

Title: **On-line Collaborative Support Offered To Associate Lecturers Involved in a Programme of Action Research/Action Learning and the Ethical Implications Raised**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Recognise strategies for using on-line communication tools to support a group of associate lecturers engaging in action research and action learning.

Identify the differences in facilitating action learning using video conferencing and how it is similar to, and different from action learning in face-to-face contexts.

Recognise the changing nature of human interaction using online tools for learning.

Identify key ethical issues relating to the ownership of ideas and postings in collaborative online spaces in relation to offline ethical guidelines that ignore 'questions of authorship and collaboration' Rose (2007).

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Action research has a long tradition in higher education of supporting professional development through 'self-reflective enquiry' in areas of practice that are either problematic or troublesome (Kemmis, 2007). As a method, action research involves a number of distinct stages involved in a reflective cycle including 'planning', 'acting', 'observing' and 'reflecting' (Lewin, 1944, cited in Kemmis, 2007). Uniquely, action research permits the practitioner to embrace and critically evaluate their practices, situated in specific learning contexts, while recognising and accepting that these are underpinned by 'habits', 'customs' and 'precedents' (*ibid*). A recent programme of action research involved eight Open University Associate Lecturers (ALs) in investigating their practices related to correspondence tuition. On-line support was offered to encourage collaborative support among the AL group. As Powell (2001) notes, on-line forums bring 'a new richness' to collaborative support because of the opportunity for more lengthy reflection which can lead to deeper and more probing questions about ideas.

The ethical implications of collaborative work for teaching and learning are less well defined than technical uses and applications. The changing nature of human interaction using online tools for learning such as conferences, wikis, blogs FlashMeeting, Elluminate etc will be reflected upon with

particular reference to a number of key ethical issues. Offline ethical guidelines focus on 'individual property rights' that ignore 'questions of authorship and collaboration' Rose (2007) posed by the potential uses and sharing of ideas and postings in collaborative online spaces. These can be 'multiauthored, multilinked, exchangeable material' (Latchaw and Galin, 1998 cited in Rose, 2007). Issues of eliciting informed consent, negotiation, assessing public / private boundaries, the security of data transmissions (BSA, 2002) are also pose new ethical challenges.

This session will consider the key outcomes from the Open University project and identify the strengths and limitations of offering collaborative support in a range of on-line forums, including asynchronous conferencing, video-conferencing and through a project wiki.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

15 minutes – Overview of the Open University Project engaging ALs in on-line action learning, including the ethical issues this type of collaborative support raised, and questions

15 minutes – small group discussions:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of offering on-line collaborative support for colleagues engaged in a programme of action research?

15 minutes – feedback and large group discussion

References

British Sociological Association (2002) Statement of Ethical Practice, Bailey Suite, Palatine House, Belmont Business Park, Belmont, Durham, DH1 1TW (www.britsoc.co.uk accessed on 21.10.08)

Kemmis, S (2007) Action research, in Hammersley, M (ed) *Educational Research and Evidence-based Practice*, London, Sage

Powell, J (2001) *Using learning styles and action learning, over the internet, to drive learning for innovation in small and medium enterprises- a case study from construction*, (accessed: http://www.portlandpress.com/pp/books/online/vu/pdf/vu_ch8.pdf on 01.12.06)

Rose, J.M. (2007) When human subjects become cybersubjects: A call for collaborative consent, *Computers and Composition* 01/01/2007.Vol.24,Iss.4;p.462, Source: ScienceDirect Journals www.sciencedirect.com/science accessed on 16.10.08