ACTION RESEARCH

• Definition and key features
• History
• Process
• Limitations
DEFINITION OF ACTION RESEARCH

“…simply a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own situations, their understandings of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out”.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:5)
CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION RESEARCH
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Collective
Participative
Enquiry
Reflective
Understand
Rationality
Improve
Social Situations
Practice
Justice
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

ACTION RESEARCH

• Cyclic process of action research which involves some kind of action intervention

• The research partnership, in which the degree of participation of the researched may vary from co-operation to direct collective action
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<td>Active Object of own study</td>
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<td>Contextualised Tensions Complexities</td>
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HISTORY OF ACTION RESEARCH

• 1940’s: Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) popularised action research and coined its name

• 1950-60’s: Decline in action research as quantitative research including ‘new’ statistical techniques took prominence

• 1970’s: Lawrence Stenhouse ‘Teacher as researcher’ movement and the rise of educational action research

• 1980’s+: Growing interest in the application of action research in health, social care and police
RISE OF ACTION RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

- Inappropriateness of traditional research for the study of human organisations and for problem solving
- Dissatisfaction with top-down approaches
- Shrinkage of research funds
- Institutionalised separation of theory and practice of traditional approaches
- Lack of relevance of academic research
TYPES OF IMPROVEMENT

• Technical
  For example, questionnaires on the quality of general practices

• Educational
  For example, for glaucoma patients

• Professional
  For example, developing professionals who care for home based care for patients living with HIV/AIDS

• Service delivery
  For example, in the care of patients with hyperemesis gravidarum

RESOURCES – HUMAN & TECHNICAL

• People need to be released to participate

• Costs need to be covered for the improvement

• The scale and speed of the project can be negatively effected if no funding

• SDO, NIHR and charities fund action research

PROCESS OF AR

- Identifying a general or initial idea
- Reconnaissance or fact finding
- Planning
- Evaluate
- Amended plan
- Take first action step
- Take second action step...

KEY ROLES OF ACTION RESEARCH

• Improvements in Practice

• User and staff involvement

• Knowledge and understanding
LIMITATIONS OF ACTION RESEARCH
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i. Empowerment

ii. Management of change

iii. Data collection versus change

iv. Ethical issues

v. Writing up and publication

CONCLUSION

- Reflects critically on what ‘might or ought to be’
- Political as it seeks to challenge the ‘status quo’
- Improves practice and evaluates the results
- Produces knowledge for action that empowers
- Carried out by researchers and participants
- Utilises qualitative or quantitative research depending on what needs to be known.

CONCLUSION

Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice.

• Lewin K. 1946 reproduced in Lewin K. Resolving social conflicts selected papers on group dynamics G.W. Lwein (ed) New York Harper