Action Research as a co-creation method?

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Aims of the session

▶ To briefly define action research as an assessment method and to explore how well this works as a co-creative model for students in their final year of undergraduate study, using BA Childhood and Youth Studies Top Up as an example.

▶ It will be useful to define action research and explore what we mean by co-creation within this context.

▶ To give examples of work undertaken by students and examine the element of co-creative processes that have taken place and then discuss with you if this is co-creation in practice?

Context

- BA Childhood & Youth Studies Top Up

- 1 year full time programme – studied over 2 evenings a week with additional blended learning.

- Students are either employed or on placement within the 0 -19 children and young people sector.

- Majority of students are female, have children and families

- Action research is undertaken within placement is 40 credits towards classification …but it is so much more!

Action research (AR)..

▶ Is a research method that aims to simultaneously investigate and solve an issue. In other words, action research conducts research and takes action at the same time.

▶ It was first coined as a term in 1944 by Kurt Lewin.

▶ A highly interactive method, action research is often used in the social sciences, particularly in educational settings.

▶ Particularly popular with educators as a form of systematic inquiry, it prioritizes reflection and bridges the gap between theory and practice. (George 2023)

Action Research cont..

- Due to the nature of the research, it is also sometimes called a cycle of action or a cycle of inquiry.
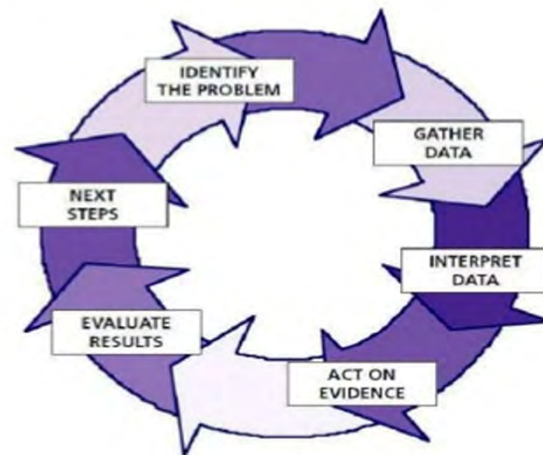
STEPS IN ACTION RESEARCH
(FERRANCE, 2000)

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

GATHER DATA

NEXT STEPS

INTERPRET DATA

EVALUATE RESULTS

ACT ON EVIDENCE

Figure 2. Action Research Cycle

Action Research cont..

- There are 2 common types of action research: participatory action research and practical action research.

- **Participatory action research** emphasizes that participants should be members of the community being studied, empowering those directly affected by outcomes of said research. In this method, participants are effectively co-researchers, with their lived experiences considered formative to the research process.

- **Practical action** research focuses more on how research is conducted and is designed to address and solve specific issues. (Students have to do both)

- Both types of action research are more focused on increasing the capacity and ability of future practitioners than contributing to a theoretical body of knowledge. (George 2023)

Student Engagement, Students as partners & Co-creation

▶ Student engagement in the UK refers to both engagement in learning and teaching as well as engagement in student representation and governance systems. (Kuh, 2009)

▶ Cook-Sather et al. (2014: 6–7) define partnership in learning and teaching as 'a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis'.

▶ Ryan and Tilbury (2013) introduce co-creation as a new pedagogical idea that emphasises learner empowerment.

▶ Bovill et al. (2016: 197) suggest that 'one way to conceptualise co-creation is occupying the space in between student engagement and partnership, to suggest a meaningful collaboration between students and staff, with students becoming more active participants in the learning process, constructing understanding and resources with academic staff.'

Cited in Bovill (2019)

Undertaking Action Research

Stages students go through within their study

▶ Identifying a topic or issue and setting the context in collaboration with managers/mentors, colleagues, AR supervisors and tutors.

▶ Reviewing and analysing the literature – Secondary research focusing on the topic, question or hypothesis

▶ Planning primary research – to be completed in setting with colleagues/stakeholders.

▶ Gathering and Analysing data – using traditional research methods

▶ Planning and implementing the activity or intervention for making a change or improving practice.

▶ Evaluating and reflecting on outcomes – including leadership approaches in managing the project.

▶ Writing Report including recommendations

Student projects

- Mentoring reading project Yr 9 with Yr 7

- Children's voice – Empowering students to co-create independent projects for change

- Developing a communication strategy within an independent school

- Supporting key stage 1 children with phonics

- Implementing structured physical activities for FE students with additional needs.

- Self regulation for children with complex needs

Strengths for children service sector

► Empowering to the practitioner involved

► Always relevant to the participants

► Determined by the researchers, who are also the primary consumers of the findings. (Co-creation)

► Helps practitioner to become effective in their practice

► Action research can be engaged in by one practitioner alone or a group of colleagues who share a common problem (co-creation)

► Bridges the divide between theory and practice

► Provides a framework to explore and investigate

► Raise standards

Sagor (2019)

Benefits to students

▶ Become change agents by influencing practice in the setting, and wider

▶ Develop research skills

▶ Develop leadership skills

▶ Develops refection skills contributing to continual professional development

▶ Develops collaboration skills

▶ Creates – co-creators?

Limitations of AR

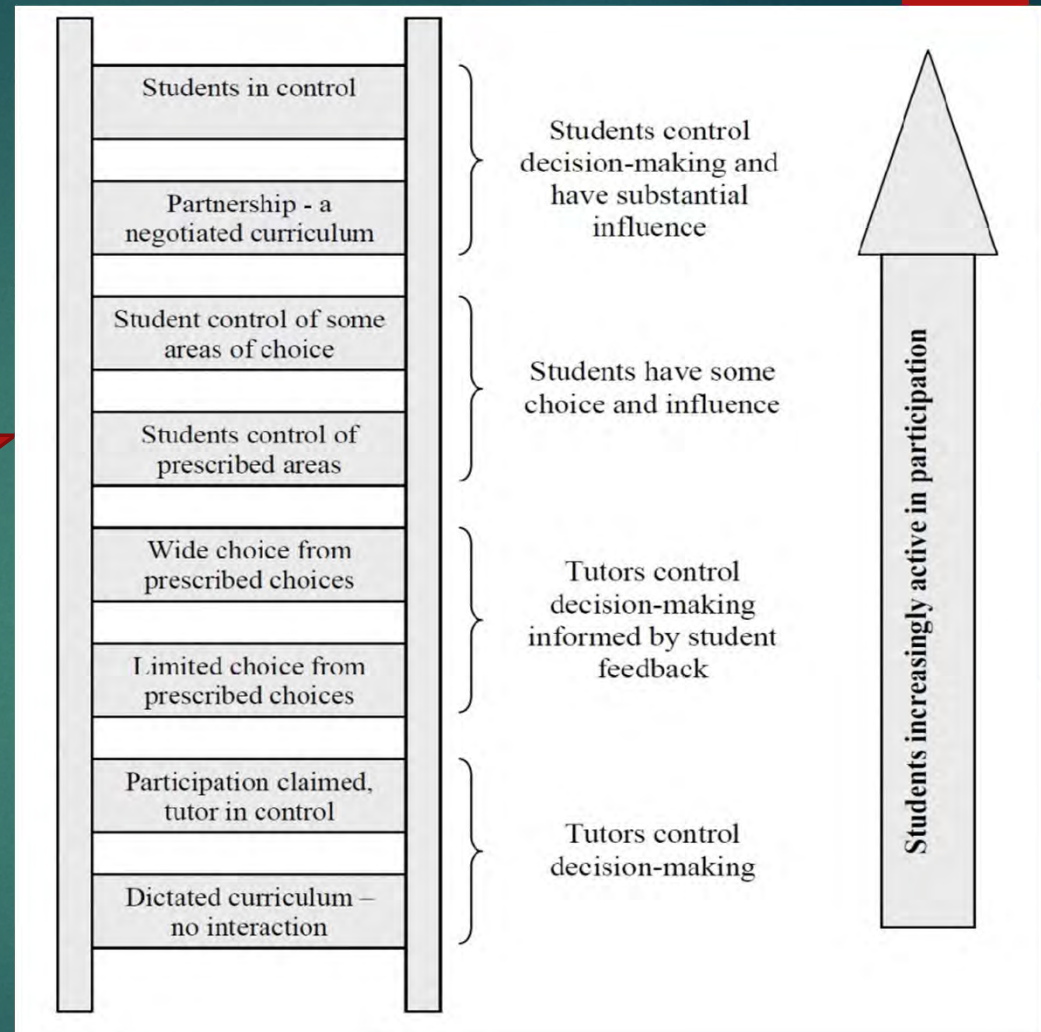- One of the criticisms – is that it lacks rigour and validity due to the researchers influence and bias when drawing conclusions

- Findings are not generalisable due to the flexibility and it being context specific

- Often seen as a soft option – parameters needs to be set from the beginnings

- Ethical Challenges due to participant and stakeholder involvement

- Time constraints

Limitations and issues for students

▶ It is an involved, time consuming process for 1 year of study

▶ Has to fit within curriculum or practice demands of their organisation and ours! This can limit creativity and leave the student feeling disempowered.

▶ Students are assessed on the evidence they provide in the report which does not always reflect the volume and quality of the work they have undertaken. (this is something we are reviewing).

▶ Students are not always given credit within their setting for the improvement in practice made.

So is this
Co-creation?

Students in control

Partnership - a negotiated curriculum

Students control decision-making and have substantial influence

Student control of some areas of choice

Students control of prescribed areas

Students have some choice and influence

Wide choice from prescribed choices

Limited choice from prescribed choices

Tutors control decision-making informed by student feedback

Participation claimed, tutor in control

Dictated curriculum – no interaction

Tutors control decision-making

Students increasingly active in participation

University of Edinburgh

References

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