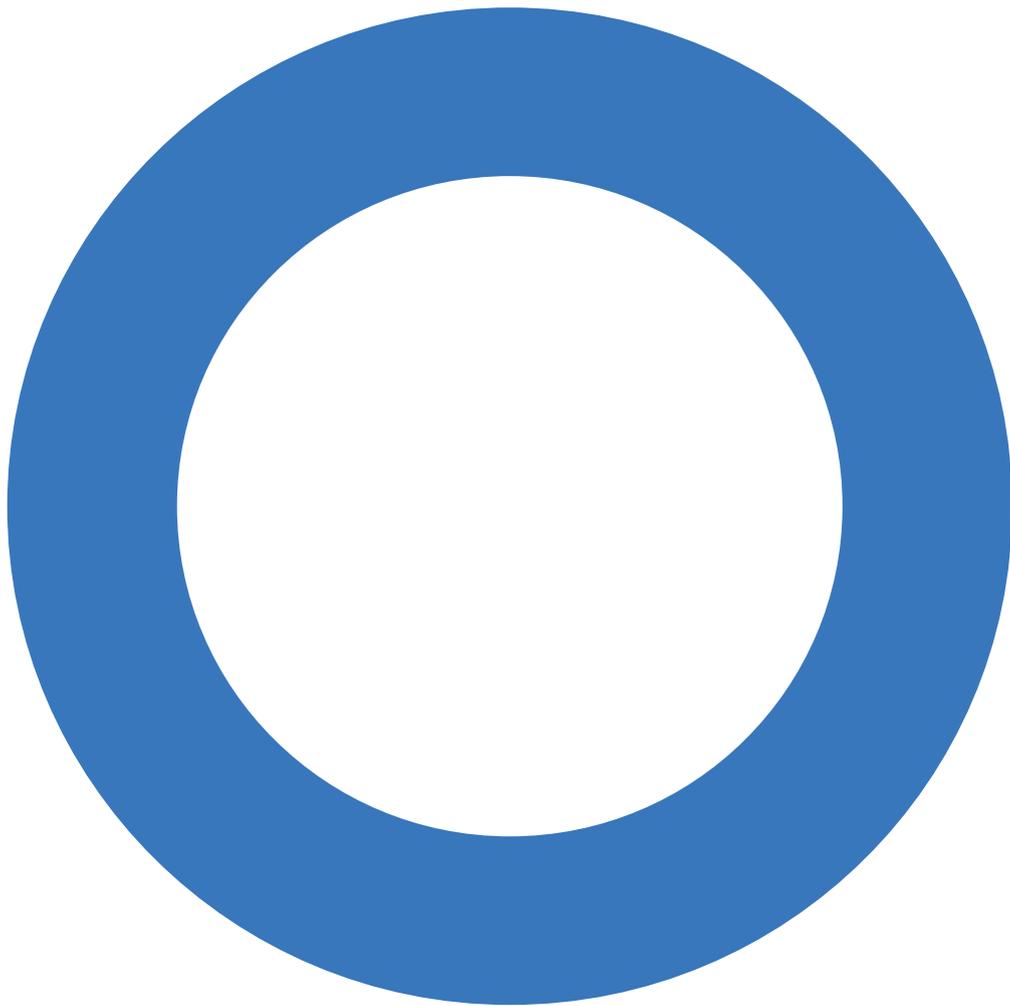


A Guide to Inquiry and Experiential Research: The Oasis Approach



oasis

School of Human Relations

Contents

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| Reader's Note | 3 |
| Section 1: Introduction | 5 |
| Section 2: Research - A New Paradigm | 7 |
| Section 3: Co-operative Inquiry | 13 |
| Section 4: Oasis and Co-operative Inquiry: Outline History | 29 |
| Appendix 1: Towards an Extended Epistemology | 31 |
| Appendix 2: References | 37 |

Reader's Note

Section 1 is intended to offer a brief introduction to the basis of qualitative research and how this is mirrored in the educational approach of The Oasis School.

Section 2 provides a guide to forms of experiential and new paradigm research.

Section 3 highlights in more detail the particular approach of Co-operative Inquiry and identifies the phases, conditions for effective research, useful mechanisms for practice, possible challenges and potential outcomes.

Section 4 outlines events and influences for The Oasis School in the area of Co-operative Inquiry and peer-based approaches to research.

Section 1: Introduction

“Once one sees the task of understanding human behaviour as involving interpretation and empathy rather than prediction or control, the self-reports of the people one is studying become very important in any psychological research project. And these should not be taken as (falsifiable) reports of states of mind but as expressions of how things are to the subject. Thus the experimenter or observer has to enter into a discourse with the people being studied and try to appreciate the shape of the subject’s cognitive world. But at this point it no longer makes sense to talk of observers and subjects at all. There are only co-participants in the project of making sense of the world and our experience of it.” Rom Harré and Grant Gillett, *The Discursive Mind*, Sage Publications, London, 1994.

Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) was the founding father whose influence upon group dynamics, participative methods and experiential learning arose out of his concept of *field theory*. Two of the key features of field theory are:

1. Behaviour is a function of the field that exists at the time the behaviour occurs.
2. Analysis begins with the situation as a whole from which are differentiated the component parts.

His work and experience in field theory starts to give us a background to almost all the participatory and experiential approaches that have subsequently evolved. Central to field theory was the evolution of the ‘T’ group, which was much maligned but which is essential to the understanding of action research based methods. Lewin was, through field theory, largely responsible for what became known as *action research*: it was also taken up and applied in group dynamics.

Introducing participants to evaluating their own learning is a fore-runner to qualitative research which involves participants *in* the research being undertaken. This is essentially where qualitative research takes off. At the radical end of the spectrum we have Co-operative Inquiry (CI) where participants are involved in every aspect of the process. (See Section 3.)

Possible Areas for Participant Involvement

- Designing the questions
- Designing the method
- Designing any evaluative process
- Designing any validity procedures
- Doing the research on themselves

Box 1: Possible Areas for Participant Involvement

The Educational Approach of Oasis

This document sets out the links between Oasis, its educational approach and forms of experiential inquiry that inform that approach. It outlines a wide range of *qualitative* research and inquiry methods that directly involve participants to provide the reader with a spectrum of experiential research methods and some of their common uses. It then goes on to describe in detail the specific participatory and inquiry methods that have a strong link to the work that Oasis promotes and in which the School has had a long-term and continuing interest, namely:

1. Self and peer assessment: Oasis has been fully committed to self and peer assessment in experiential learning for over two decades.
2. Co-operative Inquiry: a mode of research that Oasis has been strongly engaged with for over ten years.

The educational approach developed by Oasis, therefore, centres upon the collaboration of peers working in free association and is supported by three underlying principles:

1. Learning is a **whole person activity**.
2. Learning is rooted in **individual experience**.
3. Experience is a **complex inter-connection of mind, body, soul, spirit** and not a mere intellectual activity.

Section 2: Research – A New Paradigm

Experiential Research

Experiential research is a new research paradigm that breaks down the traditional distinction between the role of the researcher and the role of the subject. In the traditional paradigm only the researcher does the thinking, generating, designing, managing and drawing conclusions from the research; whilst the subject – often knowing nothing of what the researcher is up to in his thinking – is involved in the action and experience of what is being researched. In other words, the subject's involvement is solely restricted to the action phase i.e. they are 'studied'.

“In the new paradigm, this separation of roles is dissolved. Those involved in the research are co-researchers and co-subjects. They devise, manage and draw conclusions from the research; and they also undergo the experiences and perform the actions that are being researched.” John Heron, *Empirical Validity in Experiential Research*, Sage, London, 1982.

Common Qualities of Human Science Research

In his book *Phenomenological Research*, Moustakas covers many qualitative research models and theories, including ethnography, grounded research theory, hermeneutics, empirical phenomenology, and heuristics. He outlines seven points that distinguish qualitative research themes and models, which would include co-operative inquiry and the other methods described in this paper, from traditional, quantitative research theories and methodologies. They are:

1. Recognising the value of qualitative designs and methodologies, studies of human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches.
2. Focusing on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts.
3. Searching for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations.
4. Obtaining descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews.
5. Regarding the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behaviour and as evidence for scientific investigations.
6. Formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher.
7. Viewing experience and behaviour as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole.

Participative Forms of Inquiry

Within the traditional model, knowledge-creation is the domain of researchers; specialists who are apart and distinct from the object of study. Even in the human sciences, it has been the traditional view that the researcher must beware of over-involved association with those studied. The reasoning has been that once people know that they are being studied in order for others to learn, they will interfere with the researchers' purposes. Whilst all this may be true, it is also the case that when people are involved in research about themselves, they can be of assistance. They can contribute and raise issues that may well have been overlooked by those designing the research.

In a new paradigm view, human research takes on much more of a collaborative and participatory character, all the way from qualitative research that has elements of participant involvement to full-blown co-operative inquires. (See Reason and Rowan, 1989; Heron, 1996; Moustakas, 1989, 1992.)

Participative research leads into more open-ended forms of inquiry where the interest in the work, how it is done and the area of investigation are all held within the group of collaborators. The participants also share a joint responsibility for the design and the reporting of the results they develop. In his recent book on the topic John Heron described it as:

“... a form of participative, person-centred inquiry which does research with people not on them.” John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry*, Sage, London, 1996.

What all this points to is a placing of the centrality of being at the heart of things; our being, the being of the other, the being of the cosmos – the recognition that we are not ultimately separated, but temporarily apart from all that is because we are in embodied form. This amounts to a *realisation* rather than simply a matter of learning some thing; an experiential awakening rather than a cool fact. It is a form of consciousness (rather than knowing) and represents a shift of a fundamental kind. It is a richer, more complete form of knowing (as in apprehension).

Often the awakening to such a new paradigm comes in great leaps or flashes followed by periods of calm and even stages of regression. Entering into light from darkness is an immediate experience but it takes time to adjust; time to become familiar and even longer to feel at home. To know it is the next place is a long journey. We have far yet to travel.

Qualitative Research

With the development of an academic base and a substantial body of literature, qualitative research has become a resource both for practice and for service development. Many different kinds of work-place practices currently face challenges in adapting to new expectations and changing economic realities. Professionals' relationships with service users, for example, are changing, as are relationships between service providers and stakeholders.

There is an increasing requirement for sound evidence to direct such developments. Yet many of the important questions cannot be addressed solely by the quantitative methods, which have become the norm in many organisations. For instance, the collaboration between different statutory and voluntary agencies in the complex processes involved is often problematic. Qualitative methods explicitly address such complexity and offer a means to identify important issues and suggest ways of tackling them. These methods also have the flexibility of dealing with changes over time. The purpose of choosing a qualitative approach to this research is threefold.

1. **Purpose:** qualitative methods allow access to the process through which development takes place, at the level of relationships, roles, systems, groups or organisations. They are particularly good at aiding understanding how social systems function.
2. **Context:** qualitative methods study and explore people's views and descriptions of what they do within a given context. Where this is also documented or examined through other perspectives, these methods can help bridge the gap between what is said and what is done.
3. **Meaning:** the meaning people assign to phenomena is not static or measurable, but changes with context. To capture meaning, the researcher must identify the context. Through this emphasis of context, qualitative methodologies capture ways in which people interpret events, experiences and relationships.

Having defined the research question through discussion with the commissioning agents, the appropriate approach is agreed. Semi-structured interviews, for example, are often appropriate but access to service users depends on issues of confidentiality and assessment processes. Qualitative methods are suited to questions of what, how and why events are taking place.

As in most qualitative research, a momentum emerges out of the work being carried out yet it is evident that the depth and breadth of investigation is necessarily limited according to funding and timescale involved. The methods used and the questions asked of participants are informed by knowledge of the areas that form the focus of the inquiry. Discussions with supervisors and research colleagues clarify the best fit of methodology and research area, and discussions with related professionals can often influence the process significantly.

There are two main concepts central in understanding and evaluating qualitative research.

1. **Multiple realities:** qualitative methods are said to lack rigour and to produce anecdotal data about a small number of situations or research subjects, rather than reproducible facts about large populations. The concept of multiple realities impacts here. Social life is not static; the situation and setting visited by the researcher is constantly changing and the presence of the researcher will have its own impact.
2. **Promotion of reflexivity:** encouraging the capacity of individuals to stand back from their experience and look upon it with critical subjectivity.

Types of Qualitative Research

1. Literature-based research
2. Grounded theory
3. Semi-structured interviews
4. Case study
5. In-depth interviews
6. Focus groups

Box 2: Types of Qualitative Research

1. **Literature-based research:** there are now a number of examples where small scale research has led to significant changes in particular service settings. For example Gregory Bateson’s (1972) work on schizophrenia and communication in family life influenced the development of family therapy models focusing on observable elements of behaviour and its effect on family members.

Qualitative methods have also been used in evaluating and changing the organisation of services. For example, Silverman et al (1987) reported on studies of doctor-patient interactions in paediatric outpatient settings. The findings suggested that the communication skills of the individual doctor were not the decisive factor in the parents’ involvement in decision-making; it was more the understanding of the condition and confidence in their management of the condition. The researchers suggested the introduction of a pre-admission clinic which concentrated on the parents’ concerns about their child’s condition and treatment. It was found to work well for both staff and parents.

2. **Grounded theory:** a useful description of grounded theory is found in the *Scottish Consensus Statement on Qualitative Research in Primary Health Care* (1995):¹

“As has been suggested, the principle of grounded theory involves the generation of concepts from reflection on data, and the more accurate adaptation of concepts to data from hypotheses formulated by researchers. Once categories have been identified, further data is collected until the categories are ‘saturated’, that is, the meaning and importance of the categories are made clear. The researcher can then form more abstract theories about the interrelationships among the categories by making comparisons with... other topics in the study setting. Such hypotheses about links between categories can be tested by further data collection. The level of understanding increases with each step.”

Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s and 1970s during a period of significant growth in social research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The essence of grounded theory is that the concepts and theory which emerge from a study are inductively derived from the phenomenon being studied. Theory is thereby ‘grounded’ in the data. Research using this method does not have a hypothesis to test, but a phenomenon to study and what is relevant to that phenomenon is allowed to emerge. As understanding is gained, further investigation is focused onto questions.

¹ Acknowledgements to *Scottish Consensus Paper on Qualitative Research in Primary Health Care*. The report guides the reader through the process of this piece of research. Each area is not truly distinct from other aspects. Rather, each phase of the research has implications for another. In qualitative research, action, reflect on, and interpretation are all part of a continuing process. There can be no set formulae, only broad guidelines.

Charmarz (1990) stresses the role of the researcher in actively applying inevitable pre-existing ideas and concepts to the data collection and the generation of categories. That active role and interaction with the data is an important part of the analysis, which should be reflected in its description.

3. **Semi-structured interviews:** a set of questions which need to be covered, but which also give the interviewers the freedom and skill to clarify relevant points as they arise. This offers the ability to weave the set questions into conversation, making it possible to assess when a shared understanding is reached.
4. **Case study:** case studies involve a description of one or more social units, for example, a youth club, a client or an organisation. Case studies on individuals are widely accepted and are used to illustrate points of interest and to organise information in such a way that it can inform management and teaching. Case studies of groups within a social setting may be used to validate other sources of information.
5. **In-depth interviews:** interviews range from fixed questions (survey) to unstructured conversation. Each kind of interview has its own advantages and disadvantage.

Oakley (1981) states that in order for an interview to be successful it must have all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation, with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching. She criticised the standard textbook account of interviewing, which encouraged the building of rapport, but at the same time advised the deflection of respondent's questions for fear of influencing their response. She cited the following reasons for her critique which are supported by the researchers involved in this study:

- a. It is impossible for an interviewer to establish rapport without revealing anything about themselves.
- b. The quality of the data will be higher if the person being interviewed feels he or she is participating in a real conversation and being treated as a person of equal status by the interviewer.

For this balance between a real meeting between two people to take place and a rigour in the process to be upheld, the interviewer needs particular interpersonal skills and understanding of process.

6. **Focus groups:** focus groups were originally developed for use in market research. In essence, the focus group is a group discussion or interview and is commonly used as a term to describe any group discussion where group interaction is used to generate data. They can give insight into complex behaviours and attitudes, but their use requires critical appraisal.

Elements of Qualitative Research

The role of contextual data and field notes will vary but can be used to aid data analysis or highlight parallel processes and can provide a broader, richer, overall study.

1. **Selecting the study setting and sample:** once the method for data collection has been agreed, questions emerge about the study setting and sample. These issues interact with the collection and analysis of data, throughout the research process. Qualitative research often deals with topics where the parameters and characteristics are not known at the outset and cannot easily be established until well into the study. Especially when using networking methods of selection, the process can add important value to the findings of the study.
2. **Analysis:** analysis starts at the stage of planning a good system of recording, retrieving and coding data. This system has to be considered and put in place at an early stage of the study.
3. **Triangulation:** the use of multiple analysts who compare their interpretation of a sample of the same data; use of written documents supplied by organisations; and data from users of services.
4. **Respondent validation:** the response of participants to the findings of the research will give a reasonable indication of the validity of the research when using a qualitative approach.

- 5. **Peer debriefing and group analysis:** in qualitative research the researcher becomes closely involved in the questions being asked. This is a strength and brings much insight to the research, but detachment and reflection are needed to gain more.

It is essential to have effective supervision and the opportunity to reflect with colleagues on the themes emerging to achieve this. When carried out with experienced colleagues, there is also the opportunity for the validity of these themes to be challenged before they become entrenched beliefs.

The Researcher Role

The integrity and the quality of the researcher’s understanding are crucial to the credibility of the research. Every researcher comes to the research with their own particular life history, views of society and research which inevitably shape the questions asked, methods used, and techniques of analysis. The researcher must therefore acknowledge their training and approach for the reader’s benefit. Reflection on the part of the researcher is crucial to in part compensate for their own leanings.

External factors, such as funding bodies’ expectations, or local politics, will also have an influence. Good research makes explicit the conditions in which knowledge is being produced and it specifies the ways in which the researcher’s own identity and role affect the data collected and the picture produced.

Researchers need to continually reflect upon the ways in which they affect the data and upon the conditions under which they are producing the knowledge. A researcher can only present the data as they have found it based on a careful analysis of that data. The reader must then decide how well the study has been conducted and how relevant its findings are to the reader.

Appreciative Inquiry

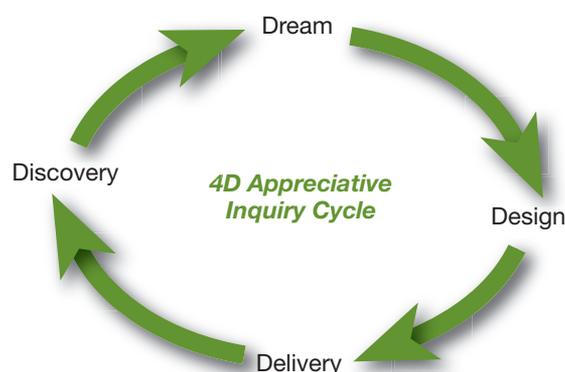
The term appreciative inquiry (AI) was created in 1986 by David Cooperrider in his doctoral thesis, *Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Utilising and Enhancing Organizational Innovation*. AI is:

“... a theory and practice for approaching change from a holistic framework. Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them, AI leads systems to move toward the generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core – their values, visions, achievements and best practices.” J M Watkins and B J Mohr, *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*, Jossey Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco, 2001.

A central principle underpinning AI is that of social construction:

“Our ability to create new and better organizations is only limited by our imagination and collective will. Furthermore, language and words are the basic building blocks of social reality... As we talk to each other we are constructing the world we see and think about and as we change how we talk we are changing the world.” G R Bushe, in David Cooperrider, *Appreciative Inquiry*, Stipes Publishing LLC, Illinois, 2000.

Reconstructing stories around experiences from the past on which we wish to build the future is at the heart of AI. There are four stages in the process, which are usually referred to as the 4D Appreciative Inquiry Cycle.



Before the cycle can begin you have to be clear about an issue you want to explore in an appreciative way. The issue of improving the services an organisation offers is taken as an example to illustrate how the inquiry cycle unfolds.

1. **Discovery:** the first stage in the process is for individuals to pair off and interview each other. Each encourages the other to bring to mind a positive/peak experience when, in this case, they received the best service they had ever experienced and to describe it in as much detail as possible. Then each pair meets up with other pairs and shares stories and identifies central themes that seem to be emerging out of the stories. Before you move into the next phase, there should have been an opportunity for all groups having a stake in their organisation's future to share their stories and agree common themes about the experience of service excellence.
2. **Dream:** the next phase of the process is to move from the past to the present and future, and envisage what your organisation (or any organisation) will look like if it were able to provide and support the kind of experience you've shared in groups. This is akin to what Peter Senge (1994) calls 'shared vision' and could be captured as a picture, graphic, poem or narrative. You then agree, as a group, what is called a 'provocative proposition' of what your organisation would be like if your dreams came true.
3. **Design:** the provocative proposition leads into the third phase where, as a group, in Senge's words, you 'co-create the future' by agreeing what the organisation (and in particular you) need to do to realise your dream.
4. **Deliver:** this final phase is where the organisation commits resources and support to ensure the blueprint agreed at the design stage is brought into being. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) question the appropriateness of the word 'deliver' and suggest 'destiny' on the basis that "organisational change needs to look more like an inspired movement than a neatly packaged or engineered product."

Section 3: Co-operative Inquiry

A Heuristic Approach

Co-operative Inquiry is a collaborative way of working together as a group with individuals pursuing their own emphasis of interest on a theme that has drawn them together. Heuristic research, on the other hand, is a form of rigorous inquiry that, whilst best experienced with the assistance of others, is largely conducted as an individual inquiry.

Clark Moustakas, has, perhaps as much as anyone, sought to give validation and recognition to the potential in all of us for 'meaning-making' (what all this is relating to). His own life experience of the pain and anguish of facing a life-threatening decision on behalf of his daughter brought Moustakas face-to-face with a form of loneliness and isolation that sent him on a search for meaning. That personal search helped him bear his personal crisis and also helped reveal to him that there was a deep longing in many people to explore their own experience, to frame it into some disciplined and organised form that could then be transmitted to others. This they did, not for the sake of a qualification, or for publication, but as their own internal commitment to learning about their own process and the place it takes in their life.

Moustakas further explored his insights with others and wrote up his findings in *Heuristic Research*. It is a short but moving account of his own and other projects together with the procedures involved in making a rigorous study of a personal quest. He says, for example:

"I begin the heuristic journey with something that has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awareness but whose nature is largely unknown. In such an odyssey, I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the mystery summons me and lures me 'to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current'." Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, Sage, 1990.

A Heuristic approach is one of deep connection to any transpersonal quest. Moustakas describes it as coming from the Greek word 'heuriskein', meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and where one develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. A heuristic process incorporates creative self-processes and self-discoveries. He continues:

"The heuristic process is a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation. What appears, what shows itself as itself casts a light that enables one to come to know more fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is also illuminated.

I may challenge, confront, or even doubt my understanding of a human concern or issue, but when I persist in a disciplined and devoted way, I ultimately deepen my knowledge of the phenomenon. In the heuristic process, I am personally involved. I am searching for qualities, conditions, and relationships that underlie a fundamental question issue or concern." Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, Sage, 1990.

This kind of work involves many methods such as self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery: the research questions and the methodology 'flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration.'

"... I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest. I may come into touch with new regions of myself, and discover revealing connections with others. Through the guides of a heuristic design, I am able to see and understand in a different way. Emphasis on the investigator's internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry." Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, Sage, 1990.

The Heuristic approach, although individually based, involves a strongly collaborative element in assessing significance and validating findings as Moustakas' work indicates. There is a rigour through continually re-examining the data, constantly appraising its significance, by returning to research participants, sharing with them the meanings that have been derived from the research and then seeking their assessment for accuracy and comprehensiveness.

“In heuristics, an unshakeable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling and awareness. It is I, the person living in a world with others, alone yet inseparable from the community of others; I who come to know essential meanings inherent in my experience.” Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, Sage, 1990.

Co-operative Inquiry

CI offers an example of radical research and is a developing form of exploring human experience which fits well with the ethos of an organisation interested in understanding and developing new ways of working with people.

It is a developing form of exploring human experience and fits well with the ethos of an organisation which is interested in looking at and developing new ways of working with people. Participative research leads into more open-ended forms of inquiry where interest in the work, how it is done and the area of investigation are all held within the group collaborators, who share a joint responsibility for the design and the reporting of the results that develop. In his book on the topic John Heron described it as:

“... a form of participative, person centred inquiry which does research with people not on them. It breaks down the old paradigms separation between the role of researcher and subject.” John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry*, Sage, 1996.

According to John Heron, the defining features of a Co-operative Inquiry include:

- All the subjects are as fully involved as possible as co-researchers in all research decisions – about both content and method – throughout all phases of the inquiry
- There is intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other
- There is explicit attention to develop appropriate validity procedures for the inquiry and its findings
- There is a radical epistemology for wide-ranging inquiry methods that can be both informative about and transformative of any aspects of the human condition accessible to a transparent body mind, that is one that has an open, unbound awareness
- There are, as well as validity procedures, a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry. For example, the level of affective competence of the participants needs to match the rigour of the inquiry itself
- The full range of human sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry.

Co-operative Inquiry is a way of investigating the world as a way of learning about it and doing it with others. It starts from the working assumption that much of the personal world we live in overlaps with the social world that shapes and forms us. These two worlds are not separate in experience. They can, however, be discussed separately and it is possible to develop a way of thinking that overlooks the fact that these two different ways of 'being in the world' are always spilling over into one another, subtly and sometimes crudely, each having an impact upon the other.

Most 'study', however, is centred on the external, given, subject matter, or, at best, the accounts of those who have gone before about what there is to learn and therefore know. Co-operative Inquiry (and other forms of action research) recognise that most of the questions that occupy people and shape the personal meaning they give to the world around them, the relationships of the elements that surround them and the influences that affect them have not been answered before – by themselves.

Such personal learning is what helps to give shape and direction (or lack of it) to our lives and yet we are rarely encouraged to explore, investigate, or express together how we come to make sense of the experiences and events that happen to us. Nor do we celebrate the way we understand what it means to be the person we are with those other persons that are also distinctly themselves and with whom we share our daily lives.

In addition, most of us have acquired the belief that what we think is not important or that our personal understanding of the subject matter is not likely to be relevant to the inquiry we might be wishing to make. Centuries of dogmatic repression places doctrine over experience and leaves individuals believing they have to be told the nature of their experience by others who are 'experts'.

The starting point of a CI – the importance and validity of personal experience, the authentic expression of what one finds inside oneself in relation to the inquiry to hand – is therefore strongly counter-cultural.

As individuals learn about CI (and other action inquiry and action research methods) they may think that rigour and validity are overlooked in favour of, 'If this is my experience and it is authentic then that's enough.' But most people who persevere with CI approaches want to go far beyond the purely subjective response and inquire into the meaning of the responses they have. They seek to evaluate the similarities and differences of their explorations against those of others and to share the tentative understanding and significance of what they are doing – something that can best be done in the company of others.

Out of such 'dialogue' it may be possible to begin to formulate some way of describing the 'findings' in such a way that they may be of use to others who have an interest in the topic area. However, such findings are not a way of exhausting the inquiry for others, merely offering learning to stimulate or to give some assistance.

A Co-operative Inquiry Process

In a Co-operative Inquiry, a group of people come together to explore issues of interest and concern in order to:

1. Understand our world, make sense of our lives, and develop new and creative ways of looking at things.
2. Learn how to act to change things we may want to change and find out how to do things better/more positively.

All members of the group contribute both to the ideas that go into their work together, and also are part of the activity that is being researched. Everyone has a say in deciding what questions are to be addressed and what ideas may be of help; everyone contributes to thinking about how to explore the questions; everyone gets involved in the activity that is being researched; and, finally, everybody has a say in whatever conclusions and outcomes the Co-operative Inquiry group may reach.

To do all this, we need to delve, explore, share different points of view and experiences, try out different ways of acting and being, deepen our awareness, reflect, assimilate, review and modify; then cycle through all of these phases again refining and deepening our growing understanding. Co-operative Inquiry also involves all the four different kinds of ways of knowing.²

Four Kinds of Knowing

1. Experiential
2. Presentational
3. Propositional
4. Practical

Box 3: Four Kinds of Knowing

In Co-operative Inquiry we say that knowing will be more valid if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other: if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives.

²The four ways of knowing, four forms of belief and the fields of knowing are all described in the appendix: Towards an Extended Epistemology.

While every group is different, each one can be seen as engaged in *several cycles of action and reflection* which go something like the process described below.

Phase one: a group of people come together with a common interest. People outline their personal interests and needs in relation to this theme, agree on a general way of stating it and then develop a more detailed, varied set of questions or *propositions* with which to explore it.

This may lead to the formation of small groups, each one choosing a different area of interest. Each group agrees on some form of action or practice to explore their chosen area, and also agrees on ways of observing and recording each person's own and each other's experience.

Phase two: the group or sub-groups try out the agreed action or practice, and observe and record the outcomes. People may at first simply watch what it is that happens to them so they develop a better understanding of their experience. In later action phases they may start trying out new forms of practice.

Phase three: people become fully immersed in their experience. They may become more open to what is going on and they may begin to see their experience in new ways. They may deepen their experience so that the original understandings are elaborated and developed. Or they may be led away from the original ideas and proposals into new fields, unpredicted action and creative insights.

It is also possible that they may get so involved in what they are doing that they lose the awareness that they are part of an inquiry group: there may be a practical crisis, they may become enthralled, they may simply forget.

This phase is in some ways the touchstone of the inquiry method and is what makes it so very different from conventional research, because people are deeply involved in their own experience so any practical skills or new understandings will grow out of this experience.

Further phases: after an agreed time engaged in the second and third phases, everyone re-assembles to consider their original questions in the light of their experience. As a result, they may change their questions in some way, or reject them and pose new questions. They then agree on a second cycle of action and reflection. They may choose to focus on the same or on different aspects of the overall inquiry. The group may choose to amend or develop its inquiry procedure, i.e. forms of action and ways of gathering information, in the light of the experience of the first cycle.

A Co-operative Inquiry often engages in some six to ten cycles of action and reflection. These can take place over a short workshop or may extend over a year or more, depending on the kind of questions that are being explored.

Critical Subjectivity

As we have seen, Co-operative Inquiry is a radical way of doing research based on people examining their own experience and action carefully in collaboration with people who share similar concerns and interests. But, you might say, 'Isn't it true that people can fool themselves about their experience?' 'Isn't this why we have professional researchers who can be detached and objective?' The answer to this is that certainly people can and do fool themselves, but we find that we can also develop our attention so we can look at our beliefs and theories critically and in this way improve the quality of our claims to knowing. We call this '*critical subjectivity*': it means that we don't have to throw away our living knowledge in the search for objectivity, but, rather, are able to build on it and develop it.

A number of procedures can help improve the quality of knowing including:

- Going through a number of cycles of action, reflection, review and modification
- Having an overall balance of divergent and convergent³ cycles
- Having a balance of action and reflection
- Developing critical attention and using a Devil's Advocate (see later) procedure
- Sustaining authentic collaboration
- Allowing space within the group for emotional expression and the management of any emotional distress
- Allowing a balance between chaos and order.

In these ways, Co-operative Inquiry both embraces and goes beyond what is called action research. It is concerned with revisioning our understanding of our world, as well as transforming our living practice within it.⁴

The Starting Point of the Work

There are certain conditions that, if in position, will enhance the possibilities for an inquiry to make the most of the opportunity to explore both the task in hand and the whole process of coming together in a group to work in this way. The minimum of these conditions needed to get a Co-operative Inquiry up and running together with an outline process for initiating an inquiry are given below:

1. A topic that 'calls people' to come together to meet for initial discussion. 'What do you/I want to explore with me/you/us?'
2. A launching off point for the inquiry itself. This is a time for outlining, exploring and collecting ideas about the themes, styles, and options. In the example of Integrated Practice and Holistic Learning (IPHL), the inquiry meeting began with accounts from the individuals who had been meeting explaining the work and thinking behind the theme.
3. It is important that everyone holds the same shared information at the outset. Clarity of background and aspirations and so on need to be made explicit to those who are entering into the inquiry invitation from 'cold'.
4. From this basis it is then possible to move into an exploration of what personal meaning the words of the inquiry invitation hold for those who are likely to join.
5. Each person involved in the inquiry needs to be willing to find their authentic response and express it. Since the quality of any inquiry process depends upon the directness and authenticity of those involved, it is important that it is encouraged at the outset.
6. Early attempts to fudge issues or seek early compromises are neither necessary nor helpful. People can get what they want, but only by learning to declare it clearly. They may also find they change their minds rapidly in the light of hearing other people's contributions and suggestions and this they may find a little disturbing.
7. The willingness to resist consensus collusion from developing in the group is the best form of guarantee of inquiry health. Healthy scepticism at attempts to search for 'too neat answers and solutions' in what is a developing and unfolding process are welcome signs.
8. It is important to highlight any attempts to avoid issues and attempts to bring about premature agreement as a way of reducing anxiety in the face of uncertainty. There is also the need to be willing to challenge the game of, 'It's alright for you to act in any old way you like because you are only being who you are and we are all here to tolerate one another.'

³In some cycles, participants may inquire into their own particular question within the overall topic – a *divergent* cycle. In other cycles, everyone will take away the same question – a *convergent* cycle.
⁴This section is adapted from the work of Barbara Langton who herself adapted *A Short Guide to Co-operative Inquiry* by Peter Reason and John Heron.

9. To enter into a CI is to recognise we are engaging in a form of participative co-creation. This is a profoundly radical act of autonomous free association between individuals with self-direction and yet with a simultaneous capacity to co-create a research process centred on some aspect of the human condition that might lead to lifelong benefits for all concerned.
10. It is important that participants are given opportunities to recognise and understand how to dismantle their own pathological and distress-distorted behaviour patterns as a legitimate aspect of the CI functioning. The manifestations of frustration, anxiety and other distress distorted reactions are valuable opportunities for burning up the ego. Emotional skills to highlight the distorted expression of need or pathological efforts at suppression of genuine distress are essential.

A Tentative Framework

Below is a tentative framework of the elements of CI. The success of getting a CI off the ground effectively lies in the group members working with the elements that they can most manage and gaining confidence and sophistication based on their early experiences.

| Focus | I | You | We |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----|----|
| Time: how long Inquiry Time Scale | | | |
| Subject/Inquiry Theme | | | |
| Current Inquiry Question | | | |
| Current Inquiry Phase | | | |

Table 1: Framework of Co-operative Inquiry Element

Ways of Researching

A CI may range across a very wide spectrum of approaches. Each participant may develop their own research topic independently of the topics of others; there may be overlap or there may be a common topic explored in a common way. All options are viable and each will generate data of a particular kind. So, for example, a group of colleagues or professional associates may want to explore a topic of common interest in a specific way in order to generate a relatively large amount of data relating to the common theme and then evaluate the results.

On the other hand, a group of individuals responding to a call to come together to deepen their personal learning about a topic (the use and meaning of *difference*, for example) may each want to understand the term differently as well as propose individual forms of inquiry. Each approach has value and the second example will often bring deeper and deeper personal learning and the development of a greater common understanding of the very complexity of the term under investigation. Here are some of the possible variations:

1. I want to explore x.
2. I will help you to explore x with my help.
3. I want us to explore x with our help.
4. I want to explore x with your help.
5. I want us to explore x with your help.
6. You want to explore x with my help.
7. You want to help me to explore x with your help.
8. You want to explore x.
9. We want to help you to explore x with our help.
10. We want to help me to explore x with my help.
11. We want us explore x together.

Whilst this is a bewildering range of choices, in practice most inquiries soon ‘sense’ whether the topic has a strong common theme running through individual interests or whether there is a much more diverse range of interests that are going to be loosely held together.

Supporting Aspects

Since our culture and past educational experience do tend to reinforce the belief that our own knowledge/learning is not adequate or valuable there are certain aspects within a Co-operative Inquiry approach that can be 're-learned'.

- Restoring the individual's original relation to the unity of self and experience
- Recognising and reaffirming that personal authority lies within
- Reinforcing the value of the autonomous co-creativity of persons in collaboration
- Developing emotional skills – affective competence – such as checking 'projections', dealing with transference, distortions, and other distress-laden 'readings' of other people i.e. emotional house clearing.

For many people, this way of coming together in a group is contrary to all previous experience and it can feel daunting in the early stages. CI does have its own hidden dangers and pitfalls and it is wise to outline and practise the adoption of certain mechanisms to give support to group members.

Support Mechanisms

1. Initial facilitation
2. Clarity of 'what and why'
3. Understanding the *Devil's Advocate* procedure
4. Rigorous commitment to, 'What are we doing?'
5. Frequent vote checking
6. Challenging restrictive behaviour
7. Critical Subjectivity

Box 4: Support Mechanisms

1. **Clear initial facilitation of the process:** the facilitator needs to be a clear 'guardian of the process' whilst encouraging others to adopt the same role of stewardship as early as is feasible and giving strong encouragement to try it out.

There is no substitute for peers sharing consciously in the processes of the inquiry from an early stage. Even though some of these attempts can be short-lived or fail to hold momentum, they are necessary attempts to begin to express the nature of sharing *power with others* upon which a Co-operative Inquiry ultimately depends.

2. **Clear accounts of the 'what and the why'** of the process in the early stages are critical in enabling people to move together with a shared understanding of where they are or are not in the process. This requires those who are *au fait* with the method to be willing to speak their process so others gain some insight as to how to make sense of what is happening.
3. **Giving information regarding the value and use of the *Devil's Advocate (DA)* procedure** for testing out anything at any time – whether of a procedural, content, process, individual or collective nature.

The application of the DA procedure stops the process and must be taken notice of. The DA procedure is an honoured act whereby any group member at any time, on the vaguest suspicion or with a clear sense of 'knowing' something is afoot, stops the process and challenges the group to account for the way it is conducting itself.

A member who interrupts the process through the DA procedure needs full support and appreciation for what is a difficult act of challenge to the group norm that may be operating. Once the DA procedure has been invoked, members examine their actions and the process in the light of the challenge put to them.

It may, for example, be that the challenge is 'we have slipped out of one phase of the work and into another without consciously recognising it'; a relatively small challenge but one that has valuable repercussions. It may go all the way to a challenge to the group's way of dealing with its own decision-making methods, in which case it may require a considerable exploration and consideration for the group to clear the issues before its effective functioning can be resumed.

4. **A rigorous commitment to check, 'What are we doing?'** and ask, 'Is this what we said we were doing?' or query, 'Do we want to carry on with this if we are experiencing...?'

This is in addition to the DA procedure described above and is equally important for the individual in the group and the group as a whole. The influences that can operate to distract an inquiry are many. They range from enthusiastic excursions into insight or new forms of knowing that individuals want to share, to individual attempts to shift the focus of the work without fully realising the way they are operating; from the group losing its sense of purpose as it struggles with *content and process issues* that are intertwined and hard to separate, to the phase of 'being stuck' in the '*primordial soup*' of latent creativity where no one is quite sure whether one phase is complete and another is awaiting to be born or whether it is a simple matter of the group falling asleep on its own process.

Primordial soup refers to the experience of dissolution and emergent chaos that all inquiries have to encounter at different points in the cycle. An example may help to explain this more fully.

When the group reassembles to share its data after an action cycle, there is any number of steps that can be taken:

- Some may want to reflect further on the reflection
- Some may want to get into procedural discussions
- Some may need further help or attention to deepen their understanding gained so far.

The richness of information and observations that arises at such a point leaves participants with some significant choices about next steps to be taken. The resulting discussion may take some time before any decision emerges. It can seem disturbingly chaotic and formless and is a poor reflection of the quality of what has been shared. The resulting 'messiness' is, therefore, something to work through without losing heart.

The genuine encouragement for members to voice their uncertainty about where they are in the process is an important element to any vibrant inquiry culture. What is needed is the willingness for individuals to give expression to their working understanding, not on the grounds that they should know or be 'right' but that we all have a sense of where we are – even if we can't define it clearly. Sharing our 'felt sense' of how things are when no-one is clear can signal the beginning of the group stitching together a more comprehensive understanding of its situation than the understanding held by any single individual.

This aspect of CI can be both exhilarating and irritating depending upon the mood of the members, the history of individuals and their real interest in transcending some of the limiting beliefs that are common about how groups are – 'slow', 'pointless', 'a waste of time' and so on. Working successfully through a trough of energy can begin to demonstrate to sceptics and doubters that, indeed, groups do not have to fall apart at the first signs of uncertainty or conflict but can transcend their moments of difficulty and regenerate themselves into extremely lively and creative forums for the expression of new questions.

5. **Frequent vote checking:** voting in a Co-operative Inquiry is not a procedural device or a form of committee-like management. It is more in the nature of a visible indicator of where people are on any given issue. A vote may be called as a form of sounding out where people stand.

To give an example: the inquiry group have been discussing their readiness to begin to formulate a new question for a further research cycle. Discussion has been valuable, contributors sometimes giving suggestions to colleagues or inviting help and suggestions. The process could go on, but, given the session will end in two hours and the questions need to be given more attention and some structure if they are to be a valuable tool for researching experience out in the world, at some point someone needs to intrude into the current activity and suggest we take a vote on, 'Are we ready to move on?'

Such a vote is both a reminder to the group members that they need to remain conscious of how they are spending their time and a time to do a 'stop and think' about how they are prioritising their efforts. It may well be that everyone is happily going along with something that, given the choice, they are equally happy to leave behind and move on.

A vote is offered by an arm show in one of three positions: upright arm, arm outstretched in the parallel position to the ground and arm pointing down. Upright suggests strongly in favour of the suggestion being made. Parallel position suggests that, 'I have at least some reservations about the suggestion and need to express those reservations.' Arm down suggests a strong disagreement with something: the suggestion, the potential of the suggestion or some personal limitation that needs 'clearing' before the participant can entertain dealing with the request fully. Such a voting mechanism is not to short-change shared collaborative decision-making but to enable collecting a 'sense of the meeting'.

Experience of several inquiry groups demonstrates that, given a little experience of voting as an indicative process rather than as an exclusive decision-making process, participants soon learn to make almost all decisions by consensus. It is rarely the case about any procedural suggestion that there is such a polarised opposition that progress is stalled for long. More usually individuals have a lack of clarity about what is being suggested, have useful reservations about their own contribution to the suggestion or feel that the current phase of the work is not at a point where it can be left. All these objections can be voiced and collated and the group can then decide whether to work with someone's reservations, invite them to either claim some time to deal with them or if they feel sufficiently 'heard' to be able to 'drop them'.

6. **Challenging restrictive behaviours**, old 'patterns' of responding or defending and working with expressions of distress.

Inquiry cultures provide a near unique opportunity to work with emotional reactions positively. By the nature of the complexity of what is being attempted, inquirers are almost certain to meet some strong emotional reactions and responses that are anything but rational expressions (though they will usually feel rational in the sense that they will have the warrant of strong familiarity about them).

When people are 'triggered' into strong reactions, old patterns and other outmoded forms of re-enacting their 'emotional baggage', it is important for inquiry groups to recognise that this is something that will happen. It isn't a 'problem'; it is simply an interruption to manage and the skills do exist to enable people to unlock their distress-laden behaviours and dismantle their defences with dignity and courage if the group build a conscious recognition of the value of emotional skills.

An important element for the initiating facilitator(s) to model is the promotion of a genuine 'loving toughness' on displacement, anxiety and distress-laden attempts to 'make it all right'. Amongst the most liberating aspects of effective inquiry cultures is outlining to participants how to work with strong feelings in creative ways that transcend 'stuck reactions'.

7. **Critical subjectivity** is the term used to describe how CI processes offer participants the opportunity to practise authentic, discriminatory, awareness; to become more attuned to the shifts and movements of both the group process and their own inner development.

The willingness to subject oneself to the kind of scrutiny and rigour that helps illuminate clear aware choice from compulsive or over-determined reactions provides a strong crucible for major insights to emerge and for the 'burning of the ego': the exhaustion of old, outworn behaviour patterns and their replacement with more creative and innovative responses.

All the above point to CI as a serious form of creative engagement that honours personal integrity and individual autonomy in a genuinely co-operative process of decision-making and inquiry.

Personal Considerations

As might be imagined given the foregoing, there are a number of risks to the process getting underway effectively. The greatest risk to the successful introduction of the inquiry method is the paradoxical element of the need for considerable structure to launch it (if people are to genuinely engage with the freedom that it offers once they have a grasp of the way the mechanisms work) and the value they offer for enabling individuals to contribute and feel their participation is protected from the kinds of dysfunctional arrangements that can operate in most groups.

Accusations of making the procedural outline more complex than it need be – since we all know what co-operative decision-making means – are not uncommon. Similarly, there are those whose counter-dependent approach to authority makes CI appeal strongly until they discover that they, nevertheless, still have to work alongside others and share decision-making rather than attack every whiff of decision-making that appears.

There are also some individuals who have a high level of participation at the inclusion stage of the group forming. They appear to be committed to the inquiry topic early yet begin to lose interest once they realise that there is no place for them to take a 'star' role.

The very venture itself is something of an act of faith in the willingness of people to stay together, work out their differences – and the aim is to work out of these differences rather than to suppress them – and together create something of value, all out of freely-elected membership.

Some of the most obvious areas of tension are:

1. **Interpersonal processes:** messy emotional tangles may arise out of the work, the process, and the challenges faced by the individual in relation to others etc. There is the need for periodic emotional house clearing to ensure that resentments do not get stacked up or displaced and that individuals are contributing with the degree of freedom they need to express an authentic involvement and so on.
2. **Archaic personal agendas:** the surfacing of old emotional material that is 'triggered' by some contemporary occurrence. Such distress-determined reactions can take hold of an individual or several members of the group – particularly at times of deep anxiety about the structure or when facing some of the moments of chaos in the process.
3. **Methodological skewing:** lack of familiarity or ease with the creation of an emergent process may lead individuals to leap into old style methodology, such as inappropriate suggestions of structure that may undermine the nature of the inquiry itself. An example of this might be in opting for an unexamined majority voting system where individuals don't get a chance to air their differences or work with them.
4. **The potential for collapse into chaos:** when there are so many different views/ responses offered at different times, managing the complexity is a major undertaking. Also, attempts to bring it all together prematurely in an effort to 'rescue' the situation that will re-order itself into a new more integrated and complex form can actually precipitate the very phenomena that it seeks to forestall.

5. **The lack of emotional and/or methodological sophistication amongst members:** a good description (such as the one we have borrowed here from Barbara Langton) suggests Co-operative Inquiry is something easily within reach of any interested inquiry group. However, in actual practice, managing the varying processes and keeping together to make progress with the inquiry itself is far from easy. Members who are new to many dimensions of it need nurturing and supporting through their anxieties or their projections about how ‘messy’ it all is. The tendency to blame or feel dispirited is considerable if members are naïve in working at this level of disclosure and feedback.
6. **Unwillingness to face ‘no rebirth without a death’:** an inquiry moves through a number of cycles: planning, acting, reviewing, sifting and sorting the results, and then moving to a new planning cycle once more. This is an easy enough series of moves to describe but not to ‘live through’. There can be an unwillingness to let go of one particular phase and move on. This indicates a form of clinging to an out of date stage of the cycle for fear of entering the chaos that will re-emerge for a time.

Individuals get more interested in some phases of the cycle than others. Some cycles are more demanding upon all members than others and the potential for ‘slippage’ and getting off track require a degree of vigilance from everyone involved. The period between cycles can be a deeply unsettling period for everyone with no one sure that the move is timely or that further concentration on present agendas wouldn’t bear fruit. Learning to ‘listen’ and to really ‘hear’ the shifts and changes that occur is a major challenge of individual sensitivity, but an important potential for growth and development.

7. **Unaware addiction to some undisclosed collusive corporate premise:** if participants at an early stage develop a collusive agreement to avoid or to pursue some theme or topic without surfacing the unconscious enmeshment that is driving the activity, it can lead the inquiry itself a long way off track. It may also generate a climate that makes it increasingly difficult for any individual or sub-group to challenge strongly enough the way the unconscious projections are driving the group’s direction.
8. **Wholesome chaos is refuted, leading to consensus collusion:** those who find the uncertainties stronger than either they have anticipated or have experienced elsewhere, may find themselves making appealing and apparently rational calls for foreshortening on the chaos. They may also suggest an ‘obvious’ structural recommendation as the ‘answer’ to the issue that, even if it fails to take hold, may lock up a good deal of the available energy in dealing with the displacement that it signals. Chaos is an inevitable and to be welcomed part of the creative process.
9. **Experiential focusing:** it is important that the participants develop the skill of experiential focusing – noting the subtle shifts and processes of the inquiry’s movements. In large measure, the major benefit of the inquiry process for individuals is their self-development in the form of an increase in their ‘self as instrument’ – their capacity to sense the moves in the processes that the inquiry follows with increasing clarity and confidence. This awareness of being in communication with others at such a level is a talent not confined to the inquiry itself but can be taken out to life. It thus becomes an important aspect of the individual’s growth and repertoire as a participant on the planet.

Inquiry Outcomes

It is in the area of inquiry outcomes that CI demonstrates some of its more radical aspects. Traditional research is almost exclusively concerned with written records, conceptual information and generally adding more to the store of knowledge *about* a topic. However, whilst this is not overlooked in CI, it is viewed as only one way of recording ‘findings’. There are four major ways ‘findings’ generated by CI are expressed from the most radical to the most familiar and conventional i.e. written records.

| Expression of Findings | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Transformations of being: | presence |
| Transformations of skill: | practice |
| Aesthetic patterns: | presentation |
| Written records: | propositions |

Box 5: Co-operative Inquiry Outcomes

1. **Transformations of being: presence:** as a result of inquiry research and experience the person is changed, deep connections between personal learning and being-in-the-world are established and the individual is therefore in the world differently. This is one of the most potent forms of change. The radical impact is demonstrable, expressive, declared and lived out for all to see.
2. **Transformations of skill: practice:** following an inquiry a person can now manage, express, 'perform' with greater fluency, order or coherence than previously. They can embed their learning in forms of expression that were not previously possible or were of only limited complexity. Action in the world is informed, developed and enhanced by the research and brings about notable shifts in action and performance.
3. **Aesthetic patterns: presentation:** individuals, the inquiry group or a sub-group might give expressive form to their 'findings'. This may be through acts of drama, dance, primary theatre or other ritual expression of the 'meanings' arising out of their shared inquiry – all these are possible aesthetic expressions and presentations. The capacity to represent learning and understanding in other ways than formal data gives freedom for participants to find creative and expressive media that reflect the value of the insights gained and the learning achieved.
4. **Written records: propositions:** finally, we come to the more traditional and conventional aspects of presenting and collating findings – the writing up and the conceptualising 'about' the work that has taken place with or without the thought of publication and wider circulation. Distributing texts, sharing understanding and providing direct comprehensive and replicable accounts of the work may be part of a CI.

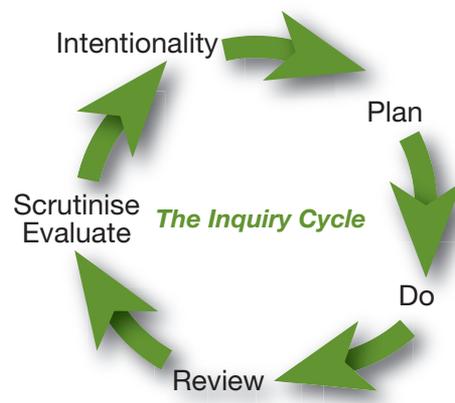


Figure 2: The Inquiry Cycle

CI follows a similar pattern to all forms of action research. Each step in a cycle feeds into the others: none stands isolated and alone. There is the need for:

- Some planning
- A developing intention or getting intention into the equation
- Separating one's wishes and hopes from what one is willing to actually put to the work.

This is followed by some design of how the intention can be given active and realistic expression to generate some information that will have a value in being monitored, collated and brought back to share with collaborators. Then there is the implementation of the work, which may take the form of inquiring of others in the world about how they understand some phenomenon or how they deal with a situation that a participant is investigating.

It may (and more often, in my experience) take the form of the individual monitoring and noting their own responses to situations or experiences of a kind that illuminate the question. These *observations* then form the *raw data* that are brought together at a future meeting of the inquiry group.

From initial comments and observations, attention is given to the most appropriate ways to work with the kind of data that people have identified, whilst from the *sifting and sorting process* some *evaluation* takes place. This is a tentative attempt to state or declare where one's inquiry has reached before the work begins on finding the next theme or the next redefinition of the question for a future cycle.

In this way, the inquiry is dynamic and adaptable to the discoveries of its members as cycles progress. There is no pre-determined sequence of steps to take or research to do; these emerge as the inquiry progresses. Certain elements need to be held as conscious elements of the process:

1. **The need for creative management:** the underlying purpose is to 'generate transformative action for...' The more members remind themselves of the potential for the work to have transformative effects, the less likely they are to get 'hung up' on procedural mechanics.
2. **The need for a balance between reflection and action:** John Heron suggests somewhere in the region of six to eight cycles as a useful number to keep the whole thing mobile and evolving. Too few cycles and the results are not that innovative, more than eight cycles and it is hard for a group to maintain its focus or for members to continue to attend.⁵
3. **Encouragement to develop 'reflection in action':** data management and collection needs to be appropriate and not necessarily confined to those predictable and typical of more conventional research methods – diaries/diagrams etc. There is room for more creative, authentically artistic accounts.

Reporting and Recording

It is important to draw a distinction between *records* and *reports*. For our purposes, records are the personal recordings of experiences, observations, learnings that the individual acquires throughout the inquiry. These records could be merely jottings, drawings, or more elaborate accounts. They form the basis of any individual or collective report. Once the reporting stage is reached, however, a wider audience than the inquiry participants is being considered.

The notion of the report raises a number of questions and issues. For example, how and who reports what to whom? These are questions often asked about CI 'results'. It might well be that an organisation is willing to support a group of staff exploring aspects of their practice by using a CI model, but that should not give them the expectation that they somehow have a right to, or otherwise have ownership of, the results. These kinds of issues need to be made explicit to all concerned at the outset. Inquiry research is the property of the inquirers, who may or may not have an interest in broadcasting their findings to a wider audience. Hopefully, some will and the endeavours that CI can help people explore can then become more widely known. John Heron's book (*Co-operative Inquiry*, 1994) describes personal learning and observation of individual participants on various inquiries.

There may be individual accounts of a Co-operative Inquiry and not necessarily one common report. Given the nature of the learning, individuals may wish to create some formal record of their own progress that is not in any sense an inquiry 'owned' piece of work. However, it has arisen out of the shared efforts of all and others will almost certainly have contributed to the value of what has been learned. Courtesy suggests that there is some acknowledgement of even personal conclusions that take a permanent form and participants often get together to assist in the development of the finished 'product'.

It may, in contrast, be a corporate decision of the inquirers to generate their common record or to have one such record assembled through the agency of *rappoteurs* or other 'volunteers'. In such cases the individual(s) charged with the task of preparing the document are acting on behalf of the inquirers and have to balance the needs of the task against the potential range of opinions that need to be reflected in any account of what took place.

⁵In several inquiry groups, participants have continued to meet in a reflective and quasi-CI mode because of the fellowship and level of trust the inquiry itself developed. Such 'follow-up' meetings are not to be confused with the inquiry phase itself and certainly are not an alternative to it. They do, however, illustrate some of the lifelong benefits of connection and sharing that a successful inquiry can generate amongst those taking part.

If, as occurred on one occasion, an individual expressed a desire to keep track of the group process (on occasions, verbatim reports) as a means of having a historical account of what took place, this would need to be openly discussed by inquiry members and agreed at the outset. Yet this itself is not an easy thing. There are questions of surfacing any genuine concerns about something apparently so innocuous as an individual's wish to record what is happening, or conversely something so extremely challenging to raise given the potential implications of having someone write down what you say and which may, one day, find its way into the public report/record!

These matters can be straightforward or they can be complex and require some delicate negotiation. The use of recording is not something of an afterthought but a consideration that needs to be surfaced early. A balance has to be found between maintaining the atmosphere and development of the inquiry momentum and not treating something as simply a procedural matter when it has potentially enormous implications. It may be fine for an experienced inquirer to pass the matter of someone making a written record off as of no consequence but, for others, it may be the signal that their autonomy is already being compromised by the decision others want to make without any great opportunity to influence what finally happens to the material.

Having the reporting issue out in the open early has to be balanced with the need for people to get a feel for what they are doing before they can have any meaningful sense of what views they take to its propagation. The more an inquiry is likely to surface useful findings that may have value to others, the more the discussion needs to be raised at the first appropriate time: far enough in to the inquiry for people to know and be able to express any genuine reservations they may have and yet soon enough for the recording to illuminate the whole inquiry life cycle.

Co-operative Inquiry Cultures

There are two main styles for approaching a Co-operative Inquiry; however, they are not mutually exclusive. Each style of inquiry generates a distinctive 'culture' and one might be used more consistently than the other given the topic or the participants and one style might be much more appropriate at a particular point in an inquiry. It is not unusual for single inquiry to apply and use both cultures at different points in the life of the inquiry. The inquiry cultures are referred to as the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian* to illustrate their contrasting expressions.

1. **Apollonian:** the more traditional – structured, planned, more ordered and thought out in advance.
2. **Dionysian:** more creative, spontaneous and open to innovation and intuition as it goes along. The getting to where we intended is less important than being with the flow and flux; of learning how to be with the process as it unfolds.

Summary

The main points of Co-operative Inquiry include:

1. Working out together:
 - What we explore: **theme**
 - Who explores it: **design**
 - What is then involved: **implementation**
 - How we go about it: **methodology.**
2. A way of working participatively and co-creatively.
3. A way of finding authentic responses to the topic and therefore being open to challenge so that we can identify patterns and distortions in thinking, misapprehensions in the data and the experiences that we undertake.
4. The importance of the evolution of the group's influence as it progresses.
5. The risks of illusion, collusion and delusion: the risk of 'letting things go because...'

6. Affirming that authority lies within – balanced with a sharing of decision-making and working it out together.
7. The value and use of rounds:⁶
 - To keep track
 - To keep pace
 - To check where we are
 - To review where we are together.
9. Method: the research cycle of planning. Being intentional in our exploration, moving into doing, scrutinising, evaluating and then reviewing before the cycle begins again.
- 10 Main areas of tension:
 - Methodological ‘skewing’
 - Undisclosed collusive agendas
 - Interpersonal issues: archaic material being triggered by the uncertainty of the experience.
11. Chaos: requires a need to be loose about control and a willingness to express uncertainties about where the process may be at any particular moment.
12. What helps:
 - Knowing that chaos is wholesome
 - Remembering that there is no rebirth without a death
 - Devil’s Advocate procedures
 - Asking, ‘What are we doing?’
 - Open, loving challenge
 - Creative engagement
 - Recognising we are not together unless we are all together
 - Silence is only people not saying anything – no one can read its meaning securely.

⁶The term ‘round’ describes the opportunity for each participant to have an interrupted time to make a relevant observation or comment on the subject matter in hand. In CI, a round may be requested to learn something of where people are in relation to the topic, the process – indeed, anything that makes clearer where things stand.

Section 4: Oasis and Co-operative Inquiry: Outline History

Main Influences

- Peer learning principles
- Self and peer assessment process from the 1980s in all Oasis programmes
- Experiential approach to learning
- Long experience of helping and counselling education from a self-directed learning perspective
- Involvement with IDHP (Institute for the Development of Human Potential) and the New Paradigm Influences (Rowan and Reason)
- Association for over 20 years with John Heron: formerly Director of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation and Director of the Human Potential Research Project at the University of Surrey, now at the South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry in New Zealand.

CI Milestone Events

1996 Visit by John Heron to Oasis to introduce the methodology of CI at a two-day event.

1997-8 Foundation Programme in Transpersonal Learning Community: a peer learning approach to Transpersonal Exploration for one year. The programme led to the foundation of the Transpersonal Learning Community, a peer-based community model of exploring transpersonal experiences that meets for 20 days per year and has continued from its inception in 1998. Currently, it has 15 members.

May 1999 Co-operative Inquiry into Integrated Practice and Holistic Learning: an 18-month modular programme. The programme was inaugurated with a week-long residential in Volterra, Tuscany, with John Heron as initiating facilitator into the themes of the inquiry. The inquiry then continued on a modular basis and there are full reports of the work undertaken and some personal records of individual group members.

2001 A Co-operative Inquiry – Transformative Living, Transforming the World through Transforming the Self – began meeting in Wales. The group settled to a dozen members and met regularly for over two years. The group members then decided to continue to meet informally to review their transpersonal progress and still do so as of July 2004. Some reports are available on aspects of the work.

2001 Co-operative Inquiry into Peer Learning inaugurated by Oasis and invited associates to explore aspects of Peer Learning via CI Methods. The inquiry was incomplete. Reports are available of the stages of the inquiry and there are some individual notes.

March 2002 A Co-operative Inquiry into Primal Theatre with John Heron. A group of eight people from Oasis joined a five-day intensive CI at the South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry in New Zealand.

April 2002 CI into 'Difference'; a six-month inquiry in a small group to explore aspects of difference.

July 2002 Co-Creation workshop held by John Heron on behalf of Oasis.

January 2003 First Diploma in Transpersonal Development offered by Oasis: a peer learning community-based programme with an optional second year as a Co-operative Inquiry. (The group is on-going.)

April 2004 Intensive five-day CI into 'The Space Between' with the Centre for Human Inquiry.

October 2004 Inquiry into Global Responsibility with UN Global Compact and European Foundation for Management Development.

November 2004 UK Peer Inquiry into Leadership with multi-sector participants.

Context Observations

CI has a strong alignment with the kind of values and methodology that Oasis has developed over the length of its life. Participative research and methods like grounded theory are familiar in the work of the organisation, and CI is a more radical methodology than these.

With its requirement for high levels of participation and willingness to experience substantial personal development through the demanding process of CI, it has enormous potential as a development tool in areas of exploration relating to the 'human condition'.

It is also suited to any topic about which there is no settled view and which draws participants who are interested in deepening their own appreciation of the topic in question.

Although there are reports of CIs being undertaken in universities, such as Manchester, by groups of students (with tutor support or involvement), it is unlikely to become a mainstream form of research and inquiry because of its radical experiential nature.

The Centre for Action Research and Professional Practice (CARPP, Bath University) promoted collaborative and inquiry-based methods of research that led to the award of higher degrees. In recent years there has been a strong interest in many social sciences and humanities departments in alternative methods of research. Bristol is another centre noted for collaborative methods. In relation to the total provision of mainstream higher education, this kind of research is minimal and, though encouraging, it is on the fringes of the academic world.

Action research as a means of gaining academic recognition, it can be argued, represents a programmatic marriage between the theoretical interests of the participant and the need for institutions to find ways to attract postgraduate students who are not interested in taught programmes. Action research provides a way of awarding qualifications for individuals who are largely self-directed and have interest in making a difference in their world rather than simply contributing to the avalanche of academic knowledge.

Appendix 1: Towards an Extended Epistemology

If we are going to begin to inquire into participative and qualitative methods, we need a different methodology: a whole person methodology and not a traditional cognitive approach. A number of people who have developed participatory and Co-operative Inquiry approaches have begun to develop a 'post-linguistic' view of consciousness. In this, individuals talk increasingly of a participatory paradigm in which all life takes part as an expression of consciousness.

The radical implications of this paradigm are gradually opening out in every area of human endeavour. There are implications for science, sacred practices, artistic endeavour, ecological respect, political arrangements, social justice, redistribution of resources and the economic order. No field of activity is spared. *Feeling and Personhood*, by John Heron, is a definitive text in this area and an excellent introduction to it is John Gray's *Tour of Feeling and Personhood* (only available from Oasis Press).

Systemic Thinking

Peter Reason, in a recent article in *Resurgence*, extends and develops some of the newly emerging ideas. He highlights the importance of more systemic thinking and suggests that it offers an important counterpoint to both the mechanical world-view of the past and the temptations inherent in the relativist world-views that are currently attracting attention.

“However, systemic thought can miss the important point that *we are embodied participants in the co-creation of our world*. The human mind makes its world by participating in its being. Our theories and models of the world are grounded in our experiential participation in what is present, in what there is. Therefore the notion of *participation* must be central to the new world-view.”

Peter Reason in *Resurgence* (first italics added).

The Fields of Knowing

What would such a participatory paradigm include and what would it involve? Reason describes how, in order to begin to answer this question, it would help to focus on three fundamental and interrelated areas of further exploration. He points out that any world-view must generate a response to the following questions:

1. 'What is there to know?' The field of **ontology**.
2. 'What is worthwhile?' The field of **axiology**.
3. 'What is the nature of knowledge?' The field of **epistemology**.

We also need to consider what might be required or involved in embarking on such a project.

1. **Knowing what is out there to know (ontology):** there is a marked contrast between the mechanical world-view that sees a world of independent human thought and the relativist world-view that asserts there is nothing but the constructions of the human mind. A participative world-view accepts that there is a given cosmos, a primordial reality, and that human presence actively participates with it. Mind and the given cosmos are engaged in a co-creative dance.

“It is through active participation that we meet what is Other: we call them trees, rocks, persons, spirits and so on. Reality is *subjective-objective*, always called into being and shared by the participation of the knower in what is known.” Peter Reason in *Resurgence*.

2. **Knowing what is worthwhile (axiology):** this opens up the area of values: the value of knowledge itself and the use to which it is put. How do we use our knowing for worthwhile ends, for purposes that are sound and balanced? Who decides what is 'worthwhile' and in relation to what?

“While it is possible to divorce thought from action, you cannot divorce action from thought.” Peter Reason in *Resurgence*.

When we are exploring and deepening our understanding of how come we value what we value and what conflicts that brings about, we learn more profoundly about our world.

“So the purpose of learning, of knowledge, of inquiry is to change the world! Our action in the world is based in our values and in our knowledge; valid action must be grounded in our experiential, presentational and propositional knowing.” Peter Reason in *Resurgence*.

3. **Knowing how we know (epistemology):** the dualism of mind/body, subjective/ objective realms gives way to a much wider range of knowing – ways of knowing that have a useful and legitimate role in making sense of our experience and our world.

There are several ways of ‘knowing’ that are important and the mind actively participates in the creation of its knowing. Knowing itself is not ‘out there’ waiting to be garnered: it is part of a process of engagement with the world. We participate in the world of ‘the other’ in the form of inanimate and animate co-presences. The traditional subjective/objective split is better understood as “a subjectively articulated world, whose objectivity is relative to the perspective of the knower.” (Reason)

Radical Knowing and Co-operative Inquiry

In the same way that dualism lies at the heart of the way we have thought about how we know, so it stands at the centre of what there is to know. There is ‘me’ and there is ‘reality’, but a participatory view recognises that there are at least four major domains of knowing that go beyond both the application of intellect and conceptual knowing that marks out our usual categories of what makes up knowledge. Reason calls this an ‘extended epistemology’. What we are beginning to recognise is something much richer and more extensive than the usual ways of thinking about knowing. It is an altogether more holistic view of knowing. Heron (1996) speaks of it in his recent book on Co-operative Inquiry in this way:

“... holistic knowing which holds that *propositional knowing*, expressed in statements that something is the case, is interdependent with three other kinds of knowing: *practical knowing*, or knowing how to exercise a skill; *presentational knowing*, an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical, and verbal art-forms; and *experiential knowing*, imaging, and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing...” John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry*, Sage, 1996 (italics added).

If we look only a little at each form of knowing in turn, it already begins to suggest that we need a new paradigm for understanding our knowing; a richer way of thinking about what and how we know. We need to come to a deeper way of valuing ways of knowing that traditionally have been relegated to positions of inferiority and even dismissal. If we take them in reverse order according to Heron’s typology, we can immediately recognise some of the limitations of traditional forms of education and training.

1. **Experiential knowing:** such knowing relates to the direct immediacy of our experience. It involves our moral imagination, our willingness to enter into the world of the other rather than stand back and simply observe it.

“Experiential knowing means unrestricted perception and radical meeting. The former is the creative shaping of a world through the transaction of imaging it. The latter is participative empathy, through which we commune with the inner experience of beings and their modes of awareness. The transaction of imaging a world is not restricted to sense perception, but includes productive imagination and extra-sensory perception...”

I suggested that these kinds of knowing are a systematic whole, a pyramid of upwards support in which experiential knowing at the base upholds presentational knowing, which supports propositional or conceptual knowing, which upholds practical knowing, the exercise of skill.” John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry*, Sage, 1996.

Empathy and engagement are essential in experiential knowing. I have to be 'in' it and attentive of it, otherwise I may have experience but it may become little more than a passive accumulation of events. Experiential knowing is a vital ingredient in all human relations whether in personal, social or organisational life. How we learn what we value in and from our experience; how we organise it, reflect upon it, articulate it, communicate it; how we shape it into characteristic productions, develop it into the analysis of report, or create it into forms of narrative account, are all features of experiential knowing.

2. **Presentational knowing:** it is in this shift from experiential knowing that presentational knowing makes its appearance. Having organised my experience internally, recounted it verbally – when I begin to put form and order to it – then I am involved in presentational knowing. In transforming it into something that takes on a life independent of the experience from which it originates, which can then be examined and regarded by others as separate (even though closely related) to me, my knowing takes on presentational form. This is, however, still in the domain of **my** experience, of **my** understanding and **my** way of communicating that understanding and experience.
3. **Propositional knowing:** as our knowing becomes more and more abstract, when we conceptualise it and move beyond the facts, it begins to take on the qualities of propositional knowledge or 'knowledge about'. Such knowledge then moves into the public domain into agreed codes and rules for things to mean what they are to mean. The knowledge of subjects and disciplines is contained in propositional knowledge and is, of course, the domain of most overt education in our education system.

The danger of an overdose of propositional knowledge is knowing how and why things work, what the rules are and even how to follow them, but there is no strong engagement with the 'me' at the centre of it all, or the purpose it might give to 'me' the doer, the actor in the world. It can then become no more than the means by which I conform to the norms of a society, a group or a profession with no regard for the implications or the consequences of the actions of which I am a part.

4. **Practical knowing:** the familiar way of 'knowing how'; of skills and artistry that makes up a performance – whether it be riding a bike, making a cupboard, or flying a kite. It is the integration of knowing and action, and order and pattern into a skilled performance that accomplishes some given purpose; it is the realm of practical competence. Know-how is relatively easy to identify when on display or demonstrated and exceedingly difficult to describe. How do you begin to break up the process of riding a bike, for example?

Academic knowledge is valued for its capacity to be ordered and written and therefore capable of being examined and evaluated independent of the individual who produces it, so it is not surprising that know-how has little status in our culture. Of course, individuals who display know-how to a high order are accorded recognition, but they are nevertheless not regarded as quite legitimate.

The Discounting of Know-how

Much know-how is related to activity in the world of toil, effort and accomplishment, all of which further undermines its importance and its social value. Know-how is difficult to describe. It is one thing to know how to drive a car, but to drive any car in any conditions? A good driver might well decide not to drive 'under these conditions' and another may take the risk. It doesn't make the riskier driver a better driver simply because he/she survives. But, of course, such decisions **require judgement based on an adequate understanding** of the conditions, the influences, the equipment and the state of the folk involved. These things are not easy to measure, let alone evaluate.

It is considerations like these that make it difficult to give know-how its particular importance except where it manifests as high art. It is important to remember that even things like sculpture and ballet are forms of know-how, or certainly depend on it. Know-how is the terrain where most individuals have most of their accomplishments, yet it remains the area least valued in our educational system and least developed by it. Consequently, there is precious little encouragement to develop the resources that most people have or to excel in the talents they possess.

This demeaning of the practical know-how and ability to be able to do things is already changing. In part this is because most of the skills required in world that is rapidly emerging are not simply conceptual skills of a high order (though these are needed) but also inter-personal skills and the capacity to work out things as you go (problem solving), usually with others. The world that is appearing is asking people to become interested in how to influence what is happening rather than display the capacity to be obedient and do as they are told. Formerly, where conformity to authority and acceptance of the routines laid down were essential requirements of most occupations, there is an increasing recognition that people in the future will need far higher levels of creativity, ability to work with others and flexibility in their response to novel or non-routine situations.

Applied activities have usually suffered this kind of elitist condescension from the academic world on the grounds of, 'If you can't describe it, how can anyone know you can do it?' In short, it doesn't value that ability to do things half so much as the capability of explaining how those things are done. And there is a value in being able to explain them, but describing the *Mona Lisa*, a song by Bob Dylan or a film like *American Beauty* is not the same thing as being able to create such works. Yet the emphasis we place upon the critical explanation of how things work as compared to the value we place upon those who can do those very things is out of all proportion.

It is a throwback to the time when education was a mark of social attainment. For those who had rank and status, it was a way of distinguishing themselves from the rest of the population. Those who had to toil by doing, who had a livelihood to make in order hold a place in society, were distinguished by those activities from the wealthy and educated elite who had no such requirements to fulfil. In fact, the less the ruling elite did, the more they were to be esteemed because it placed them beyond the reach of work as a necessity. Know-how was devalued because it was associated with the requirements of economic necessity whereas those with leisure were distinguished by their interest in matters that had no necessary direct economic value. Ability to purchase know-how was held above the know-how itself.

Relationships are, of course, a know-how domain. No matter how well a person understands the importance of 'empathy', for example, if they do not display it it's not much use in their relationships, even though it may well help them pass academic examinations about relationships and they may sound knowledgeable about the way relationships work.

Forms of Belief

Knowledge and belief are closely related. John Heron puts it this way:

"Before knowledge comes belief. A belief is beyond mere arbitrariness of mind. It has some sort of warrant that makes it plausible. The claim to know something has a stronger warrant, which makes the claim not merely plausible but well-founded."
John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry*, Sage, 1996.

My beliefs may be deluded, mistaken, inaccurate, misapplied or simply unfitting to the terrain to which I am attempting to apply them. The difficulty with beliefs is that they hold when the world changes. It is easier to change my perception than change my beliefs and easier to believe what I believe than the evidence to the contrary – 'denial', as it is termed. This is why many of us hang onto beliefs that are redundant or downright unhelpful, long past their sell-by date. Quite simply, it is hard to lose something that you are not only familiar with, but which also makes the world itself the familiar place it is. However, many of us are passing through repeated crises of belief about many of those things in our social, economic and political world, which ensures we are faced with a continual challenge to the relevance or suitability of our beliefs.

Many of us have experienced that crisis of belief when the world presents such overwhelming evidence to the contrary that no matter how hard we try to maintain our belief in 'the way it is', it has to give way and turbulence, upset and internal upheaval ensues. Exploration of beliefs, (and 'values', which are closely related to beliefs and form part of what makes up a belief), can become a conscious process, enabling individuals to make explicit to themselves the commitment that their beliefs imply and the stance their beliefs lead them to adopt. They can therefore become conscious of the consequences and implications of the values and beliefs they hold and begin to articulate to themselves alternative beliefs they wish to evolve. Heron again:

“Just as there are four kinds of knowledge (see below), with the word used in different senses in each case, so there are the equivalent four kinds of belief, with the word ‘belief’ being used not only in the sense of propositional belief in some statement, but also in the sense of presentational belief as a hunch about, rather than a full intuition of, significant pattern; of practical belief as the process of acquiring skill rather than knowing how to do it; of experiential belief as inchoate participation in the presence of something rather than a richly fulfilled resonance with it.

This extension of the notion of belief is related to the distinction between ‘belief that’ and ‘belief in’. Propositional belief is belief that something is the case. Presentational belief is belief in one’s intuitive feel for a meaningful pattern. Practical belief is belief in one’s developing skill. Experiential belief is belief in one’s dawning sense of a presence. These forms of believing in all carry elements of trust and the commitment of faith, as well as their different kinds of provisional and tentative, but not fully substantive, knowing.” John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry*, Sage, 1996.

Many of our beliefs are inherited along with the language, the society, the family and the culture into which we are born; they come with the territory, so to speak. Other beliefs we know we have acquired as a result of decisive experiences and considered reflection. A ‘belief system’ is a handier phrase than anything concrete. Beliefs do not, in a strict sense, form part of a system; they are cast around the contents of our consciousness waiting to be applied without warning to experiences that may be simple and obvious, or complex and incomprehensible. But no matter, our beliefs are on hand to interpret the world for us and tell us what to make of it.

Our beliefs then are both a handicap and a prerequisite for navigating the complexity of the realities that make up the background of our lives. For most of us, working on the limitations of our beliefs and on the replacement of worn out beliefs with more sophisticated beliefs, has already begun or is arriving soon and will remain indefinitely – unless we find sectarian fundamentalism is appealing.

The strength of fundamentalism’s appeal lies in its ability to provide a ready-made answer without the holder having to make the effort to work out the implications and the consequences for themselves. Fundamentalism appears to offer the certainty of understanding the multi-layered complexities of the post-modern era. Of course, in reality, it doesn’t because it can’t (not without the corresponding conviction that once you have your fundamentalist beliefs in place then you have a warrant to make reality conform to your beliefs). Hence the violence and the appalling suffering taking place around the world as people fight, not for resources, not for land, but for their beliefs: for the ability to impose their convictions and make reality what they wish it to be. Beliefs are both pervasive and potentially dangerous.

Educational Impact

The more all such ‘knowledges’ as those described above become inter-related and combined together to meet individual overall purposes or vocation, the more each enriches the other. The more they become part of the person’s felt experience of the totality of all that occurs, the more the one domain is a useful contributor to questions or uncertainties in others, then the more whole their inner and outer world is likely to be. Individuals may fall short of understanding all kinds of things but they are more able to move around their world with a range of valued ways of making sense of all their many experiences.

It is early days yet to predict how many of the new ideas that are circulating in educational circles will take hold and make a real impact upon an educational system designed for a different era and to serve different purposes. There is little doubt that the weight of opinion and the determination of pioneering workers will continue to challenge the ways in which educational provision is offered – even if it is only as a challenge to the mainstream.

The recognition that our personal paradigms are in need of reassessment and re-evaluation, and that the way we learn and how we learn needs to be thought of much more broadly, inevitably raises questions about the nature and purpose of education itself. Underlying the new paradigm ideas that have had an influence upon human relations thinking has been the work of the New Paradigm Research Group who met in the late 1970s and early 1980s and whose work is found in *Human Inquiry*, edited by Peter Reason and John Rowan (1980). It was a book that brought together many of the leading thinkers in the field of experiential learning. The text, still in print, is a source book of ideas and thinking for anyone interested in a radical educational approach and holistic learning. The book also includes an account of the new paradigm of research that is fundamental to a holistic approach.

Experiential research is a new research paradigm, which breaks down the traditional distinction between the role of the researcher and the role of the subject. In the old paradigm, only the researcher does the thinking, generates, designs, manages and draws conclusions from the research; and the subject – often knowing nothing of what the researcher is up to in his thinking – is involved in the action and experience of what is being researched. In the new paradigm, this separation of roles is dissolved. Those involved in the research are co-researchers and co-subjects. They devise, manage and draw conclusions from the research; and also undergo the experiences and perform the actions that are being researched.

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