

# Key issues in working with service users as co- researchers

Prof. Shulamit Ramon and Dr. Carolyn Gutman

[s.ramon@Herts.ac.uk](mailto:s.ramon@Herts.ac.uk)



# What's in the name?

- Service users involvement
- People who use social care services
- Consultants
- Engagement in research of people without training in research
- Lived experience
- Co-production



# Background to our comparative research

- Aims:
- comparing the views of students about users involvement in their social work degree training
- Engaging older people as co-researchers in Israel and the UK
- History of the two countries re involving service users in training and in research
- Develop tools which would enable comparison
- Training and supporting co-researchers
- Funding: British Council



# The challenge of comparative tools

- Looking for tools that are:
- Easy to work with
- Fun to work with
- Relevant to social work education
- Valid in the context of the two countries
- Our solutions:
- Case studies analysis
- Concept Map

## ➤ A.Vignettes

Vignettes, or case studies, are used frequently in social work and other helping professions as a way of illustrating complex issues in everyday practice.

They are also used in social science research as a tool that enables participants to express their views on complex issues.

Hence their choice as a comparative tool in this study.

While the questions asked of students were the same in the two countries, the case studies were not, because each country focused on somewhat different areas of social work, and because in Tel Hai only two courses enabled service users involvement in the teaching.

Each case study outlined a situation in which a client is asking to be involved in a user-led training option as part of their near future recovery journey.

- the vignette asks the students to: a.illustrate how they would integrate this knowledge in their practice.
- b.specify how they would apply the values, skills and knowledge they already mentioned in the concept map, and how they understand that the context impacts on a specific case.
- The vignette also explores how the student reacts to a concrete situation.



► Concept Maps (mind maps)

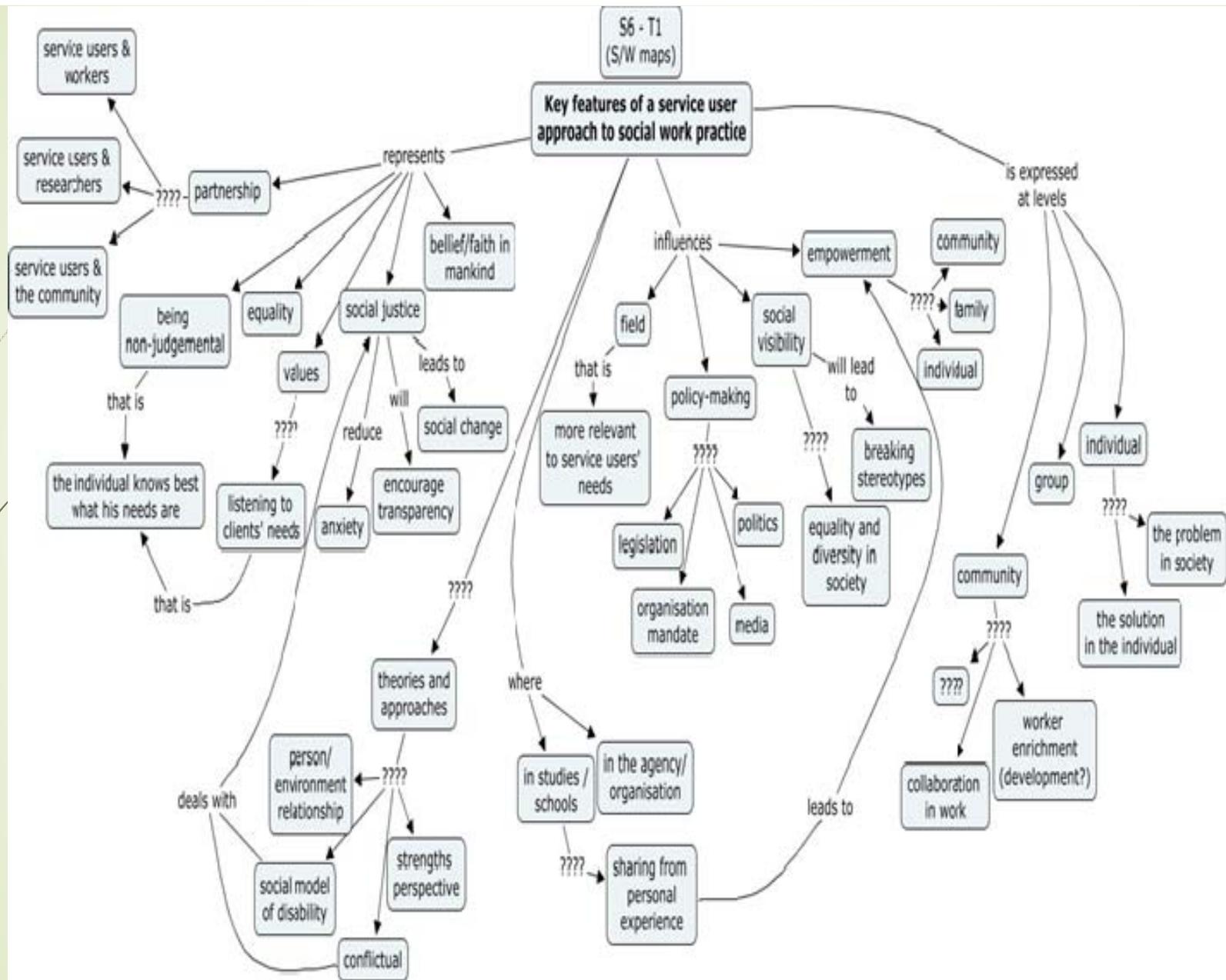
These are used frequently as a visual aid to planning or summarising an area of knowledge and/or action. They are easy to do, take about 15-20 minutes to outline a complex concept map, and many people enjoy doing them.

Because of the visual aspect they can be easily used across cultures.

We instructed students to draw a concept map on user involvement in terms of all possible dimensions they consider relevant.

We judged the value of the maps by the degree of complexity of both including most relevant dimensions as well as the connections between them.

The co-researchers in each country participated in analysing the concept maps.





# Samples and factors influencing samples size

- ▶ Third year students at both institutions, and some MA students at Anglia Ruskin University
- ▶ ARU: 28 (20.5%) from the whole cohort
- ▶ Tel Hai: 43 (70%) from the two electives which had service users involvement in training
- ▶ More students responding at the follow up phase



# The co-researchers

- Age: 68 to 96
- Occupational background: agricultural work, dentist, physiotherapists, social workers, teachers.
- Middle class
- Kibbutz vs. town
- While using health and social care services, did not wish to be defined as service users, but as either consultants or activists.
- The Why Not co-operative
- Research knowledge
- Attitudes to undertaking research tasks (interviewing (only Tel Hai) analysis of both vignettes and concepts maps



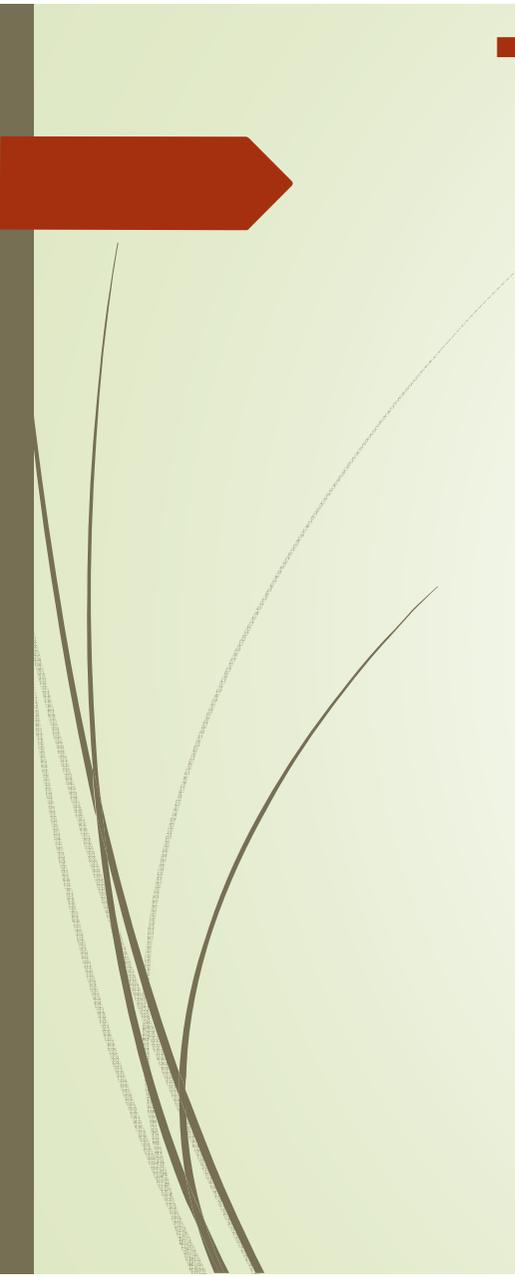
# Key findings

- ▶ On the whole students in both institutions welcomed service users involvement in their training.
- ▶ This was more so in Tel Hai than in Anglia Ruskin, in terms of degree of satisfaction from this involvement, as well as in terms of the numbers of students opting to participate in the study.
- ▶ This applies to findings in both the concept maps and the vignettes
- ▶ UK students tended to opt for questioning users involvement in terms of likely negative risk that could be associated with their involvement, highlighting the pre-occupation in the UK culture with preventing negative risk and in not considering taking positive risk as a worthwhile aim.
- ▶ Some of the MA students at Anglia Ruskin perceived user involvement to be a neoliberal policy step.



# Reservations

- ▶ Doubts have been raised as to the value of the experiential knowledge which service users contribute, due to its subjective and intersubjective stance vis a vis the assumed need for “objectivity” in research.
- ▶ Most qualitative, interpretative, research has also been similarly doubted , and several responses to it have emerged.
- ▶ Doubts have also been expressed as to whether co-researchers – i.e. service users who are not qualified researchers – can work up to the rigour required of good research



▶ The value of user involvement in participative research to students and practitioners in health and social care

- ▶ Activating students;
- ▶ Enabling them to appreciate research through doing it;
- ▶ A contribution to the organisations in the community;
- ▶ A bridge between practitioners, clients and researchers;
- ▶ Students and lecturers; the university and the community;
- ▶ An integral ingredient in any inquiry-action-learning sequence;
- ▶ Demystifying research;
- ▶ Energising demoralised practitioners;
- ▶ Enables ownership which can be carried out to implementation of findings into practice