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Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry

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FROM one perspective, the orthodox scientific worldview is the product of the Enlightenment and represents a liberating step for human society in releasing itself from the bonds of superstition and Scholasticism. From another perspective, it is a movement to narrow our view of our world and to monopolize knowing in the hands of an elite few, and is fueled by patriarchy, alienation, and materialism; it is the product of a society committed to the domination of nature and of other peoples, of a society committed to a transcendental theology that sees man (*sic*) in the image of God and thus outside His creation (Baring & Cashford, 1991). So whereas on the one hand the scientific perspective has taught us the value of critical public testing of what is taken as knowledge, another consequence has been to place the researcher firmly outside and separate from the subject of his or her research, reaching for an objective knowledge and for one separate truth (Bateson, 1972b).

I believe and hope that there is an emerging worldview, more holistic, pluralist, and egalitarian, that is essentially participative. It is fueled by holistic and systemic thinking (Bateson, 1972b;

Maturana & Varela, 1986; Skolimowski, 1992), feminism (Lichtenstein, 1988; Plant, 1989; Reinharz, 1992), liberationist education (Freire, 1970; Rogers, 1969), an extended epistemology (Habermas, 1972), new visions of spirituality and theology (Fox, 1991), deep ecology (Naess, 1989), and the metaphors of "new" physics, mathematics, and biology (Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1980). This worldview sees human beings as cocreating their reality through participation: through their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action (Heron, 1992). As Skolimowski (1992) puts it, "We always partake of what we describe" (p. 20), so our "reality" is a product of the dance between our individual and collective mind and "what is there," the amorphous primordial givenness of the universe. This participative worldview is at the heart of inquiry methodologies that emphasize participation as a core strategy.

Let me be clear that my personal and professional commitment is to contribute to the emergence of this more participative worldview; that I write this chapter as an advocate of the methods presented rather than as an outside reviewer. I

have devoted the past 15 years of my professional life to the development and application of co-operative inquiry in which the emphasis is on working with groups as co-researchers. As I look at the practice of action inquiry I am excited and awed by the challenge of developing the kind of self-reflexive critical awareness-in-action it demands. As I read about the work of practitioners of participatory action research, whose emphasis is on establishing liberating dialogue with impoverished and oppressed peoples, I understand the link between power and knowledge and realize the privileged position that I am in as a white male European academic. It seems to me to be urgent for the planet and for all its creatures that we discover ways of living in more collaborative relation with each other and with the wider ecology. I see these participative approaches to inquiry and the worldview they foster as part of this quest.

I have chosen three approaches to research as participation as the focus of my discussion: co-operative inquiry, participatory action research, and action inquiry. These three seem to me to be well articulated in both theory and practice and to stand together in quite radical contrast to orthodox scientific method; at the same time, all start from quite different premises and emphasize different aspects of the participative inquiry process. I acknowledge that in making my choices I have left out other approaches: appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987), "emerging varieties" of action research (Elden & Chisholm, 1993), applied anthropology (Stull & Schensul, 1987), critical ethnography (Quantz, 1992), research partnerships (Whitaker, Archer, & Greve, 1990), and others.

In this chapter I take each approach separately and set out what I see as its underlying assumptions and practice. I attempt to give a flavor of the language and perspective of each, to do justice to the three as separate traditions. Then, in later sections of the chapter, I explore some of the similarities and differences among the three approaches and make critical comparisons. I attempt to show how the three approaches complement each other, so that together they stand as the beginnings of a robust "paradigm" of research with people.

Before proceeding further, let me acknowledge the paradox of writing "about" research with people, for I cannot really do it alone. In its complete version, participation belongs to the people who participate, and thus to all those who have joined in this kind of research, who include disadvantaged people in Asia, Africa, and South America; factory workers in the United States and Scandinavia; medical and nursing practitioners in England; and aboriginal people in Australia. In some ways to write (and to read) "about" these people's experience in coming to understand their own

worlds is to repossess it as an academic subject that can be studied from outside. These approaches to inquiry through participation need to be seen as living processes of coming to know rather than as formal academic method. And, as we shall see, one of the key questions about research is the political one: Who owns the knowledge, and thus who can define the reality?

One final word of caution: Although I attempt to provide the flavor of each of three approaches, I am not able to provide an exhaustive review of each, nor can I explore some of the subtleties of theory and practice. I have the feeling that those who are closely identified with any of these methods may find my presentation biased and inadequate, whereas some of those coming from more traditional research strategies may be put off by the language, which is often passionate and committed, and will want a more formal definition of each approach. So I have the strange feeling that I am not merely entering a lion's den, but that I am entering several lions' dens simultaneously. So be it.

Co-Operative Inquiry

Co-operative inquiry has its roots in humanistic psychology, in the idea that persons can with help choose how they live their lives, free from the distress of early conditioning and restrictive social custom (e.g., Heron, 1977; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Rowan, 1976), and that working together in a group with norms of open authentic communication will facilitate this (see, e.g., Randall & Southgate, 1980; Srivastva, Obert, & Neilson, 1977).

The proposal for cooperative experiential inquiry was first made by John Heron (1971; see also Heron, 1981a, 1981b, 1992; Reason, 1988, in press; Reason & Heron, 1986). At the heart of his critique of orthodox inquiry is the idea that its methods are neither adequate nor appropriate for the study of *persons*, for persons are to some significant degree self-determining. Orthodox social science inquiry methods, as part of their rationale, exclude the 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 be a science of persons.

To say that persons are self-determining is to say that they are the authors of their own actions—to some degree actually, and to a greater degree potentially. In other words, their intentions

and purposes, their intelligent choices, are causes of their behavior. One can do research on persons in the full and proper sense of the term only 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. So in cooperative inquiry all those involved in the research are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision making contribute to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience, and *also* co-subjects, participating in the activity being researched.

Ideally, there is full reciprocity, so that each person's agency is fundamentally honored in both the exchange of ideas and the action. This does not necessarily mean that all those involved in the inquiry enterprise contribute in identical ways. An inquiry group, like any human group, has to struggle with the problems of inclusion, influence, and intimacy; people will take different roles, and there will be differences in both the quality and quantity of members' contributions. In particular, one or more members may have initiated the inquiry as part of their organizational role or more informally; these members or others may act as facilitators of the inquiry process. How the group manages these potential differences in power will affect the quality of its work. Thus, although ideally full consensus will be reached on all decisions, this is rarely practical; at a minimum, everyone involved needs to be initiated into the inquiry process and needs to give free and informed assent to all decisions about process and outcome. (For discussion of these pragmatic issues in establishing an inquiry group, see Reason, 1988, in press.)

Heron (1981b) also suggests an extended epistemology that includes at least three kinds of knowledge: (a) *Experiential knowledge* is gained through direct encounter face-to-face with persons, places, or things; (b) *practical knowledge* concerns "how to" do something—it is knowledge demonstrated in a skill or competence; and (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 neither the experience nor the praxis of the subjects.

Recently, Heron (1992) has clarified the additional notion of *presentational knowledge* as the process by which we first order our tacit experiential knowledge into patterns, and that is expressed in images, dream, story, creative imagination. The development of presentational knowledge is an important (and often neglected) bridge between experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge.

Methodology

Co-operative inquiry can be described as taking place in four phases of action and reflection.

Phase 1. Co-researchers agree on an area for inquiry and identify some initial research propositions. They may choose to explore some aspect of their experience, agree to try out in practice some particular skills, or seek to change some aspect of their world. 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, health visitors in southwest England were invited by one of their colleagues to form an inquiry group to explore the sources of stress in their work. After much resistance to the idea that they could be "researchers," the members of the group decided to explore the stress that comes from the "hidden agendas" in their work—the suspicions they had about problems such as depression, child abuse, and drug taking in the families they visit (Traylen, 1989, in press).

Phase 2. The group then applies these ideas and procedures in their everyday life and work: 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 their original ideas do and do not accord with experience. This phase involves primarily *practical* knowing.

Thus the health visitors first explored among themselves their feelings about these "hidden agendas" and decided to experiment with confronting them. They practiced the skills they thought they would need through role play, and then agreed to try raising their concerns directly with their client families.

Phase 3. The co-researchers become fully immersed in this activity and experience. They may be excited or bored, engaged or alienated; they may sometimes forget they are involved in an inquiry project; they may forget or otherwise fail to carry out and record the agreed-upon 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 co-researchers, fully engaged with their experience, may develop an openness to what is going on for them and their environment that 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.

The health visitors' experience of trying out these new behavior strategies was both terrifying and liberating in ways none of them had expected. On the one hand, they felt they were really doing their job; on the other hand, they were concerned about the depth of the problems they would uncover and whether they had adequate skills to cope with them. The initiator in particular was anxious and had disturbing dreams.

Phase 4. After an appropriate period engaged in Phases 2 and 3, the co-researchers 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. Thus this phase involves a critical return to *propositional* knowing.

The health visitors met periodically to review and make sense of their experiences. One outcome of their work was changes they made in their own professional practice; another was the report they wrote in their own language about their experiences that was made available to their colleagues and managers; a third was the master's dissertation written by the initiator (Traylen, 1989).

Validity in Co-Operative Inquiry

Co-operative inquiry claims to be a valid approach to research with persons because it "rests on a collaborative encounter with experience" (Reason & Rowan, 1981). This is the touchstone of the approach in that any practical skills or theoretical propositions that arise 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 judgments of the co-researchers, which may be called "critical subjectivity" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, chap. 10).

Critical subjectivity is a state of consciousness different from either the naive subjectivity of "primary process" awareness and the attempted objectivity of egoic "secondary process" awareness. Critical subjectivity means that we do not suppress our primary subjective experience, that we accept that our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are *aware of* that perspective and of its bias, and we *articulate* it in our communications. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing and thus is very close to what Bateson (1972a) describes as Learning III. (The notion of critical subjectivity also appears close to Keller's [1985] notion of "dynamic objectivity.")

This notion of critical subjectivity means that there will be many versions of "reality" to which people may hold with a self-reflexive passion. It also 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 faulty epistemology, cultural bias, character defense, political partisanship, spiritual impoverishment, and so on. In particular, co-operative inquiry is threatened by unaware projection and consensus collusion.

Unaware projection means that we deceive ourselves. We do this because inquiring carefully and critically into those things 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 (Devereux, 1967), giving rise to a whole variety of self-deceptions in the course of the inquiry. *Consensus collusion* means that the co-researchers may band together as a group in defense of their anxieties, so that areas of their experience that challenge their worldview are ignored or not properly explored.

It is important to find ways to explore and counteract these defensive tendencies, as the health visitors challenged themselves to look at aspects of their work that caused profound anxiety. A comprehensive set of procedures has been developed that serve to engage with and explore (but not eliminate) these threats to validity. These include cycling and recycling between action and reflection so that issues are examined several times in different ways, exploring the authenticity of participation within the group, using self-development methods to look at the impact of unacknowledged anxiety, and establishing norms whereby group members can challenge unwarranted assumptions (Heron, 1988; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Tiernan et al., in press).

These validity procedures are useful for systematically reviewing the quality of inquiry work. Their application 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.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is probably the most widely practiced participative research

approach; it is important because it emphasizes the political aspects of knowledge production. There are several different communities of PAR in different ways; what follows is necessarily a generalized account in which I have drawn strongly on Fals-Borda and Rahman's recent book *Action and Knowledge* (1991), and to a lesser extent on other discussions of PAR: Fernandes and Tandon (1981); Hall, Gillette, and Tandon (1982); Tandon (1989); Cancian and Armstead (1992); Hall (1993). For a comprehensive bibliography, see Cancian and Armstead (1993).

Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) place PAR firmly within the long tradition of liberationist movements: "Those who adopted PAR have tried to practice with a radical commitment that has gone beyond usual institutional boundaries, reminiscent of the challenging tradition of Chartists, utopians, and other social movements of the nineteenth century" (p. vii). Similarly, the brochure for PRIA (n.d.), the Society for Participatory Research in Asia, states, "Participatory Research implies an effort on the part of the people to understand the role of knowledge as a significant instrument of power and control."

Thus the primary task of PAR is the "enlightenment and awakening of common peoples" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. vi). Given this orientation, the PAR tradition starts with concerns for power and powerlessness, and aims to confront the way in which the established and power-holding elements of societies worldwide are favored because they hold a monopoly on the definition and employment of knowledge. Concerns for epistemology and methodology appear secondary to this primary concern.

A second important starting point is the lived experience of people, and the idea that through the actual experience of something we may "intuitively apprehend its essence; we feel, enjoy, and understand it as reality" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 4). Thus in PAR the knowledge and experience of people—often oppressed groups—is directly honored and valued.

So the PAR strategy has a double objective. One aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people—through research, adult education, and sociopolitical action. The second aim is to empower people at a second and deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge: They "see through" the ways in which the establishment monopolizes the production and use of knowledge for the benefit of its members. This is the meaning of consciousness-raising or *concientización*, a term popularized by Paulo Freire (1970) for a "process of self-awareness through collective self-inquiry and reflection" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 16).

A third important starting point for PAR is authentic commitment. PAR values the processes of genuine collaboration, which it sees as "rooted in cultural traditions of the common people . . . which are resplendent with feelings and attitudes of an altruistic, cooperative and communal nature and which are genuinely democratic" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 5). Those agents of change who initiate PAR processes among oppressed peoples must embrace a genuine commitment to work with these democratic values and to honor the wisdom of the people. A key notion here is dialogue, because it is through dialogue that the subject-object relationship of traditional science gives way to a subject-subject one, in which the academic knowledge of formally educated people works in a dialectical tension with the popular knowledge of the people to produce a more profound understanding of the situation.

Some practitioners (e.g., Hall, 1992) claim that the term *participatory action research* was originally used to describe this form of liberationist inquiry in the underprivileged parts of both the "Third World" and the developed West (Gaventa, 1991). Other practitioners have applied the term to their work in Western organizations (Cohen, Greenwood, & Harkavay, 1992; Greenwood, Whyte, & Harkavay, 1993; Whyte, 1991), borrowing, it is argued, the terminology of the "original" version. Many PAR practitioners object to this: It is offensive, first, because it is seen as a way in which the rich establishment is once again co-opting and colonizing the world of the underprivileged; second, because this approach is based on a liberal rather than a radical ideology and holds quite different assumptions about the relationship between popular knowledge and "scientific knowledge"; and third, because to use the same term for significantly different processes confuses the necessary debate between the variety of collaborative inquiry approaches (Brown, 1993; but see also Whyte, 1992).

Critique of Orthodox Research

Practitioners of PAR work mainly in communities that are vulnerable to colonization by the dominant culture. The primary critique of participatory research is that it serves this dominant culture through monopolizing the development and use of knowledge to the disadvantage of the communities in which the research takes place, and is thus exploitive.

Tandon (1982) offers four points in his critique of monopolistic research. The *absolutist* critique argues that pure knowledge generation cannot be the aim of social research because the assumption that there can be one pure truth in social research is erroneous. The *purist* critique attacks the social science crusade for objectivity: When strict separa-

tion is maintained between researcher and subject in the guise of maintaining rigor, all control of the research is retained in the hands of the researcher. The *rationalist* critique points out that the classical research paradigm has, in the interests of maintaining objectivity, overemphasized thinking as the means of knowing, neglecting feeling and acting. And the *elitist* critique points out that as the dominant research paradigm is available only to a body of professionals who enjoy elite status, the research they conduct is most likely to enhance the economic and ideological advantage of their class.

Tandon (1989) has developed this critique to argue that, in contrast, PAR values the people's knowledge, sharpens their capacity to conduct their own research in their own interests, helps them appropriate knowledge produced by the dominant knowledge industry for their own interests and purposes, allows problems to be explored from their perspective, and, maybe most important, liberates their minds for critical reflection, questioning, and the continuous pursuit of inquiry, thus contributing to the liberation of their minds and the development of freedom and democracy.

Methods in Participatory Action Research

In reading the literature on PAR it is easier to discover the ideology of the approach than a detailed description of what actually takes place. As Tandon (1989) points out, PAR is a *methodology* for an alternate system of knowledge production based on the people's role in setting the agendas, participating in the data gathering and analysis, and controlling the use of the outcomes. The PAR methodology may use diverse *methods*, both quantitative and qualitative, to further these ends, many of which will derive from vernacular (often oral) traditions of communication and dissemination of knowledge (Hall, 1993). The preferred way to communicate the practice of PAR seems to be through the description of actual cases. A criticism from outside is that many of these lack the kind of detail that would enable a reader to comprehend fully and learn about the approach taken.

Further, in keeping with the emphasis on PAR as inquiry as empowerment, the actual methodologies that in orthodox research would be called research design, data gathering, data analysis, and so on take second place to the emergent processes of collaboration and dialogue that empower, motivate, increase self-esteem, and develop community solidarity. As de Roux (1991) puts it, the methodologies employed must at

the rational level . . . be capable of releasing the people's pent-up knowledge, and in doing so liberate their hitherto stifled thoughts and voices, stimulating creativity and developing their ana-

lytical and critical capabilities. . . . [And] at the emotional level, the process [must] be capable of releasing feelings, of tearing down the participants' internal walls in order to free up energy for action. (p. 44)

Community meetings and events of various kinds are an important part of PAR, serving to identify issues, to reclaim a sense of community and emphasize the potential for liberation, to make sense of information collected, to reflect on progress of the project, and to develop the ability of the community to continue the PAR and developmental process. These meetings engage in a variety of activities that are in keeping with the culture of the community and might look out of place in an orthodox research project. Thus storytelling, sociodrama, plays and skits, puppets, song, drawing and painting, another engaging activities encourage a social validation of "objective" data that cannot be obtained through the orthodox processes of survey and fieldwork. It is important for an oppressed group, which may be part of a culture of silence based on centuries of oppression, to find ways to tell and thus reclaim their own story (Salazar, 1991).

The process of participation and dialogue often starts with an intervention that has a formal objective of adult literacy or development of health care. Thus in a tribal village in India funds were originally provided for an adult education project. Despite many difficulties, not least of which was dealing with the "culture of silence" of the village, the educators were able to develop these classes as "a forum for open discussion on the socio-economic position of the village and a place for beginning action to change it" (Singh, 1981, p. 164). The outcome of this was not only improved economic conditions (the villagers decided to build a road to the village, where no proper link with the wider world had existed), but also an enhanced sense of community self-determination and a social structure in which future development decisions might be made.

PAR may also use methodology that looks more "orthodox": The systematic gathering of information, for example, through survey techniques, and then making sense of it from the perspective of the community is often an important source of people's knowledge and empowerment (de Roux, 1991; Gaventa & Horton, 1981; Rahman, 1991; Tandon & Brown, 1981).

Action Science and Action Inquiry

In his early work on action inquiry, Torbert (1981b) argued that

research and action, even though analytically distinguishable, are inextricably intertwined in practice.... Knowledge is always gained in action and for action.... From this starting point, to question the validity of social science is to question, not how to develop a *reflective science about action*, but how to develop genuinely well-informed action—how to conduct an *action science*. (p. 145)

Action science and action inquiry are forms of inquiry into practice; they are concerned with the development of effective action that may contribute to the transformation of organizations and communities toward greater effectiveness and greater justice (Torbert, 1991a). Action science is a body of work developed over the past two decades primarily by Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978; Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Schön, 1983). Starting in part from this work, Torbert has emphasized some contrasting issues in his development of action inquiry, particularly with regard to power and leadership.

Theories of Action

Central to the action science perspective is the identification of the theories that actors use to guide their behavior; the claim is that it is possible to identify such theories and in broad terms to predict their consequences. A key distinction here is between espoused theories, which are those an individual claims to follow, and theories-in-use that can be inferred from action; these two may be consistent or inconsistent, and the actor may or may not be aware of any inconsistency. Theories-in-use may be made explicit by reflection on action (Argyris et al., 1985, pp. 81-83).

One of the major difficulties of action science rests in the defensiveness of human beings, their ability to produce self-fulfilling and self-sealing systems of action and justification, often with patterns of escalating error (Argyris et al., 1985, p. 61). These difficulties are compounded by the requirement to reflect not only on the action strategy being employed, but also on the "governing variables" (Argyris et al., 1985, p. 84), the assumptions that lie behind and inform the action strategy. Thus the critical distinction also made by Argyris and Schön (1974) between single-loop and double-loop learning, *double-loop learning* referring to the capacity of individuals to reflect on and amend not only their action strategies, but also the governing variables behind these strategies.

Argyris and his colleagues have identified two theories of action that illustrate these issues. Model I is a defensive theory that limits action science, commonplace in Western institutions; Model II is a normative theory that promotes a spirit of open inquiry.

The governing variables of Model I are (a) to achieve the purpose as the actor defines it; (b) to win, not to lose; (c) to suppress negative feelings; and (d) to emphasize rationality. This theory of action gives rise to defensive and controlling behavior that limits and cuts short possibilities for inquiry and learning. There is little public testing of ideas, and behavior is fixed in a self-sealing conventional pattern leading to decreased effectiveness.

In contrast to Model I, the "normative perspective that guides the action scientist" is found in Model II, the governing variables of which include (a) valid information, (b) free and informed choice, and (c) internal commitment. These are "the features of the alternative worlds that action science seeks to create" (Argyris et al., 1985, p. 98). These very different governing variables lead to behavioral strategies that actively seek information and increased participation from others, and thus lead to greater effectiveness.

Torbert's articulation of action inquiry builds on the work of Argyris and his colleagues, but also departs from it in significant ways. Action *science* focuses on the implicit cognitive models of practitioners and on their actual verbal actions. Action *inquiry*, although it addresses these, in addition addresses outcomes (measured empirically) and the quality of one's own attention (monitored by meditative exercises as one acts). Further, action inquiry addresses the question of how to transform organizations and communities into collaborative, self-reflective communities of inquiry.

Torbert argues that for an individual, community, or organization to practice action inquiry, that person, community, or organization requires valid knowledge of four "territories" of human experience: first, knowledge about the system's own *purposes*—an intuitive or spiritual knowledge of what goals are worthy of pursuit and what demands attention at any point in time (and thus also the knowledge of when another purpose becomes more important); second, knowledge about its *strategy*, an intellectual or cognitive knowledge of the theories underlying its choices; third, a knowledge of the *behavioral* choices open to it—essentially a practical knowledge, resting on an awareness of oneself and on interpersonal skill; and finally, knowledge of the *outside world*, in particular an empirical knowledge of the consequences of its behavior. Thus:

The vision of action inquiry is an attention that spans and integrates the four territories of human experience. This attention is what sees, embraces, and corrects incongruities among mission, strategy, operations, and outcomes. It is the source of the "true sanity of natural awareness of the whole." (Torbert, 1991a, p. 219)

For Torbert (1991a), action inquiry is "a kind of scientific inquiry that is conducted in everyday

TABLE 20.1 Governing Frames at Successive Developmental Stages

Stage	Torbert	Kegan	Loevinger	Governing Frame	Focus of Awareness
1	impulsive	impulsive	impulsive	impulse rules reflexes	outside world, effects
2	opportunist	imperial	opportunistic	needs, interests rule impulses	socially expected behavior
3	diplomat	interpersonal	conformist	expectations rule interests	internal logic, thought
4	technician	(transition)	(transition)	internal craft logic rules expectations	interplay of plan, practice, and effect
5	achiever	institutional	conscientious	system success in environment rules craft logics	synthetic theory of system environment development over time
6	strategist	(transition)	autonomous	principle rules system	interplay of awareness, thought, action, and outside world in eternal now
7	magician	(transition)	(transition)	process (interplay of principle/action) awareness rules principle	interplay of self and other systems in Kairatic history
8	ironist	interindividual	integrated	intersystem development awareness rules process	

SOURCE: Torbert (1989, 1991a).

life." Action inquiry differs from orthodox science in that it is concerned with "primary" data encountered "on-line" and "in the midst of perception and action" and only secondarily with recorded information. Action inquiry is "consciousness in the midst of action" (p. 221).

Now, as Torbert (1976) points out, "the discipline and rigor involved in this sort of research is formidable"; he suggests that a person must undergo what appears to be an unimaginable scale of self-development before becoming capable of relationally valid action (p. 167). In exploring this issue of personal development further, Torbert draws on the ancient tradition of search for an integrative quality of awareness and on modern theories of ego development, particularly the work of Loevinger (1976) and Kegan (1980) (see Table 20.1).

From these theories we can see that only toward the *later* stages of development is the person "aware that there are alternative frames, that perceptions, including one's own, are always framed by assumptions, and that such assumptions can be tested and transformed" (Torbert, 1989, p. 86). Thus it is not until the stage Torbert calls the *strategist* does behavior that can be characterized as collaborative inquiry appear. Earlier stages are characterized by what he calls "mystery-mastery" behavior, which is similar to Argyris's Model I. Collaborative inquiry involves the individual practitioner in continually reflecting on his or her own behavior-in-action while simultaneously behaving in a fashion that invites other members of the community to do the same (and is thus similar to Argyris's Model II).

For the organization or community, collaborative inquiry involves explicit shared reflection about the collective dream and mission, open rather than masked interpersonal relations, systematic evaluation and feedback of collective and individual performance, and direct facing and creative resolution of those paradoxes that otherwise become polarized conflicts (Torbert, 1987, p. 128).

In his later writing, Torbert (1991a, n.d.) emphasizes that transformational leadership and the exercise of transforming power are essential if organizational cultures characterized by mystery-mastery or Model I processes are to change into communities of inquiry characterized by collaborative inquiry or Model II. He suggests there are four types of social power: unilateral power, diplomatic power, rational power, and transforming power. These are based on discussions of Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls, respectively. Organizations will not change through the exercise of unilateral leadership or through abdication of leadership. Rather, they require the power of balance, a subtle, ironic, at times diabolical, certainly paradoxical, exercise of all four types of power. Torbert uses Gandhi as one example of a transformational leader quite willing to act unilaterally and to break all codes of acceptable behavior when he viewed it to be in the service of his people.

But even when using power unilaterally, transforming leadership invites cooperation and mutuality from others. It is based on an effort to be aware of the present moment in all its fullness, recognizing that such an effort can never be completely successful. Transforming power is not just open to feedback, but is actively vulnerable in

seeking challenge and contradiction, seeking out ways in which its exercise is blind and unaware. Transforming power is particularly sensitive to the timeliness of behavior, and to the analogical, metaphorical quality of action. And the intent of transforming power is to empower all those who come within its reach, including those who oppose its influence. Torbert's (1991a, n.d.) recent work provides many examples of the quest for the exercise of such transforming power.

The Practice of Action Science and Action Inquiry

The purpose of both practices is to engage with one's own action and with others in a self-reflective way, so that all become more aware of their behavior and of its underlying theories. Both practices base their work on the "raw" data of accounts and recordings of practice (usually in the form of "talk") gathered by the actors themselves, and both encourage public testing of one's own perceptions and the use of action experiments to test new theories of action and to develop new skills. One of the key skills in this process is to find ways of sidestepping one's own and others' defensive responses to the painful process of self-reflection.

Both Argyris and his colleagues and Torbert explore in detail the behavioral skills needed for this. Argyris, pointing to the extreme difficulties of discovering mistakes in action, suggests seven heuristic rules for the action scientist (Argyris et al., 1985, pp. 258-261). Similarly, Torbert identifies four dimensions of conversation—framing, advocacy, illustration, and inquiry—that correspond to the four territories of experience—purpose, strategy, behavior, and the outside world. In framing, the speaker names assumptions that bound the conversation, the "name of the game," the purpose of speaking; in advocacy, a particular path of action is argued for explicitly; in illustration, the advocacy is grounded in a concrete example or colorful story; and in inquiry, the listeners are explicitly invited to respond.

Torbert argues that confusion and the misuse of power result when these four parts of speech are left tacit, and asserts that a person practicing action inquiry will, as well as developing a span of attention across the four territories of consciousness, cultivate a form of speech that explicitly includes these four aspects of conversation. The process of self-study in action is a way of cultivating this span of awareness and behavioral flexibility (Torbert, 1991a, 1991b; Torbert & Fisher, 1992).

Co-Operative Inquiry, Participatory Action Research, and Action Inquiry: A Comparison

These three approaches to participative research start from different ideological perspectives, draw on different intellectual traditions, and emphasize different aspects of practice. Yet together they stand in marked contrast to orthodox social research. To date they have to a very large extent been self-contained traditions, with little constructive interchange of ideas and practice, so a comparison can be expected to show what they might learn from each other and ways in which they may be complementary in practice. (I have resisted the temptation to compare the three in a chart or diagram because I feel that this might lead the reader to see comparisons in a more robust way than intended.)

Ontology

The ontological position of all participative approaches to inquiry is well expressed by Paulo Freire (1982):

The concrete reality for many social scientists is a list of particular facts that they would like to capture; for example, the presence or absence of water, problems concerning erosion in the area. For me, the concrete reality is something more than isolated facts. In my view, thinking dialectically, the concrete reality consists not only of concrete facts and (physical) things, but also includes the ways in which the people involved with these facts perceive them. Thus in the last analysis, for me, the concrete reality is the connection between subjectivity and objectivity, never objectivity isolated from subjectivity. (p. 30)

This is close to a relativist ontology (Guba, 1990). In some important senses we choose our reality and our knowing of it—individually and collectively; therefore, valid human inquiry essentially requires full participation in the creation of personal and social knowings:

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, 1981, p. 241)

As methods of action inquiry, practitioners of all three would emphasize that these constructions of reality become manifest not just through the "mind," but through the reflective action of persons and communities. They draw on many sources: on Dewey's (1929) criticism of the traditional separation of knowledge and action, on MacMurray's (1957) argument for the primacy of action over reflection, on Habermas's (1972) articulation of a critical science serving emancipatory interests, on Maxwell's (1984) proposal for a philosophy of wisdom based on offering solutions to practical human concerns, on Skolimowski's (1992) argument that the process of living is a process of knowing. PAR would emphasize the collective aspect of this, pointing to ways in which the reality of oppressed people is colonized by an alien reality, whereas Torbert (1991a) would emphasize the intensely personal in his quest for living inquiry.

Knowledge arises in and for action. The interest, as Argyris and his colleagues point out, is not in developing an applied science, but in a genuine science of action. All three forms of inquiry emphasize the systematic testing of theory in live-action contexts.

The implication of this epistemology of action is that the primary outcome of inquiry is a change in the lived experience of those involved in the inquiry. Participants are empowered to define their world in the service of what they see as worthwhile interests, and as a consequence they change their world in significant ways, through action—building a road to their village, developing a new form of holistic medical practice—and through experience—developing a sense of empowerment and competence. The articulation of the new forms of knowledge in lectures, articles, and books is a secondary outcome.

Epistemology

The three approaches unite to emphasize the fundamental importance of experiential knowing. Thus for co-operative inquiry experience is the "touchstone" of the method, involving a "fundamental phenomenological discrimination of persons in relation to their world" (Heron, 1981a, p. 158; 1992); for PAR it is "through the actual experience of something that we intuitively apprehend its essence; we feel, enjoy and understand it as reality" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 4); and the vision of action inquiry is of an interpenetrating consciousness of living inquiry (Torbert, 1991a, p. 258). Thus all three approaches hold strongly the vision that people can learn to be self-reflexive about their world and their action within it. The notions of praxis, critical sub-jectivity, double-loop learning, and interpenetrating consciousness are very close.

All three approaches articulate an extended epistemology: For the co-operative inquiry this involves an interplay of experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical knowledge; for PAR it involves the reclaiming of three broad ways of knowing—thinking, feeling, and acting (Tandon, 1989); and for action inquiry it is an attention that interpenetrates the territories of intuitive purposes, intellectual strategy, behavioral expression, and the outside world. All three perspectives embrace the idea that experiential knowing arises through participation with others.

With this emphasis on experiential knowing comes the need to explore the question of subjectivity. The co-operative inquiry perspective is that research is always personal, political, and spiritual; knowledge is always from a perspective and for a purpose. The co-operative inquiry method—the cycling and recycling through phases of action and reflection, and the application of validity procedures—is the discipline through which the co-inquirers are able to *critically see through* their subjectivity. They are able to articulate the perspective they are taking and begin to see through the distortions that arise through the bias of their personal and class position. Thus the process of inquiry must also always involve the personal development of the co-inquirers as they move from being relatively unreflexively subjective toward a position of critical subjectivity (Reason & Marshall, 1987; Reason & Rowan, 1981, chap. 10).

The PAR perspective provides us in addition with understanding of how ideology and epistemology, knowledge and power, are bound up together. If an inquiry is primarily engaged in service of a dominant class it will not need to dialogue with people: it is not interested in their reality, but rather in imposing on them a dominant reality. On the other hand, if an inquiry is engaged in the service of the development of people, it will necessarily engage with them in dialogue. This points us in the direction of the possibility of a "real popular science" (Fals-Borda, 1981, 1982).

I have been asked by the editors of this volume to comment on the relationship between the epistemology of participative approaches to inquiry and postmodern and poststructural perspectives. These, as I understand them, argue that we cannot sensibly speak of raw, lived experience because experience can be accessed only through the discourse or text through which it is expressed, and that there are multiple shifting discourses, all determined through the social context. Thus any attempt at an experiential knowing is impossible from the start because we can do no more than interpret our experience through existing categories of thought, all of which lie open to radical deconstruction.

I have two problems with this perspective. First, the argument for experiential knowing is that of a radical phenomenology: Our primal experience of the world, if we will only open ourselves to it, is present prior to culture (Heron, 1992). To be sure, our experience is deeply influenced by our discourse, but we can learn to bracket off that discourse and approach experience more directly. We can do this through mindfulness disciplines (meditation, T'ai Chi, Gurdjief work [Torbert, n.d.], Alexander Technique, and so on), through systematic engagement with the cycles of action and reflection that are a central part of participative and action inquiry methods.

My second problem is that the poststructural perspective, certainly in its extreme form, is overintellectualized and thus both nihilistic and oppressive. Voices are just voices; they have no claim to truth, so the search for voice is seen as being the search for any old voice. And given current power relations on the planet, the first voices likely to be "deconstructed" are those of people already oppressed, the voices of the poor, of women, but also the voices of the body and of the earth itself. Spretnak (1992) argues that the excesses of philosophical deconstructionism are as life denying as scientism, and points out that the denial of the body is first and foremost the erasure of the female body.

Participative, action-oriented approaches to inquiry work to move beyond this overintellectualized approach and to ground knowing and action literally in the body of experience—"coming to our senses," as Berman (1989) puts it.

Data

It is interesting to note that the three approaches place different emphases on what is to be taken as "data," the recording of experience for the purpose of reflection. At the more conservative end, Argyris's version of action science relies almost entirely on formally recorded reports of conversations. Torbert's version of action inquiry includes as data a whole range of personal experience and idiosyncratic expression, and, although primarily verbal, reaches toward what he terms the "meditatively postverbal" (personal communication, 1992). Co-operative inquiry relies primarily on rational verbal reports of experience, but is branching out into imaginative storytelling (Reason & Hawkins, 1988) and metaphor (Cunningham, 1984).

Toward the other end of the spectrum, PAR wholeheartedly embraces a whole range of expressive forms, including song, dance, and theater, as well as more orthodox forms of data. This expressive activity in PAR not only enriches the inquiry, but provides a means through which ordinary people may experience and validate the data being used. If we take Heron's admonition to take expressive forms of knowing seriously and learn from the example of PAR, we may see much richer, more colorful, and more intense forms of inquiry in the future.

Attitudes Toward Leadership

In celebrating the common people's knowledge, and in emphasizing the role of participation and self-direction in development, the perspective of PAR is radically egalitarian. Rahman (1991, p. 20) argues that movements for social change are normally led by intellectuals who are in a position to provide leadership not because of any particular aptitude but because they are privileged by their economic and social status. He points to the many dangers of relying on an elite leadership for social transformation: the dangers of inflated egos; the fragility of commitment in the face of attractive temptations; the problems of the growth in size of the elite class as a movement grows and the danger of attracting new adherents holding altogether different commitments; and, finally, the self-perpetuating character of the institutions created to provide leadership. He argues that "democracy . . . is a necessity for revolutionary development" because it gives "freedom to take initiatives" (p. 22).

Yet, paradoxically, many PAR projects would not occur without the initiative of someone with time, skill, and commitment, someone who will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged and educated group. PAR appears to sit uneasily with this. Salazar (1991) points out how both participatory researchers and those with whom they aspire to work are in Colombian society part of a "long chain of transmission of authoritarian traits," and that outsiders are prone to "see what should be done" and maybe rush in without full participation. Thus "authoritarian attitudes (even unconsciously) may lead to actions which reproduce current domination patterns" (p. 56). On the other hand, Brown (1993) and his colleagues have established training programs for leaders of nongovernmental organizations doing innovative work in developing countries.

It is interesting to contrast this wary attitude toward leadership with Torbert's (1991a) argument that transformational leadership and the skilled exercise of the power of balance is essential for the development of social systems toward greater justice and effectiveness. Heron (1989) similarly argues for what he terms "distress-free charismatic authority" in group facilitation, which he sees as involving an ever-changing balance among three modes: hierarchy and the exercise of legiti-

mate authority; the peer principle and the sharing of power with a group; and the autonomy principle, which respects the freedom of each person to exercise his or her own judgment.

Although we may accept that persons are fundamentally self-directing and celebrate the common people's altruism and ability to cooperate, we must also recognize that many of the groups who might benefit from participative inquiry are alienated from the processes of knowledge creation and may be part of a "culture of silence" (Singh, 1981; Whitmore, in press). It is arguable that a practice that emphasizes participation demands an understanding of enlightened leadership. Thus co-operative inquiry is an emergent process that participants are first led through, amend and develop in the light of their experience, and finally embrace as their own. Action inquiry includes the construction of "liberating structures" (Torbert, 1991a, chap. 5) that paradoxically demand the exercise of freedom. PAR requires sustained authentic dialogue between intellectuals and the people they wish to serve.

In all this there is a tension between the ideal—and the rhetoric—of participation and the practical demands for effective leadership. This tension, this living paradox, we have to live with, to find creative resolution moment to moment.

These questions of leadership draw our attention to the process of training—both the training of initiating facilitators and "animators" and the training of participants. There is a whole range of skills required for participative research, skills that are very different from those of orthodox research, and that include personal skills of self-awareness and self-reflexiveness, facilitative skills in interpersonal and group settings, political skills, intellectual skills, and data management skills. For discussions on training for leadership in PAR, see de Oliveira (1982); D'Abreo (1981); PRIA (1982, 1987a, 1987b); Bobo, Kendall, and Max (1991); Highlander Center (1989); Brown (1993); and Fals-Borda (1988). For work addressing training for leadership in action sciences and action inquiry, see Argyris et al. (1985, chaps. 9-12), Schön (1983), Torbert (1981a, 1991a, 1991b), and Krim (1988); for co-operative inquiry, see especially Heron (1989).

A Mutual Critique
of the Three Approaches

While accepting that the three methodologies are in some sense cousins in a family of participative research, it is useful to look from one to the others in a friendly and supportive critique. Thus co-operative inquiry appears from the perspective of PAR to overemphasize the psychological at the expense of the political, the microprocesses of small group behavior at the expense of the wider political processes that define reality. And from the perspective of action inquiry it can be seen as lacking a robust theory of action and of the exercise of power.

From the perspective of co-operative inquiry the writings on PAR appear to romanticize the goodness and democratic tendencies of the common people, and to ignore the ways in which all groups may be destructive and distort their experience. Reports on PAR projects often appear to be long on ideology and short on systematic practice. From the perspective of action inquiry, PAR, in emphasizing the importance of sharing power, fails to consider seriously the ways in which leaders of democratic movements must develop personally and learn to exercise transforming power.

Finally, action inquiry may appear from the other two perspectives to be advocating an updated version of a Western and masculine "rugged individualism," "to be elitist in its emphasis on the later stages of ego development, and to ignore the contribution of common people in both the small group and the wider collective.

A Possible Integration

What, then, are the major strengths of each approach and how might they be integrated? The PAR strategy of developing knowledge through empowering dialogue initially between an animator and a community of people appears to be most appropriate when the inquiry involves a relatively large number of people who are initially disempowered. PAR also draws our attention to the political issues concerning ownership of knowledge, and to the need to create communities of people who are capable of continuing the PAR process. We see this process at work in the underprivileged rural and urban settings in Southern countries, and as Gaventa (1991) points out, it is also appropriate in Northern countries, particularly as the gap between rich and poor grows wider.

Co-operative inquiry is a strategy more likely to be successful with a group of people who experience themselves as relatively empowered and who wish to explore and develop their practice together. Thus it is a form of inquiry appropriate for smaller groups of professionals—for example, doctors, teachers, or managers—who wish to explore and develop their practice systematically. It is also a process through which a group of disempowered people may join together to explore their world, although initially such a group may be more dependent on an initiating facilitator in the manner of PAR.

Action inquiry draws our attention to the particular individual skills required for valid inquiry

with others. It confronts us with the need to cultivate a wide-ranging and subtle attention; it suggests that we can develop such an attention only as we move toward the later stages of ego development; and it offers methods for the detailed examination of our purposes, theories, and behavior, and the consequences of these for our world. Torbert suggests that, in a sense, action inquiry is a discipline relevant to those most deeply committed to participative approaches to inquiry, persons who wish to play leadership roles in cultivating this process with others and who wish to inquire about their actual effects as they do so (personal communication, 1992).

One might say that PAR serves the community, cooperative inquiry the group, and action inquiry the individual practitioner. But this is clearly a gross oversimplification, because each of the triad is fully dependent on the others. It would seem that a PAR project would be strengthened if the animators met together as a co-operative inquiry group to reflect on their practice; a co-operative inquiry would be helped if the members cultivated the interpenetrating attention advocated by action inquiry.

Let me then speculate about how these three processes might come together in one project. Imagine a group of people concerned with changing some aspect of their world—it might be a group of PAR animators engaged in developmental work in rural villages, or a group of teachers exploring education as liberation in London or New York, or a group of health care professionals wishing to work in a more holistic and person-centered fashion. Members of such a group would meet together as a co-operative inquiry group, defining their common area of interest and moving through cycles of action and reflection, meeting regularly to review progress.

In their work with a wider group of people—the villagers, the students, the patients—they would engage in the developmental dialogue of PAR. They would work to gain entry and trust in a community, help that community define its needs, and engage in all the processes of PAR discussed above. This might mean that a particular project becomes the focus of this aspect of their work—a developmental process in a village, a self-help or healing group with patients.

At the same time, they would scrutinize their individual practices through action inquiry, keeping comprehensive records of their experiences and behaviors, reviewing these in detail, engaging in experiments in action, and so on. Of course, these PAR and action inquiry processes would also become the subjects for mutual reflection in the co-operative inquiry group, which would probably lead to creative new ways of engaging in the wider group involved in PAR, so the whole process would knit together as one whole.

In view of the complementarity of these three approaches to research with people, it is curious that so far they have developed in separate communities with little cross-fertilization of ideas. It is my hope that this chapter will provide a stimulus for some future dialogue.

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