorte, R., Colognesi, S., Dachet, D., & Meunier, F. (2024). Perceptions and practices of L2 teachers in metacognitive oracy instruction: A longitudinal case study. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v7n3.1531>
- Douglas Fir Group. (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(S1), 19-47.
- Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. (2017). Avis n°3 du Groupe Central du Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence
- Han, Z. (2016). A "reimagined SLA" or an expanded SLA? A rejoinder to The Douglas fir group (2016). *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(4), 736-740.
- Han, Z. (2020). Usage-based instruction, systems thinking, and the role of Language Mining in second language development. *Language Teaching*. Advance online publication
- Herrington, J., McKenney, S., Reeves, T. C., & Oliver, R. (2007). Design-based research and doctoral students: Guidelines for preparing a dissertation proposal. Retrieved from www.editlib.org/d/25967/proceeding_25967.pdf
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press. http://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/linguistics/oxford_
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2020). Complexity theory: Relational systems in interaction and in interlocutor differences in second language development. In Gurzynski-Weiss, L. (Ed.), *Cross-theoretical explorations of interlocutors and their individual differences* (pp. 189–208). John Benjamins

Reference list

- Marsden, E., & Kasprowicz, R. (2017a). Foreign Language Educators' Exposure to Research : Reported Experiences, Exposure Via Citations, and a Proposal for Action. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(4), 613-642. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12426>
- McKenney, S., & Reeves, T. (2018). *Conducting educational design research*. Routledge.
- Nassaji, H. (2012). The relationship between SLA research and language pedagogy : Teachers' perspectives. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(3), 337-365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168812436903>
- Plomp, T. (2013). Educational Design Research : An Introduction. In T. Plomp & N. Nieveen (Eds.), *Educational Design Research Part A: An Introduction* (pp. 10-51). Enschede, The Netherlands: SLO.
- Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (2022). The Research–Practice Dialogue in Second Language Learning and Teaching : Past, Present, and Future. *The Modern Language Journal*, 106(3), 509-527. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12791>
- Spada, N. (2019). Balancing methodological rigor and pedagogical relevance : Chapter 10. Discussion. In R. M. DeKeyser & G. Prieto Botana (Eds.), *Doing SLA Research with Implications for the Classroom : Reconciling methodological demands and pedagogical applicability* (pp. 201-216). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.52.10spa>
- The Design-Based Research Collective. (2003). Design-Based Research : An Emerging Paradigm for Educational Inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 32(1), 5-8. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032001005>
- van den Akker, J. (1999). *Principles and Methods of Development Research*. In J. van den Akker, R. M. Branch, K. Gustafson, N. Nieveen & T. Plomp (Eds), *Design approaches and tools in education and training* (pp. 1–14). Springer.
- Wang, F., & Hannafin, M. J. (2005). Design-based research and technology-enhanced learning environments. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 53(4), 5-23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02504682>