

**DIPLOMA IN TEACHING IN THE LIFELONG  
LEARNING SECTOR (DTLLS)**

**ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

**THE EFFECTIVE USE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK IN  
CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMME PLANNING**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

THE EFFECTIVE USE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK IN  
CURRICULUM AND PROGRAME PLANNING

I have chosen this area of research due to the fact that while attempting to write a new programme, I found myself looking at a blank piece of paper and not sure what to write; I wanted my new programme to be purposeful but exciting for the students so that they would want to sign up and come to class. I decided that to do this I may need to review student feedback on previous courses that our team had written and delivered; so I reviewed at least seventy five per cent of the feedback forms, from programmes that were delivered with mixed groups of learners.

Reading the reviews I found that the same comments were being made by the students across three different deliveries of the programme, for example comments such as ***“too much paper work, need outline of the course in simple language, a lot of the tasks repeat themselves, small classes and not too lengthy or particularly demanding, It was interesting and I didn’t get bored”***

This made me realise that we as a group of teaching professionals we are inviting students to comment on the programmes that we deliver but we seem not to incorporate into our practises; which shows that I have not been reflective enough in my practise as I had thought. Having to meet targets sometimes means that some of the reflection that occurs within my practise is superficial and linked to completing logs and reports; but what reflective should be is a process of internally examining and explaining areas and issues in my practice which creates and clarifies, and in doing so the results should be a change in my perspective and more importantly my practise. (Boud: 1985)

The idea that not just about myself but about the team, we were not using the experiences of the students to inform and reform our practise and improve the way that we designed and delivered our programmes; needed to be addressed in a clear and systematic way not just for ourselves but so that the students in the future knew and understood that their feedback was useful and not just an organisational exercise and that we had listened and learnt from their experiences; I and the team can look at ourselves more critically and not just view would we do through a different lens.

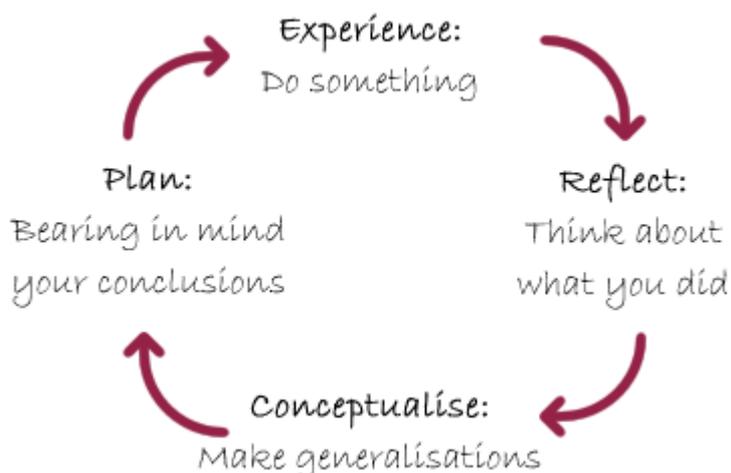
All research is about undertaking a disciplined enquiry which allows us the researcher to generate knowledge which can be shared. But the approach that we use to undertake our research can vary depending on what we want to know, what we want to share and how we want to share it as well as the subject discipline and topic area. The aim of my research is to achieve a change in my practise by finding a solution to ensure that I am using the feedback from my students constructively, to improve my practise and planning.

I need a way of reviewing and sorting out the concerns related to my practise that can provide me with one or more practical solutions, and that are specific to my circumstances and my specific area of practise. There may be other practitioners who have undertaken similar research but the solution that they have found may be right for them and their organisation but not right for my students or my organisation, as improving practise is always about the context in which one works.

Action research is a practical approach and is used for supporting educationalist in improving their practise. Stenhouse (1975) said that “*curriculum research and development should belong to the teacher*” Action research can be used to

- Understand one’s own practice
- Understand how to make one’s practice better
- Understand how to accommodate outside change in one’s practice
- Understand how to change the outside in order to make one’s practice better

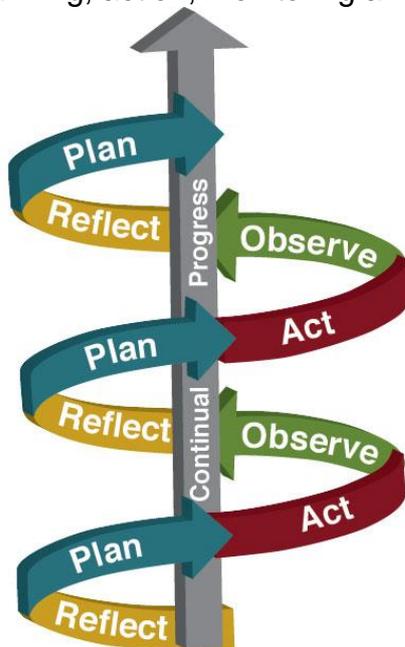
Action research can be used as another form of self-reflection as described by Kolb  
Action – reflection cycle (1984) Kolb’s Learning Cycle theory argues that we learn from our experiences of life, even on an everyday basis. It also treats reflection as an integral part of such learning. According to Kolb (1984), the process of learning follows a pattern or cycle consisting of four stages, one of which involves what Kolb refers to as 'reflective observation'.



Educationalists are drawn to action research because it is firmly located in the realm of the practitioner as it is tied to self reflection.

Action research involves the careful monitoring of planned change in practise; a decision is taken that a particular action may either submit to improvements or provide information as to the nature of the teaching situation. However, at its core the action is used as a research tool; with both elements of action and research being of equal importance in the approach.

It can be thought of in the following ways as research on action by using action as a tool for research, with the process being determined between different elements of action and the intentions between action or practise and the values behind practise. The action research cycle at its simplest level, can be seen as a spiral or cycle of planning, action, monitoring and reflection.



Carrying out action using research the spiral model offers the opportunity to visit a phenomenon at a higher level while progressing to having a greater understanding. Carrying out action research using this model, one can understand a particular issue within an educational context and making informed decisions through enhanced understanding. (Koshy, 2010).



The circular route is an ever evolving and developing, this allows for open access to the research cycle, for example the planning stage may not start at the planning stage but may start with more monitoring and observation of the existing practice before starting to plan and implement necessary changes. As the research processes it can be hard to detach one element of the process from another. Schon (1983) says that there are two types of reflection; reflection in action and reflection on action.

Reflection in action is having an experience, thinking on feet about what to do next and acting straight away, reflection on action is thinking about something that has happened, thinking about what you would do differently next time and taking your time before acting.

I have mentioned two of a number of models; however, it is important to note that that excessive reliance on any particular model, or following each stage too closely could adversely affect the unique opportunity and flexibility that is part of the action research model.

Action Research follows a pre-defined format and I will apply the Action Research model to my project in the following way.

1. **Identification of practical problem (Reflect)** – I have identified that we are not using student feedback in a way that is improving and informing the development of our training programmes. We still have a good cohort of students wanting to attend the programme, in many ways we have a “captive audience” but recruitment is done by word of mouth; it is important that we write, develop and place the work in a specific context, while seeking and implementing a solution or solutions within the relevant context. At this stage it is also important to envisage how you will if and when a solution has been found, but more importantly is it a working solution.

2. **Planning** – I will review the aims and objectives of the research and have them written down clearly to share not just with my colleagues but also for the students as there are an integral part of the research as both past and present students will benefit from the outcomes. Within the planning I will review the different research methodologies, for example should I use quantitative or qualitative research.
  
3. **Collection of Data** – all research requires the collection of data, it is important that time is spend considering the kind of data that will be needed to be collected and the best research methodologies. I decided to use two types of qualitative research methods to collect my data; at the moment I am considering using participant observation, focus groups and or semi-structured interviews.
  
4. **Analyse the data and review conclusions** - There is no single correct way for analysing qualitative data, but one important factor is that I must make sure that for the data to be effective it must be analysed systematically, particularly because the collection of the data starts from the planning process and carries through to the data collection and the final analysis which is the conclusion.

- 5. Report and act on the results** - The presentation of the information must be done in a format that is relevant and meaningful to the parties who may have requested the research, and or to the participations who have taken part in the research and who may be affected by the outcome of the research. For example for my manager I will produce a written report, for my colleagues a power point presentation and a poster presentation for my students. I will use the results to develop my curriculum planning and assessment protocols.
- 6. Reflection (Review, adapt, adjust)** - Reflection is important and must be done, this will allow me to ensure that the question that has been asked as in fact been answered, if it has not been answered in the way envisaged I must ask myself have I asked the right question, did I use the correct research methodology, have I interpreted the data correctly and do we need to do the research again, or to do need to refocus and ask a different question.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

THE EFFECTIVE USE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK IN  
CURRICULUM AND PROGRAME PLANNING

Before starting on my research I have reviewed the literature related to the effective use of student feedback in curriculum planning and development, and how student feedback is used to improve education for offenders and young offenders in particular. I have read a variety of published reports and research articles related to student feedback and how student's feedback give can be used to provide diagnostic evidence for teachers in regard to the effectiveness of their teaching, student feedback is used as information for prospective students, stakeholders and in the selection of course units, the development of new programmes and the improvement of ongoing programmes.

The literature review is broken down into different areas

- I. Changes in prison education
- II. Review of student feedback in improving teaching and learning
- III. Collection and use of data

The conclusion is the bringing together all the research information and an analysis of what I have found and how this informed my own research.

## **1. Changes in Prison Education**

Despite a great deal of interest in prison education in the last ten years offenders' voices are rarely heard; and research is limited to discussing particular topics and areas such the benefits and drawbacks of learning within a prison environment, relevance of the curriculum to their diverse needs, resources and limitations imposed by prison routines.

Since 1993 prison education has been contracted out to external providers which have included private companies and further education colleges. Particular reference was to provide education and training that will reduce offending by providing vocational qualifications and improving functional skills so that they are able to gain employment on release from prison.<sup>1</sup>

Although successive governments have thought this was a good idea and would give offenders a wider pool of training and education programmes to choose from, research undertaken by the Prison Reform Trust (2013) suggests that the opposite has occurred and that education in prison is geared totally towards vocational or academic achievement with access to art courses being reduced.

Research undertaken by Wilson and Reuss<sup>2</sup> found that prisons and educational providers within the prison saw art courses as soft options; as their concerns were in meeting government targets of gaining qualifications or skills directly applicable to employment. Prisoners had the opposite views as they saw art as a way back into education, as well as using art to develop communication skills and improving their self esteem.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal Communication from OLSU 2003

<sup>2</sup> Education stories of change and transformation, Wilson and Reuss (2000)

In 2015 the amount of education under 18 years in custody receive was increased to 30 hours per week, across all young offender institutes, Rod Clark, Chief Executive, Prisoners Trust said

***“Increasing education in custody to 30 hours per week is welcome recognition of the importance of learning in helping young people gain the skills and attitudes to work towards more positive futures. Many children and young people in custody have previously been excluded from school and up to half spent time in the care system so it is crucial that each individual is given appropriate support, tailored learning plans, a wide-ranging curriculum and stimulating teaching methods to engage effectively with learners who may be harder to reach”***

The idea is that young offenders receive near enough the same amount of education that they would receive if they were in the community and not in prison.

However, the government continues to review prison education and in 2015 Dame Sally Coates was asked to conduct a review, the government have said that they will implement the changes once the report has been published some time in 2016, it will be interesting to see if any credence has been given to what offenders say that they want rather than what the government thinks that they should have.

## **2. Review of student feedback in improving teaching and learning**

I found limited research evidence on the use of student feedback in the Further Education sector in the United Kingdom, in contrast to the wealth of research related to the teaching and learning in the primary and secondary educational sector, Research by Chapman and Sammons (2013) found that student feedback has been used regularly as part of a wider school evaluation programme as managing schools improvement.

Research by Coe et al (2014) found in their literature review that great teaching clearly identified '*student ratings*' as one of the approaches that demonstrate moderate validity in signalling effectiveness; the other two were 'classroom observations by peers, principals or external evaluators' and 'value-added' models (assessing gains in student achievement). The findings made clear that the collecting of student ratings is a good cost-effective, reliable and valid approach, which requires minimal training or financial commitments that contribute to teachers' formative assessment.

OECD's (2013) report 'What Makes Schools Successful?' advocates student feedback about teachers and emphasises its important contribution to formative processes of school evaluation. Their research found that on average across OECD countries, 59% of students attend schools where students' written feedback is combined with other forms of evaluation of teaching (i.e. internal and/or external evaluations), while only 2% of students attend schools where students' written feedback is sought but neither internal nor external evaluations are used.

Research feedback in June 2005<sup>3</sup> reviewed the use of student feedback in a number of Further Education colleagues across the UK, one strand of the research looked at improving strategic approaches, quality of teaching and the principle was the implementation and practise of student feedback on the quality of the teaching that students felt that they were getting but using online feedback; although online feedback is not something that can be considered in our context. However, what I can relate to is the use of student feedback to inform the teaching and learning specifically; while recognising that that there is limited research in this area in the UK, as it relates to further education.

Student feedback has become the most widely used research and information to evaluate and improve teaching effectiveness, however although teachers understand that the feedback is important and is used to improve our teaching in the classroom but almost no research on how this information can be used to develop, change or adapt the curriculum and not just change the way that we deliver.

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<sup>3</sup> Instant\_student\_feedback\_on\_teacher\_practices\_report.pdf

### **3. Collection of Data**

The research literature suggests that student feedback constitutes a major source of evidence for assessing teaching quality; that it can be used to inform attempts to improve teaching quality (but simply collecting such feedback is unlikely to lead to such improvements); and that student feedback can be communicated in a way that is informative for the teacher, the organisation and fellow students.

Student feedback can be obtained through formal questionnaires, surveys, casual conversations made inside or outside the classroom, question and answer sessions at the start and end of lessons, focus groups and interviews, semi structured or structured. The collection of data can be qualitative or quantitative or a mixture of both, firstly I need to identify how I want my data to be presented and to whom. The deciding factors would be that quantitative deals with numbers, with statistical techniques and objective outcomes, while qualitative deals in words, images and subjective outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Conclusion**

In reviewing the literature the focus is on collecting data for students to discuss the quality of the teaching, and how this can be improved with passing curtesy to using this information to improve curriculum design and delivery. This is extremely important for prison education so that the students can belief that they have some input and control and are active participations in a process that they are told is for their well being. I hope that with my small research study within our organisation I can give a true representation of the student's thoughts and feelings, and by presenting my findings to management that we can affect change.

# **METHODOLOGIES**

THE EFFECTIVE USE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK IN  
CURRICULUM AND PROGRAME PLANNING

### **Qualitative and Quantitative Methods**

Research can be quantitative or qualitative, the most obvious distinction between the two types are that quantitative deals with numbers and usually employs statistical techniques and objective outcomes, while qualitative deals in words, images and subjective outcomes. Quantitative is an umbrella term that covers different types of research such as questionnaires, surveys and sampling, this allows the researcher to present information in its simplest form by counting how frequently things happen and showing frequencies in table and chart form (Bryman:1988).

The methods of quantitative research share certain featured, with the core concern being to describe and account for regularities in social behaviour, rather than seeking and interpreting the meaning that people may bring to their own actions. This allows the separation of behaviour patterns into variables and explanations of these patterns represented in number form using statistical associations (Payne & Payne 2004)

Qualitative research balances the idea of statistical data with more subtle forms of evaluative measures, which are designed to provide a perspective view of a particular group or audience; it provides us with insights into the meanings that are assigned to a particular phenomenon during the collection and analysis of the data (Merriam:1998). Qualitative research is primarily concerned with process rather than concentrating on the outcomes, the research methodologies are designed to provide a perspective of a set group of people (Marshall & Rossman: 1995)

Good research depends on the selection and proper systematic application of the right methods for the task in hand, which means systematic application of the right methods for the task in hand, which means keeping each step under review, setting performance standards and at the same time continuously evaluating what is being achieved.

The third option is what is known as a mixed method approach sometimes called triangulation; this involves integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to generating new knowledge and can involve either concurrent or sequential use of these methods , by Integrating the data collection and analysis in a single study or programme of enquiry (Creswell et al: 2003). Qualitative and quantitative methods in combination may provide a better understanding of the research problem or issue than either research approach alone.

For example the use of questionnaires to collect data, this method can be useful when time is of the essence and or gathering information from a large amount of participants. The data analysis is presented in a numerate way, using some form of charts or graphs. Qualitative methods such as the use of semi-structured interviews that can be used to clarify or gather further information after the completion of the questionnaire; focus groups is another qualitative method of collecting data in a more informal atmosphere and to ask questions and acquire information from a group of participants who can share their different opinions, challenge each other but they may also present a consensus view that I as the researcher may not have considered, it is for this reason that the principles of Action Research is a good fit.

My aims to use the outcome of the research not just to improve my practise, the practise of my department and hopefully if my research report is well constructed a paradigm shift will occur within the whole educational department. It is for this reason that the principles of Action Research fit my mode of research.

Bassey (1998) describes action research ***'as an enquiry which is carried out in order to understand, to evaluate and then to change, in order to improve educational practice'*** Hopkins (2002) maintained that ***'it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform'***. The problem solving nature of action research makes this approach attractive to practitioners (Bell: 1999). The fact that action research is designed to deal with a concrete problem which can be located in an immediate situation and the results can bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather than to some future occasion (Cohen & Manion: 1994). It is for these reasons that I believe that action research will be a benefit to my research project.

### **Data Collection**

I have decided to use three different methods of data collection these are questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Questionnaires are used to collect quantitative data; and to present it in its simplest form by counting the frequency of how often a particular response occurs and presenting the frequencies in table and chart form. (Bryman: 1988). Quantitative research share certain features, with the core concern being to describe and account for regularities in social behaviour, rather than seeking and interpreting the meanings that people may bring to their own actions.

The tradition of quantitative research is that researchers are usually seeking to test prior theoretical ideas using deductive and not inductive logic and in doing so results produced can be expressed as **'laws of social behaviour'** that are generally applicable. The visibility of the processes and the potential this gives for subsequent replication of the studies with the same results being produced by other researchers is used to substantiate the case that quantitative research methods with the findings being reliable and valid and so can be locally defended (Bryman 2001)

The disadvantage of quantitative research as a way of understanding the social world is that human behaviour involves factors which cannot be controlled so there is no guarantee that if the research is undertaken again following the exact methodology and methods that the results will be the same. Quantitative research may falsely claim to be value neutral because the weakness is in the unspoken and unrecognised assumptions made and because of the ease in which data can be manipulated.

The qualitative methods that are will be using are semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The idea of qualitative research is that it tries to balance the idea of statistical data with more subtle forms of evaluative measures, which are designed to provide a perspective view of a particular view or audience; which in this instance are my students. We are provided with insights into the meanings that are assigned to a particular phenomenon, during the collection and analysis of data. (Merriam: 1999). Qualitative data is primarily concerned with process rather than concentrating on the outcomes, the use of semi structured interviews and focus groups are designed to provide me the researcher with a perspective of my students.

The methods will support me in producing detailed and non-numbered accounts of a group of students. One of my core concerns is to interpret the meanings and opinions that my students bring to their own actions, this allows for an holistic social process to take place within context rather than as opinions and actions that can be extracted and studied in isolation. (Silverman: 1993)

The advantage of using qualitative methods is that detailed information can be generated which will give an insight into the process; there is no prior social order or social structure that is external to the lived experiences of the actions that pre-determine outcomes. The disadvantage of qualitative research is in the process of data collection and its analysis, the collection of data can be time consuming and labour intensive and the patterns of the research are slow to emerge. At the same time what is true in one context may not be true for another, so it is important that data may need to be generated in a variety of contexts may not be true in another, that is why it is important that different methods of data collection may need to be generated in a variety of contexts, which takes time and effort. (Tucker et al:1995)

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical practice is not an addition to social research but is at the heart of it. Ethics provides the basis which can legitimatise the whole research process. The decision to undertake social research is based on an ethical judgement that the research undertaken is worthwhile especially when research affects the working of an organisation which may have access to public funds. (*Bryman: 2001*).

Following strict guidelines on ethical issues is of particular importance for action researchers who undertake small scale research projects such as the ones that is currently being undertaken. It is important that care is taken when collecting,

analysing and disseminating of findings. In the prison context it is important that this is adhered to so that the participants feel comfortable to be open and honest and not be aware that any negative input will be shared with the prison authorities; where the offenders may feel that they are being victimised for having certain thoughts and feelings, and that no identifying features are included which will allow identification of the participants.

The British Sociological Association (BSA) statement of ethical practice states

***‘the advancement of knowledge does not of itself provide an entitlement to over ride the rights of others.....sociologists have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well being of research participants are not adversely affected by the research. They should strive to project the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy (BSA:2002:2).***

Research ethics involves three key elements

- Informed Consent: it is the responsibility of the researcher to explain as fully as possible and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken and how it is to be promoted
- Identities should be protected – this is done by making them anonymous in published reports. This means more than just changing names but moving settings and events. At the same time reassuring the participants that all their details will be confidential.
- The third element brings together the other two and is that no harm is done to participants. (Payne & Payne: 2004).

With a considerable amount of research being conducted with children and young people, a unique set of additional responsibilities **Doyle (2000)** says that

***“The welfare of the children and young people themselves is the overriding consideration – they must not be disturbed or harmed by the experience of being interviewed”***

The challenge with the young offender prison estate is that the students are aged 16 and 17 years of age; if my research was taking place outside of the prison establishment we were gain permission from the parents but in this instance we gain permission from the governor of the establishment to undertake the research as well as explaining both verbally and in writing to the students the reasons for my research and why it is important that they participate. But I have to be careful that students do not feel pressurised to take part and that the decision is made without any undue pressure from myself, the education manager or any other staff member.

My research is small scale and confined to the education department within the one establishment and is related to improving services within this one establishment so permission does not have to be sort from the outside of the prison with the final say being made by the governor in partnership with the senior management team.

## **Timescales**

- Recruitment of participants, must have a maximum of fifty students or a minimum of thirty students (2 Weeks)
- Handing out of questionnaires to students for completion, (1 week)
- Analysis data and use information to conduct semi-structured interviews (2 days)
- Conduct semi structured interview with at least a quarter of the students who has completed and handed back questionnaire (1 week)
- Analysis data and use information for questions as part of focus groups x 2 depending on numbers and information from semi-structured interviews (3 days)
- Focus group to take place 2 days after semi structured interviews have been completed.
- Analysis of all data (1 week)
- Written and poster presentation completed with outcomes

## **Record and Monitor**

- Information on questionnaire to be transferred to excel sheet and then presented in a chart or diagram form.
- Use information to develop questions for semi-structured interviews.
- Interview students and record in note form, use information to develop three main questions and transfer to flip chart paper for focus group discussion
- Focus group with two different sets of students



- To start focus group discussion I will produce posters with three questions, the visual display to start the discussion and to share their experiences of the delivery and feedback and the changes they would like see for the future.
- Information to be collecting data in this way allows me the freedom to ask questions and to support questions to guide directions of the discussion.
- Report written for management team and colleagues and poster presentation for students

# DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

THE EFFECTIVE USE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK IN  
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Prior to the start of the research I had to re-think and re-evaluate the use of questions as a method of data collection. As I started to draft the questions I realised that this method may eliminate some of the students who may wish to take part in the research; due to their lack of reading skills, low level reading skills and ESOL students. In the end I decided in the interest of fairness that I would not use questionnaires but use participant observation, semi-structure interviews and focus groups.

Participant observation research can be conducted in two ways 'openly or covertly'. Covert participation means that the researcher becomes part of the group and interacts with members and are part of the action. Open participation means that the students are aware that they are being observed. In both methods the researcher observes what is happening, they listen to what is being said and they may question the students over the time of the observation. **(Knight: 2002)** For my research the decision was made to use participant observation in an overt rather than a covert way. All of the students are aware that they are part of a research project and thereby having a clear understanding of my role as a researcher and group member.

### **Participation Observation**

There were five different groups of students, with a minimum of ten students per group. The groups were already set and were made up of the classrooms groups that the students were normally in. In using this method I had to ensure that I participated in the discussion but not lead, as I had to be mindful that my role was to observe the discussion, make notes in as much detail as possible and highlight any reoccurring themes to guide the semi-structured interviews and focus groups.



*This is a library picture and not a picture of my*

*research group.*

**From the discussion the following themes were identified in each group**

<b>GROUP A</b> <b>Participants</b>	<b>GROUP B</b> <b>Participants</b>	<b>GROUP C</b> <b>Participants</b>	<b>GROUP D</b> <b>Participants</b>	<b>GROUP E</b> <b>Participants</b>
<p>Too much paper work.</p> <p>Repeat of course work for different units (Repetitive)</p> <p>Feedback given at end of each unit but nothing changes for the rest of the course</p> <p>Do not feel listened to</p> <p>Too hard</p>	<p>Not felt listened to</p> <p>Too much paper work</p> <p>Not enough time to complete work</p> <p>Not sure why asked about changes to course did not feel it was in there power</p>	<p>Too much paper work</p> <p>Not sure why feedback asked for, they have no control over course content or changes</p> <p>Some parts boring, too simple</p>	<p>Did not want to give feedback, felt it was a waste of time</p> <p>Powerless to make changes</p> <p>When feedback given did not see any changes to balance of course or other course*</p>	<p>Powerless to make changes</p> <p>Boring</p> <p>Hard work</p> <p>Too demanding</p> <p>Repetitive</p>

\*Previously in custody

## **Semi-Structured Interview**

I used the recurring themes identified to develop interview questions. I used a sample of 50% (30) of the students who had taken part in the participate observation to be interviewed and then I was able to interview another fifty students over a two week period who had not taken part in the first stage. This allowed helped me to access a wider pool of students than what I would normally have access to. By using semi-structured interviews I could gauge if the themes identified by my original students were ones shared by other students.

## **Semi- structured Interview Questions**

### **Course Delivery**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
<b>Were the programme aims and objectives explained to you in a way that you understood what was expected of you</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Did you think the course was well taught</b>	1	2	3	4	5

***Do you have any comments?***

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Did the course meet your expectations	1	2	3	4	5
Was the course too long or too short	1	2	3	4	5
Were the resources useful and helpful in supporting you in your learning	1	2	3	4	5
Were you asked for your comments about the course and its contents	1	2	3	4	5
Did you think that your comments were listened to	1	2	3	4	5
Would you like to have more input into the programmes that you are offered	1	2	3	4	5

*Any other comments*

### **Focus Groups**

In different circumstances it is the researcher who chooses the participants, but in this instance the participants had been pre-chosen, by the education governor I had no control over the young men who made up the two focus groups. The most common way of collecting data from focus groups is by using visual or audio recording and by using two researchers one to ask questions of the participants, and the other one to be the eyes and ears by noting not just what is said but of the silences, which is an important part of the gathering of information; unfortunately due

to the educational governor deciding not to give me the time needed I was unable to have a 2<sup>nd</sup> person present.

To start the discussion process I produced a poster with three questions for the students to answer either verbally or by writing comments and examples and to share their experiences. Each group 'piggy backed' on the comments of each other and this added a dimension to the dialogue that would not have been achieved by using one to one interviews. In collecting data in this way it allowed me the freedom to ask questions and to ask support questions to support and guide the direction of the discussion.

Were you asked for your comments about the unit and its contents?



Did you think that your comments were listened to?



Would you like to have more input into making changes?



**IT'S TIME!**

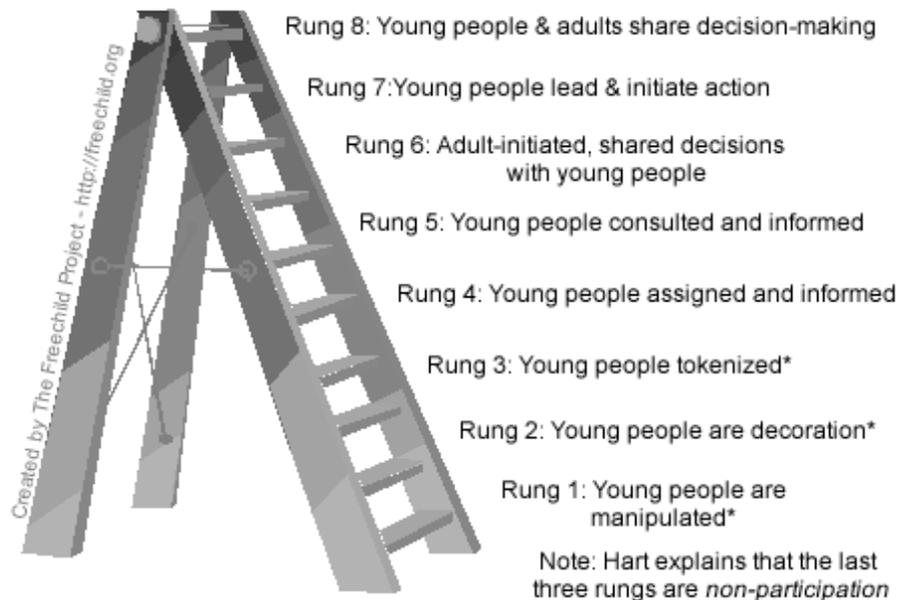
## **Data Analysis**

The overall feeling from the students was that they wanted to have more input into their programmes but they felt that in reality asking them to comment about the quality of the teaching and to recommend changes was really about paying lip service to process and that it was a futile exercise to engage in a process of evaluation.

The suspicion by the student which I believe is correct is that their views were not and are not taken seriously and that asking them to participate in the evaluative process was seen by the organisation as a tick box exercise rather than truly being rooted within the structure of prison education. Participation in the decision making process is a multi-layer concept and as educators within a complex environment such as a prison we need to understand the complexities, and if participation is to be a positive experience then it must be meaningful rather than token participation.

Power is a key concept when looking at young people's involvement in decision making and the image often employed of youth participation is of a ladder with the bottom rung representing the most limited form of consultation, where the views expressed may not be given much weight (tokenism) to the top rung which gives full control of the decision making process from initiation to outcomes as represented by rungs four to eight of Roger Harts ladder of participation.

## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

# RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

## THE EFFECTIVE USE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK IN CURRICULUM AND PROGRAME PLANNING

### **Results and Conclusions**

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This was a small scale research project conducted in one young offender's prison and therefore my results can only give credence to the prison that I have worked in. A reoccurring and consist theme that has emerged from my research is that, students do not currently believe that any feedback that they give is seen as valid by either the teacher or the organisation; this is in particular reference as it pertains to course content rather than teacher delivery.

This fits in with both formal and informal feedback that we received during the previous terms; students went onto say that they did not see any evidence from their feedback that their opinions are given much weight and that much of the time they are used as part of an organisational exercise; their views and opinions having no value and not used to improve the structure and system for the students who come onto courses after them.

Although we are charged with ensuring that we gain feedback from our students, this is so that they can feel as if they are part of a process and active members in the evaluative cycle, rather than feedback as part of a token package. There is no written policy related to the evaluative process being more about participation rather than opinion sharing, and no consensus between the prison regime and the education department and teaching body of how to use the feedback that we get from students.

We seem to be treating evaluation as a tick box exercise rather than a way to review if we are truly meeting the needs of the most important stakeholders; which are the students rather than just meeting the needs of the organisation and the awarding bodies. Reflecting on the outcomes and the feedback that I would be giving to the various stakeholders, it was important to make clear that we needed to be mindful of the student's wishes and feelings; while trying to find ways to use the feedback to make some changes if appropriate.

I realised that one of the ways forward was to review how we could make small changes to accommodate and meet student expectations, within our classrooms first by referring to and adapting Roger Hart's Ladder rungs five to eight (page: 38), if we were able to address students concerns about tokenism; we already undertake rung five which involves consulting and informing by requesting student feedback. Rung six involves a process of activating shared initiation and decision making with the students; rung seven involves allowing the young people to take the lead and initiate actions and finally rung eight the students and adults share the decision making.

If we are able to adapt these process relative to the reality of what can and cannot be changed, but adapted and presentation of this model to the students, explaining what the limitations are this may help us as teachers and at the same time show the students that we are taking their concerns seriously and trying to find solutions to incorporate their wishes and feelings.

### **Areas for further research**

Due to the limited nature of this research project, I would like to work in partnership with colleagues in other young offender units to ascertain, if my results relate just to our students or if this is a common pattern of thought across the board; particularly as the feedback from the different focus groups in my research have a common thread of words such as *“repetitive, too hard, powerless, too demanding, hard work”*.

I would also like to repeat my research within the same unit but with different students, to find out if this is the feeling across the board or if it was just my cohort of students, at the current time and place.

If I was able to use the results of my current small scale research I would like to know if my changes have made any impact on the student’s perspective of how we have effectively used their feedback. It would be interesting to carry out the research in other educational sectors such as sixth form colleges to ascertain how they use student feedback, and if they use it to adapt their curriculum to meet student needs.

### **Key areas for knowledge improvement**

Undertaking my research project has allowed me to consider in a constructive way students views not just on delivery of our programmes, but on the way that the curriculum is delivered; and if it is delivered in a way that meets the needs of our students. More importantly can I adapt and adjust the curriculum to the changing and ongoing needs of my students.

I have found that my weakness is not on the collection of data but on the analysis of the data collected and a greater understanding of research methodologies. I will be undertaking further reading around data analysis and the best way to present the information in different ways that is adaptable and understandable, for example using more charts to have a visible display of data information.

I would like to learn more about qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, this will allow me to ensure that when designing my research I can be clear that the methods chosen are suitable and appropriate to get the information that is needed; to test my hypothesis.

### **Skills for Improvement**

I want to improve my organisation of time as I found it challenging to organise all the different aspects of my research within my normal work caseload. The challenge was to complete all my student assessments, and classroom delivery and the marking of students work.

I believe that this would have helped me with the structuring of my written work as I do not believe that I had left myself enough time to do justice to the writing up of my project research. I would use a Gantt chart to develop a visual work schedule; the schedule would include not just my research schedule but a total work schedule so that I have a good overview of timescales, but it would also help me to discuss my timetable with my manager and team possibility allowing for adaptation and support.

### **Plans for improvement**

I knew straight away that my topic area was an area of interest not just for me, but for our team and organisation as a whole. In discussing my topic area with my manager it became clear that this was an area that other staff members in our team had a keen interest in using student feedback in a more constructive way. In undertaking my literature review I found limited research on this topic area and I would like to do a bigger piece of research with other colleagues who also have an interest in how student feedback is used.

I am having ongoing discussions with the staff team not just in my establishment but in others across the prison estate to find out if this research can be done, with my colleagues suggesting that I take the lead. However, I would have to do a lot more reading around action research and maybe undertake other small research projects before moving this idea forward while continuing to develop my research skills and to improve my personal confidence levels.



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