Action Research and Classroom Research

Action research background

Kurt Lewin (1946, p.35) is generally credited with coining the term action research as:

> 'a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action',

making the point that:

> 'research that produces nothing but books will not suffice'.
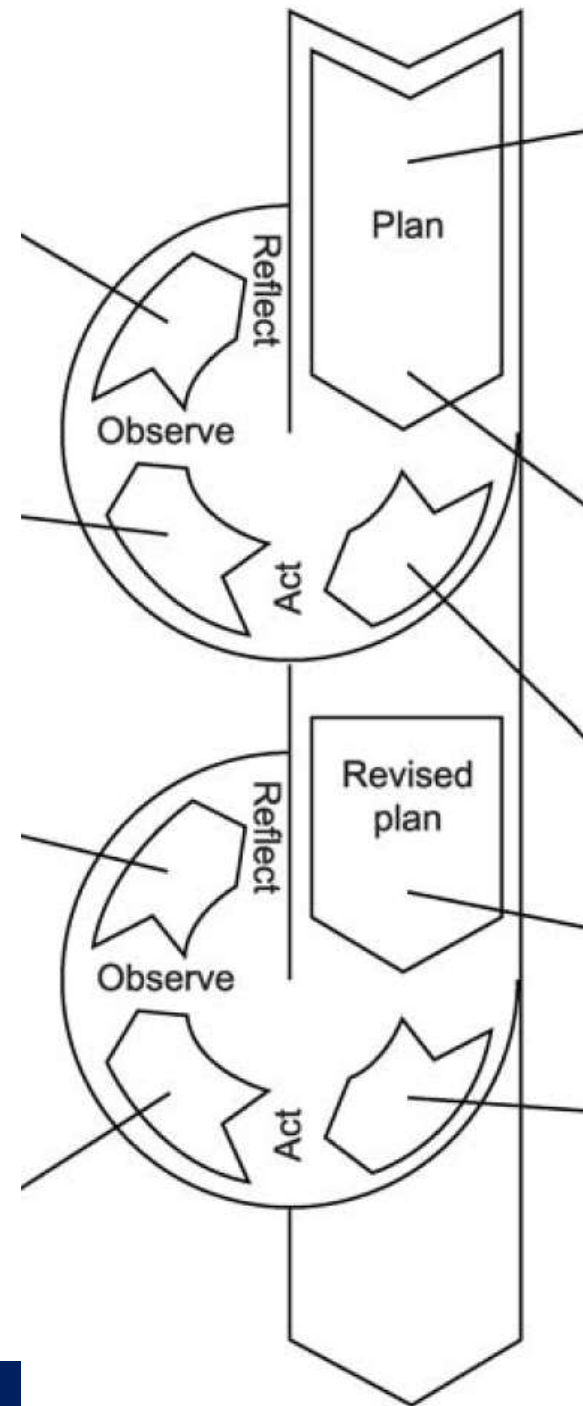
A definition

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.
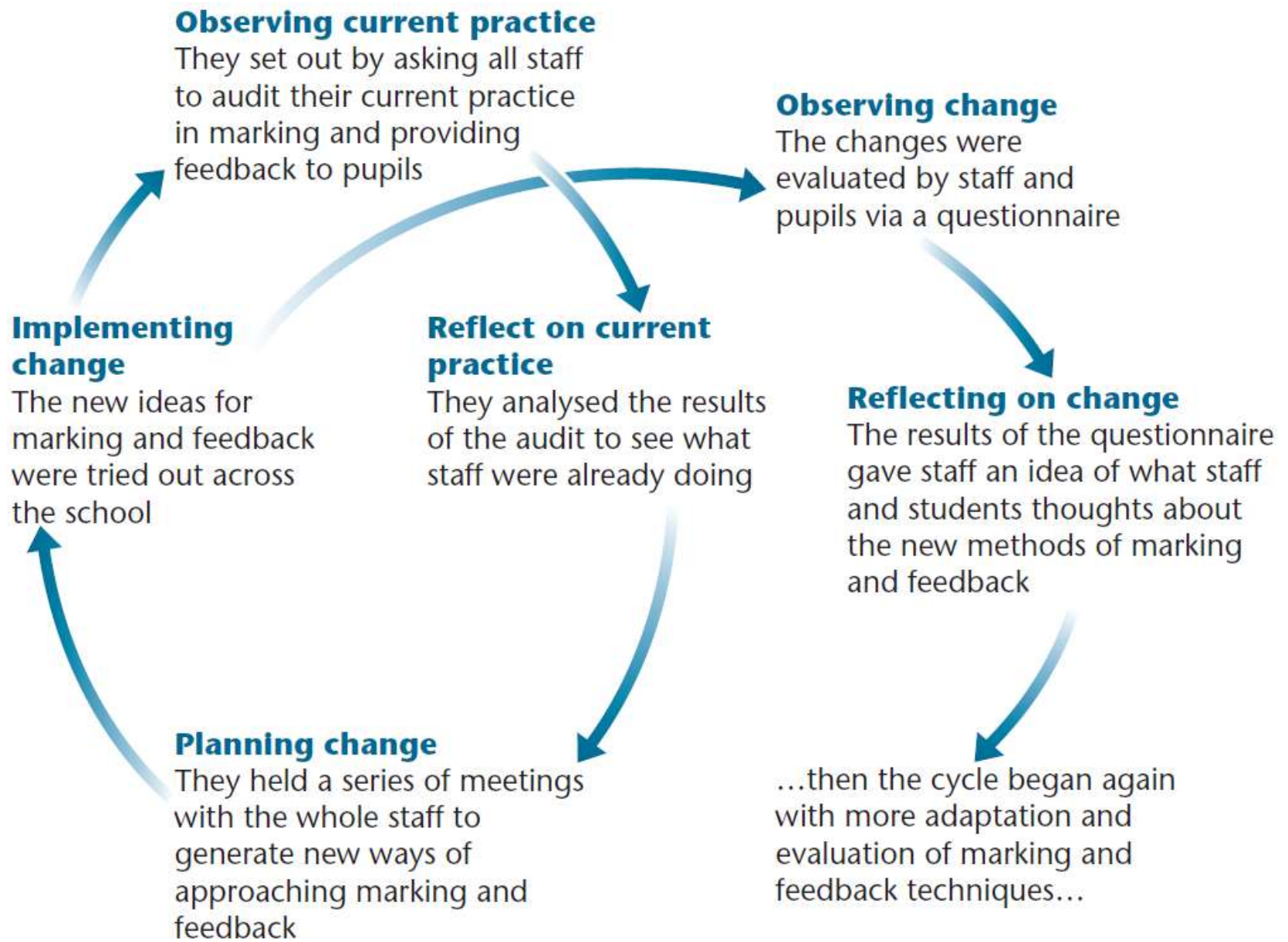
Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.162)

The AR sprial

- See handout for an example.
- **Key point** – typically the actions in each cycle are small and a project will involve several cycles.

Kemmis and McTaggart in Hopkins (1988, p.51)

Observing current practice
They set out by asking all staff to audit their current practice in marking and providing feedback to pupils

Observing change
The changes were evaluated by staff and pupils via a questionnaire

Implementing change
The new ideas for marking and feedback were tried out across the school

Reflect on current practice
They analysed the results of the audit to see what staff were already doing

Reflecting on change
The results of the questionnaire gave staff an idea of what staff and students thoughts about the new methods of marking and feedback

Planning change
They held a series of meetings with the whole staff to generate new ways of approaching marking and feedback

…then the cycle began again with more adaptation and evaluation of marking and feedback techniques…

Riggal (2009, p.ix)

Collaboration in AR

'Each of the steps outlined in the spiral of self-reflection is best undertaken collaboratively by coparticipants in the participatory action research process. Not all theorists of action research place this emphasis on collaboration; they argue that action research is frequently a solitary process of systematic self-reflection. We concede that it is often so; nevertheless, we hold that participatory action research is best conceptualized in collaborative terms.'

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p.277)

Further ideas in AR

- Action research 'provides a vehicle for researcher and co-researchers (the participants in the research) to seek and to share meanings constructed from shared experience'.

  Phelps and Hase (2002, p.514)

- Inherent in action research is conversation as 'an emergent form, one whose outcome is never pre-specified and one that is sensitive to contingencies'.

  Davis and Sumara (2005, p.462)

Potential problems

- There are different conceptions of action research, not all of which relate to teacher enquiry.

- The approach can become too formulaic and prescriptive.

- Action research sets out a strategy and process, but actual methods of evidence gathering still require careful consideration.

- The focus on problem solving can lead to a 'deficit model' of research and development.

Based on Hopkins (2008, p.55;58)

Appreciative enquiry

Mohr, B. J. and Watkins, J. M. (2002, p.5)

TWO CONTRASTING MODELS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Deficit-Based Change

Identify the Problem
What is the need?

↓

Analyze Causes
What's wrong here?

↓

Analyze Possible Solutions
How can we fix it?

↓

Action Planning
Problem solved!

Constructionist-Based Change

Discovery
Discover the best of what is.

↓

Dream
Imagine what might be.

↓

Design
Dialogue what should be.

↓

Destiny
Create what will be.

Deliberative thinking

Holt, M. (1995, p.9)

Theme	Not	But
Continuous Improvement	Goals, products, benchmarks, slogans, performances, targets	Studying the process – why as well as how
Working Together	Divisions, profit centers quotas, threats, rewards, merit pay	Community, common purpose, shared values, collaborative leadership, optimizing the system
Linking Theory and Practice	Management by numbers, by objectives, by results	'Profound knowledge': of variation, of statistics, of people, of institutions

Activity (see handout)

Plan the first stage of an action research spiral:

- Aspect of your practice to research.

- How will you change practice?

- What will you actually do differently?

- How will you observe and record what happens?

- To what extent will your approach involve collaboration?

References

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