RESEARCH WITH PEOPLE

The Paradigm of Cooperative Experiential Inquiry

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A methodology of cooperative inquiry in which all those involved work together as coresearchers is described. The epistemological and ontological issues underlying this methodology are briefly discussed, and the argument made that the inquiry rests on an attitude of critical subjectivity within an epistemological heterogeneity. Issues of validity within the paradigm are discussed, and practical steps for exploring threats to validity are outlined.

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As Rogers (1985) has pointed out, there is currently a burgeoning of new models for research and inquiry in the human sciences. We have been involved in the development of this "new" or "post-positivist" paradigm of inquiry for over ten years (Heron, 1971; Reason, 1976), and have developed an approach we call cooperative experiential inquiry. In this article we wish to

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summarize the considerations that led us to this practice, and to describe briefly the cooperative inquiry process. We will also draw attention to the worldview that underlies our approach, and set out some practical steps that can be taken to enhance the validity of this kind of inquiry.

We do not wish to pursue the critique of orthodox inquiry method in detail here: It has been developed by many writers and is thoroughly summarized in Reason and Rowan (1981a). At the heart of this critique is the idea that these methods are neither adequate nor appropriate for the study of *persons*, for persons are to some significant degree self-determining. Orthodox inquiry methods, as part of their rationale, exclude the experimental human subjects from all the thinking and decision making that generates, designs, manages, and draws conclusions from the research. Such exclusion treats the subjects as less than self-determining persons, alienates them from the inquiry process and from the knowledge that is its outcome, and thus invalidates any claim the methods have to being a science of persons.

In essence, science is creative thinking and then careful thinking, with systematic observation and public examination of ideas and predictions against experience. We do not necessarily need experimental or quasiexperimental designs, or questionnaire surveys, or any other particualr methodology to do this. These are only ways that may or may not help us inquire clearly and carefully. Rather than depend on method, we can return to the self-directing person as the primary source of knowing, and thus the primary "instrument" of inquiry, in what we have described as experiential and cooperative inquiry. This means research *with* people, rather than research *on* people (Reason & Rowan, 1981a). It is this approach to research with people that this article addresses.

BASES OF COOPERATIVE INQUIRY

A full account of the philosophical bases of a new paradigm of research has been set out elsewhere (Heron, 1981). Here we

summarize two ideas that were particularly important in the development of our thinking.

(1) *Persons as Self-Determining.* We regard persons as self-determining, that is, as the authors of their own actions—to some degree actually, and to a greater degree potentially. To say that persons are self-determining is to say that their intentions and purposes, their intelligent choices, are causes of their behavior. One can only do research on persons in the full and proper sense of the term if one addresses them as self-determining, which means that what they do and what they experience as part of the research must be to some significant degree determined by them. I can only properly study who you are if your intentionality contributes to what you do in the inquiry. This means that you need to help plan the inquiry as coresearcher as well as be subject in it. So in cooperative inquiry all those involved in the research are both coresearchers, whose thinking and decision making contributes to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience; and also cosubjects, participating in the activity that is being researched.

(2) *The nature of knowledge.* It is useful to distinguish at least three kinds of knowledge: (a) *experiential knowledge* is gained through direct encounter with persons, places, or things: (b) *practical knowledge* concerns how to do something—it is knowledge demonstrated in a skill or competence; (c) *propositional knowledge* is knowledge about something, and is expressed in statements and theories. In research on persons the propositional knowledge stated in the research conclusions needs to be rooted in and derived from the experiential and practical knowledge of the subjects in the inquiry. If the propositions are generated exclusively by a researcher who is not involved in the experience being researched, and are imposed without consultation on the practical and experiential knowledge of the subjects, we have findings that directly reflect the experience of neither the researcher nor the subjects.

METHODOLOGY

In traditional research, the roles of researcher and subject are mutually exclusive. The researcher contributes all the thinking that goes into the project, while the subject contributes the research action to be studied. In the new model of inquiry these mutually exclusive roles give way to a cooperative relationship with bilateral initiative and control, so that all those involved work together as coresearchers and cosubjects. Ideally there is full reciprocity, with each person's agency fundamentally honored both in the exchange of ideas and in the action. There can be no other base for researching the human condition from the standpoint of the person as experiencing agent.

We should note that full reciprocity does not necessarily mean that all those involved in the inquiry enterprise contribute in identical ways. In an inquiry group, as in any human group, people will take different roles, and there will be qualitative differences in contribution. While in a "pure" or ideal form of cooperative inquiry, full consensus will be reached on all decisions, this may not always be practical. At a minimum everyone involved needs to be initiated into the inquiry process and give their free and informed assent to all decisions about process and outcome.

Cooperative inquiry takes place in four phases of action and reflection.

PHASE 1

A group of coresearchers agree on an area for inquiry and identify some initial research propositions. They may choose to explore some aspect of their experience, or agree to try out in practice some particular actions or skills. They also agree to some set of procedures by which they will observe and record their own and each other's experience. This phase involves primarily propositional knowing.

For example, we initated a cooperative inquiry into the theory and practice of holistic medicine and invited general medical

practitioners to join us as coresearchers (Heron & Reason, 1985). After early meetings to establish the group and agree on the nature and scope of the inquiry, the whole group discussed the issues involved in holistic medical practice. From this discussion we developed a conceptual model of holistic medicine, a variety of strategies for applying this model in surgery, and ways of observing and recording the experienced results of this endeavor.

PHASE 2

The group then applies these ideas and procedures: They initiate the agreed actions and observe and record the outcomes of their own and each other's behavior. At this stage they need to be particularly alert for the subtleties and nuances of experience, and to ways in which the original ideas do and do not accord with experience. This phase involves primarily practical knowing.

Returning to our example, the group of doctors applied diverse holistic health strategies within the British National Health Service. For example, they attempted to engage cooperatively with their patients to define the nature of the latter's complaints; they tried to make their diagnoses in terms of psychological, social, and spiritual influences as well as physical symptoms, and so on. The doctors recorded these activities in various ways, writing a report on each full cycle of application for the next meeting of the group.

PHASE 3

The coresearchers will in all probability become fully immersed in this activity and experience. At times they will be excited and carried away by it; at times they will be bored and alienated by it; at times they will forget they are involved in an inquiry project. They may forget or otherwise fail to carry out and record the agreed procedures, or they may stumble on unexpected and unpredicted experiences and develop creative new insights. This stage of full immersion is fundamental to the whole process: It is

here that the coresearchers, fully engaged with their experience, may develop an openness to what is going on for them and their environment, which allows them to bracket off their prior beliefs and preconceptions and so see their experience in a new way. This phase involves mainly experiential knowing. For example, some of our holistic doctors found that significant self-development and personal growth is fundamental to effective holistic practice. This was not an hypothesis that all members took into the inquiry.

PHASE 4

After an appropriate period engaged in stages two and three, the coresearchers return to consider their original research propositions and hypotheses in the light of experience, modifying, reformulating, and rejecting them, adopting new hypotheses, and so on. They may also amend and develop their research procedures more fully to record their experience. So this phase involves a critical return to propositional knowing. Thus our medical inquiry group met periodically over a year to revise and develop our overall model of holistic medicine as well as particular strategies for implementing it.

This cycle of movement from reflection to action and back to reflection needs to be repeated several times so that ideas and discoveries tentatively reached in early cycles may be clarified, refined, deepened, and corrected. This "research cycling" clearly has an important bearing on the empirical validity of the whole inquiry process, and is discussed in more detail later in this article.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL HETEROGENEITY

Having outlined the cooperative inquiry method, we wish now to turn to some of the epistemological and ontological issues that underlie it. We do this even though it means touching only briefly on complex questions of fundamental importance, and in doing

so we may be seen as oversimplifying and overstating. However, our disciplines are involved in a shift in paradigms; maybe our Western culture is involved in an epochal shift in worldview: The old perspective is passing, and there is as yet no "official" or generally accepted alternative. The ground of our understanding is shifting under our feet, and these are anxious, confusing, and exciting times when debate must inevitably verge on the polemical. As Feyerabend (1978) points out, it is impossible to translate between paradigms, they are incommensurable. Whatever we write, we will necessarily upset and disturb some people: Therefore it is important to us to state clearly, if briefly, how work with our method has affected our thinking.

Cooperative inquiry is inquiry with people; it is participatory. While it overlaps with qualitative and naturalistic research methods, it is also significantly different from them because it invites people to participate in the cocreation of knowing about themselves. Texts on qualitative method suggest that research must be "grounded" in data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), or that findings must be "negotiated" with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We argue that this is not enough.

Skolimowski (1985) maps out how our prevailing worldview and associated epistemology is in the process of change. The worldview based on Cartesian rationality and Newtonian physics, with "an empirical view of the mind based on notions of objectivity" (p. 12), is giving way: It is under pressure from new ideas in physics, from systems thinking and ecological awareness, and from the realization of the dark side of our culture, the "ecological devastations, human and social fragmentation, the spiritual impoverishment" (p. 22).

Skolimowski argues that as the mechanistic metaphor collapses, an evolutionary-holistic cosmology is emerging, and that this goes hand in hand with a participatory methodology:

> Wholeness means that all parts belong together, and that means that they partake in each other. Thus from the central idea that all is connected, that each is part of the whole, comes the idea that

> each participate in the whole. *Thus participation is an implicit aspect of wholeness* [Skolimowski, 1985, p. 25].

As we participate in the Whole we cocreate with it. In some sense we choose our reality and our knowing of it; therefore, valid human inquiry essentially requires full participation in the creation of personal and social knowings.

In our own practice we started to develop and use cooperative inquiry primarily for pragmatic reasons: We could find no other way of doing justice to the experience and action of self-directing persons. But once we started working this way—both initiating our own inquiries and supervising research students—we were in a sense forced, by our experience of what worked and what didn't work, further and further away from an orthodox scientific worldview. We found that we were almost inevitably adopting a radical philosophical position that affirms the centrality of critical subjectivity and epistemological heterogeneity. While this position is related and indebted to the work of many modern writers on science (Bateson, 1972; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Bohm, 1978; Capra, 1982; Hainer, 1968; Koestler, 1978; Macmurray, 1957; Maslow, 1966; Mitroff, 1974; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1978; Polanyi, 1958; Schwartz & Oglivy, 1980; Wilber, 1981), it has evolved out of our practical work as researchers in the fields of humanistic psychology and holistic medicine.

Orthodox scientific inquiry within the positivist paradigm is based on at least six presuppositions with which we take issue: (1) that there is one "reality"; (2) that this one reality can be known objectively; (3) that this knowledge is identical for all knowers; (4) that knowledge is expressed in propositions that are validated empirically, in the ideal form in the carefully controlled experiment; (5) that the whole may be explained in terms of the sum of the parts, and the aim of inquiry is to discover more and more fundamental elements and processes; and (6) that explanation is sought in terms of linear, energetic cause and effect. (For a useful review of the positivist paradigm, see Lincoln & Guba, 1985.)

While we believe that this view of the scientific enterprise is no longer fully secure, it still prevails at heart both among laypeople

and many professionals. While sophisticated theoretical discussions may argue that science has moved beyond this position, in fundamental ways many people remain attached to it: It underlies our Western civilization and is the basis of its success and of its troubles, and is extremely difficult and anxiety provoking to get away from. As Bateson (1972, p. 462) argues, "The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way." Our own attempts to think in a new way have led us to the following tentative position.

First, we hold that reality is both one and many in the sense that we can only have knowledge of objective reality (accepting, for pragmatic purposes, that there is one or are some) from many different subjective perspectives as we choose or cocreate our reality (Rogers, 1980). Thus knowledge is subjective-objective, always knowing from a perspective (Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1979) in the sense of being a "personal view from some distance" suggesting "neither the universality of objectivity nor the personal bias of subjectivity" (p. 51). As Bateson puts it:

> The word "objective" becomes, of course, quite quietly obsolete: and the world subjective, which normally confines you within your skin, disappears as well. . . . The world is no longer "out there" in quite the way it used to be. . . . There is a combining or marriage between an objectivity that is passive to the outside world and a creative subjectivity, neither pure solipsism nor its opposite. . . . Somewhere between these two is a region where you are partly blown by the winds of reality and partly an artist creating a composite out of inner and outer events [in Brockman, 1977, p. 245].

And as we have argued before,

> We have to learn to think dialectically, to view reality as a process, always emerging through a self-contradictory development, always becoming; knowing this reality is neither subjective nor objective, it is both wholly independent of me and wholly dependent on me [Reason & Rowan, 1981b, p. 241].

Thus there will be as many knowings as there are knowers, we must accept an epistemological heterogeneity. Truth about reality (or realities) may be more fully revealed in the way these different knowings or perspectives overlap and inform each other.

It also follows from the tripartite nature of knowledge that these multiple knowings are not only sets of propositions or theories about the subject matter, but also the validating competences (practical knowledge) and experiences (experiential knowledge) of those participating in it. This point is echoed by Torbert (1981, p. 145) who argues that the important thing is "not how to develop a reflective science *about* action, but how to develop genuinely well informed action—how to conduct *action science.*"

Within this paradigm we seek to understand and act in whole systems and whole situations as such, not fragmenting wholes into the simple sum of the parts but understanding the parts in terms of their interaction within the whole, realizing also that we are a part of that whole. Finally, arising from this ecological view, explanation is sought in terms of mutual action and interaction within the total system, not solely in terms of linear cause and effect (Bateson, 1972).

In conducting cooperative inquiry we seek not objectivity but what might be termed *critical subjectivity*: We seek a "rigor of softness." It is to the establishment of that rigor that we now turn.

VALIDITY IN COOPERATIVE INQUIRY

Cooperative inquiry claims to be a valid approach to research with people because it "rests on a collaborative encounter with experience" (Reason & Rowan, 198lb). This is the touchstone of the approach in that any practical skills or theoretical propositions that arise from the inquiry can be said to derive from and be congruent with this experience. The validity of this encounter with experience in turn rests on the high quality, critical, self-aware, discriminating, and informed judgements of the co-

researchers. Of course, this means that the method is open to all the ways in which human beings fool themselves and each other in their perceptions of the world, through cultural bias, character defense, political partisanship, spiritual impoverishment, and so on. As we have argued earlier (Reason & Rowan, 1981b; Heron, 1982), cooperative inquiry is threatened by unaware projection and consensus collusion.

Unaware projection means that we deceive ourselves. We do this because to inquire carefully and critically into those things that we care about is an anxiety-provoking business that stirs up our psychological defenses. We then project our anxieties onto the world we are supposed to be studying (Devereaux, 1967).

The coresearchers on our holistic medicine inquiry had invested half a lifetime, years of education, practice and commitment in being orthodox doctors: To set this aside to explore new attitudes and ways of practice was a formidably difficult task, involving the personal risk of error and shame, and the possibility of injury and death. It is much more comfortable to hold onto the worldview one already knows. Therefore it is easy for one's defenses to give rise to a whole variety of self-deceptions in the course of the inquiry, so one cannot or will not see the new truth.

Consensus collusion means that the co-researchers may band together as a group in defence of their anxieties, so that areas of their experience which challenge their worldview are ignored or not properly explored.

PROCEDURES FOR ENHANCING VALIDITY

We suggest the following procedures may serve to counteract (but not eliminate) these threats to validity (Reason & Rowan, 1981b; Heron, 1982).

(1) *Development of discriminating awareness.* Unless human beings adopt some practices for cultivating the quality of their awareness—what might be called *mindfulness* or *wakefulness*

(Masters, 1981)—they cannot practice critical subjectivity, but merely lapse into subjectivism, and "life is but a dream." This applies particularly to experiential inquiry. There are many disciplines, both ancient and modern, from which we can borrow for this purpose. In our own work we have adapted from Gestalt therapy, T'ai Chi and Circle Dancing, Alexander's Inhibiting Technique and the Gurdjieff "Stop!" exercise (Masters, 1981), the work of Jean Houston (1982), and Charlotte Selver (in Brooks, 1974).

(2) *Research cycling, divergence, and convergence. Research cycling* means taking an idea several times around the cycle of reflection and action. Primarily, this provides a series of corrective feedback loops; it may also clarify and deepen the ideas being explored (Heron, 1982). Divergence and convergence are complementary forms of cycling. We may choose to explore one aspect of our inquiry in closer and closer detail over several cycles, or we may choose to diverge into different aspects so we can see phenomena in context, or both. Through convergent cycling the coresearchers are checking and rechecking with more and more attention to detail. Through divergent cycling one may affirm equally the values of heterogeneity and the creativity that comes with taking many different viewpoints, and in addition place one's work in a wider context.

This interweaving of convergence and divergence over several cycles has the effect of knitting together various strands of the inquiry into a comprehensive whole. It assures that, while any one piece of data or conclusion may be tentative or open to error, the final outcome is a network of interrelated ideas and evidence that together have a holistic or contextual validity (Diesing, 1972; Reason, 1985).

Thus in our holistic medicine project we completed six cycles of action and reflection in the course of a year's study. We started the project with each person following her or his own interests. Some explored power sharing with their patients by organizing self-help groups for particular ailments; some set out to widen the kinds of

issues they explored with patients in the surgery; others decided to look critically at their own lifestyle, and so on. It seemed right to continue this degree of divergence through the first two cycles, since it sustained creativity and commitment, and enabled the group as a whole to range freely over the whole field. At the third meeting, however, we established two subgroups. One explored power-sharing strategies and another the use of spiritual interventions, thus seeking a balance between divergence and convergence in our research cycling.

(3) Authentic collaboration. It is clearly not possible to do this kind of research alone; the diversity of viewpoint, the loving support of colleagues, the challenge when we seem to be in error, are all essential. Since collaboration is an essential aspect of this form of inquiry, it must be in some sense authentic: it must not be a relationship overdominated by a charismatic leader or a small clique, but rather the kind of experieince in which all persons can in time find a place to be themselves, to make their own contribution to decision making and creative thinking, and in which the differences among all concerned may be celebrated. Our experience with a variety of learning groups convinces us that it is possible to facilitate the emergence of intimate collaboration with appropriate amounts of both support and confrontation. We know that this also takes time, willingness, and skill.

In our holistic medicine inquiry, we met for one three-hour session each cycle in an encounter group format. During this time we attempted to establish norms of open and direct critique of our behavior during the inquiry. We discovered several aspects of our group process with which we were unhappy, and those we attempted to change. For example, discussion was at times dominated by vocal cliques; the men tended to be more outspoken than the women; and our leadership as initiating facilitators was challenged and criticized. Our conclusion at the end of the project was that we had managed to establish authentic participation in the group, but to a modest degree.

(4) *Falsification.* We have mentioned above the danger of consensus collusion. It is essential that inquiry groups build in norms that will counter this tendency: We need what Torbert (1976) described as "friends willing to act as enemies." We have found the Devil's Advocate procedure helpful in this. The Devil's Advocate is a member of the group who temporarily takes the role of radical critic. The Devil's Advocate is charged with the paradoxical duty of challenging all assumptions the group appears to make, all occasions when actual behavior appears to diverge from espoused behavior and ideology, all occasions when the group appears to be colluding to bury some issue, and so on. The Devil's Advocate may be appointed as part of a regular session; or special sessions may be arranged where the Devil's Advocate's role is evoked and systematically exercised—such as when critically challenging tentative findings. We have found it helpful if the Devil's Advocate has some concrete symbol of authority—something can usually be found that will serve as a "mace."

(5) *Management of unaware projections.* We have pointed out above how unacknowledged distress and psychological defenses may seriously distort inquiry. Some systematic method is needed that will draw the distress into awareness and either resolve it or allow it creative expression. Devereaux (1967) suggested that the researcher should undergo psychoanalysis; we have used co-counseling (Jackins, 1965; Heron, 1973). That is a method of reciprocal support through which each person, working as client in a pair relationship, can explore the ways in which their own defenses are being caught up with the research thinking and action. Psychodrama can be similarly used (Hawkins, 1986).

(6) *Balance of action and reflection.* Collaborative inquiry involves both action and reflection, and somehow these need to be brought into appropriate balance. Too much action without reflection is mere activism; too much reflection without action is mere introspection and armchair discussion. The right sort of

balance will depend on the inquiry in question, and on the judgments of those involved.

(7) *Chaos.* From our early inquiries we came to the conclusion that a descent into chaos would often facilitate the emergence of new creative order. There is an element of arbitrariness, randomness, chaos, indeterminism, in the scheme of things. If the group is really going to be open, adventurous, exploratory, creative, innovative, and put all at risk to reach out for the truth beyond fear and collusion, then once the inquiry is well under way, divergence of thought and expression is likely to descend into confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, disorder, and even chaos with most if not all coresearchers feeling lost to a greater or lesser degree.

There can be no guarantee that chaos will occur; certainly one cannot plan it. The key validity issue is to be prepared for it, to be able to tolerate it, to go with the confusions and uncertainty; not to pull out of it anxiously, but to wait until there's a real sense of creative resolution. We make this argument for openness to extreme uncertainty to counterbalance the human being's enormous capacity for creating and sustaining order, even when such order is no longer appropriate.

APPLICATION OF VALIDITY PROCEDURES

These validity procedures are useful for systematically reviewing the quality of inquiry work. Use of them does not mean that the experiential, practical, or propositional knowing that comes out of the research is valid in any absolute sense of the term, but rather that it is possible to see more clearly and communicate to others the perspective from which that knowing is derived, and to illuminate the distortions that may have occurred.

It is important to distinguish between the influence of perspective and distortion. For example, the perspective of our holistic medicine inquiry is that of a group of general medical practitioners who are interested in and committed to the development of holistic practice. Other groups—patients, professional medical

researchers, hospital doctors, and so on—would have worked from equally valid but different perspectives. Dialogue between these would increase the comprehensiveness of our knowing. The perspective of the inquiry also derives from the aware choices of the inquiry group as they carry out their work—for example, how they chose convergent and divergent cycles of inquiry. On the other hand, distortions in inquiry derive from the group's *unaware* choices arising from simple carelessness and unsystematic inquiry, from anxiety, false consensus, and so on.

Full use of the validity procedures will assist an inquiry group to make decisions that will clarify the perspective of its work, and draw its attention to ways in which the inquiry is likely to be distorted. In our own inquiries we have used the validity procedures to review systematically our work at the end of each cycle of research. In the early cycles of the holistic medical inquiry this review was completed entirely by ourselves as initiating facilitators. As the inquiry progressed the validity procedures were increasingly adopted, internalized, and developed by members of the inquiry group, so that by the fourth meeting the validity review was undertaken by the group as a whole.

ASSESSMENT OF COOPERATIVE INQUIRY

We have been asked by the editors of this journal to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the cooperative inquiry approach. We have decided to take our own advice and do this in the form of a critical dialogue between ourselves and a more orthodox Devil's Advocate, who expresses some of the objections of our critics.

Devil's Advocate: What do you two think you're up to, anyway? It is not clear whether you are putting forward a whole new approach to research, or just offering additional tools that may be useful in some circumstances.

Authors: No, it's not just another tool. We are attempting to work our way toward a new, genuinely postpositivist paradigm for

inquiry with persons. We argue strongly that the only basis for inquiry with persons is cooperation, participation, dialogue, whatever term is preferred. Here we have set out our way of cooperation; we know that other inquirers and other inquiry groups will find their own different approaches.

Devil's Advocate: But how on earth can you expect people to devote so much time and energy to it? The method just won't work unless people really want to work with you.

Authors: That's right. We don't see any point to inquiry unless people genuinely want to change their experience or behavior, personally or professionally, on the basis of new knowings. Much research is quite useless in practice, because no one is committed to the questions posed or the answers obtained, so it becomes an academic exercise, in the worst sense of that term.

Devil's Advocate: But then you can really only work with very small samples, and your results will not be generalizable!

Authors: When you use the term "sample" you reveal your continuing commitment to positivist assumptions and methods. We want to work with *people,* not with samples. And generalization is problematic anyway, since you cannot, in our epistemology, generalize knowings beyond the particular person or group who holds them. What you *can* do is tell others, "This is what we found for ourselves, maybe you would like to try it out as well," which seems to us to be a much more healthy way of spreading ideas and practice.

Devil's Advocate: Well then, all you are really doing is offering us another "exploratory" research method. There really is no way of testing theories and confirming your findings.

Authors: You really are attached to the old ideas, aren't you! We don't find the distinction between "exploratory" and "confirmatory" inquiry particularly helpful: They belong to an epistemology in which it is possible to be absolutely "right" or "wrong" that we have rejected. In cooperative inquiry, if we wish to examine tentative findings carefully, we would arrange for our research cycling to converge on the relevant issues so they could be looked at several times in increasing detail; and we would attempt to establish the contextual validity of our discoveries by knitting together a complex view of the whole.

Devil's Advocate: So you'd never be properly rigorous and use an experiment or a questionnaire.

Authors: Oh yes, we might! Although on the whole we prefer holistic inquiry that views each aspect of the subject in its context, it is possible to conceive of a situation in which we wanted to test one variable with considerable rigor, in which case a controlled experiment *might* be the best way. However, we would require all those involved in the inquiry to be party to its design and to the interpretation of results. Questionnaires and surveys can be used on the same basis. But this is very different from having someone else make sense of our answers to questions that we were not involved in asking in the first place.

Devil's Advocate: You haven't told us anything about the outcomes of the holistic medicine inquiry. Did you discover anything useful?

Authors: We reviewed the project in terms of the validity procedures and concluded that it had been a modest success. We were able to use the cooperative inquiry model successfully, developing and beginning to explore critically in practice a model for holistic medicine. Certainly involvement in the inquiry brought about far-reaching changes in the medical practice of most of the participants: a deeper care for their own well-being, shifts toward cooperative diagnoses and treatment, and a deeper understanding of psychological and spiritual aspects of their practice. It has been more difficult to communicate these changes to others who were not part of the original inquiry, although several members of the inquiry are active participants in the newly formed British Holistic Medical Association. Obviously there is a place for further inquiries to explore both the model as a whole and the detailed strategies implied by it.

Devil's Advocate: Well, despite all you say, I think you are offering an interesting approach to problem solving rather than a general research paradigm.

Authors: From our perspective it is really important not to split these two. We want to develop an experiential and practical science, in which sound research findings consist of a mix of experiential, practical, and propositional knowings. There is no such thing as a "body of knowledge" separate from the practice or application of that knowledge.

Devil's Advocate: I find all this very difficult to fit in with all I was taught about research methods.

Authors: Well, it is. We have outlined an approach to human inquiry based on assumptions about persons and human capacities radically different from those of positivist science. In practice the research process and outcomes are also very different. The kind of inquiry we are advocating is very much alive, very much an existential struggle with understanding and practice in a real world context. Managing this kind of inquiry is a complex and multifaceted process, involving questions about the creativity and pathology of the inquirers as persons, about the behavior of groups, as well as more traditional questions concerning the logic of the inquiry process. We have tried to develop a *rigour of softness*, or a *rigour of participation* that takes into account the person as a whole being capable of critical awareness, and hence capable of human inquiry. The intellectual, emotional, and practical challenge of doing this kind of research well is formidable. It is also enormously rewarding.

AUTHORS' NOTE

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