



Designing Mahi Tahī Action Learning with Tertiary Students with Hidden Disabilities in Aotearoa New Zealand

A participatory action research study



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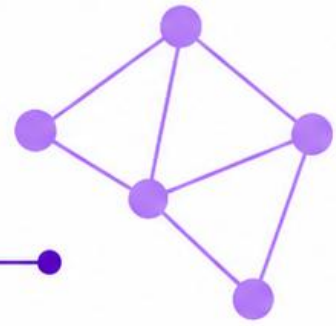


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Why this study?



WHAT I NOTICED

Students frequently disclosed difficulties not readily visible to others.



THE TENSION

Available support did not always translate into accessible, timely, or safe support.



THE QUESTION

How might students help shape more responsive support?

Activity 1: What makes participation harder?

Everyone has different experiences of sharing in groups, online spaces, or professional settings.



Think about your experiences. You do not need to share personal details.

1. WHAT MAKES IT HARDER?

What situations, attitudes, practices or environments make it difficult for people to participate or contribute honestly?



2. WHAT HELPS?

What approaches, conditions or support make it easier for people to feel able to participate or speak up?



3. ONE SMALL CHANGE

What is one small change that could make participation more accessible, safe and respectful?

Frameworks guiding the study



Social Model of Disability

Locates barriers in environments, systems and practices—not within the individual.



Guides attention towards what needs to change.

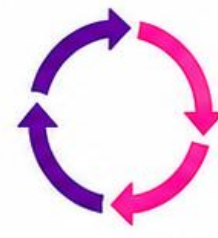


Mahi tahi

Participants and the researcher work together, sharing experiences, knowledge and decisions.



Positions participants as contributors to knowledge and change.



PAR

Learning develops through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection.



PLAN



ACT



OBSERVE



REFLECT



RE-PLAN



Moves collaborative learning towards action.



Together, these frameworks support participant-led learning, collective reflection and practical change.



Mahi tahi

Working together toward a shared purpose

In this study, *mahi tahi* means:



Participants' lived experience



Shared identification of barriers



Collective reflection and possible strategies



Action and recommendations for change



Participants are *contributors* to knowledge and solutions—not only sources of data.



Mahi tahi is enacted through participatory action research.



Plan together



Act



Observe



Reflect together

Sampling and participants

Participants and sampling



8–15 tertiary students in Aotearoa New Zealand
Undergraduate and postgraduate



A hidden disability present for six months or longer.



Formally diagnosed or self-identified.



Exclusion

Students currently or previously taught by the principal researcher are excluded.



Sampling

Purposive sampling.

Recruitment and consent



Online advertisements

Shared through neurodiversity, ADHD and hidden-disability networks.



Scan QR code



Participant Information Sheet



Microsoft Forms consent



Participant email address



Email addresses used for

- Commencement date
- Padlet link and instructions
- Study findings



Data collection

Anonymous online questionnaire and Asynchronous Padlet discussion



Anonymous online questionnaire (Qualtrics)

Baseline

- Experiences
- Barriers
- Support
- Disclosure

Mid-study

- Reflections and changes following Cycle 1

Final

- Outcomes
- Feedback
- Recommendations

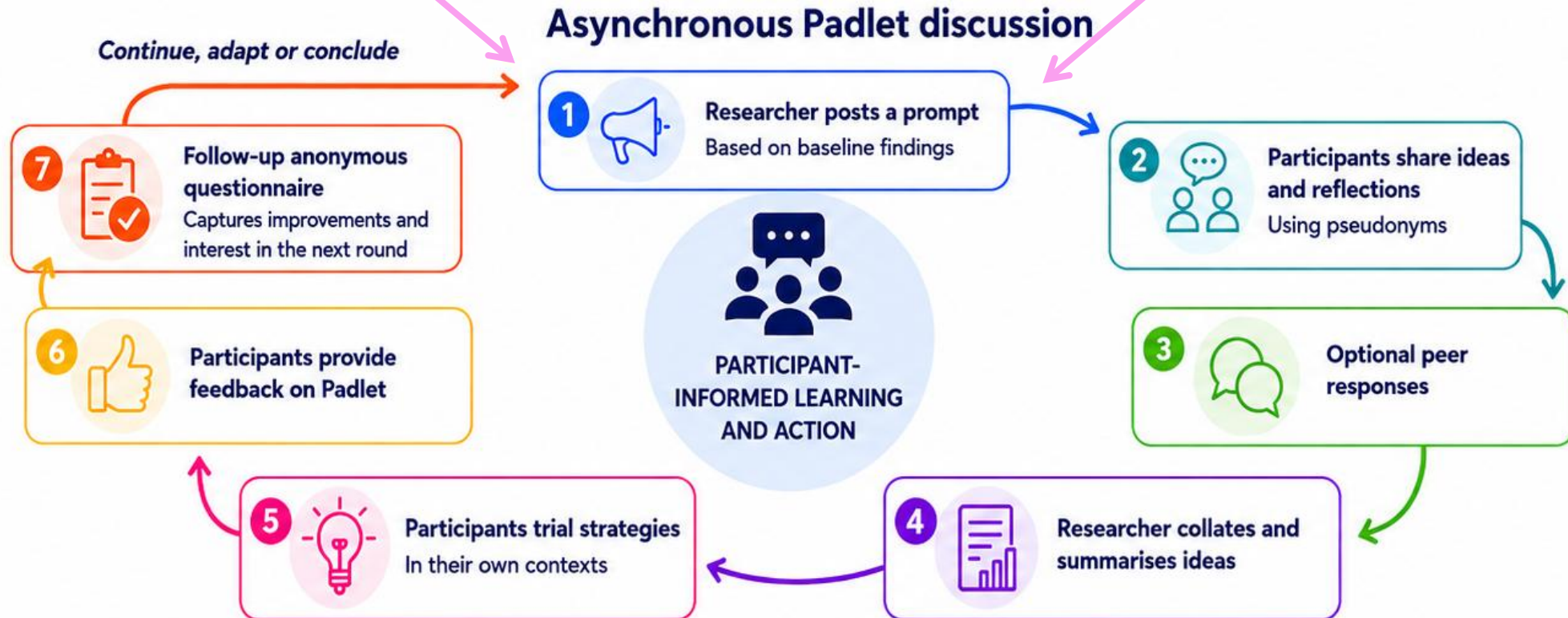
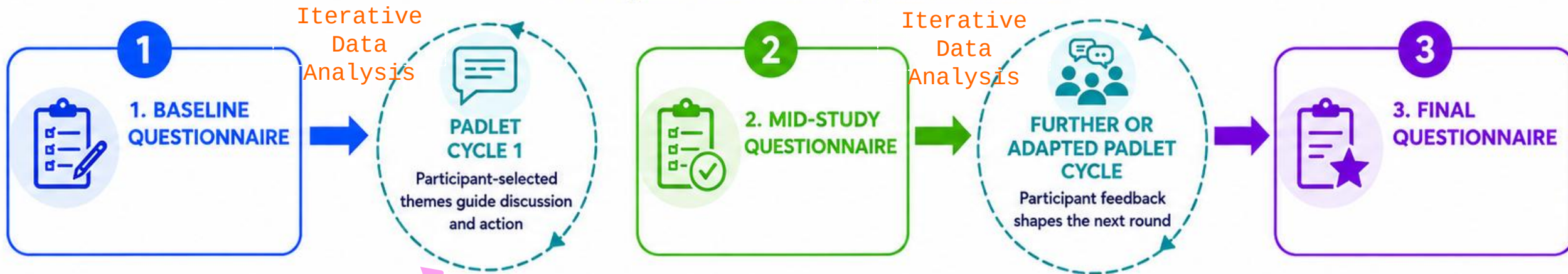
5–10 minutes each



Asynchronous Padlet discussions

- Participant-informed discussion, reflection and action between questionnaires
- Time dependent on each participant

Anonymous online questionnaire

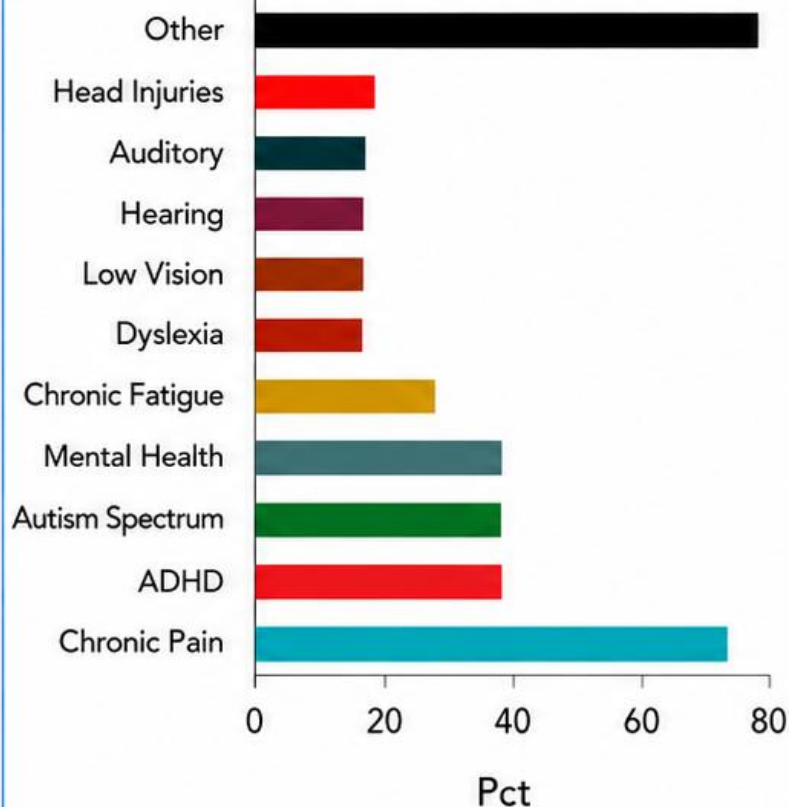


Baseline questionnaire summary

The baseline questionnaire captured participant background, experiences, challenges, and suggestions for inclusive tertiary learning.

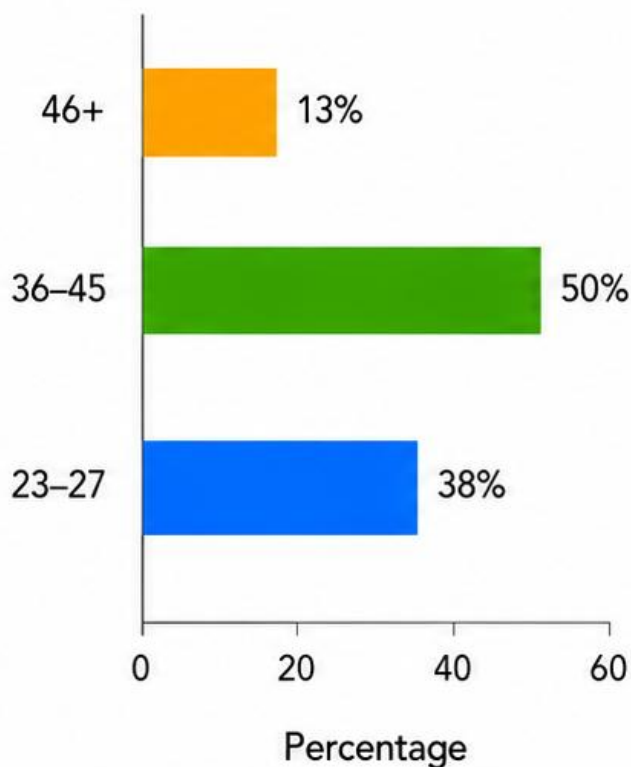
1. What hidden disability do you identify with?

Hidden Disabilities Pct



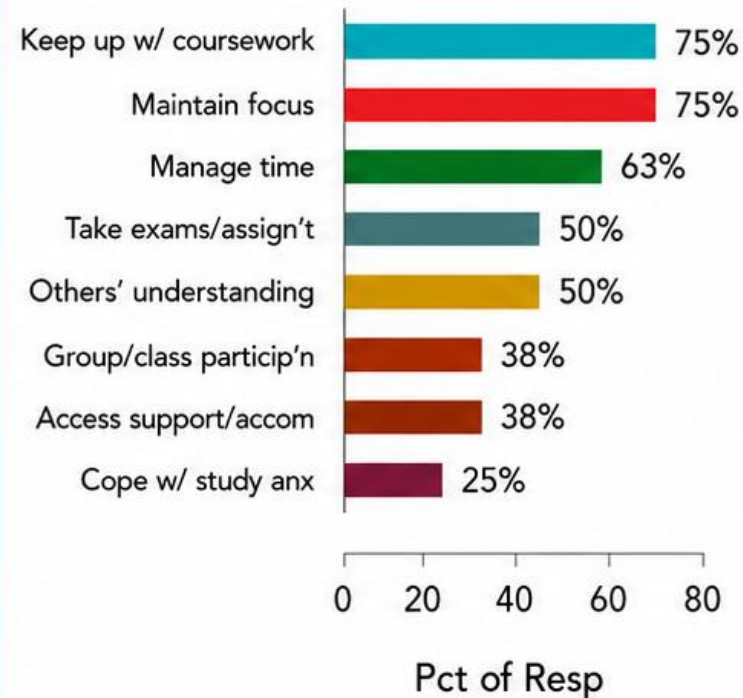
2. What is your age range?

Age Range Distribution

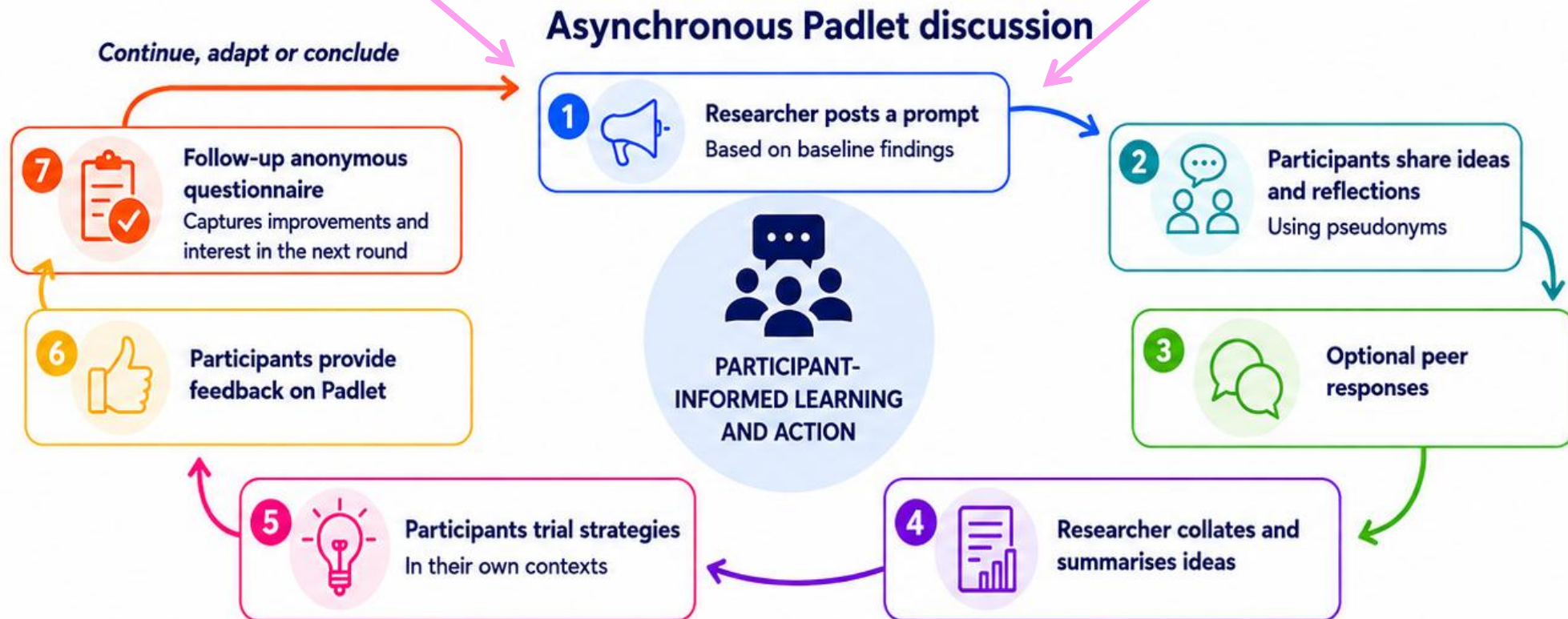
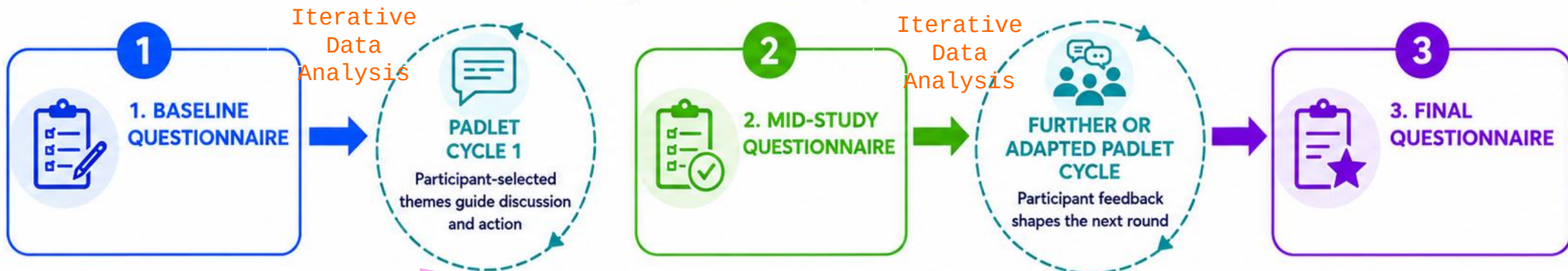


3. What are the biggest challenges you face as a tertiary student because of your hidden disability?

Top Challenges for Tertiary Students



Anonymous online questionnaire



Example: Participant response

A Anienie Veldsman



Concentration & Coursework: What works for you?

- Many of us struggle to concentrate or keep up with coursework.
- Share what helps you over the next week.
- Your experience might help others!



1



1



Going to the gym first helps me. A yoga stretch or 10–15 mins on the crossfit gives me structure and makes studying easier.

I set a low-volume alarm for a cuppa break every 2–3 hours. Helps me stay hydrated and avoid study fatigue.

Example: Discussion prompt posted

A Anienie Veldsman



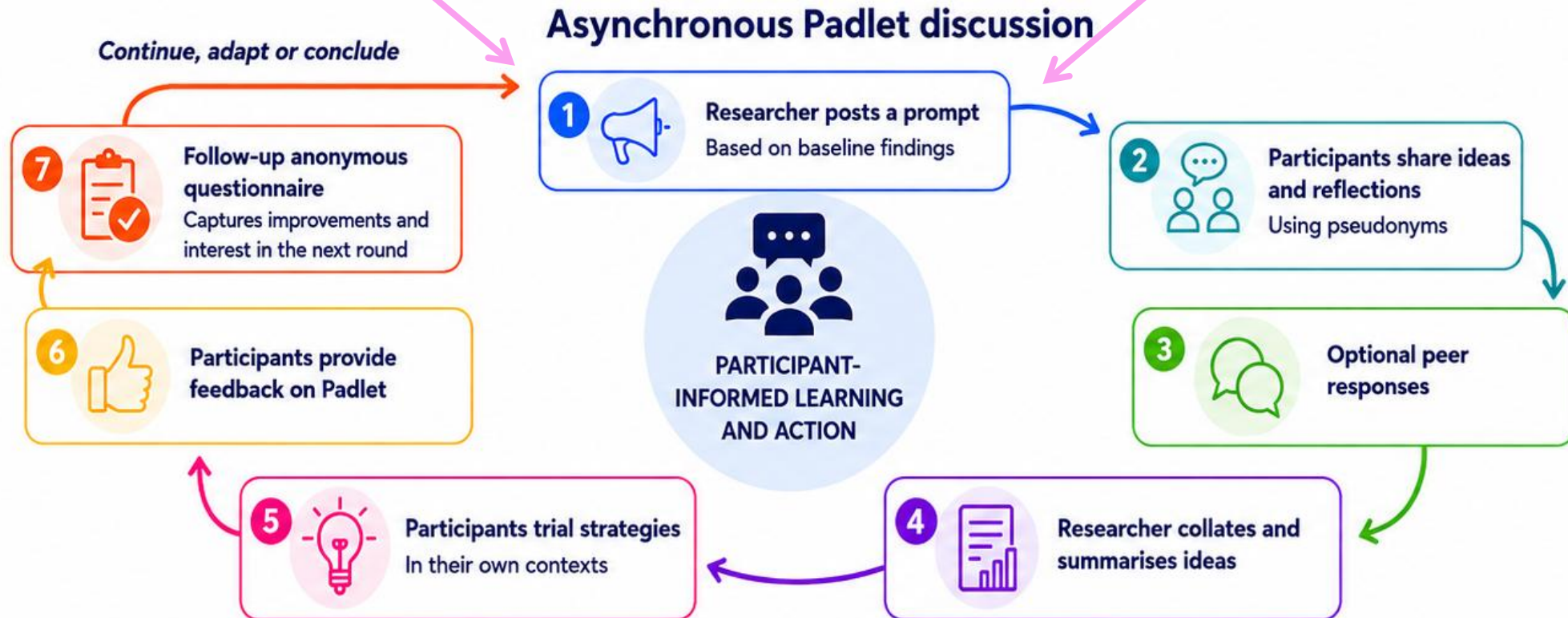
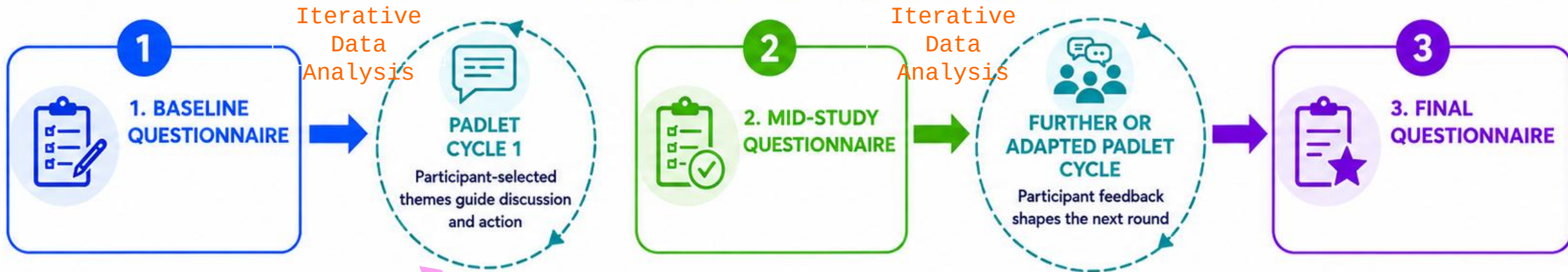
Lets trail our strategies

Share your thoughts and experiences.
Your reflections help us all learn and grow.

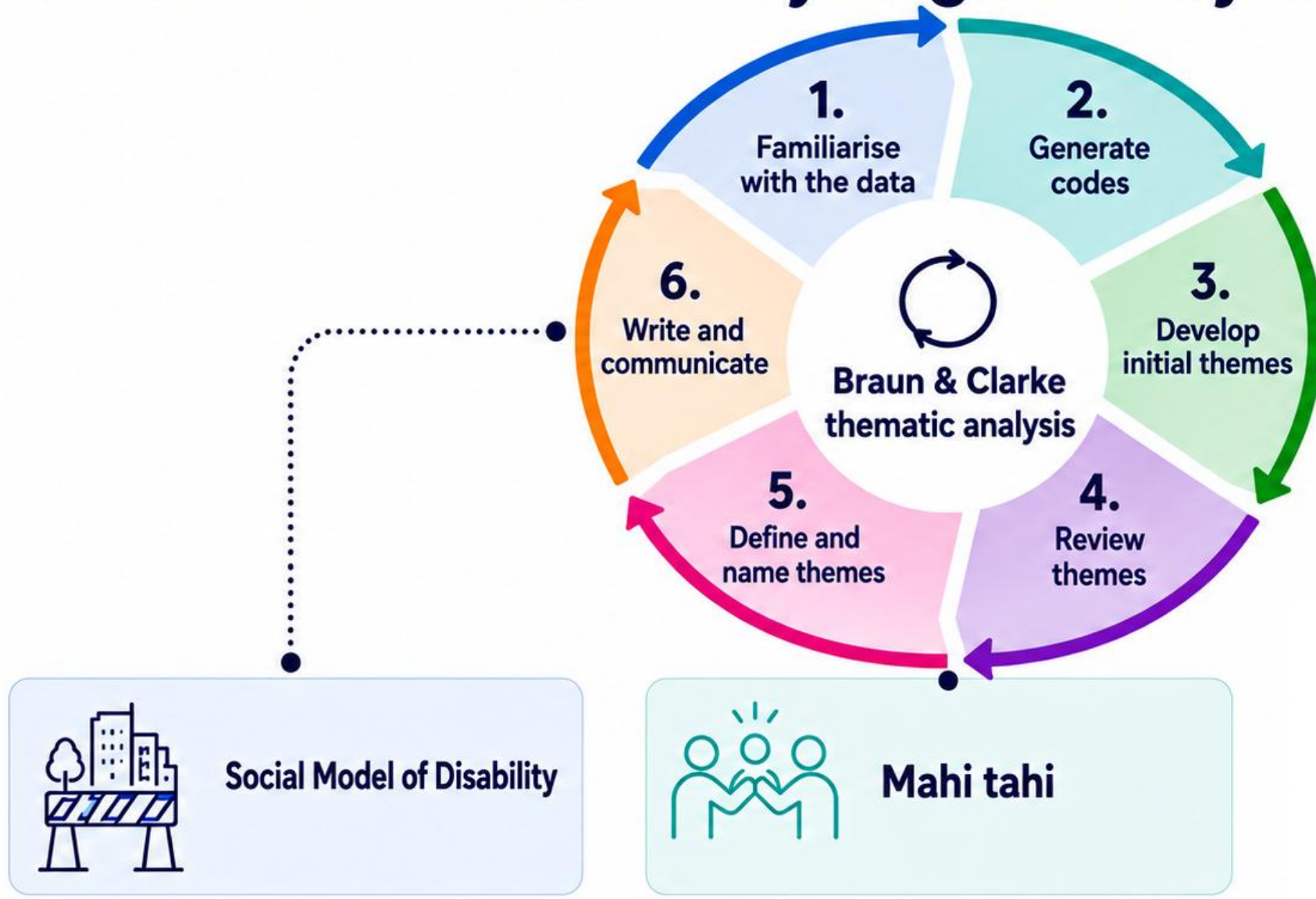
- Which strategy/s did you choose?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work?
- Any strategies that felt challenging or less effective?
- Other ideas we'd like to try?

#MahiTahi #StrongerTogether

Anonymous online questionnaire



Reflexive thematic analysis guided by the study frameworks





Study Design for Accessible Participation



Flexible participation

Engage online at a suitable time and pace.



Low pressure

No live sessions; questions or prompts could be skipped.



Privacy

Anonymous questionnaires, pseudonyms, and private forums.



Participant voice

Participants selected discussion priorities.



Accessible tools

Flexible Qualtrics completion and Padlet support.

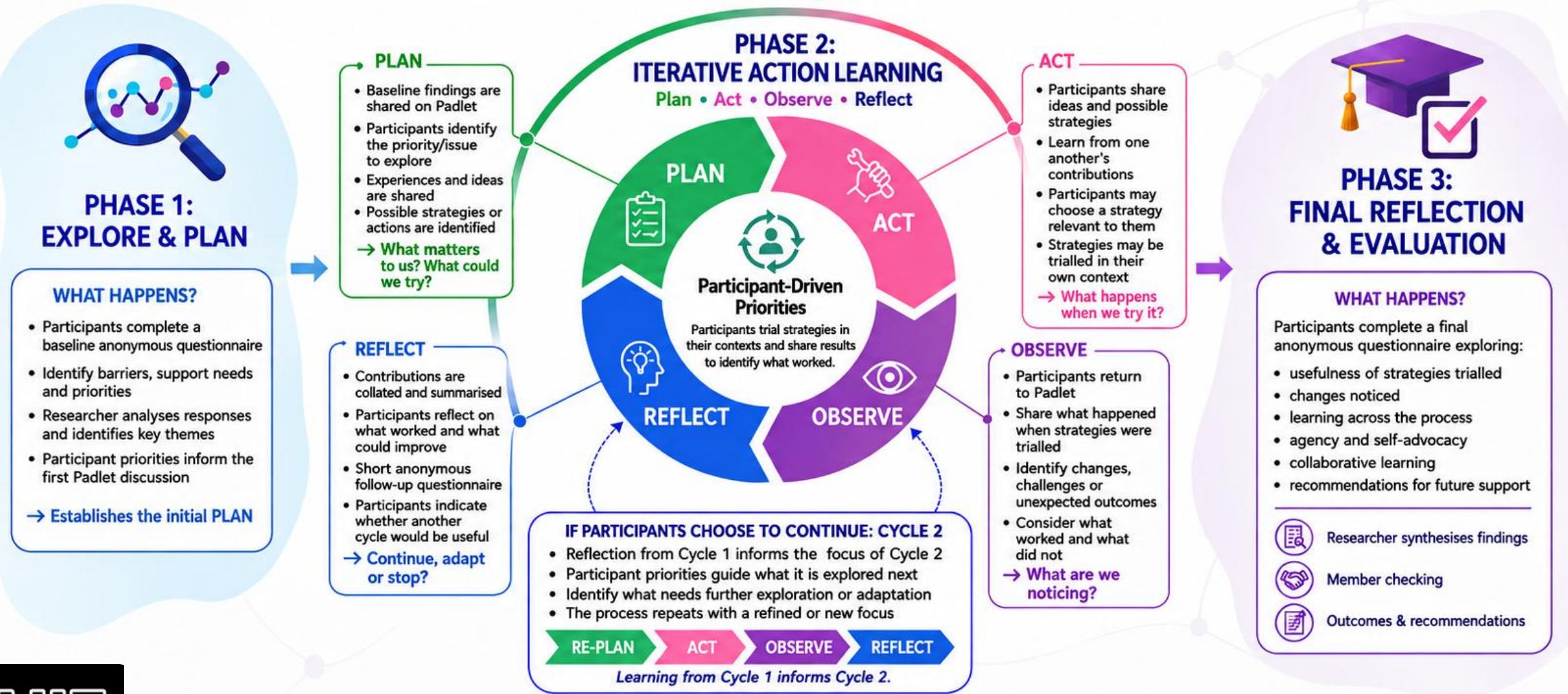


Safety

Moderated forums and wellbeing-support information.

The Action Research Journey: Phases and Iterative Cycles

A participatory, iterative process shaped by participants' priorities and experiences





Ethical study design



Choice

Voluntary participation;
skip or withdraw



Privacy

Anonymous surveys;
pseudonymous forums



Power

Students taught by the researcher
were excluded



Safety

Moderated forums,
respectful spaces,
support information



Inclusion

Flexible,
asynchronous participation;
participant-led priorities



Data care

Consent/contact details stored
separately from research data

Activity 2: Returning to your ideas

Where do your ideas appear in this research design?



Think back to what you identified in Activity 1.



1. YOUR PRIORITIES

Which barrier, support or form of influence did you identify?



2. THE STUDY DESIGN

Where do you see that idea reflected in this study?



3. WHAT REMAINS?

What might still limit participation or influence?

You may:



Think privately



Discuss with someone



Contribute online



Pass



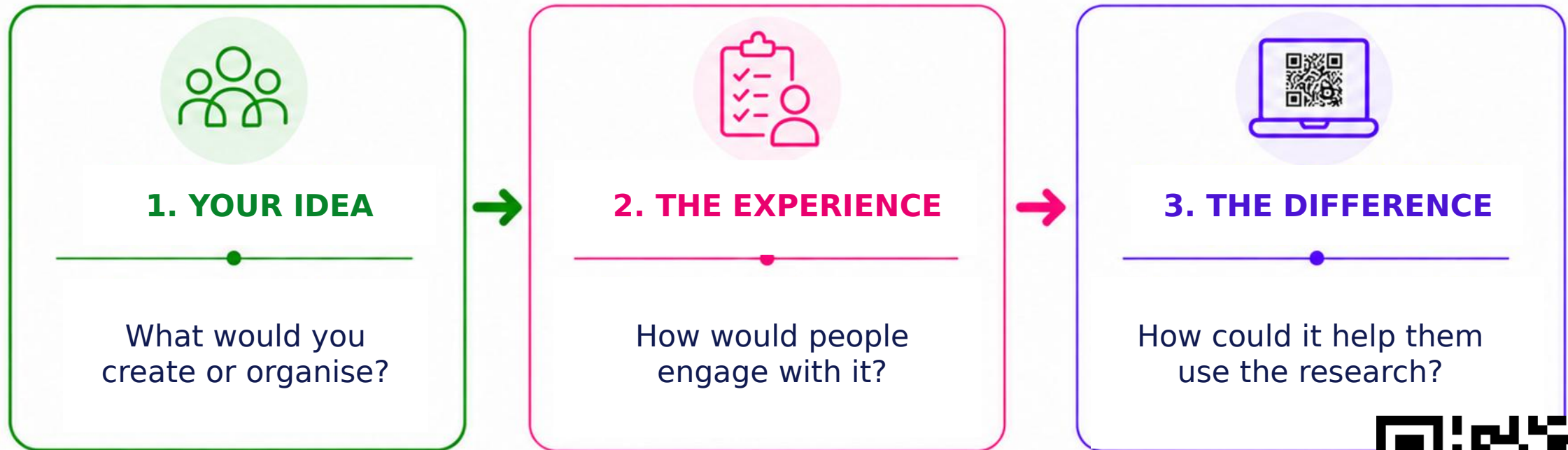
About 4 minutes: 1 min reflect · 2 min discuss or post · 1 min share



Activity 3: What's next? Be creative!

What creative ways could help people engage with this research and use it in practice?

 Your ideas may help shape a research-and-engagement application.



You may:



Think privately



Discuss with someone



Contribute online



Pass



About 8 minutes: 3 min reflect · 3 min discuss or post · 2 min share





Q and A



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