

ACTION RESEARCH WORKSHOP FOSO COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

3RD-4TH MARCH 2020

TUESDAY 3RD MARCH

ACTION

I used revised materials today that incorporated AL and SF videos into the introductory presentations and started with formation of learning teams who began to work around common projects along with material from my 'ethical incidents' project as a worked example. In particular, I had groups review research they had already completed to see if their recommendations could be the basis for an AL project. The second session on Engagement overran slightly so that I paused for the lunch break before completing the session properly. In the morning the learning groups functioned well, especially around topics and concerns. Once colleagues understood the living theory maps, they were able to engage with them very constructively. In the afternoon I finished the Exploration session and moved into engagement – how to engage context, people, research, literature and research ethics. Session on research methods was very productive as was the first part on research ethics with rules. I had to do a plenary walk through on virtues as time was fading along with participant attention. Interesting discussions about discovering counselling issues in a semi-structured interview.

ACHIEVEMENTS

There was a high level of participation in groups until the last 30 minutes so the decision to focus on group discussion rather than individual reflection was successful. The inclusion of material from my ethical incidents project seemed to be positively received, despite it adding time. There also seemed to be some clear projects in the making around mentoring, counselling to address absenteeism, storytelling in math, literacy in local languages. Use of the AR Process worksheet seems to be useful as colleagues completed steps 1 & 2 and were taking steps 3-5 away to work on.

Ratings in Minute ratings consistently high 7+ – active and participative approach in teams greatly appreciated. Colleagues felt that this contributed to a high level of learning, positive comments about inclusion of my research material. One rating even referred to me as 'tactful'.

I was also able to realize my values in collaborative and discussion based learning drawing on colleagues own experience and learning. In particular I was able to engage colleagues with collaborative learning and dynamic concepts of truth and knowledge – as something living. The inclusion of my own research facilitated this. Further, I have some confidence that from the living theory mapping exercise and some of the 'heavy' value laden words that emerged that Living Theory perspectives had been appreciated.

ADJUSTMENTS

To my embarrassment I had not edited out all of the references to entrepreneurship from the Abidjan presentation. I need to take care to do this. The main area for improvement is time keeping, so I need to consider what to cut out or abbreviate. Another common request was for group presentations – which we will do tomorrow. A common issue was the audibility and intelligibility of the videos – this could be an area to save time! Get some juicy quotes instead!

The issue of time won't be easy to address if I'm to lay a sufficient foundation for AR projects in two days.

AMBITIONS

Certainly, tomorrow should see some good team presentations. I feel that forming the Learning Teams up front has given the AR process greater focus and momentum. I also hope to share the presentation on GALARA and the World Convention.

If I could pick up some names, that would be good

WEDNESDAY 4TH MARCH 2020

ACTIONS

I began the day by giving the ALARAGh presentation to encourage colleagues to sign up for the association and went through the benefits of membership in terms of workshops, conferences, publications and our membership structure. We then began the action planning process in which I walked colleagues through defining goals and identifying resources and partners. After this I walked colleagues through developing their route map in stages, but without the interruption of reporting in order to save time and for groups to develop their Action research plans at the end of the morning session. We ended up with some good plans, but I did not actively monitor. Following the practice that I developed from Abidjan I developed my own route map of the ethical incidents project but did not present it. Projects plans were later posted on the walls at lunchtime.

In the afternoon session I shared the ALARA World Convention presentation to encourage colleagues to work on their AR projects. One colleague asked about the benefits of belonging to ALARAGh and I commented that he was already receiving a benefit from an ALARAGh workshop, plus the possibility of conference and workshop presentations.

We then moved on to reflecting on evaluation. I did a plenary exercise in establishing the reasons for evaluation using the Foso staff's experience of the recent NAB accreditation exercise then I asked them to identify their own standards by which their projects should be judged. To save time I walked through the place of reflection at milestones and had colleagues consider individual and team accountability. We took a break and then the last 100 minutes were spend considering use of different research methodologies in evaluation. In order to make the first group assignment, on the use of qualitative methods evaluation, I had to move forward to my documentary analysis of student 'E's work. This was useful as it provided an example of coding as well as my observations as a participant. I may need to revise the presentation for allow for this. After this I was able to get some good interactions over the use of qualitative methods. I then moved onto the use of questionnaires, again, using the questionnaire that I developed in the Ethical Incidents project. By this time, it was 4:40PM and colleague's energy was getting low, even I was forgetting names of key authors in the critical incident literature. In the light of this I abbreviated the last group exercise to frame one closed question and indicate at what milestone it might be used. Even then I had to prompt and suggest use of Likert scale and pre-or post-intervention use.

In the course of the afternoon I was asked about the nature of action learning teams – I was able to advise my colleague that he had been working in a Learning Team for the last two days!

A more critical question was about the source of my assertion that 40% was considered a good rate of return for questionnaires. I will need to track down my source for that.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Looking at the day the groups continued to work well, and viable route maps were produced that could be the basis of viable projects if followed through. Learning teams also developed good standards and networks for accountability. The day has been successful in terms of my learning goals for my colleagues as they are now equipped to engage in action research if they choose to do so. I was also able to generate some interest in ALARAGh and the forthcoming World Congress. The real test of this will be whether colleagues become active action researchers.

I feel that my influence has been in light with my values again today as I have facilitated interactive and participatory discussion-based learning. Through the use of examples from my Ethical Incidents project I've also been able to communicate my Christian oriented ontology and epistemology which is there as a question, and I hope, inspiration for my colleagues. In a private conversation the Principal shared with me his appreciation of the solution-focused approach. I shared with him the lessons I had learnt from Ed Sallis from his use of the solution-focused approach to building quality. (N.B. – need to send him some resources). He even suggested that colleagues frame their concerns as improvements rather than as problems. This gave me room to suggest an SF approach to others.

ADJUSTMENTS

The teacher educator colleagues at Foso are as unruly as those in Accra. When introducing Action Learning I did not establish any ground rules for discussion-based learning as I would for undergraduate students. While exchanges were good humoured they took time and distracted from learning. In the next iteration I may have to include a 'ground rule' exercise. (To make room for this I may have to take out the videos which no one could understand. (I need to use the SF animation instead of McKergow video)).

In previous iterations of this workshop I would use group reporting to monitor progress and give suggestions and guidance. Now that I am walking colleagues through the Action Planning process I need to monitor the design of the route maps more carefully by moving around groups to check progress. I also need to reframe my introduction to my action project by presenting it as a sample action plan to give a better idea of what a route map might look like.

The afternoon section on Evaluation also needs to be rationalized. The examples of documentary analysis, questionnaire and epistemology and ontology that I give from my project appear to be valuable but it is heavy material at the end of the day. I need to frame exercise so that I take questions on my evaluative methods and then have groups do their own engagement and design exercises. So, further revision of the presentation to achieve this. It would also be useful if I could get some feedback on the value of this material. I may also need to introduce the ideas of ontology and epistemology in the 'Exploration' section. How can I relate this to the Living Theory Map?

AMBITIONS

This is a successful workshop and I can make some key adjustments to make it even better. Going forward the key issue is how to follow up with the three institutions that I've delivered this workshop in to ensure that colleagues are beginning to work on their AR projects. The second concern is to build ALARAGh's membership. We need to recruit chapter leaders in each institution that I've visited. This should be a deliberate strategy in future engagements. Give the ALARAGh presentation after lunch on the first day and aim to recruit an organizer by the second. When colleagues engage me for support I could encourage (oblige) them to become members.

What else?

NOTES ON DATA FROM FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

ACTION

Twenty-nine colleagues submitted questionnaires – I completed one which brought the total to 30.

In the closed section scores ranged from between 7.6 (1. Format was effective for me) to a high of 8.7 (4. Had the right level of participation for me.) with an average of 8.3.

Participants completed almost all questions with two omitting to indicate an option for 5 (my role as action researcher) and some omissions from section 2 (Small Steps) and 4. (Enhancement)

ACHIEVEMENTS

Highest scores were achieved in 4 (Participation) 8.7, 2 (relevance of Discussion) 8.6, 3. (Usefulness of discussion) 8.5 and 5. (Role as practitioner-researcher) 8.5. These scores are supported by comments under section 3: Facilitation which emphasise participatory nature of workshop and the knowledge and insights participants gained from it in relation to the practice of action research.

Participants also demonstrate their understanding of their role as practitioner-researchers by committing themselves to beginning project mostly in terms of identifying a concern or problem, conducting a literature review, finding collaborators and in some cases beginning a programme of research – even building on planning done in the workshop.

I am pleased that there is evidence of my influence in terms of some colleagues identifying concerns rather than simply 'problems' and the emphasis placed on virtues both in next steps and in facilitation.

ADJUSTMENTS

The lowest score on the closed questions is 1 (Format) 7.6 and this probably relates to comments under enhancement about the extensive hours of the workshop – 9-5 eight hours each day. I am not sure how to address this other than see what can be rationalized and even cut out. This will be a challenge – unless I simply stress that the workshop will be demanding because of the limited time. In the GSM iteration I took 3 days for this section, but I had more material included. In the original plan the evaluation section was going to be delivered as workshop on its own once projects were underway. This might be ideal, but I'm not sure that this is realistic.

The other low score is on the role of research partners (6) at 7.8. Perhaps I will need to stress that Learning Teams identify what they hope each group of collaborators will do.

In Section 2, Small Steps the steps, with one exception all vague – no specific concerns are identified. One way to address this is to stress that the project will be based on one of the items in the 'Influence on others' areas in the Living Theory Map. I should connect my Critical Incident approach with my focus on the application of ethics and experiential learning.

Some of the items in Section 4 are interesting as they seem to ask for more of what I'm already attempting to do by using my Ethical Incidents project as a 'worked' example and walking colleagues through this step by step. How can I spell out the steps more clearly?

Other issues raised under section 4 such as tutors sharing projects, peer review and publications will be addressed at the follow-up workshop.

Food and internet I can't really do much about!

AMBITIONS

As I add in my own responses, I will need to review my presentations to see where things could be usefully compressed. I will remove the videos and replace them with statements about the topics concerned. I can use Vissar's animation in place of McKergow's video. I already have Revan's key quotes and can use his picture and I can find suitable quotes from Whitehead. However, I will need to add activities around setting ground rules. I am reluctant to remove my documentary analysis and questionnaire material from the last session on evaluation as it demonstrates how to evaluate a project using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The Principal of Fosu CoE has asked if he could pass my contact details on to his colleague at Komenda CoE so I could also facilitate the workshop there. The momentum is growing, and I will have to see where it leads. But I will need to polish my materials.

My key ambition now after completing these three workshops is to support colleagues as they pursue actual action research projects. Fletcher's work on being a research mentor could be very helpful here and I will need to follow it up.

I will also need to draw my journals and questionnaire data into one place as this is now becoming an action research project in its own right!