

Evaluation Café

A review of literature concerning World Café methodology used as an evaluative tool in education

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1, Introduction

The evaluation of teaching and learning can facilitate and develop education. Reflection upon processes and experiences can help conceptualise issues and further develop future action (Kolb, 1984). However, there is little literature concerning the evaluation of teaching and learning with a focus on relationship building and collective learning in addressing critical questions facing students and educators in a dialogical or dialectic format (Fouche and Light, 2010). Therefore, this study aimed to explore a participatory action research method process of both inquiry and action (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001). In order to do this, exploration of literature which used World Café methodology as a method of successfully engaging students in the evaluation process was conducted.

2, Background

The World Café is a participatory research method, first outlined by Brown and Isaacs in 2005 which is becoming increasingly popular. As a method, World Café can enable participants to 'take turns' to be heard and to voice their thoughts and concerns as part of a process to advocate for action and change (Brown and Isaacs, 2005). Those who participate in World Café are enabled to identify issues that relate to specific questions. The depth and contextual-specific nature of feedback is considered a particular strength in utilising this particular approach.

3, Research Method

Searches of key databases found little published on World Café as an evaluation tool in education. Therefore, the search strategy for this literature review was enhanced by adopting the principles of a systematic review.

Nine databases were searched using terms such as evaluation, World Café, students and education. In addition to the databases, searches were made of relevant websites and bibliographies.

Although a review of literature on World Café as an evaluation tool for learning and teaching in education yielded 0 papers, Brown and Isaacs (2005) publication and Weitzenegger (2010) paper were identified as key texts. While some articles that focused on World Café as a research method have described lessons learned from the World Café process (Prewitt, 2011), more structured assessment of the method as a tool for educational evaluation, in different contexts, is warranted.

This study was desk based in nature. It comprised of a literature review which did not require ethical approval. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Staffordshire University.

4, Findings

The name 'world café' is used to invoke the metaphor of the world being a café – a place to discuss challenging topics where it is safe to voice your opinion and listen to others (Necochea and Cline, 2008). This is a very unifying experience for participants (Nunez, Robertson-James, Reels, Weingartner and Bungy, 2012), which can help challenge previously held assumptions (Prewitt, 2011; Brown, Homer and Isaacs, 2009). Brown and Isaacs (2005) point out that the interconnectedness of the world café process are essential for successful implementation and meaningful dialogue and change to occur. It is also noted (Brown and Isaacs, 2005; Slater, 2003) that forging connections between people and their thoughts, contributes not only to dialogue that enables students and educators to be heard, but can also have an impact on planning new outcomes towards common goals.

Weitzenegger (2010) who seeks stakeholders' views on success and impact on planning activities, applies Brown and Isaacs (2005) World Café principles to what he calls Evaluation Café.

Café Principles

Table 1. Dialog principles 'the world café'.

Important café principles for hosting conversations that matter	
(P1)	Set the context.
(P2)	Create a hospitable space.
(P3)	Explore questions that matter.
(P4)	Encourage everyone's contribution.
(P5)	Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives.
(P6)	Listen together for pattern, insight, and deeper questions.
(P7)	Harvest and share collective discoveries.

Source: Brown & Isaacs (2005).

Context and a hospitable space

Brown and Isaacs (2005) identify three components to an appropriate context; participants, purpose and parameters. They further add that these components form '... an essential part of bringing coherence without control to the conversational experience' (p. 49).

Adding to the context is the importance of creating a welcoming and informal space for large group dialogue and learning:

'there is something about the physical and social environment of a café that evokes more authentic conversations, even across cultures-conversations that are more creative, playful, curious, intimate, and honest than those in most formal business meetings...' (Brown and Isaacs (2005, p. 66).

7, References

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Café Questions

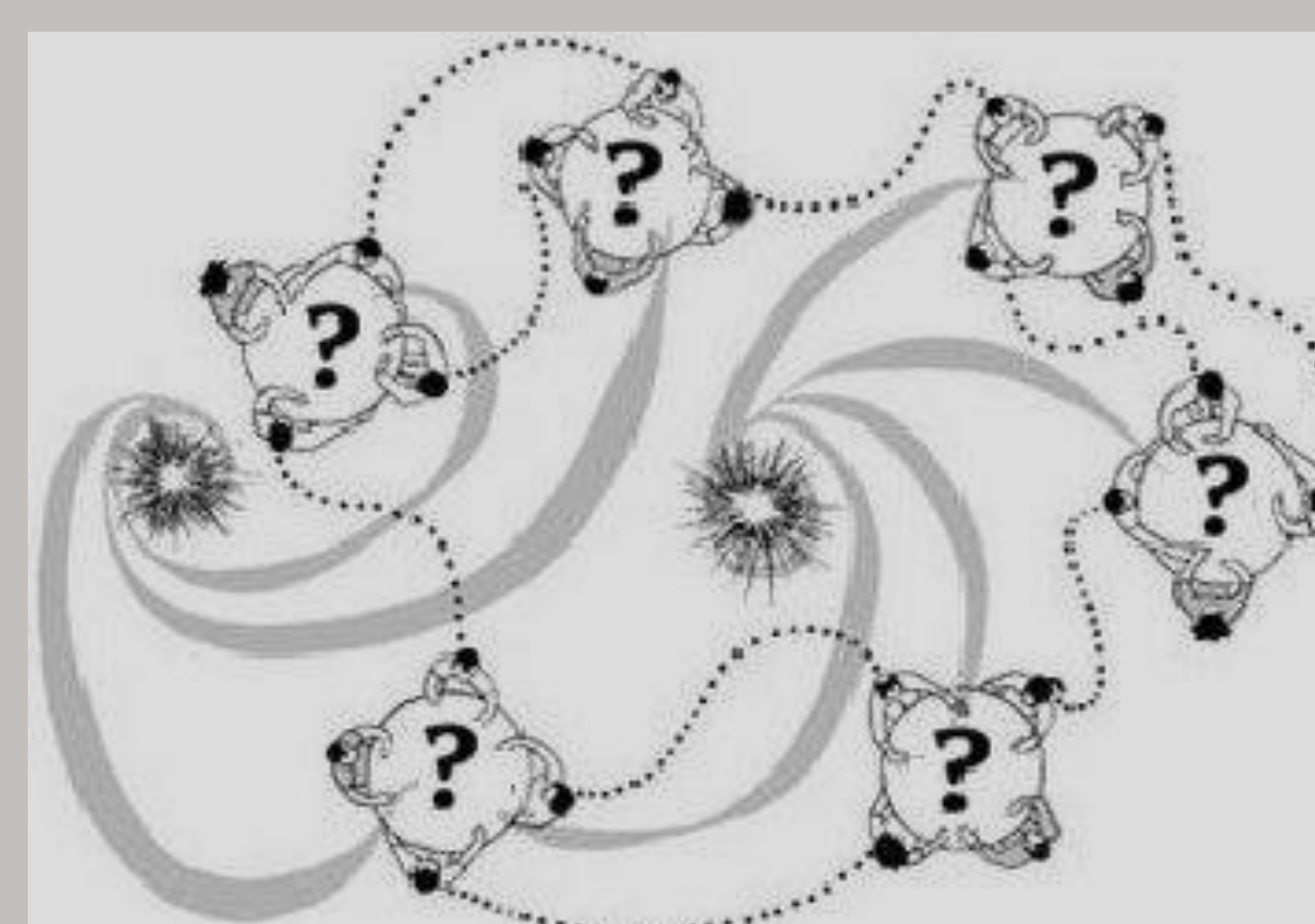
Brown and Isaacs (2005) advocate the importance of forming questions which count, using provocative narratives to explore new ideas. For example, asking one question and seeing where it goes. Weitzenegger (2010) further suggests open questions that relate to the evaluation criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and sustainability need to be explored. In this case it is suggested that different questions are addressed by each group of participants at the same Café event.

Everyone contributes

Brown and Isaacs (2005) suggest there should be three rounds of twenty minutes where delegates explored the same question. One participant becomes the table host and remains at the table throughout to share what was discussed by the previous group.

This process gives participants an opportunity to share and express their views with the wider Café group their insights into the smaller table discussions.

Each table move means participants are with a new group of people. This means that each round should enable a deeper explorations of the questions and raise new questions.



Source: Brown & Isaacs (2005)

Sharing collective discoveries

Brown and Isaacs (2005) suggest table hosts feedback the results from each table to the wider Café group at the end of the three table rounds. This provides an opportunity for debate and further deepen understanding amongst all participants. A sharing of issues experienced by all participants further aids development and furthers knowledge.

5, Discussion

It is essential that both teaching and learning are evaluated in order to further develop education. The student voice needs to be heard in evaluating teaching and in formative assessment. Using the principles of participatory research which advocates action based coproduced investigation, means a more informed and equal approach to the development of education. This approach can foster ownership of learning amongst students and staff and provide a positive element to the student experience.

Work Café methodology has provided important insights into how previously unheard voices are illuminated and how collectively people crossed boundaries of culture, role and organisation within different contexts. For example, students can interact with different people (other students, educators, doctors, professors, administrators, managers, employers etc) while moving from table to table during the discussion process.

Using the principles outlined by Brown and Isaacs (2005) and using evaluation criteria to determined the nature of the question or questions needed to produce an informed evaluation inquiry (Weitzenegger, 2010) can provide a platform to hear the student voice.

Students play a crucial role in signposting, brokering and providing appropriate, values based solutions to their learning.

Modest additional resourcing of the Evaluation Café would have a meaningful impact on the student experience. This may then have an impact on individual grades and students feedback on their experiences at the University.

6, Recommendation

There is limited literature on the principles of the World Café methodology being used as an evaluative tool in teaching and learning. To further add to the dearth of literature, this literature review study provides a starting point for new empirical research.

An examination of World Café as a method for evaluating teaching needs to be conducted. Consenting students and teaching staff need to conduct Evaluation Cafés that are based on the World Café process. Each Café question needs to focus on the evaluation of the taught sessions.

A second study needs to assess the World Café as a method to evaluate learning. As a formative learning tool, consenting students and teaching staff will appraise learning through World Café events.

Both studies will analyse findings and make recommendations based on best practice for the World Café method to be used in the evaluation of teaching and learning.

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