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Intentions of presentation

• To describe participatory action research
• To discuss the part played by critical reflection in PAR and its importance for professional learning
• To look at examples of PAR – and how it can generate knowledge for practice
• To explore PAR as a research methodology for social work practitioners
• To look at the congruence between PAR as research practice and social work practice
• Next steps?
Participatory action research

Co-operative inquiry (Heron 1996) as a form of Participatory Action Research (Reason and Bradbury 2001/2008)

Working with professionals in social care/work organisations, mainly focusing on professional development and policy implementation – 2 examples

PAR different to traditional research:
Simple scientific rationalism

Ontologically - reality is "out there" to be discovered

Epistemologically - research task is to collect knowledge about essential reality

Methodologically - expert researchers gleaning knowledge from objects of research (people)
Participatory action research

Ontologically - reality constructed through relationship in given universe

Extended epistemology

Methodologically - researchers working collaboratively with fellow research subjects
Co-operative inquiry and participatory action research

Extended epistemology

- propositional
- experiential
- presentational and
- practical

Need to consider affective knowing as well (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985)
Co-operative inquiry and participatory action research

- Participatory approach – research with and not on people
- Validity improved because learning has meaning within researchers’ experience and is owned by them
- Action orientation – research over time affecting behaviour
- Informational or transformational intentions?
When to use participatory research methods

Emancipatory research

• With people who have no voice
• With people learning to take control of their lives
• With people learning skills for life

Developmental research

• Where researching process is important
• Where change is constant
• With workers who are interested in developing skills over time
4 phases of co-operative inquiry

• Co-researchers form a group and agree focus of research
• Attention to group processes
• Agreement on specific focus of action phase – who will do what – how recorded - becoming co-subjects
• Engaging in action over three/four weeks and opening up to new experience and understanding
• Re-forming group and sharing experience, collaborative critical reflection, making sense and learning - feeds back into original propositions – informing next phase of act
• Repeat cycles of action and reflection to embed learning in practice
• Endings – commitment to critical reflection
Case example 1 – co-operative inquiry with social work professionals

• My motivation/interest – focus for this research
• Their motivation and interest
• Use of professional skills and values within a challenging new policy framework – care management – undermining professional autonomy and discretion?
• Agreed activity – use of professional discretion in decision-making
• Collective critical reflection – detailed investigation of the use of discretion, especially intuitive knowing
• Cycles of action and reflection – learning about professional practice – what informs it – importance of critical reflection for practice development
Case example 1 – co-operative inquiry with social work professionals

- Experimenting with new forms of practice – especially what discretion is and how to critically evaluate it
- Discretion and intuition
- Collecting data on effectiveness
- Developing understanding of problems and effective ways of dealing with them
- Gaining confidence – especially in valuing and making opportunities for mutual critical reflection
- Recognising organisational attitudes to management, supervision and team work and testing out opportunities to influence them
Example 2 - working through resistance to implement a new policy

Locality team for people with learning difficulties

Providing a care management – assessment, care planning role

Requirement to offer and assess for direct payments not being met

Reflects national picture of poor take-up of DPs by people with learning difficulties
Example 2 - working through resistance to implement a new policy

Step 1 – identifying the barriers to the provision of direct payments
  - separating internal and external barriers
  - identifying activities that could remove barriers

Step 2 – team collect data
  - e.g. using supervision to reflect on specific cases
  - using team meetings to look at case studies
  - feeding back concerns to the rest of the organisation

Step 3 – working on own professional practice
  - identifying dilemmas of protection/empowerment (e.g.)

Step 4 – using opportunities for critical reflection to match top down policy imperatives with traditional and contemporary social work
Example 2 - working through resistance to implement a new policy

Some problems with co-operative inquiry

- resistance from some social workers
- off-loading responsibility
- mixed commitment to explore own practice

Plus organisational problems – e.g. DP champions left team during project

Some willingness by the organisation to address problems raised by team

- modelling feedback loops
- recognition of need for critical reflection
- include practitioner voice in policy implementation
Some conclusions

First example – SWs using the research method for critical reflection

Second example - team resisting critical reflection on own practice

Organisation willing to listen to practitioner voice and address problematic approaches to policy implementation

In example 1 team were willing to own the focus issue – innovation

In example 2 – traditional social workers resisting new policy development and not owning it within their own practice and values
Conclusions

Not made a critique of the policy frameworks here – e.g. the personalisation agenda

Noting that PAR is an appropriate method for researching the importance of critical reflection for individual and organisational learning.

And organisational learning as essential for effective service delivery

Practitioners are well positioned to collect data through this research method to look at individual and collective professional development and more effective service delivery.

If this is important, then critical reflectors will increasingly collide with managerialist policy
PAR and social work - similarities and congruence (Baldwin 2012)

- Definitional similarities
- Service user involvement
- Shared political objectives
- Capitalising on strengths
- Focus on process and outcomes
- Focus on critical reflection
- Social work as a form of PAR – academic freedom vs being an employee – where are the opportunities for research, let alone emancipatory research?
WHAT NEXT?

For continued registration as a social worker an HCPC registrant must:

1) Maintain a continuous, up-to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities

2) Demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice

3) Seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery

4) Seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user

5) Upon request, present a written profile, which must be their own work and supported by evidence, explaining how they have met the standards for CPD
WHAT NEXT?

SW Reform Board national framework for CPD ideas: The standards for CPD and relevance to SW researchers

• “Learning from and with other professionals. Action learning sets

• Access to research resources, forums and lectures; web streaming lectures

• Participating in active practice-based research”

But also:

• Partnerships with Universities for research – individually and collectively. University staff acting as facilitators.

• Involving students in research on placement – e.g. community profiling projects
Potential areas for discussion – helpful for you?

- Extended epistemology
- Participatory approach – ownership and meaning
- Action orientation
- Learning cycles – action/reflection
- Critical reflection
- Collective learning
- Emancipatory research
- Developmental research
Bibliography


Bibliography


Heron, John (1996), Co-operative Inquiry, Research into the Human Condition, London; Sage.

Reason, Peter and Heron, John (2001) The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' people, in Reason, P and Bradbury, H (2001) (eds.)

See also second edition of Reason and Bradbury (2008)
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