

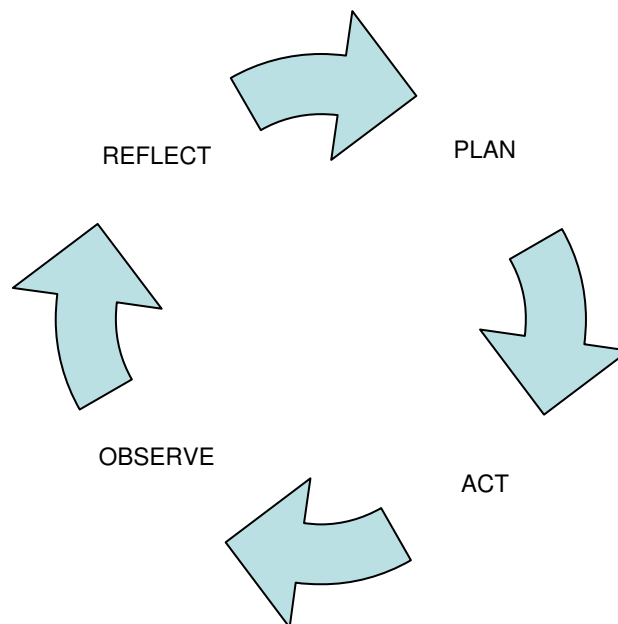
Four 'Moments' of Action Research

(Kemmis, McTaggart, & Retallic, 2004)

To *do* action research, one undertakes:

- to develop a *plan* of action to improve what is already happening;
- to *act* to implement the plan;
- to *observe* the effects of action in the context in which it occurs; and
- to *reflect* on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and so on, through a succession of cycles

'Moments': not static steps, complete in themselves, but rather moments in the action research spiral process



Action Research: A Definition

Action research is a period of inquiry that describes, interprets and explains social situations while executing a change intervention aimed at improvement and involvement. It is problem-focused, context-specific and future-oriented. Action research is a group activity with an explicit critical value basis and is founded on a partnership between action researchers and participants, all of whom are involved in the change process. The participatory process is educative and empowering, involving a dynamic approach in which problem identification, planning, action and evaluation are interlinked. Knowledge may be advanced through reflection and research, and qualitative and quantitative research methods may be employed to collect data. Different types of knowledge, including practical and prepositional, may be produced by action research. Theory may be generated and refined, and its general application explored through the cycles of the action research process.

(Waterman, Tillen, Dickson, & de Koning, 2001)

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Planning

- Prospective or prior to action; forward looking
- Recognize that all social action is to some degree unpredictable and therefore somewhat risky
- Flexible enough to adapt to unforeseen effects and previously unrecognized constraints
- Strategic:
 - Taking into account the risks involved in social change, and recognizing real constraints in the situation
 - Chosen because it allows the practitioner to act more effectively over a greater range of circumstances, more wisely and more prudently.

Action

- Deliberate and controlled: careful and thoughtful variation of practice.
- Practice as 'idea-in-action'
- Guided but not controlled by plan and prior practice
- Risky, in real time, dealing with real constraints
- Fluid and dynamic, instant decisions, practical judgement
- 'Struggle' towards improvement

Observation

- Documenting the effects of action
- Prospective: provides the basis for reflection now but more so in the immediate future
- Careful observation is necessary because action will always be limited by constraints of reality, and all of these constraints will never be clear in advance
- Observation must be planned, so that there will be a documentary basis for subsequent reflection, but it must not be too narrow – must be responsive, flexible, and open-minded
- Observe:
 - the action process
 - the effects of action (intended and unintended)
 - the circumstances of and constraints on action
 - the way circumstances and constraints limit or channel the planned action and its effects
 - other issues which arise
- Guided by intent to provide a sound basis for critical self-reflection

Reflection

- Retrospective, recalls action as it has been recorded in observation
- Seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints made manifest in strategic action
- Takes account of the variety of perspectives possible in the situation
- Aided by discussion among participants
- Through discourse – a reconstruction of the meaning of the social situation, leading to a revised plan
- Evaluative aspect: practitioner is to judge whether effects/issues were desirable and suggest ways of proceeding
- Descriptive aspect: new understanding, a more vivid picture of the situation, the action, and what might now be possible