

# **Empowering Teachers through Collaborative Action Research**



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# What is action research?



- What does action research mean?
- What do you already know about it?
- Have you tried it out? On your own? With others?

# **I'm a teacher not a researcher!!**



- Teachers are trained to teach!
- Teachers are interested in practical classroom things...not theory!
- I don't get paid to do research!
- Teachers shouldn't be experimenting on their students!
- Research? That's scary!!!!

# **But, do you want to...?!!**



- be a reflective teacher?
- share ideas with your colleagues?
- learn more about teaching?
- understand your students better?
- improve something in your classroom for your students?
- know what drives your teaching?
- learn more about research?

# **AR: Some definitions**



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 & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162)

# AR: Some definitions



AR involves a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach to enquiry by participants who are at the same time members of the research community. The aim is to identify problematic situations or issues considered by participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice. Action research is underpinned by democratic principles in that the ownership of change is invested in those who conduct the research.

(Burns, cited in Cornwell, 1999)

# What teachers say about AR



“AR encourages teachers to reach their own solutions and conclusions and this is far more attractive than being presented with ideals which cannot be attained.”  
(Australia)

“I will continue doing AR. I have no doubt about the advantages of an AR approach for my teaching although it is also not easy to conduct it consistently.”  
(Indonesia)

“The action research model gave me the courage to cross the border from technician to professional.” (USA)

# So, how do we do AR?

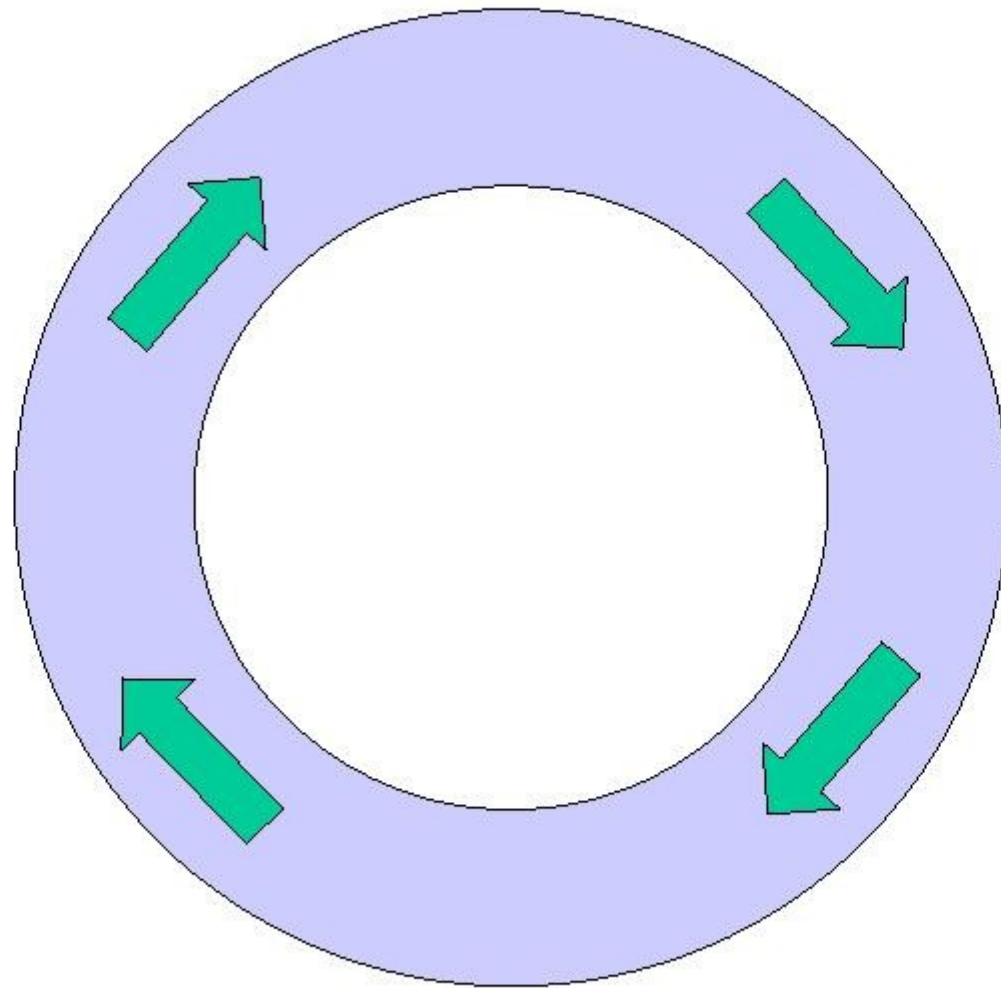


- **Plan** - develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
- **Act** - act to implement the plan
- **Observe** - observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs
- **Reflect** - reflect on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action, [etc.] through a succession of stages.

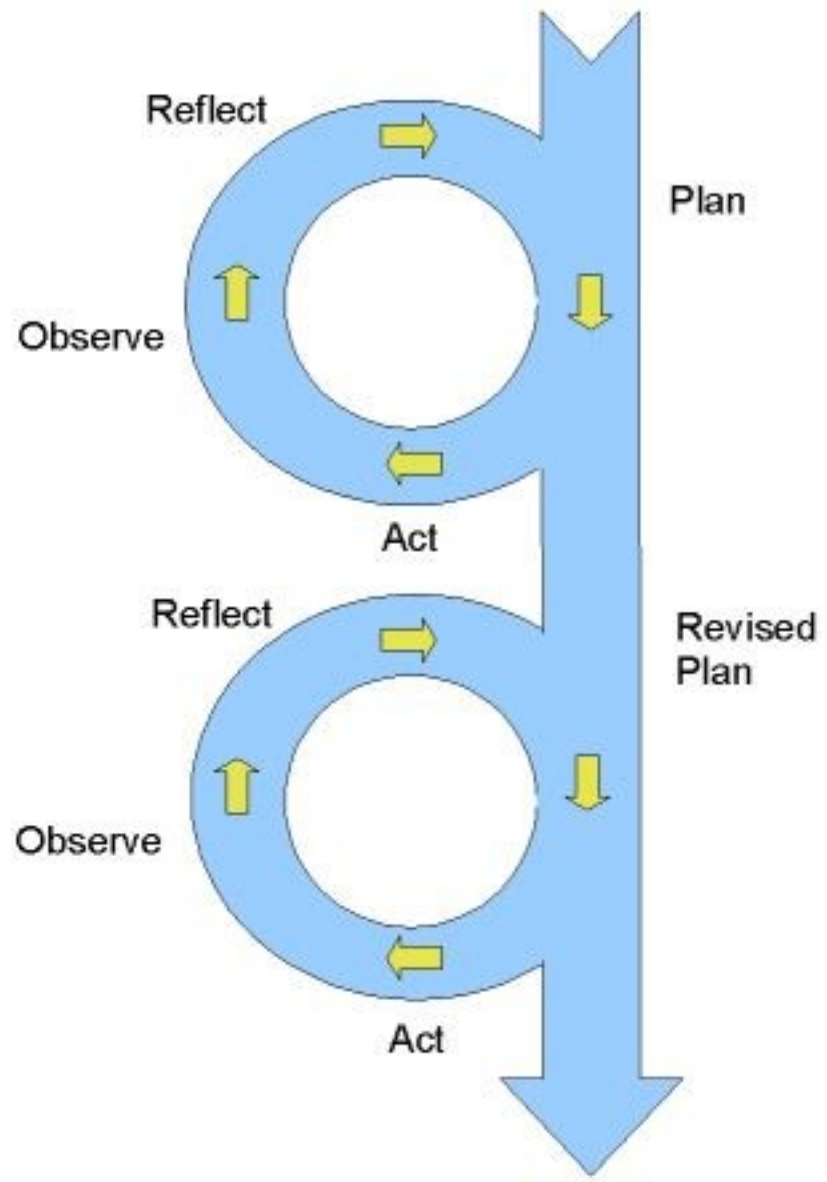
**Plan**

**Reflect**

**Act**



**Observe**



# Characteristics of action research



- focus on a particular social situation
- collaboration/dialogue with others to identify the issues and to collect and analyse data
- deliberate intervention into the operation of the status quo
- processes of research lead to the construction of knowledge and theory (and critical action)

# An example from Indonesia



- Collaborative AR project - 10 teachers and a facilitator in Surakarta, Central Java
- Aims: To explore teachers perceptions of :
  - whether their involvement in AR enhanced PD
  - whether their involvement in AR influenced their classroom practice
  - whether their involvement in AR influenced student learning
  - the difficulties they encountered as they did AR
  - the support structures they needed for AR

# Collaborative AR in Indonesia



- The teachers
  - Ages 33-54
  - High school teachers
  - 3 male and 7 female
  - 7-25 years' experience
  - Teaching Yr 1-3
  - All unfamiliar with AR

(Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006)

# The AR processes



- Workshops and other activities over six months to introduce teacher to AR
- Identification by teachers of own research areas and focus
- AR by teachers for 14 weeks in Term 3
- Journals kept by teachers and facilitator to record events and reflections
- Teacher reports and poster displays at AR seminar held at one of the schools

# AR topics chosen by teachers



- A: teaching speaking outside the regular classroom
- B: Increasing students' motivation through games
- C: Choosing teaching materials for a tired teacher
- D: Optimising brainstorming in teaching speaking
- E: Using transln. to improve SS's reading comprehension
- F: Improving SS's ability to identify ideas in main paras.
- G: Preventing cheating and promoting SS's motivation
- H: Negotiating lessons with SSs
- I: Improving SS's preparation for tests
- J: Increasing SS's motivation through games

# Case study: Teacher E



## ■ **Situation:**

Low ranking high sch./challenging, low achieving students

## ■ **T's attitude to AR:**

Very sceptical and doubtful about effectiveness

## ■ **Personal situation:**

Lack of enthusiasm for teaching (15 yrs), bad early teaching experiences, responsible for sick mother

## ■ **Classroom issue/situation:**

Low level of S participation, unfriendly relationship with SS

# Teacher E's voice



"I taught my students because that was what I had to do as a teacher. I did not really care whether they learned something from my lessons."

"The classroom atmosphere was not relaxed. I did not make any efforts to be friendly to my students. In the class I taught unhappy faces. I knew quite well that my students talked behind my back and called me a mean teacher."

# Case study: Teacher E



## ■ **Teaching responsibilities:**

Taught reading, structure and vocabulary in four Year 1 classes; syllabus and texts mandated by school

## ■ **AR plan:**

Use translation as pre-reading activity, try different ways to interact with SS

## ■ **Data collection:**

Kept notes in class and wrote diary of activities and events

# Teacher E's voice



"The students' motivation is very low. They did not show active participation in my class..."

"The failure in teaching reading was because students could not comprehend the meanings of the words or phrases well, answer the questions or complete the tasks. They had difficulties in understanding the questions, especially if they related to the skill of deducing meaning or reading between the lines."

"My students are very dependent on the teacher. I am thinking of asking them to translate next week's reading at home so they will be more ready in class."

# Case study: Teacher E



What happened when he tried out his AR:

- T.E told his SS to do translations before coming to class.
- He rewarded those who did the translations with scores.
- In the first two lessons, 2-5 students did not do the translations.
- In lesson 3 all students did the translations, there was better comprehension, question asking and task completion. T. E noticed S motivation was increasing.
- In lesson 4, SS did group translations, checked in class.
- The SS showed even less difficulty in completing tasks, enjoyed retelling texts and motivation increased again.

# Teacher E's voice



“In translation in groups, the students helped each other so that their translation was better and more contextual. In addition by checking it in the class, it reduced the time of correction.”

“When the students were motivated, the class atmosphere was more alive. Some students asked me if they could practise English with “real people”. They also asked me to conduct a speech contest, which was then conducted twice.”

# Case study: Teacher E



## ■ Outcomes

- The SS motivation and involvement increased considerably
- SS suggested extensions to the activities which T.E took up - two speech contests, visits to tourist sites to practise English
- Test achievements increased
- The teacher's relationship with his students improved dramatically
- SS expressed their appreciation of their teacher explicitly
- T.E's enthusiasm for teaching was rejuvenated
- He was keen to continue the processes he had learned about in AR

# **Voices from Teacher E's situation**



“In the classroom I tried to make conversation with my students, offered more help for difficult words or questions. I spoiled my students by trying to fulfil what they wanted in class.” (Teacher E)

“If T. E hadn't let me know about his students, I wouldn't have had any idea that they used to be passive in class... After the contest, many asked me questions about how to study English successfully and effectively.” (Facilitator)

# **Voices from Teacher E's classroom**



“English and Teacher E is the best!!!” (Student exam sheet)

“I can do it because my teacher.” (Student exam sheet)

“This is my last test in first class. But it will be OK because of you, Teacher E... Yesterday.... I hate you!!!! But now and forever... I love U. Thank you. Bye.” (Student exam sheet)

AR helped Teacher E “grow my enthusiasm again”.

# How CAR empowered the teachers in the project



- tested practical knowledge and theory by feeding them back into changes in practice
- evaluated changes to practice through further cycles of action and reflection
- opened new theories and knowledge to wider scrutiny through report writing, information presentation and dissemination
- enabled them to offer examples for other teachers in similar situations to apply
- increased professional development

# How CAR empowers teachers



Central concepts are:

- empowering participants in a social situation
- moving towards “a better world” for TS/SS
- self-consciously criticising what exists through awareness of givens and assumptions that shape the social situation
- enhancing awareness of one’s own subjective, intersubjective and normative frames of reference
- working to confront inequities in the system
- working to transform the social situation

# Undertaking collaborative action research



## Key issues

- Who will you involve?
- What issues/questions will you focus on?
- What steps in the process will you put in place next?
- How will you collect data/information?
- How will you track/analyse it/identify emerging issues?
- What resources do you need?
- What skills/knowledge do you need?

# The last word!



“I like the cycles in AR. The stages of planning, action, monitoring and reflection enabled me to evaluate and modify my teaching strategies.” (Teacher H)

“Never did I have to look at my teaching this way.” (T.D)

“Usually we were the object of study and were evaluated by the researcher. AR is different.” (Teacher J)

# The last word!



“ I am proud of myself since what I taught was understood by my students and the process of teaching and learning was more fun.” (Teacher I)

“What I learned from AR was that it helped me to help my students... I could feel that their motivation was increasing, as they believed they were capable.” (T.B)

“Implementaion of AR in my class has solved my problems.” (Teacher A)

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