Participatory Action Research/Action Learning: Contributing to Participants Understanding of the Concept of Community Work

Grete Oline Hole & Anne Karin Larsen
Associate Professors
Bergen University College, Norway
Background

Social Work – Virtual Campus
EU-funded project 2008-2010
12 European HEI partners

Aim: an online module in
Community Work with virtual learning material

Empirical field for PAR/PAL research
Research Question

What is the best way to construct a learning arena in Community Work that demonstrates the use of Community Work Theory and Methods including Participatory, Emancipatory and Democratic spaces for Co-Construction of Knowledge?

Participants:
- Teachers
- Students
- Researchers
Community Work

«…assisting people to improve their own communities by collective actions»

(Twelvetrees 2002, p1)
Community Work – Action Research

CW is a planned process to mobilise communities to use their own social structures and resources to address their own problems and achieve their own objectives. It focuses on participation and fosters empowerment, emancipation and change through collective action. CW is closely related to work for human rights. The community work process is about people in communities creating opportunities for growth and change.

Curriculum Plan Community Work,
SW-VirCamp, 2012
# Research process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CW Course teachers process</th>
<th>Survey to students in the CW pilot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on the research questions by teachers on e-mail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group interview with teachers before starting on the Curriculum Plan</td>
<td>Start survey to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript sent for feedback to teachers</td>
<td>Results reported to students asking for feedback and suggestions for Q. for the next survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview with teachers before the course starts</td>
<td>Midway survey to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript sent for feedback to T.</td>
<td>Results reported to students asking for feedback and suggestions for Q. for the next survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview online in the middle of the course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript sent for feedback to T.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview at the end of the pilot course</td>
<td>Final Survey to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation report</td>
<td>Evaluation report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participatory learning

Green Park Community Blog

Info boards in the park
November 7th, 2009

The other day when I was walking with Yusef, he came up with an idea which I found very useful. He talked about the lack of communication between the different groups using the park, and proposed that we could put up two or three big information boards in central places in the park, which everybody could use.

At present there is only one "official" board with information from the city government, which is illegal for others to use. The only means for ordinary people to inform others now, is to fasten notice on poles. This is not very satisfactory and also is also ugly to look upon.

Therefore I give this idea to the Park neighbour committee and hope they will act on it.

(But they must not end up like that! It’s the responsibility of us all…)

photo: Auntie P
## Research process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CW Course teachers  process</th>
<th>Survey to students in the CW pilot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on the research questions by teachers on e-mail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group interview with teachers before starting on the Curriculum Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript sent for feedback to teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview with teachers before the course starts</td>
<td>Start survey to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript sent for feedback to T.</td>
<td>Results reported to students asking for feedback and suggestions for Q. for the next survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview online in the middle of the course</td>
<td>Midway survey to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript sent for feedback to T.</td>
<td>Results reported to students asking for feedback and suggestions for Q. for the next survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview at the end of the pilot course</td>
<td>Final Survey to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation report</td>
<td>Evaluation report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How did the research process trigger the participants understanding of CW?
Teacher group interviews / discussions triggered:

• A discourse on the core concepts
• A clarification of the teacher role and power relation students- teachers
• How to work in an emancipatory way in an e-learning course
• How to support the students in their learning process
Respect and open discussions

«It is a very respectful environment. And lots of discussions, sometimes very strong discussions, tough discussions. Even clashes of cultures. But it always is with respect. The team situation is a good one. Synergy between persons, support us to work in a constructive way. And there is always space to say what we think and to come back and talk things over. The situation is a good one»

(R1 external evaluation report)
A new teacher role

«By working with VirCamp we have been more organized, more strategic and have new ideas for research. Also in the ways of teaching; We now give more importance to the work of the students, give more input to the students’ work. And participating – we give them a voice. Then things have changed completely. It has changed the concrete behaviour in the classrooms. And the students give good feedback to us; they think that we work in a very good way»

(R2 – external evaluation report)
Citation from one of the teachers

‘I do not feel like a controller … I feel like a counselor, who looks with them into the process. By asking them questions and giving them some suggestions I stimulate them to find their way’.
Students’ (n19/ N23)

Students ranking of competencies achieved (related to competences stated in the CP)
Students’ (n19/ N23)

Students answer to the question: «The course has shown me how to link theory to practice»:
Citations from one student

“CW for me is not to take over the work but to help the community in the right direction, and help the community to take action by themselves for themselves”.
Another student

“I believe that Community work includes two perspectives, top-down and bottom-up- Bottom-up because the work has to come from within the community members and top-down because some sort of connection and guidance from the city or state has to be included””
For more info about our courses

Go to our Virtual Campus: http://vircamp.net
Questions??

Grete.Oline.Hole@hib.no
Anne.Larsen@hib.no