

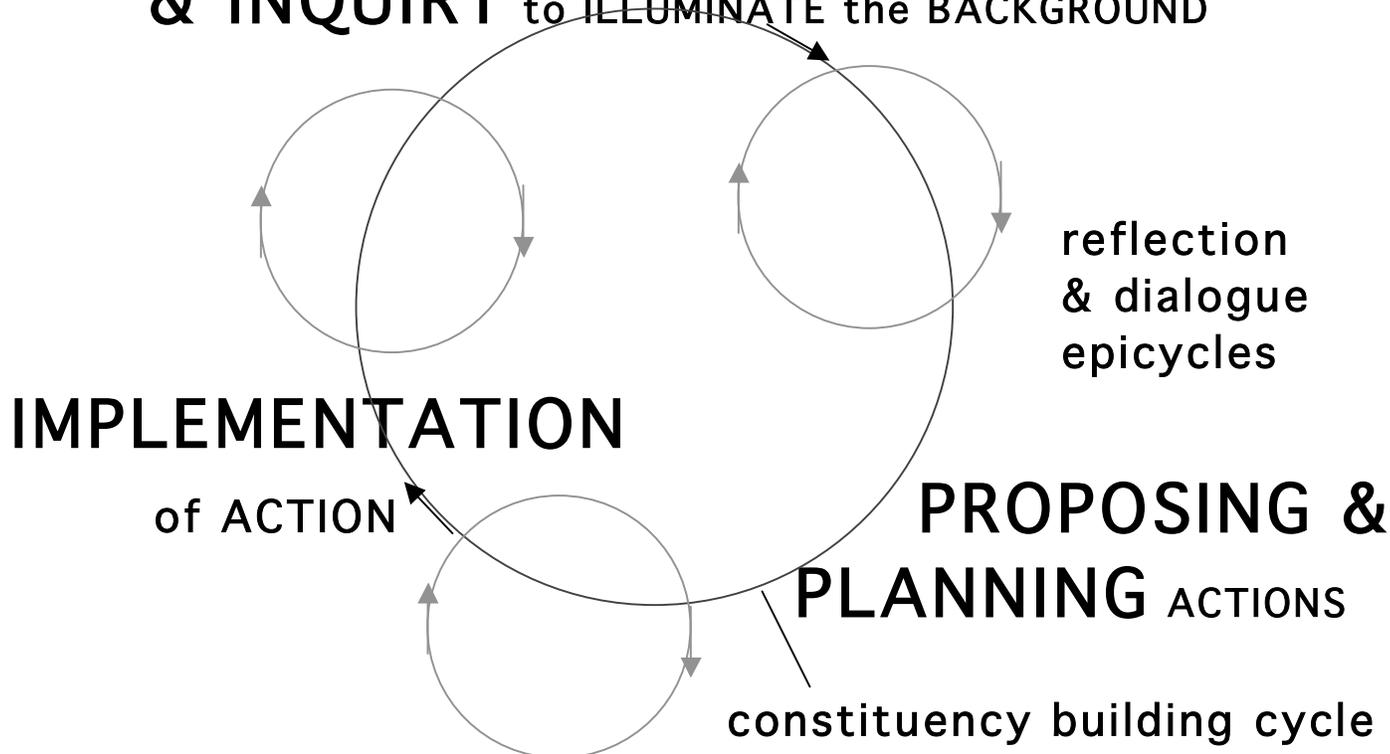
CYCLES and EPICYCLES of ACTION RESEARCH

for EDUCATIONAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL
and PERSONAL CHANGE

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EVALUATION: SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH on EFFECTS of
ACTION

& INQUIRY to ILLUMINATE the BACKGROUND



Action Research begins with a person or group of people wanting to do something to change the current situation, that is, to take action. Your actions may include new or revised curricula, organizational arrangements, policies, procedures in educational settings, equivalent changes in other professions, workplaces, or communities, and changes in personal practices.

To develop proposals about what change is needed, you may need to evaluate¹ the effects of past actions and inquire more broadly so as to fill in relevant background. You will also have to get people—yourselves included—to adopt or adapt your proposal(s), that is, you have to build a constituency for any action(s). Constituency building occurs through reflection and dialogue, proposing and planning action(s), implementation of action(s), and subsequent evaluation of how good the action(s)/change(s) were in relation to objectives you formulated.

Evaluation of the effects of a change or action can lead to new or revised ideas about further changes and about how to build a constituency around them, thus action research can be an ongoing

¹ See next page for elaboration of underlined terms.

cycle. The cycle is not, however, a steady progression one step to the next. Reflection and dialogue can lead to you to revisit and revise the ideas you had about what change is needed and about how to build a constituency to implement the change—this is what is meant by the “epicycles” (cycles on top of cycles) of action research. Revision also happens through planning, that is, through looking ahead at what may be involved before you settle on what actions to pursue.

In summary, action research involves evaluation and inquiry, reflection and dialogue, planning, and constituency building in order to get actions implemented, take stock of the outcomes, and continue developing your efforts.

Evaluation is systematic study of the effects of any actions implemented (including actions taken before you got involved or in another setting). You use the results of evaluations to design new or revised actions and to convince others to implement equivalent actions in other settings. If evaluation is tightly focused to establish the specific effect of a specific action, this is complemented by broader inquiry to clarify what warrants change/action in the view of what is known about this situation and others like it and to clarify what a potential constituency is. (The “phases of research and engagement in CCT 698 are relevant here.) Indeed, an oscillation between opening out and focusing in runs through Action Research.

[Tools introduced in CCT 693 for Evaluation: Critical Incident Questionnaire, Evaluation Clock, Basic logic of statistical analysis, +Δ Feedback (appreciation, thing to be developed); for Inquiry: Inquiry based on Q of KAQ]

Constituency building involves identifying, convincing and enlisting a constituency to implement actions that respect the resources—possibly limited—that they have. Constituency building can involve facilitation of “stakeholder” participation in the initial evaluation, in formulation of action proposals, and in planning so as to bring about investment in their implementation. (If the actions are personal changes and the constituency is yourself, you can still facilitate your own evaluation and planning process to ensure your investment in the actions.) Constituency building is helped by succinct presentations to a potential constituency of action proposals and the research that supports them.

Constituency building begins with oneself. In order to contribute effectively to change, you need to be engaged yourself—to have your head and heart together. You need to pay attention to what help you need to get engaged and stay so.

Reflection and dialogue are needed for ongoing revision of your ideas about the current situation, proposing changes/actions, and for drawing more people into your constituency. Through reflection and dialogue you and others can check that the evaluation and inquiry you undertake are related to possible actions and constituencies. You can also check that the actions and constituency building you pursue are supported by the results of your evaluation and inquiry.

[Tools introduced in CCT 693 for Reflection: Freewriting, KAQ, Focused Conversation, Supportive listening, Strategic Personal Planning, Historical scan; for Dialogue: Wiki-based probing of KAQ, Small group process, Focused Conversation, Jig-saw discussion of readings, Historical scan]

Planning involves looking ahead at what may be involved before you settle on what actions to pursue. You want your action proposals to respect the resources—possibly limited—that you and your constituency have and to elicit investment in implementation of those actions.

[Tools introduced in CCT 693: KAQ, Evaluation clock, Strategic Personal/Participatory Planning]

All these processes continue during the implementation of actions, but that is not the focus of CCT 693.