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Designing the plane while flying it.

**Knowledge co-creation within the complexity
of a collaborative action research project**



**THINK
BIGGER**

Greenwood & Levin (2007: 265):

- ‘The aim of action research is to support democratization processes.’
- ‘The essence of the democratic process is the cogeneration of knowledge.’
- Participation of key stakeholders

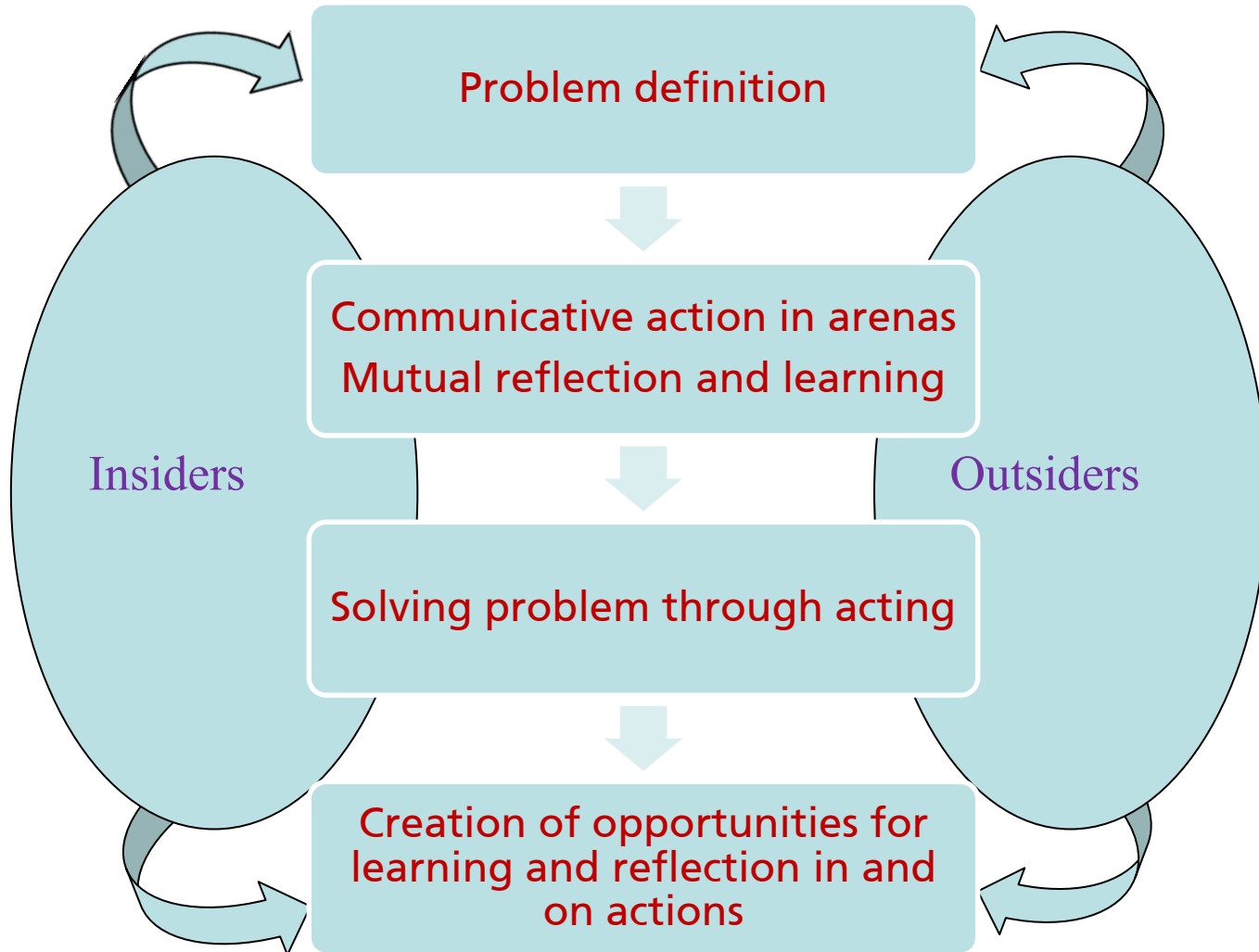
Twofold purpose of CAR

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1. Professional development of practitioners, with emphasis on practical output
2. Generic knowledge building on topic of common interest

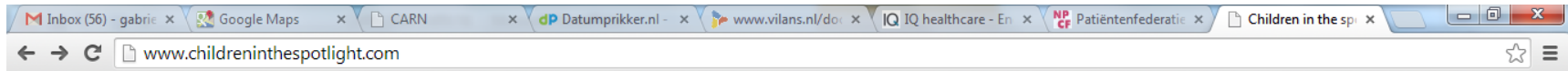
(Levin & Martin, 2007)

- The formation of a ‘communicative space’ in which dialogue takes place (Kemmis, 2001)
- Democratic ideal of AR: cogeneration of knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2007): ‘**encounter between the worlds of practical reasoning and scientifically constructed knowledge**’ (p. 104)



THINK
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- Background
<http://www.childreninthspotlight.com/index.htm>
- 4-year project (2012-2016), funded by RAAK-SIA
- Goals:
 1. **Professional development** of teachers in primary education aimed at strengthening the social and communicative development of children
 2. **Knowledge co-construction** on: pedagogical sensitivity; durable child development; and collective learning



Children and Youth in the PEDAGOGIC SPOTLIGHT
From best to next practice

Contact

International forum

Downloads

Publications

Participants

Project



**THINK
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1. FSW: formal network of 42 schools in primary education (Utrecht area)
2. The Royal Auris Group for children with speech, hearing and language problems → schools for special education
3. Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Eindhoven/Tilburg
4. Utrecht Professional University
5. University for Humanistic Studies, Utrecht

Collaborative action research design

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Teachers conduct small action research projects in their own schools → practical knowing and professional development

They collaborate in a Community of Practice (CoP) as a context for professional development and knowledge co-construction by dialogue (e.g. Wenger, 1998)

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Collating the results from the small AR projects → the co-construction of knowledge on the research topics of the overall project (knowing-about-action)

Co-construction of key concepts within CAR

THINK
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- Focus in this presentation on one of the central concepts of the study: ‘durable child development’
- Research questions:
 - **How has the concept of ‘durable child development’ developed within the context of the Pro Sense project?**
 - **What are favourable and what are unfavourable conditions in this process?**

Theoretical focus

**THINK
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- Focus on concepts as the shared, multi-layered and ‘lived’ constructs used, discussed and founded in the dynamics of professional practice (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2005; Babbie, 2007)
- Concept analysis: “strategic examination of the scientific literature that results in an integrated perspective of the state of the science” (Penrod & Hupcey, 2005)
- Our focus: an ethnographic AR approach to concept analysis
→ the dynamic practice of collaborative conceptualization in a CAR project

The issue of practical validity

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- Two approaches:
 - Participation as a *tool* for validity (triangulation through e.g. member-check (Feldman, 2007))
 - Participation as a *validity standard* (dialogic & democratic validity (Burns, 1999), katalytic validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) & interactive or self-mobilising participation (Pretty, 1995; Jacobs, 2010))

Research approach

**THINK
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- Single case study (Yin, 1994) with AR elements
 - Case: members of the research team and teachers who participate in the CoPs
 - Period: first two years of the project
 - Researcher is (at some points) actively involved in the concept development
- Data collection:
 - a) Project documents (meeting notes, presentations, portal documents);
 - b) Participant observation (field notes)
 - c) Focus group with research team and individual interviews with 4 project team members of the CoP 'durable child development'

Data analysis

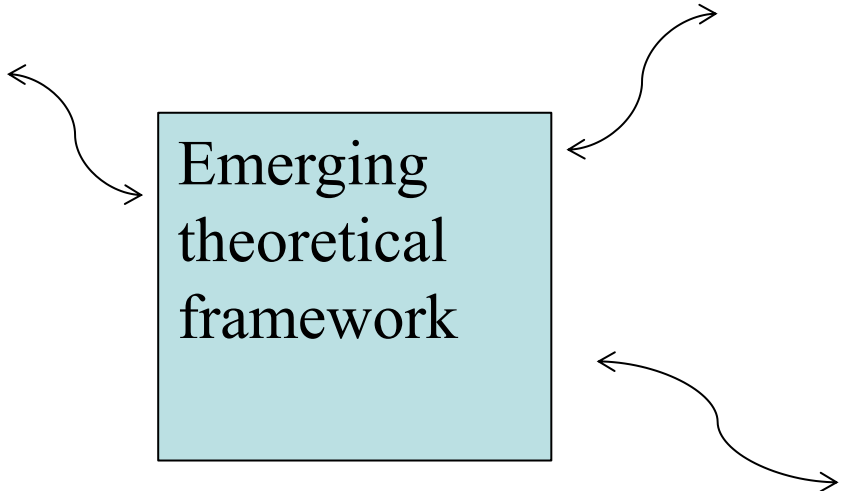
THINK BIGGER

Phase I/II/III
Participant observation
Document study

Phase II
Focus Group

Emerging theoretical framework

Phase III
Interviews



Methodological and ethical quality

**THINK
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- Reflexivity, reliability and validity: Participation in the project as insider-outsider
 - ‘Critical subjectivity means that [...] we accept our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are aware of that perspective, and of its bias, and we articulate it in our communications.’ (Reason, 1994: 10)
 - Intersubjectivity: participants as co-researchers

**THINK
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How has the concept of 'durable child development' developed in the Prosense project?

- Initially low participation of teachers in conceptualisation & theoretical oversaturation
- Shifting concepts: from 'durable child development' towards 'communicative self-reliance' and 'social self-reliance'
- Later on autonomy for teachers: they take on projects aimed at a diversity of child development goals, under the headings of the two new high level concepts
- Will this lead to an emerging framework for 'durable child development'?

Findings (2)

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What are favourable and what are unfavourable conditions in this process?

- Time pressure, leading to low participation of teachers which is unfavourable from the perspective of practical validity
- Struggles to bridge high level concepts with practical perspectives & vice versa
- Shifting concepts: unfavourable since they are not practice-based; favourable since they offer space for teacher researchers to conduct AR on questions from their own practice
- ‘Competing concepts’: endangers the boundaries of the concept (cf. Morse, 1995; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2005)

Conclusion



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- Working with high level concepts without theoretical operationalisation is favourable in providing space for teacher researchers to develop their own projects, thereby contributing to their professional and practice development
- However, it has not (yet) contributed to knowledge co-generation on the high level concept

Discussion

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- Is the goal of knowledge development on high level concepts conflicting with the goal of professional development? **No!**
- Participation of teachers on a high level; autonomy or reciprocity?
- Phase of ‘autonomy’ will be followed by co-generation: responsive evaluation based on story workshops with the knowledge generated within the AR projects

Discussion (cont.)

**THINK
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- Insiders vs outsiders in the Cogenerative Action Research Model (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, 94)
- Cogeneration of knowledge is as much an issue within the insider groups and within the outsider groups as between them!

Thank you very much!

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