

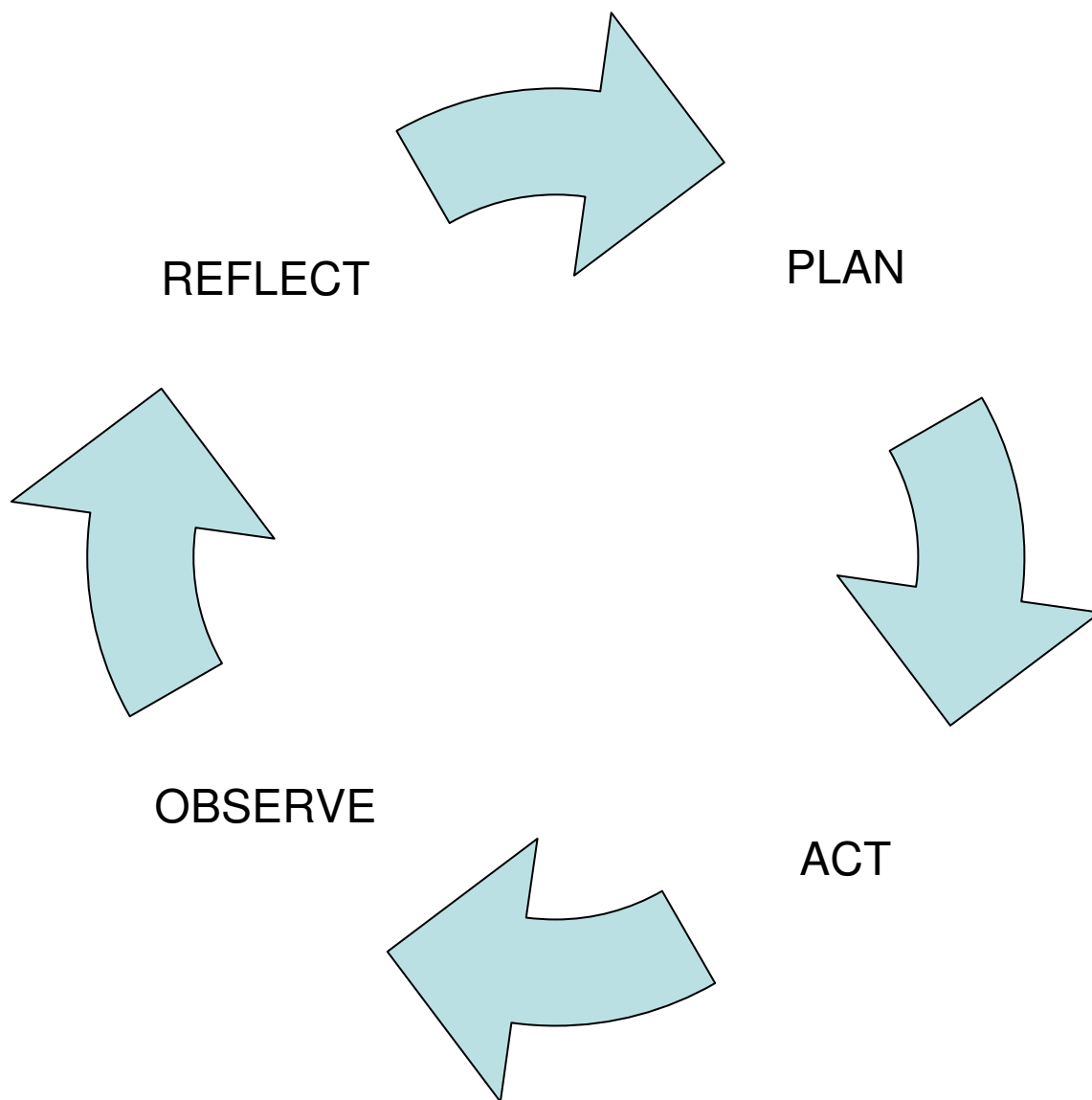
## Four 'Moments' of Action Research

(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



# Four 'Moments' of Action Research

(Kemmis, McTaggart, & Retallic, 2004)

## 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

## 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)

## Participatory Action Research

PAR aims to put the process of knowledge generation in the hands of marginalized communities, thus enabling them to improve their lives through systemic transformation (Park, 1993 & Hall, 1981).

PAR is:

### *People-centred:*

- participation of marginalized people throughout the research process, from identifying research questions, selecting study designs, disseminating findings, to mobilizing for social change (Sohng, 1996)

### *Power-conscious:*

- as community members become more closely involved in the knowledge development process, they move from margins to the centre of the discourse surrounding issues related to themselves, thus beginning to define their own realities (Sohng, 1996)

### *Action-oriented:*

- the quest for social justice is actualized through this research methodology; as research and social action engage in a continuous spiral under PAR, the theoretical aspect of the former and the practicality of the latter become inseparable (Dick, 2002 )

## Evaluating Participation in a Research Project

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### Conceptual Framework:

Typically, there are four conceptual parties involved in research:

- the **researcher(s)**: those commissioning or carrying out the research
- the **critical reference group** or the researched for: those who have the problem the research is to solve)
- **other stakeholders** – other than the researcher(s) and the critical reference group (the researched for: those who might benefit from better information about the situation)
- the **researched**: those who provide the ‘data’ (this may or may not be the critical reference group)

There are different ways these parties can participate in the research project:

- non-participation (no involvement)
- passive participation (being ‘researched’ or consulted – providing the data which is being collected by the researchers)
- active participation (being more meaningfully involved in the research design, process, implementation, and analysis)

These are not exclusive categories, but rather can be viewed as a continuum of participation.

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### Group Task:

Think about a research project in which you have been involved. This may be a needs assessment, baseline survey, impact evaluation, etc. Using the attached worksheet, discuss the following:

- 1) What was the level of participation of each stakeholder, at each step of the research process?
- 2) For each stakeholder, what are the consequences (benefits and disadvantages/challenges) of different levels of participation?