How research and positive action can be combined

Josh Cameron
School of Health Professions
University of Brighton
What is positive action?
What is research?
Action & Research: worlds apart?
Action Research
(It does what it says on the tin)

Aims to achieve change as part of research process
Difference with traditional research

• Unlike traditional qualitative (words/image based research) & quantitative (numbers based research).
  – These try to make sure the research process has no impact on a static situation.
  – Action research intends to make change not just after research is completed but during the research.
How does action research work?
Kurt Lewin 1946
What about the data/information?

• Collect research data in a way that as natural as possible:
  – Records of meetings
  – Documents produced
  – Interviews
  – Subjective accounts of participants

• But the actions are also data.
  • (Munn-Giddings 2002, Winter 1996)
Example of Action Research

• Collaboration of Deaf & hearing people linked with a US hospice (Allen et al 2002)
• Investigated end of life care for Deaf people
• Linked to development of workshops to train Deaf hospice volunteers
• The research aims to create educational material for Deaf older people using hospices.
• How they did the research changed through the process of doing it
Example 2 HIV prevention poster
(Crowe 2002)

• US study created a prevention poster and condom card targeted for Deaf people who use American Sign Language.

• A funded research study – used focus groups
  – to understand needs
  – To consider different design approaches (re language, graphics, culture)
  – Agree final design
Challenges of action research

• Power/perceived power relations
• Collaborators can’t always agree on everything
  – So look for a pact & co-operation
  – Maintain honesty by “recognising that there are common interests and different interests, conflicts and consensus” (Weiskopf and Laske 1996)
• Unknown directions/changes
  – Need to be flexible and enjoy the ride!
Understanding Our Space as action research

• One of a range of research projects across South East Coast

• “The key to success is articulating openly the mutual benefit ... Just as institutions are an important source of knowledge and capacity-building in their localities, the expertise in communities can promote practise-based research and teaching in HE institutions.”

• “Demonstrator” project

(South East Coastal Communities Programme 2007)
Understanding Our Space as action research

• Investigating how cultural participation can support Deaf people’s wellbeing
  – Use of reminiscence to promote wellbeing
  – Internet based “space”
  – Festival event (2010)
  – Role of *Deaf Sussex Today* journal

• Our research aims to “demonstrate” this by collaboration between Universities & communities – *Action.*
Collaboration in action & research

• How can local Universities and local community collaborative for mutual benefit to achieve this?

• E.g. Occupational Therapy uses creative activities as its “medicine”.

• Our students can learn from the festival event (eg re Deaf cultural identity)

• I hope they can also contribute to the project
The purpose of collaboration

• “if you’ve come to help me you’re wasting your time. But if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together”
  – aboriginal social worker Lillie Watson

• (Winter and Munn-Giddings’ 2001 p36).

• We may not liberate each other but we might demonstrate how we can collaborate to create opportunities (“spaces”) that promote Deaf people’s wellbeing (& that others can learn from too)
The journey is part of the destination

• In action research you don’t always know where you’re going but how you get there is part of the product and should leave a lasting legacy.