Breaking Boundaries in Leadership Development: Exploring the Possibilities of Action Research in Leadership Development

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Presentation Outline

Conceptual underpinning of the presentation

The state of educational leadership

The state of leadership development

What is Action Research

Rationale for adopting Action Research

Cases of the impact of Action Research on educational leaders

Challenges of employing Action research as a development tool

Recommendations for effective leadership development

Conceptual Framework

Leadership is a complex role and lack of effective life-long leadership development is adding to the complexities of educational leadership;

Professional development should be life-long;

Leaders should have access to constructivist-oriented leadership development opportunities;

Leadership development must encourage boundary-breaking thinking.

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School Leadership in a Flux?

Principal makes whistleblowers' life 'hell'

'Porno' principal reinstated

Special-needs school principal in funds row

'Unethical' school principal angers teachers

'Principal selling fake school reports'

'Principal canvasses for the ANC during class'

Police find drugs and apparently drunk principal

Principal in sex inquiry still on duty

Calm restored at Khayelitsha school as principal gets special leave after teen's beating

15-year-old allegedly raped by school principal

Principal probed for unethical sex

Probe after principal mislays papers

PRINCIPAL UP FOR MURDER
New twist in killing of musician

'Principal hired hitman to kill'

Principal goes on Facebook as 16-year-old girl

Principal at 'bogus' college arrested

Being a school principal…

- Assumption – Good teacher = effective school leader;

- Principle of seniority in operation

- School leadership positions are now advertised and appointees are subjected to interviews;

- What a school principal does is largely determined by the general socio-cultural and economic complexities prevalent in the region;

- School principalship is largely administrative;

- School principals have limited autonomy, therefore most school principals are neither innovative nor proactive.

- School principalship has become more complex – government reforms, impact of HIV/AIDS etc

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Leadership Development

Growing recognition that poor management of schools is due to ill prepared school leaders;

School principals are being encouraged to pursue professional development programmes to improve their leadership and management skills;

Several institutions are now offering in-service programmes for school principals;

BUT

There is need to develop school leaders for the roles they have to play in the challenging contexts they face.

Professional development is viewed as sporadic courses and workshop.
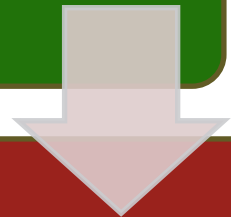
Hence, the employ of action research as a viable means for this kind of development

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What is Action Research?

"An enquiry undertaken with rigour and understanding so as to constantly improve practice; the emerging evidence-based outcomes will then contribute to the practitioner's continuing professional development" (Koshy, 2005, p.1);

It "is about working towards practical outcomes and also about creating new understandings since action without understanding is blind…"

"Starts with everyday experience…" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.2);

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Action research involves…

- Researching your own practice;
- Is emergent;
- Is participatory;
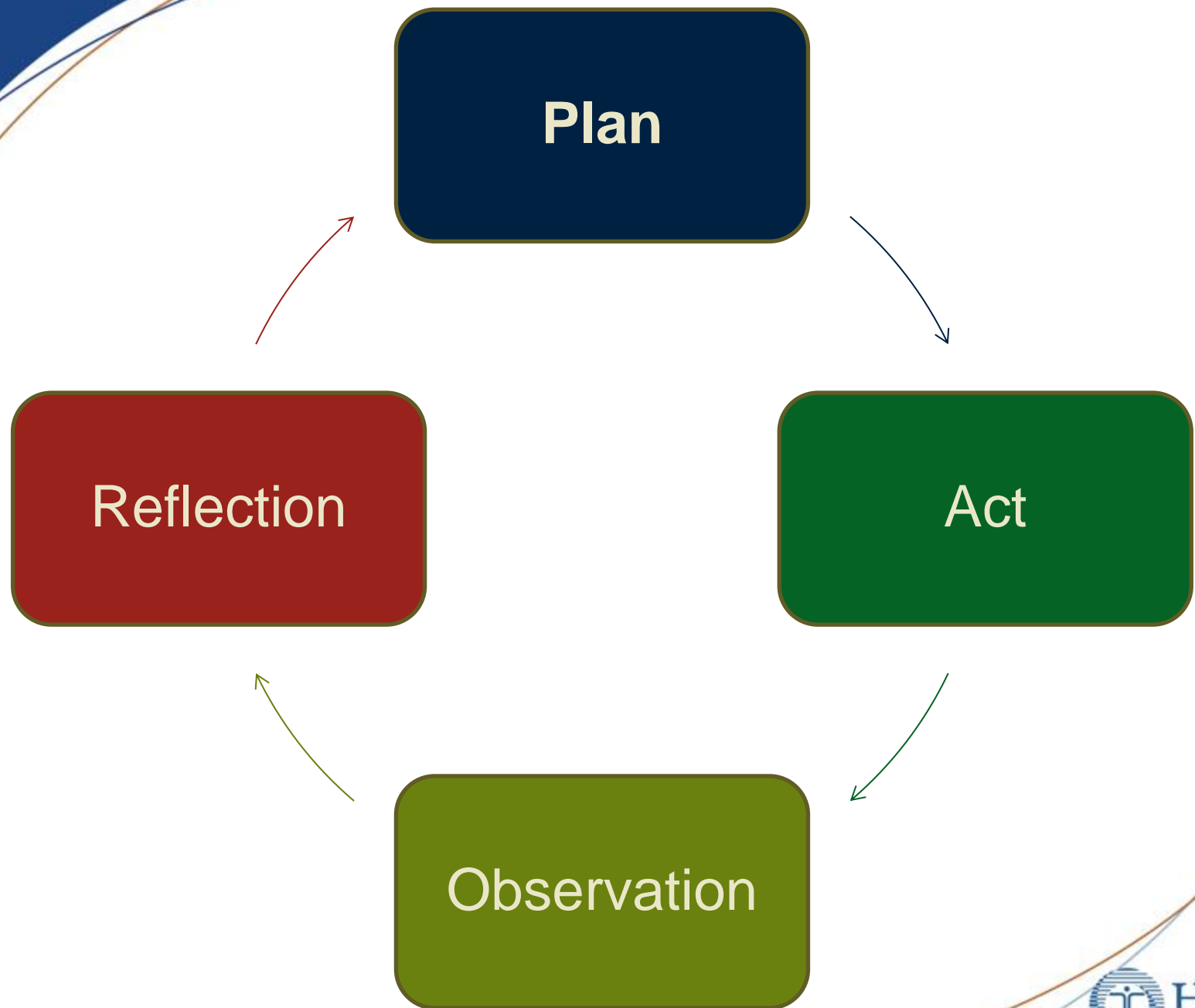- Constructs theory from practice;
- Is situation-based;
- Can be useful in problem-solving;
- Is about improvement;
- Deals with individuals or groups
- Involves analysis, reflection & evaluation;
- Facilitates changes through enquiry

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Why Action Research?

Aims to help bring about change in their schools/work places.

Both Action Research & Reflective Practice embedded in it - powerful tools that school leaders find they can use to think about and effect changes in their practice.

Sustainable outcomes;

Collaborative endeavour – involves others in the school in effecting change;

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Contexts of Leadership Development

Issues Dealt With…

Time Management

Effective staff meetings

Student discipline

Punctuality – teachers & students

Absentism

Positive parental involvement in school matters

Effective homework practices

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Benefits

Participants develop a sense of agency;
- "*Now I know I can. I have just realised that I had retired long before my time. I am now instituting changes with my teachers. It is exciting*" (SMS Kisumu, 2009).

Become Reflective practitioners;

"I learned from my action research that as a pedagogical leader, a head teacher needs to think out of the box, reflect upon the challenges in his or her leadership and take appropriate action to improve his / her school" (AR report, Mombasa 2011).

Benefits (Cont.)

They learn to find a proactive way of dealing with issues, especially policy decisions instituted from above;

- *"Together with the teachers, we found ways of managing our large classrooms. The teachers found out and used teaching strategies that involved all the children in the class. As for me, I found ways of supporting them by helping them acquire resources from the community and sometimes co-teaching with them*"; (AR Report, Maputo, 2010)

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Benefits (Cont.)

Development of collegial relationships among leaders and staff

- *"AR brought in a strong collegial relationship. The teacher`s attitude became positive towards the positive intervention by the administration and education officer in the class. Fear of fault finding during classroom observation changed to professional development for the teacher. Team spirit was the basis of it all. Working together towards a common focus helped the impact of action be positively realized*" (AR Report, Dar es Salaam, 2012).

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Challenges

Intimidation by the notion of research;

Different kind of thinking/mindset

'Handholding';

Time consuming;

Commitment & patience;

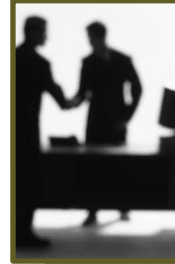Facilitator – an all-Knowing individual?

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Way Forward

Leadership training needs to be as practical as possible and closely linked to school settings;

Leadership programmes need to have a stronger social agenda;

Professional development must be perceived as a process;

Reflective practice needs to be a central tenet of leadership programmes - can nurture leaders' abilities to access information from within themselves and from others;

A one-size-fits-all model is inappropriate - different needs, contexts, and problems.

Thank You …..