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Co-operative Inquiry as a Tool for Professional Development

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This article describes my involvement as an external facilitator in separate research projects, with a total of five co-operative inquiry groups. The groups all consisted of social welfare professionals, mainly social workers, who were wanting to explore the development of their practice in a context of competing demands from legislation, policy, and management at an organizational level. The article focuses on process, and how, collectively, we facilitated these as more or less successful inquiries. There is detail about how co-operative inquiry, with professionals, in their organizational context, can work successfully, and the part that an external facilitator can take in ensuring a positive result.

KEY WORDS: Co-operative inquiry; social work; facilitation.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have facilitated five co-operative inquiry groups in the past 4 years and have learned a great deal about this form of inquiry as a research methodology. It is this general learning that I will focus upon in this article, rather than specific learning from each group. What is important about co-operative inquiry is, first, that it is co-operative and therefore, involves people learning together. Second, it is a process, so that it provides an opportunity for those involved to investigate the possibilities for transformation over time, not just investigation of how things are at the moment.

The normative literature about co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001) claims it as a methodology that is different to traditional qualitative method. I have learned that using co-operative inquiry is useful for researching professional practice and organizational processes because it locates the meaning of experience with those involved, rather than with the researcher. Ownership of the learning from the inquiry is then also with those involved, who have an opportunity

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to learn from their investigation and transform their practice. In these inquiries, I engaged with people from different organizations as co-researchers. We learned together and were able to investigate changes in practice over time. Co-operative inquiry was uniquely able to achieve this. How inquiry groups can do this, and the skills of facilitating such groups, and making it happen, is what I have learned from these experiences, and my focus for this article. For people who are interested in engaging in inquiry groups, this article will provide some answers to the why and how of co-operative inquiry.

My experience of co-operative inquiry has come in two blocks. The first was with two groups of social workers investigating the development of their practice. The second, followed commissioning of research by a national children's charity who wished to investigate the development of "innovative" practice within their organization. I have written elsewhere about the process and outcomes of work with the two groups of social workers (Baldwin, 2000, 2001), but will use this experience to explore some of the details of how co-operative inquiry can work with professionals exploring their practice. Using such inquiry for this purpose is a very particular use of the method, and one which has been written about elsewhere (Traylen, 1994; Barrett, 2001; Hills, 2001). The expectation is that this article will be helpful to others who wish to make such inquiries with fellow professionals, although it may be that it is of use to facilitators working with others in co-operative inquiry.

2. CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY GROUPS

2.1. Two Groups of Social Workers

I engaged with two groups of social workers (Social Work Groups) at a time when I was wishing to investigate the process of implementation of the Community Care Act in the UK. I was very aware of the part played by front-line workers in the implementation of policy (Lipsky, 1980) and was keen to see how this could be investigated with the professionals involved, as it unfolded, rather than parachuting in and "capturing" information from those involved at a particular time. Negotiation involved two groups, one of which was a team of hospital social workers (Hospital Social Work Group) who already worked together collaboratively, and the other a more disparate group of social workers (General Social Work Group) carrying out similar tasks from a variety of teams. These two groups were persuaded that it would be of interest and use to them to engage in such an inquiry as a co-operative venture.

2.2. Three Groups of Workers in Children's Charity Projects

Three project teams (The Project Groups) from a national children's charity agreed to work with me in co-operative inquiry groups to investigate the development of innovative practice. The three projects were all very different in their work focus.

One was a drug awareness project for young people (Drug Awareness Group), another provided respite care for young disabled people (Respite Care Group), and the third was a youth and community work project enabling children to participate in matters affecting their life chances (Children's Participation Group). The commonality between these projects was that they were all working with young people, whom the organization recognizes as a marginalized sector of the whole population. The organization proclaims itself a justice organization that is committed to working with children and young people to reduce their marginalization within wider society. Because of the ubiquity of children's marginalization, projects recognize the importance of developing new ways to work with young people. How can an organization develop innovative practices while avoiding replicating the experience of discrimination?

3. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR USING CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY

Investigation of a sophisticated professional practice, such as social work, requires a methodology that will be able to reflect that complexity. The process of making sense of other people's lives across cultural divides requires a particular approach if investigation is to be able to make sense of relationships. Enabling people who have perhaps considerable problems of communication to have their voice heard in decisions about their future is not a skill that can be looked up in a book, demonstrated, and then "captured" by interview or questionnaire. This process of practice requires the transfer of knowledge and skills from one different setting to another, not the scientific application of learned skills according to determined certainties about context. Skills for practice in this context thus develop over time, through processes of reflection and action (Schon, 1984; Gould and Taylor, 1996). A research method that enables practitioners to enter into a process of action and reflection is more likely to result in learning through and about the process of practice. Co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001) provides such an approach.

The co-operative inquiry method was also congruent with the task identified. With the Social Work Groups, I was investigating the process through which social workers, at the bottom end of the policy implementation hierarchy, implemented and, therefore, influenced that policy. Lipsky (1980) has persuasively revealed the ways in which "Street-level bureaucrats" use the process of their practice to systematically undermine policy intentions. There is some evidence (Baldwin, 2000), through co-operative inquiry methodology, that participative approaches, which focus on engaging street-level bureaucrats in the process of implementation, are more likely to achieve success. If the argument is that professional practitioners construct policy through the use of professional discretion, then there needs to be a methodology which engages with participants over time, if this process is to be explored with any degree of validity.

Where there is an expectation within research groups that investigation will result in change of behavior (in this case change in professional practice), then it is of consequence that the methodology enables those engaged in the inquiry to be able to learn about and develop their practice. Heron and Reason (2001) speak of the difference between "informative or transformative" inquiry cultures. "Will the inquiry be descriptive of some domain of experience, being informative and explanatory about it? Or will it be exploring practice within some domain, being transformative of it?" (Heron and Reason, 2001, p. 183). The Social Work Groups wanted to explore ways of bringing their professional expertise more into line with policy and procedural expectations. I was motivated by a desire to investigate the transformational possibilities for social work practice through these inquiries. It was this desire to research the prospects for change that led me to co-operative inquiry as an appropriate methodology.

The Project Groups all identified "innovative practice," the general focus for the research investigation, as a process of developing practice. They recognized the need to engage in such development in a knowing and reflective manner, in order to ensure that the service they offered young people was developing according to the expressed needs of young people. Both sets of groups set out needing to engage in a process of change and development of practice. We needed a methodology that could facilitate this process and were persuaded that co-operative inquiry was such an approach.

The collaborative, participative, nature of co-operative inquiry has another advantage for groups of investigators wanting to engage in a change process. Traditional research relies on a researcher using their skills to capture knowledge and information from the objects of research. What was owned by the practitioner, becomes the property of the researcher, as they take away and analyze their data. Through the process of analysis, it takes on the meaning bestowed upon it by the researcher, rather than the meaning of those objects of the research. For change in behavior to occur, it is important that what is to be changed, and what the change is to consist of, has some meaning within the experience of those who are expecting to change. It is only when potential change has such meaning that it is likely to be owned by those involved and result in desired change. Co-operative inquiry starts with this participative premise (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001) and is, therefore, a method that is likely to facilitate change in practice.

In working with groups of social workers and related professionals, it was also important to take heed of the kind of value base that they habitually engage. Most social workers recognize the importance of a supportive team environment (Payne, 2000) to maximize opportunities for the development of effective service provision. Co-operative inquiry replicates that supportive environment, providing a potentially supportive context to explore complex and contested ideas, and the feelings generated by engaging with stressful and challenging situations.

Other parts of the value base for social work and social care practice involve a recognition of the potentially negative effects of power within professional relationships. All the groups worked regularly with people who were marginalized for a range of reasons—age, disability, mental health, learning difficulty, racism, sexism, etc. They felt a powerful need to be working within democratic work groups and a wider organization in which their voice was being heard in the development of practice and service provision. Having ways of working imposed upon them was a fear for these professionals. This particularly involved a fear that unethical practices might be foisted upon them in contradiction to their espoused values. There was a feeling that group processes must mirror their practice with people using their services. Some group members felt that policy, procedures, and practices had been imposed upon them by national government and their employing organizations and they did not want to engage with a research process replicating this experience.

The Project Groups were very comfortable with the way the method reflected the "justice" elements of organizational philosophy within which they were happy to work. Inclusion, social justice, and participation mirrored their practice with young people. With the Social Work Groups this organizational congruence was less apparent. Participants within these groups experienced a gap between the expressed intentions of a democratically managed organization and the reality of an autocratic imposition of policies and practices with draconian sanctions attached for noncompliance. These groups were very happy to be engaging with a research process that mirrored their beliefs in how practice development *ought* to reflect their espoused values for social work practice.

4. THE PROCESS OF CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY

In this section, I will use my experience with these five inquiry groups to illustrate the development and facilitation of co-operative inquiry. I will explain how the groups were negotiated within the organizations that they were a part of, how they were established, once they had been identified as potential collaborators, how we made initial decisions about the focus of inquiry, and then engagement in the four-part process that constitutes co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001; see also introduction to this issue). I will demonstrate the learning that flowed from these cycles of action and participative reflection and the methods that we used, individually or collectively to maintain the flow of inquiry, reflection, and learning, during the lifetime of the groups. I will also talk about endings and the way that we fed learning back into organizations to embed the outcomes within the working practices of the inquiry groups, but also in the wider organizations. As the skills involved in the maintenance and development of inquiry groups is so integral to the process, I will look at these simultaneously.

4.1. Establishing Groups

Establishing the Social Work Groups involved persuading their employing organization that it would be a good idea to explore the development of social workers' practice and that co-operative inquiry was an appropriate method. I started by offering to feed back to social workers in the organization the results of prior research that I had done into similar social work practices. I had received permission from the organization to ask if there was anyone attending the workshop who might be interested in exploring the implementation of policy in *their* team.

A great deal of interest was generated not only in the research findings but also in the proposal to investigate further. I explained the possibility of using co-operative inquiry as a method (it was new to me at that stage) and left it with participants to get back to me if they were interested. It is hard to say why there was such a positive response, although I have an ability to sound excited and motivated when discussing my research interests. Some of the feedback I received later suggests to me that it was the opportunity for them to investigate their own practices through a collaborative inquiry which sold the idea to them. The presentation had to be persuasive to enable those workers to give up 3 hours of their work time each month. They did not do it for me, so they must have felt there was something in it for them. I engaged with two groups of social workers—one of eight people who knew each other more or less (General Social Work Group), and one of the five people who were an established team (Hospital Social Work Group), used to a degree of collaborative working.

The Project Groups were established differently. I was asked by the children's organization to research the development of "innovative practice" within the organization. Senior management in the national organization wanted to be seen as representing an innovative organization, both as a marketing ploy (to increase contributions to the organization), and as a means to an end of effective practice in an organization dedicated to social justice for marginalized young people. They were also concerned that practice should be closely scrutinized to avoid the development of oppressive practices. The question for the organization was how to facilitate, but also manage, the development of innovation in practice.

My feeling was that co-operative inquiry would be an appropriate method for engaging with people working within the organization, to investigate the development of innovative practice. My contact manager was persuaded that the approach would be appropriate to the task as well as congruent with the organization's ethos for action research and developmental practice. I was able to persuade two regional managers that it was a worthwhile project and they linked me up with three potential collaborative projects. I met with the managers of two of these and they were left convinced that the inquiry and the method would be of use to them in their commitment to action research and practice development. The third project team was persuaded without a preparatory visit that they would engage in the research venture.

Subsequently, I started work with three inquiry groups in this organization. One was the whole of a very small team of workers engaged in youth work to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized young people in decisions that affected their lives (Children's Participation Group). The three people really stretched the definition of a co-operative inquiry group to its lower limits. Their enthusiasm and commitment to the process of inquiry as a reflective and developmental learning process overcame any problems with their size. Critical mass for co-operative inquiry groups can be as much to do with commitment to participation as with actual numbers of people.

The second group was the whole of a drug awareness project team (Drug Awareness Group). They wished to investigate the development of their practice and recognized, at that establishment stage, that they had not, by themselves, engaged in much critical reflection in team discussions for some time. They felt that the co-operative inquiry could kick-start their commitment to such a process.

The third group was a subgroup of a much larger project team that provided a respite care service to young disabled people (Respite Care Group). The whole team was too large to engage with, so a part of the team volunteered to work with me. This separating of the subgroup created an interesting dynamic within the whole team. I had an optimal number in this subgroup (six people), but their separation from the rest of the team did, as shall be seen, create difficulties.

The difficulty raises questions about open and closed groups. In all these groups, a decision was made at the initial meeting that they should be closed. There was no problem for any of the groups in this as they were more or less self-contained, as teams, or groups of people who were happy to work exclusively together on the proposed inquiry. The Respite Care Group, however, could not work as a closed group as they were not separate from the rest of the team. Inevitably, the others had an influence on the inquiry and, for one cycle of action and reflection, they joined with the subgroup for what proved to be an essential exploration of team processes.

At the time of setting up each of these five groups, I was stimulated by the possibilities. The preparation work within the organizations was very important to my feeling of engagement and quiet optimism about the prospects for interesting inquiries. I think I am motivated by the uncertainty involved in such ventures. They are, as a friend once put it, "exciting but dangerous"! Certainly, by the time I engaged with the Project Groups, I was committed to co-operative inquiry as a useful way of investigating areas of professional practice, and walked into those groups with confidence that they would be interesting and productive for all involved.

4.2. Getting Started—Deciding on the Focus of the Inquiry

For all groups, the groundwork that I did prior to meeting with the people with whom I was going to work, was fundamental. By the time I met with them,

they had a reasonable idea of the general focus for inquiry and of the intentions as far as method were concerned. The lead-in to starting the co-operative inquiry would, I believe, have been far longer if I had not done this ground work. When, subsequently, we met as emergent inquiry groups, it meant that we were able to deal with discussions about ground rules (Heron, 1996) for group engagement, as well as moving on to look at the focus of inquiry, all in one session. They wanted to be involved in this inquiry, but, however important we know that ground-rule discussion may be, it is often seen as secondary to the inquiry. I used my facilitation skills to enable them to discuss ground rules in a helpful manner. I doubt that I had the motivating skills to maintain group commitment if we had only discussed group processes at that first meeting.

With the Social Work Groups, we agreed to explore their use of professional skills and knowledge in the implementation of a key social policy initiative. What we then focused on as an illustration of that more general inquiry was agreed democratically. The Hospital Social Work Group centered on a piece of work specified by agency procedures, to compare and contrast their interpretation of organizational intentions, and how they used their professional knowledge and skills to achieve the task. The General Social Work Group focused on examples of their individual work. From this, we were able to draw out the general themes in much the same way as the hospital team.

For the Project Groups, the focus of inquiry had been chosen by their organization. Having said that, it was interesting to see the different ways that each group tackled the issue. Although there were differences in detail about what constituted innovation, which reflected their very different work settings, there was congruence in the way that they defined innovation. It was important to use my facilitation skills in drawing out these themes, reflecting back to them what I heard them saying, summarizing their collective views, and checking out that I had made sense of the discussion in a way that we could all agree upon. These skills, facilitation, reflecting back, summarizing, and checking out are fundamental to all stages of co-operative inquiry, but are particularly important in this early stage, where a group is trying to make sense of the focus for inquiry.

Each of the Project Groups then chose a specific focus for their inquiry for Phases Two and Three (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001), in which they would engage in a task, with some agreement about what they would investigate and how they would record their learning. Discussion about the what and the how was focused and optimistic at this stage. They all suggested what appeared to be viable areas for investigation. I did engage in some devil's advocacy, wanting to convince myself and them, that their inquiry was worthwhile and relevant to the over all purpose. Devil's advocacy is part of the validity criteria outlined in the literature on co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). It is a system in which it is agreed that any member of an inquiry group has permission to "confront fully some collusion" (Heron, 1996, p. 147) that they believe may be occurring. In this way,

inquiry can avoid uncritical subjectivity and collusion and maximize the validity of the inquiry process.

This kind of focusing on task and relating it to outcome is important to maintain motivation and commitment. There are dangers of straitjacketing the inquiry and the groups allowed themselves the freedom to stray from the focus of inquiry if there were important side avenues to travel along. With time constraints so important for busy professionals, I have learned that it is not viable to be too "chaotic" or "Dionysian" (Heron, 1996) in the organization of the inquiry. Discovering that the inquiry group had spent the whole of the first cycle of inquiry traveling into a cul-de-sac could be demotivating. It could, however, be important to the inquiry. This is what happened with the Respite Care Group, and the change of direction that occurred took us into uncomfortable, but important, areas of inquiry.

4.3. Reflecting on the Initial Inquiry Stages

The fruitfulness of initial inquiry cycles can be variable. Maintaining focus on useful inquiry is a key part of these stages, and requires vigilance from all members of the inquiry group to ensure that direction and learning are being achieved. This will partly depend on the chosen task. For the Social Work Group that chose to investigate their own practice, there was a ready-made focus for work in each cycle of inquiry, and the reflection stage involved drawing out the collective learning from these individual inquiry cycles. Shifting from the particular to the general and back again in cycles of action and reflection ensured that we maintained momentum. It also, however, dampened down the scope of the inquiry to what was safe and achievable. I could have adopted more of a devil's advocate role in this inquiry, but the depth to which it is safe to explore is a judgment to be made for the whole group, but particularly for the facilitator. I checked out with this group that they were satisfied with the level of inquiry and its usefulness to them in identifying fruitful areas for practice development. The degree of satisfaction with the course of inquiry was, I felt as the outsider, good enough. They moved, as a group, outside of the comfort zone and took risks in their inquiries, but the risks were not as great as those taken by other inquiry groups.

Two of the Project Team Groups were impressive in the way that they engaged in the process of action and reflection. I engaged in some devil's advocacy with the Drug Awareness Group, when they described their expertise as common sense and experience. I was able to help them critically analyze how they conceptualized this tacit knowledge. This critique was important because of the dangers of assumption and prejudice or routine practices evolving without critical reflection. Heron engages in a debate about practical knowledge and "the knack." He says you "can describe a skill in words up to a point, but the inner core of the action, the knack, defies verbal description" (Heron, 1996, p. 111). Both this group and the Hospital Social Work Group analyzed their professional skills. Both groups

got better at identifying and conceptualizing the skills they could replicate and transfer into other work settings, always finding a core of intuitive practical skills to equate with Heron's concept of "knack."

The Children's Participation Group was extremely focused and, apart from some facilitation, engaged in the process of co-operative inquiry with little assistance. The process was very akin to their habitual team practice. Establishing their focus of work, immersing themselves in it and then regularly reviewing its effectiveness through critical reflection was routine for them. They were a small and cohesive team working in a field that engendered huge enthusiasm and commitment from them. It may be unrealistic to expect such a positive focus in groups as a general rule. Skills of facilitation and maintenance are, in my experience, required in most groups to a far greater degree than was necessary with this one. Even with this project team, however, skills of facilitation were necessary to maintain direction and a critical edge to our reflections. These skills of reflection include demonstrating an enabling persistence and helpful challenge. Having checked out my understanding of what I heard, it was then important on occasions to question colleagues' viewpoints through what is described in the literature as "critical subjectivity" (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001).

Facilitating genuine collaborative discussions and critical reflection required me to engage in practices, such as, paraphrasing, reflecting back, and providing similar examples to illustrate points and broaden discussions. Explanation of complex practices was relayed in anecdotal form. I sometimes found it useful to reposition these stories into a propositional framework, relating them to some broader theory or value for practice, which enabled them to transform the experience into learning and then transfer it into a different context. The classification of stories listed by Reason and Hawkins (1988) is a helpful tool for facilitation in co-operative inquiry groups. In their model, stories can be used as "replies", "echoes", "re-creations" or "reflections" of other stories. Responding to stories or anecdotes told by participants in any of these ways could be useful in elaborating the learning to be found in stories and embedding it in future practice.

In the Respite Care Group, I worked with a subgroup of the whole team. The first cycle of inquiry resulted in a frank admission that their focus of inquiry was, at that stage, fruitless to pursue. Wishing to explore the nature of their relationships, as a team, with young disabled people, their caregivers and other agencies, the inquiry group learned that they, first, had to deal with their own internal communication difficulties. Almost all of the rest of the inquiry cycles focused on whole team communication and an analysis of the negative effect of power relationships within the team.

In one cycle of action and reflection, the entire team explored supervision as an illustrative example of communication in the team. I met with the entire team for the following reflection session. The feedback was that my facilitation of this meeting was crucial to the team dealing with internal communication difficulties,

which were hampering the development of innovative practices. There is a lesson here, for facilitators, about the importance of flexibility in managing an inquiry group. If we had stuck to the original plan, without diverting into this essential by-road, then it could have proved a fruitless inquiry. There is also a lesson about using group processes to enable people to reveal and deal with their emotional responses to difficulties that arise. I recognized that there were strengths within the entire team, and that, despite concerns expressed about an autocratic management style pervading the team, there was still a willingness to confront that, when, as the inquiry did, they were given a chance to do so. Recognizing and building on group strengths is another important skill for facilitators, in particular, but also for all group members. I found this particular group the most challenging of all to work with. On reflection, this seems to do with the degree of uncertainty we had to engage with in shifting direction. It would have been easier to have colluded in the pursuit of a fruitless investigation. Courage and determination, for all involved in co-operative inquiry, is, at some points in the process, the principle quality required.

4.4. Endings and Evaluation

We did, at the outset in all these groups, make plans about endings. This does not always have to be the case, but, when working with busy professionals whose time for such inquiry is largely prescribed by their organization, it was important to have a clear idea of the length of the inquiry. We ensured that the tasks and focus for inquiry were geared toward this time limitation. This process was successful for most inquiries. Where it was less successful, this was to do sometimes with the nature of the inquiry and sometimes with the nature of the team.

Ending is a key part of the co-operative inquiry process. In order to note the change that has occurred, the degree to which the inquiry was "transformative," rather than just "informative" (Heron, 1996, p. 101), there needs to be an event that evaluates learning. One of the principle requirements for all groups was to replicate the usefulness of the inquiry process in their continuing work as teams of professionals. Indeed, the Hospital Social Work Group used their last two cycles of action and reflection to look at how they could generate critical analysis within supervision and collective critical reflection within the team. All the groups felt that much had been achieved through a process of inquiry and learning. None wished to lose this, because the research project was finishing.

I now want to return to the problems with endings that some of the teams encountered, either because of the nature of the inquiry they were engaged in or because of something within team structure. The Respite Care Group "lost" time by diverting into investigating team communication and relationships, which meant that there was less time for investigating innovation. This diversion was essential, however, and the inquiry did then enable the team to explore practice developments

in a different forum. The Children's Participation Group experienced staff turnover in the latter stages of the inquiry, which interfered with ending.

Recording is an issue that Heron says should not cloud ending and learning (Heron, 1996), so we structured it in from the beginning. Recording of data collected from the inquiry tasks in the action phase was something agreed upon by the groups. This recording produced evidence for the reflective group sessions. We also agreed that I, as facilitator, would record the reflection sessions, producing draft notes, which group members could change. Recording of the whole inquiry was also delegated to me, with much the same rule, that it would be circulated in draft for people to comment upon and request changes as required. The recording of the inquiry did, to some degree, then, mirror the process of action and reflection.

We also preplanned a scheme for feeding back our learning into the wider organization. The Social Work Groups met with senior managers, with the purpose of embedding learning into the rest of the organization. While the managers were very impressed with the outcomes of the inquiry and, more particularly, with the process we entered into, there is little to suggest that the organization has learned the importance of participative approaches to policy and practice development. The process of learning for the children's charity continues. This is an organization with a keen awareness of the importance of action learning for effective service development. As with many voluntary sector organizations, they are currently going through financial crisis and restructuring, but is hoped that there will be an opportunity to discuss learning with managers and project workers to explore ways in which they could replicate the process in their parts of the organization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The focus of my research was on change in professional practice, so a method that effects and reflects the change process was a necessity. I have learned that co-operative inquiry is a method for investigating aspects of the human condition and that facilitates learning by actors, so they can understand and transform their behavior, making their practice more effective. In engaging with professional practitioners committed to the development of the effectiveness of their practice, co-operative inquiry was a viable and appropriate method. This article has indicated the ways in which the process of co-operative inquiry does not just reflect the good practice of professional social work, but actually effects its development. It was exciting for me to share with practitioners the generation of critical reflection in and upon practice through a research process. From the experience of these groups, co-operative inquiry demonstrates clearly and conclusively the effectiveness of the forms of professional practice, policy implementation, and organizational structure and process that emphasize a collaborative and participative approach to practice development and evaluation. Co-operative inquiry replicates some of the best features of the learning organization (Senge, 1990; Pottage and Evans, 1994).

I have also listed and explained, in action, a number of the skills of facilitation for effective participative inquiry. These skills can be located in the role of a dedicated facilitator within an inquiry group, but can also be seen as the responsibility of other group members. Democratic group processes, agreed upon in advance, and discussed and evaluated while being used, are an essential aspect of co-operative inquiry.

I have not engaged with any other than groups of professional practitioners in co-operative inquiries, so I am not sure how viable or effective a method it would be in facilitating other people's inquiries. From the success of the inquiry groups described in this article, I would suggest that it is an effective method for any group of people who wish to explore an area of mutual significance, investigating the similarities and differences in their perspective on the area of investigation. If the aim is to achieve transformation in behavior, rather than just a confirmation of how things are, then the way in which co-operative inquiry ensures ownership of learning within the direct meaning and experience of participating individuals, provides a very high likelihood of successful outcome.

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