

# Conducting School-Based Action Research

A Pathway Towards Continuous  
School Improvement

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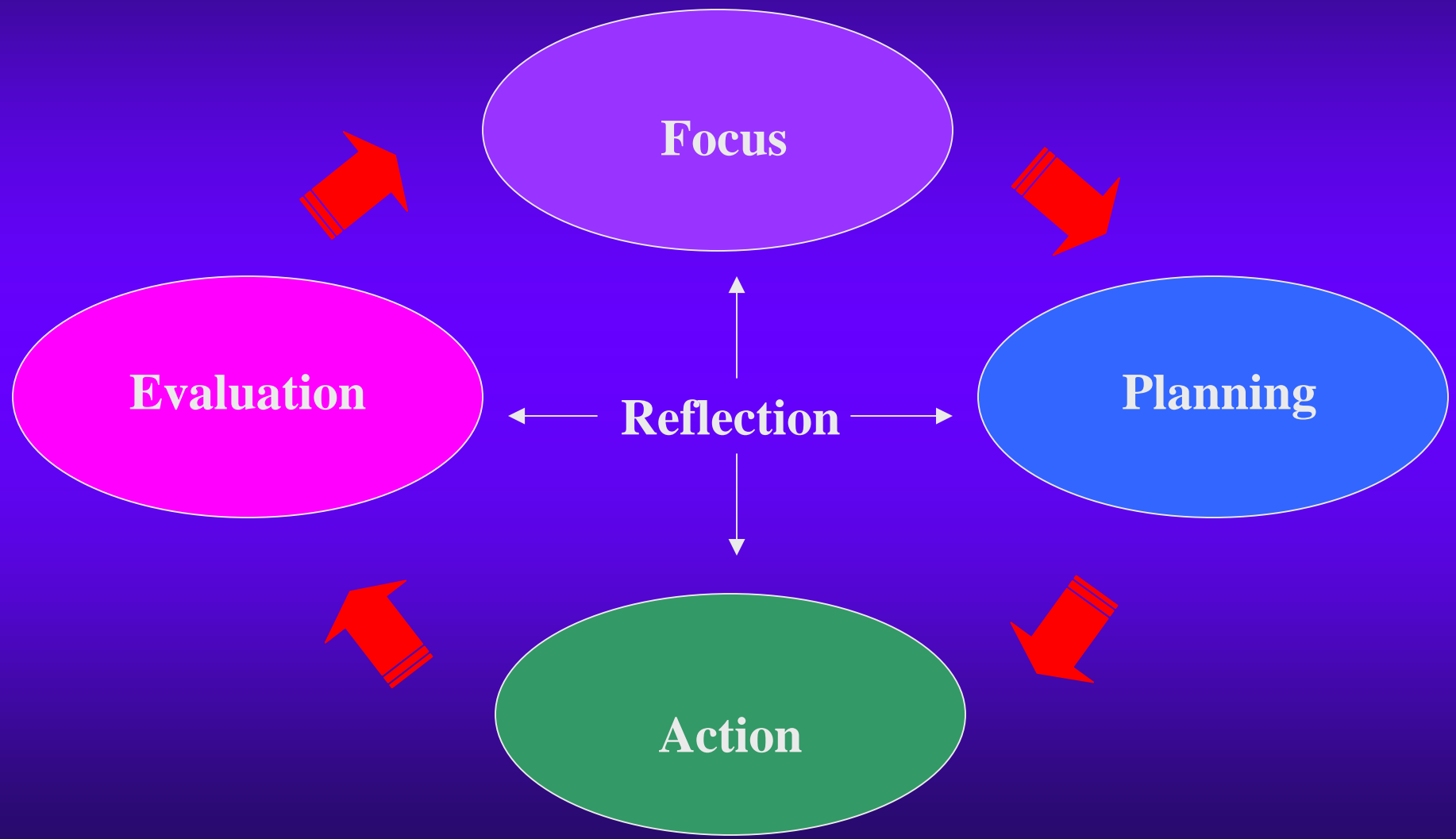
# Action Research

From an educational perspective ...disciplined reflective inquiry in the context of focused & systematic efforts to enhance our understanding of educational policies, practices, interventions and programs, and to generate and sustain improvements in schools.

# Importance of Action Research

- ◆ Facilitates change in classrooms and schools
- ◆ Fosters disciplined and systematic inquiry
- ◆ Empowers individuals via collaborative teams
- ◆ Encourages reflection on practice
- ◆ Vehicle for creating professional learning communities
- ◆ Seeks to narrow gap between vision & practice

# Action Research Model



# Procedural Steps for AR

1. Identify a focal problem, issue or question
2. Consult with others and locate resources
3. Plan a strategy for data collection
4. Collect data
5. Analyze & interpret the data/report
6. Develop an action plan
7. Implement plan
8. Reflect throughout process

# 1. Select an Area of Focus

- ◆ Consider students, practices, programs
- ◆ State research purpose/question(s)
- ◆ I would like to improve...
- ◆ I want to learn more about...
- ◆ An idea I would like to try out is...
- ◆ Something that I think would make a significant difference is ...

## 2. Consultation and Literature Review

- ◆ Identify key terms
- ◆ Pose a question you want answered
- ◆ Locating literature
  - Primary, secondary sources; meta-analysis, summaries, abstracts, indexes, journals, books
- ◆ Web-quests

# 3. Plan Data Collection Strategy

- ◆ Obtain permissions (if applicable)
- ◆ Select target group, scope, sampling
- ◆ Identify unit of analysis
- ◆ Identify data options
- ◆ Locate or develop an instrument

# Types of Student/School Data

- ◆ Achievement (e.g., report card marks, EQAO assessment results, PM Benchmarks, DRA)
- ◆ Demographic (e.g., gender, SES indicators, primary language spoken at home, mobility)
- ◆ Perceptual (e.g., student, parent & staff surveys re: safety, satisfaction, culture)
- ◆ School-Based (e.g., absenteeism, suspensions, behavioral incidents)
- ◆ Behavioural Observation (e.g., on-task behaviour, frequency of aggressive acts)

## 4. Collect Data

- ◆ Triangulation of data
  - Multiple sources/methods/perspectives/times
- ◆ Record and input data
- ◆ Consider the 5W's and I H question(s)
- ◆ Safeguard accuracy and security of data

# Data Collection Techniques for AR

- ◆ Observation
- ◆ Interviews
- ◆ Questionnaires
- ◆ Standardized tests
- ◆ Journals
- ◆ Audio-video tapes

# Data Quality

- ◆ Reliable
- ◆ Valid
- ◆ Useful
- ◆ Relevant
- ◆ Accurate

# Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent
- Respect for participants' rights to confidentiality, decision to withdraw
- Meet expectations of sponsor (e.g., share and disseminate results of research)

# 5. Data Analysis, Interpretation & Reporting

- ◆ Prepare and organize data
- ◆ Analyze it descriptively and inferentially (if appropriate)
- ◆ Software for quantitative and qualitative data
- ◆ Summarize and explain
- ◆ Present visually or graphically
- ◆ Use APA style

## 6. Action Planning

An action plan may be informally developed or alternatively may be quite structured employing an action planning template that specifies goals, performance targets, resources, strategies, time-lines etc,

# 7. Implementation

- ◆ Try out strategy
- ◆ Ensure fidelity of implementation
- ◆ Is the plan making a difference - why or why not?
- ◆ Consult original objectives or the research question you sought to answer

## 8. Reflection

- ◆ Reflect on what has been learned
- ◆ Look for validation for findings
- ◆ Share with others and disseminate

# Some Lessons Learned and Tips

- Share proposed data gathering strategies and measures with colleagues
- Pilot questions & measures
- Keep a 'reflective journal'
- Adjust implementation based on reflection
- Relate findings to scientific literature & practice

# Select References & Resources

- ◆ Calhoun, E. F. (1994). *How to use action research in the self-renewing school.*
- ◆ Mills, G.E. (2000). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher.*
- ◆ Sagor, R. (1992). *How to conduct collaborative action research*
- ◆ Stringer, E. T. (1999). *Action research* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).
- ◆ Action Research Links -  
<http://www.wnmu.org/gap/ar.html>



# Potential Impact of Action Research

- ✓ Enhanced professional development
- ✓ Enhanced capacity to influence change
- ✓ Informed decision-making about effectiveness of instructional strategies and educational interventions
- ✓ Improved student learning and achievement
- ✓ Continuous school improvement