typically needs 3–4 hours' transcription time per hour of tape to produce a simple orthographic transcript; a novice transcriber is likely to take twice or three times as long. Transcription suitable for conversation analysis typically takes many hours per *minute* of tape (for this reason, whole tapes are rarely transcribed in this way – rather, extracts relevant to the particular phenomenon under study are selected for transcription). Focus group data are harder to transcribe than one-to-one interview data, because of overlapping talk (although the degree of accuracy with which you need to transcribe this will depend on whether it is a feature of your planned analysis). Make back-up copies of all transcripts too, and store them separately, appropriately labelled and in both disk and paper form (a large ring-binder with dividers is useful for the latter).

Data Analysis

You should have decided long before this stage how you will analyse your data, in relation to your theoretical framework and your specific research question (see earlier for a range of possibilities). Here, I will give examples of two contrasting ways of analysing focus group data – content analysis and discursive analysis – again drawn from my breast cancer project.

The analyses presented below are both concerned with the possible 'causes' of breast cancer. The content analysis (conducted within an essentialist framework – see above) rests on the assumption that people have (relatively stable and enduring) beliefs or opinions about the causes of breast cancer, and that these can reliably be inferred from an analysis of what they say. Its aim, then, is to identify participants' beliefs or opinions about the causes of breast cancer. The discursive analysis (conducted within a social constructionist framework – see above) rests on the claim that people's ideas about the causes of breast cancer are produced collaboratively, in social interactions between people, and that these collaborative productions can be observed, as they actually happen, in the course of focus group interaction. Its aim, then, is to identify the ways in which people actively construct and negotiate ideas about the causes of breast cancer.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a commonly used approach to analysing qualitative data, including focus group data. It involves coding participants' open-ended talk into closed categories, which summarize and systematize the data. These categories may be derived either from the data itself (perhaps using grounded theory – see Chapter 5; this is known as a 'bottom-up' approach) or from the prior theoretical framework of the researcher (this is known as a 'top-down' approach, and requires prior familiarity with the literature on the topic under investigation in order to derive the categories, as in the worked example below). The end point of the analysis may be simply to illustrate each category by means of representative quotations from the data, presented either in a table (see Box 9.3a); or written up as consecutive prose (e.g. Fish and Wilkinson, 2000a, 2000b). Box 9.3a provides an example of a content analysis based on the transcript of a breast cancer focus group with three participants. All talk in this focus group about the 'causes' of breast cancer has been categorized systematically. The categories (and sub-categories) are derived from Mildred Blaxter's (1983) classic study on women talking about the causes of disease, with the addition of an 'Other' category. Box 9.3a illustrates each category used by the participants with representative quotations from their talk.

One particular advantage of content analysis (for some researchers) is that it also allows for the conversion of qualitative data into a quantitative form. This is done by means of counting the number of responses falling within each category (that is, their frequency or 'popularity') and then summarizing the number (or percentage) of responses for each category, usually in tabular form. Box 9.3b illustrates this. It is based on the same data and the same categories as Box 9.3a, but the results of the content analysis are presented quantitatively, rather than qualitatively. Box 9.3b records the frequency with which 'causes' falling into each category are mentioned.

The main advantages of undertaking a content analysis of these data, then, are that it provides a useful summary of women's beliefs about the causes of breast cancer, and offers an overview of the range and diversity of their ideas. It also offers easy comparison with other studies undertaken within a similar framework. If the potential for quantification is taken up, content analysis also gives a sense of the relative significance women attach to different causes (if – as in Blaxter's (1983) analysis – frequency of mention is equated with perceived importance). The main disadvantages are that a great deal of detail is lost; it can be hard to select quotations which are both representative of the categories and compelling to the reader ('naturalistic' talk doesn't come in sound bites!); and (particularly in the quantified version) one loses a sense of individual participants and – especially – the interaction between participants, which is so distinctive in focus group data. (It may be possible to preserve this by doing a separate 'sweep' of the data for interactional phenomena, and attempting to 'map' these onto the content analysis in some way.)

There is also a range of coding problems associated with content analysis. For example, the analysis above categorizes as equivalent causes which the women say *do* apply to them (for example, 'I took the pill at a younger age') and those which they say *do not* (for example, 'there's no family history'). It also categorizes as equivalent statements which the women present as their *own* beliefs or opinions (for example, 'I always think . . .'; 'It must be . . .') and those which they attribute to *others* (for example, 'I was once told . . .'; 'He told them . . .'; 'They say . . .'). Finally, it is unable to

Box 9.3a Content analysis – presented qualitatively

Women's Beliefs about the Causes of Breast Cancer

1. *Infection*

   Not discussed

2. *Heredity or familial tendencies*

   - 'I mean there's no family history'

3. *Agents in the environment:*
   a) 'poisons', working condition, climate (see also Box 9.3b)

   - 'I was once told that if you use them aluminium pans that cause cancer'
   - 'Looking years and years ago, I mean, everybody used to [laughs] sit about sunning themselves on the beach and now all of a sudden you get cancer from sunshine'
   - 'I don't know (about) all the chemicals in what you're eating and things these days as well, and how cultivated and everything'

   b) Drugs or the contraceptive pill

   - 'I mean I did t-, you know, obviously I took the pill at a younger age'

4. *Secondary to other diseases*

   Not discussed

5. *Stress, strain and worry*

   Not discussed

6. *Caused by childbearing, the menopause*

   - 'Inverted nipples, they say that that is one thing that you could be wary of'
   - 'Until I came to the point of actually trying to breastfeed I didn't realize I had flattened nipples and one of them was nearly inverted or whatever, so I had a lot of trouble breastfeeding, and it, and I was several weeks with a breast pump trying to uhm get it right, so that he could suckle on my nipple, I did have that problem'

continued

   - 'Over the years, every, I couldn't say it happened monthly or anything like that, it would just start throbbing this [pause] leakage, nothing to put a dressing on or anything like that, but there it was, it was coming from somewhere and it were just kind of gently crust over'
   - 'I mean, I don't know whether the age at which you have children makes a difference as well because I had my [pause] 8-year-old relatively late, I was an old mum'
   - 'They say that if you've only had one that you're more likely to get it than if you have a big family'

7. *Secondary to trauma or to surgery*

   - 'Sometimes I've heard that knocks can bring one on'
   - 'I then remembered that I'd banged my breast with this, uhm [tch] you know these shopping bags with a wooden rod thing, those big trolley bags?'
   - 'I always think that people go into hospital, even for an exploratory, it may be all wrong, but I do think, well the air gets to it, it seems to me that it's not long afterwards before they [pause] simply find that there's more to it than they thought, you know, and I often wonder if the air getting to your inside is- [pause] brings, brings on [pause] cancer in any form'

8. *Neglect, the constraints of poverty*

   Not discussed

9. *Inherent susceptibility, individual and not hereditary*

   Not discussed

10. *Behaviour, own responsibility*

    - 'I was also told that if you eat tomatoes and plums at the same meal that-'

11. *Ageing, natural degeneration*

    Not discussed

12. *Other*

    - 'He told them nurses in his lectures that everybody has a cancer, and [pause] it's a case of whether it lays dormant'
    - 'I don't think it could be one cause, can it? It must be multi, multifactorial'

Box 9.3b Content analysis – presented quantitatively

Women's Beliefs about the Causes of Breast Cancer

1. *Infection*: 0 instances
2. *Heredity or familial tendencies*: 2 instances

   family history (×2)
3. *Agents in the environment:*
   a) 'poisons', working condition, climate: 3 instances

   aluminium pans; exposure to sun; chemicals in food

   b) drugs or the contraceptive pill: 1 instance

   taking the contraceptive pill
4. *Secondary to other diseases*: 0 instances
5. *Stress, strain and worry*: 0 instances
6. *Caused by childbearing, the menopause*: 22 instances

   not breastfeeding; late childbearing (×3); having only one child; being single/not having children; hormonal; trouble with breastfeeding – unspecified (×4); flattened nipples (×2); inverted nipples (×7); nipple discharge (×2)
7. *Secondary to trauma or to surgery*: 9 instances

   knocks (×4); unspecified injury; air getting inside body (×4)
8. *Neglect, the constraints of poverty*: 0 instances
9. *Inherent susceptibility, individual and not hereditary*: 0 instances
10. *Behaviour, own responsibility*: 1 instance

    mixing specific foods
11. *Ageing, natural degeneration*: 0 instances

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12. *Other*: 5 instances

    'several things'; 'a lot'; 'multifactorial'; everybody has a 'dormant' cancer; 'anything' could wake a dormant cancer

deal with inconsistencies in expressed beliefs or apparent changes of opinion during the course of the focus group – because each mention of a cause is treated as an isolated occurrence, taken out of context. These apparent 'coding problems' are actually epistemological issues arising from the framework within which this type of analysis is undertaken – and, as such, they are key to what can (and cannot) be said about the data (see Wilkinson, 2000b, for a more extended discussion). The point will become clearer as we move to a second example of focus group analysis, again drawing on some of my breast cancer data.

Discursive Analysis

The data extract on which the second analysis is based is shown in Box 9.4 (note that this is a simple orthographic transcription of a small part of a focus group). There are three participants in this focus group, in addition to myself as researcher/moderator. Doris and Fiona are both pub landladies (although Doris has recently retired). They arrived early for the session, met each other for the first time, and discovered their shared occupation while waiting for the other participants to arrive. During this pre-focus group conversation, they developed a joint theory about the possible role of their work in causing their breast cancer. Specifically, Doris and Fiona co-constructed the explanation that 'pulling' (drawing beer from a cask, by means of a handpump, which is quite a strenuous activity) was to blame. Immediately prior to the extract presented here, I asked the focus group participants if they had any idea about what might have caused their breast cancer.

Doris and Fiona answer my question by presenting their joint theory to the group (note that they simply continue as if everyone had been present at their earlier conversation, making no concession to Edith's later arrival – it is left to me, as group moderator, to 'fill Edith in' on what has gone before). Edith is, however, very quick to catch on (asking a clarificatory question – 'Is it at the side where . . .?' – which I, as researcher, would certainly not have thought to ask). Doris and Fiona respond to Edith's question by pooling their similar experiences: Fiona even completes Doris's sentence for her, in expounding their joint theory. Fiona then offers additional information: she has two friends who are also pub landladies, and *they too* have breast cancer on the same side as they pull beer. This strengthens their joint theory still further: with the evidence of *four* pub landladies all with breast cancer on the same side as they pull beer, who could doubt that 'pulling' is a contributory factor? However, Doris then offers an alternative or additional contributory factor for breast cancer in pub landladies: 'the atmosphere of the smoke in the pub'.

There are several possibilities open to Fiona at this point: she can *reject* this new information out of hand in favour of the 'pulling' theory (in which

Box 9.4 Data extract for discursive analysis

In the following data extract, two pub landladies (Doris and Fiona) consider the possible role of their profession in 'causing' their breast cancer (another focus group participant [Edith] and the researcher/moderator [SW] also contribute to the discussion).

Doris: Well, I uhm, like you-
Edith: [Cuts in] It's not in the family
Doris: [Turns to Fiona] Like you I wondered if it was with pulling, you know
Fiona: Yeah
SW: [Turns to Edith] These two were talking about being pub landladies and whether that contributed
Edith: Well that, oh [indistinct]
Fiona: Yeah, you know, yeah
Edith: Is it at the side where . . .?
Doris: Mine's at the side where [indistinct]
Fiona: where you pulled
Doris: Yes
Fiona: and mine's the same side, and I've got two friends who are both pub landladies down south
Doris: And then
Fiona: and they're sisters and both of them have got breast cancer, both on the same side as they pull beer
Doris: And then there's the atmosphere of the smoke in the [stutters] pub
Fiona: Well I, I'm not, I don't know, I'm not so sure about that one
Doris: Well, I think I lean to that more in, what do they call him? The artist, Roy Castle
Fiona: Oh Roy Castle, yeah, with passive smoking
Doris: Mm hm, he said he got his through being in smoke, smoke filled rooms

case she will need to defend 'pulling' as the stronger contender, perhaps offering more evidence to support 'pulling' or to refute the 'smoky atmosphere' theory); she can elaborate the 'pulling' theory to incorporate 'smoky atmosphere' as an *additional* possible cause; she can engage with the new information as offering a possible *alternative* theory (perhaps exploring the parameters and implications of a 'smoky atmosphere', or challenging Doris to provide examples or additional evidence of its effects); or she can simply *accept* 'smoky atmosphere' as a better explanation for breast cancer. In the event, her hesitant and qualified response ('Well I, I'm not, I don't know, I'm not so sure about that one') implies disagreement (or, at the very least, uncertainty). Fiona's apparent disagreement leads Doris to marshal supporting evidence for the 'smoky atmosphere' theory, in the form of a recent television documentary featuring a celebrity with cancer. Fiona has seen the documentary too, and in her response to Doris, we see the possible beginning of a shift in her views (or at least a willingness to engage seriously with the 'smoky atmosphere' theory): she recognizes – and names (as 'passive smoking') – the phenomenon Doris has identified. Doris accepts this label and goes on to relate it to the case of the TV celebrity.

This discursive analysis illustrates the collaborative production and negotiation of ideas about the causes of breast cancer. In its focus on the *processes* of constructing notions of cause through ongoing social interaction, it is epistemologically very different from a content analytic approach that sees ideas about cause as internal 'cognitions'. It is also worth noting that, although discursive analysis has an affinity with narrative methods (see Chapter 6), from a discursive perspective, a narrated story – or other contribution to a discussion – is never just a stand-alone. Rather, it is a form of social action, produced for a specific purpose (such as to amuse, inform, illustrate or explain) within the particular interactional context of a particular focus group discussion. (See Chapter 8 for more on discursive analysis.)

The main advantages of undertaking a discursive analysis of focus group data such as these, then, are that it takes the fullest possible account of the social context within which statements about cause are made; it does not treat such statements as unitary, static or non-contingent; and it preserves both a sense of individual participants and – particularly – the details of their interaction, which here become a central analytic concern. If video (rather than audio) data are available, a broader analysis of the group dynamics within which particular conversations are located becomes a real possibility. The very different epistemological framework of discursive analysis also accounts for many of the 'coding problems' identified in relation to content analysis (for example, the inconsistency and variability of accounts) – see Wilkinson (2000b) for a more extended discussion. The main disadvantages of discursive analysis are that it does not easily permit either a summary overview of a large data set, or a detailed focus on the lives of individuals outside the focus group context (for this, see Chapters 3, 4 and 6 on phenomenological and narrative research). Only a very small sample of data can be analysed in detail in this way, and traditional concerns about representativeness, generalizability, reliability and validity (often levelled at qualitative research) may be difficult to counter (but see Chapter 11 for ways in which qualitative researchers have reconceptualized these traditional concerns).

In sum, then, what I hope to have illustrated by these two worked examples is that there is no single canonical – or even preferred – way of analysing focus group data. Rather, such data can be analysed in a number of (very different) ways, each of which has particular benefits, and also

particular costs. Further, I hope to have shown that the particular method of analysis chosen depends centrally upon the particular theoretical framework of researchers and the kinds of research question that they hope to address.

Finally, I hope that the practical guide above does not look too daunting. Focus group research does demand a great deal of planning and organization (and often, also, considerable development of analytic skills), but in my experience it is also immensely rewarding, both for the researcher and for the participants.

Further Reading

Wilkinson, S. (1998b) 'Focus group methodology: a review', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 1: 181–203.

Good brief introduction to the method and the range of ways in which it has been used in various disciplinary contexts.

Barbour, R. and Kitzinger, J. (eds) (1999) *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice*. London: Sage.

One of the most recent edited collections, with a wider range of examples than most.

Krueger, R.A. (1994) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (2nd edn). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

One of the two best introductions to doing focus group research, very practical.

Morgan, D.L. (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (2nd edn). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

The other best introduction to doing focus group research; covers key issues as well as practical details.

Wilkinson, S. (2000b) 'Women with breast cancer talking causes: comparing content, biographical and discursive analyses', *Feminism & Psychology*, 10: 431–60.

Useful for more examples of different types of data analysis, and discussion of their implications.

Chapter 10

Cooperative inquiry

Peter Reason

Epistemological Groundings

The primary tradition of research in psychology has emphasized the separation of subject and object, observer from what is observed, in a search for objective truth. In this tradition, it is the researcher who makes all the decisions about what to study, how to study it, and what conclusions may be drawn; and the 'subjects' contribute only their responses to the situation in which they are observed, without knowing anything about the ideas that inform the inquiry. However, another inquiry tradition, which we can broadly call participatory research, has placed a contrasting emphasis on collaboration between 'researcher' and 'subject', so that in the full flowering of the approach this distinction is done away with, and *all* those involved in the inquiry endeavour to act as co-researchers, contributing both to the decisions which inform the research and the action which is to be studied.

The fundamental argument behind this participatory tradition is that it is not possible to have a true science of persons unless the inquiry engages with humans as persons. And since persons are manifestly capable of making sense of their behaviour, the distinction between a 'researcher' who does all the thinking, and 'subjects' who do the behaving is completely inappropriate. And from a participatory perspective, the 'subjects' of the traditional form are really objects – curiously, the word 'subject' wraps around itself to mean both the autonomous human being and the one who is 'subject to' God, monarch or a scientific researcher. In a science of persons, all those engaged in the inquiry process enter the process as persons, bringing with them their intelligence, their intentionality and their ability to reflect on experience and to enter relations with others – and, of course, also their capacity for self-deception, for consensus collusion, for rationalization, and for refusal to see the obvious that also characterizes human beings.

A science of persons also rests on a participative view of the world:

> Our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships which we co-author. We participate in our world, so that the

> 'reality' we experience is a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and construing. The participative metaphor is particularly apt for action research, because as we participate in creating our world we are already embodied and breathing beings *who are necessarily acting* – and this draws us to consider how to judge the *quality* of our acting.
>
> A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their world – both human and more-than-human – embodied in their world, co-creating their world. A participatory perspective asks us to be both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a: 6–7)

A science of persons in this sense is not a science of the Enlightenment. It does not seek a transcendental truth, which Descartes and his fellows would have us pursue. A science of persons embraces a 'postmodern' sentiment in attempting to move us beyond grand narratives toward localized, pragmatic and constructed practical knowings that are based in the experience and action of those engaged in the inquiry project. Toulmin (1990) argues persuasively that this can be seen as a reassertion of Renaissance values of practical philosophy.

Thus, the experiential basis on which participative forms of inquiry are based is 'extended'; extended beyond the positivist concern for the rational and the empirical to include diverse ways of knowing as persons encounter and act in their world, particularly forms of knowing which are experiential and practical.

As Eikeland (2001) points out, this notion goes right back to Aristotle, and in modern times Polanyi (1958) described clearly his concept of tacit knowledge, a type of embodied know-how that is the foundation of all cognitive action. Writing more recently, Shotter argues that, in addition to Gilbert Ryle's distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how', there is a 'kind of knowledge one has *only from within a social situation*, a group, or an institution, and thus takes into account . . . the *others* in the social situation' (Shotter, 1993: 7; emphasis in original). It is significant that Shotter usually uses the verbal form '*knowing* of the third kind', to describe this, rather than the noun *knowledge*, emphasizing that such knowing is not a thing, to be discovered or created and stored up in journals, but rather arises in the process of living and in the voices of ordinary people in conversation.

Many writers have articulated different ways of framing an extended epistemology from pragmatic, constructionist, critical, feminist and developmental perspectives. While these descriptions differ in detail, they all go

beyond orthodox empirical and rational Western views of knowing, and embrace a multiplicity of ways of knowing that start from a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition. They assert the importance of sensitivity and attunement in the moment of relationship, and of knowing not just as an academic pursuit but as the everyday practices of acting in relationship and creating meaning in our lives (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a).

The methodology of cooperative inquiry draws on a fourfold extended epistemology: *experiential knowing* is through direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place or thing – it is knowing through empathy and resonance, that kind of in-depth knowing which is almost impossible to put into words; *presentational knowing* grows out of experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression through story, drawing, sculpture, movement and dance, drawing on aesthetic imagery; *propositional knowing* draws on concepts and ideas; and *practical knowing* consummates the other forms of knowing in action in the world (Heron, 1992; 1996). In some ways, the practical has primacy since:

> most of our knowledge, and all our primary knowledge, arises as an aspect of activities that have practical, not theoretical objectives; and it is this knowledge, itself an aspect of action, to which all reflective theory must refer. (Macmurray, 1957: 12)

However, as well as being an expression of an extended epistemology within a participative world-view, a science of persons has a political dimension. The relationship between power and knowledge has been well argued by Habermas, Foucault, Lukes and others (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Participative forms of inquiry start with concerns for power and powerlessness, and aim to confront the way in which the established and power-holding elements of societies worldwide are favoured because they hold a monopoly on the definition and employment of knowledge:

> This political form of participation affirms people's right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them. It asserts the importance of liberating the muted voices of those held down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism, and homophobia. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a: 9)

So participatory research has a double objective. One aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people – through research, adult education and socio-political 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 *conscientização*, a term popularized by Paulo Freire (1970) for a 'process of self-awareness through collective self-inquiry and reflection' (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991: 16). As Daniel Selener emphasizes, while a major goal of participatory research is to solve practical problems in a community, 'another goal is the creation of shifts in the balance of power in favour of poor and marginalized groups in society' (Selener, 1997: 12). Greenwood and Levin (1998: 3) also emphasize how action research contributes actively to processes of democratic social change. Participative research is at its best a process that explicitly aims to educate those involved to develop their capacity for inquiry both individually and collectively.

These four dimensions of a science of persons – treating persons as persons, a participative world-view, an extended epistemology and a liberationist spirit – can be seen as the basis of contemporary action research. Action research itself is currently undergoing an exciting resurgence of interest and creativity, and there are many forms of inquiry practice within this tradition. In one attempt to provide some order to this diversity, we have elsewhere described three broad pathways to this practice. First-person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of researchers to foster an inquiring approach to their own lives, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. Second-person action research/practice addresses our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern. Third-person research/practice aims to extend these relatively small-scale projects to create a wider community of inquiry involving a whole organization or community (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b: xxv–xxvi).

Cooperative inquiry is one articulation of action research. The original initiatives into experiential inquiry were taken around 1970 by John Heron (Heron, 1971). This developed into a practice of cooperative inquiry as a methodology for a science of persons (Heron, 1996), which places an emphasis on first-person research/practice in the context of supportive and critical second-person relationships, while having the potential to reach out toward third-person practice. In this chapter, I will first set out the logics of the cooperative inquiry method, and then endeavour to show how this takes place within the learning community which is a cooperative inquiry group.

The Logics of Cooperative Inquiry

Cooperative inquiry can be seen as cycling through four phases of reflection and action (see Figure 10.1).

In phase 1 a group of co-researchers come together to explore an agreed area of human activity. They may be professionals who wish to develop their

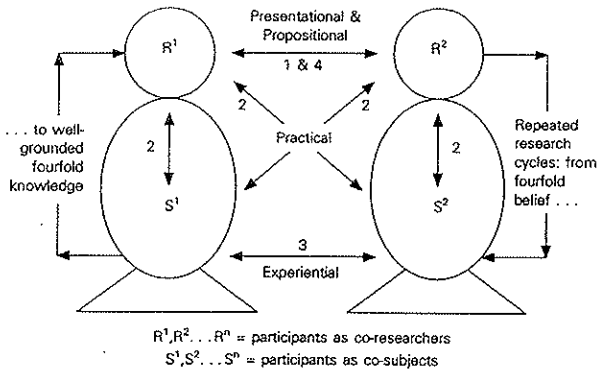

Figure 10.1 *The fourfold epistemology and phases of the inquiry cycle. (Heron, 1996)*

understanding and skill in a particular area of practice or members of a minority group who wish to articulate an aspect of their experience which has been muted by the dominant culture. They may wish to explore in depth their experience of certain states of consciousness, to assess the impact on their well-being of particular healing practices, and so on. In this first phase, they agree on the focus of their inquiry, and develop together tentative questions or propositions they wish to explore. They agree to undertake some action, some practice, which will contribute to this exploration, and agree to a set of procedures by which they will observe and record their own and each other's experience.

Phase 1 is primarily in the mode of propositional knowing, although it will also contain important elements of presentational knowing, as group members use their imagination in story, fantasy and graphics to help them articulate their interests and to focus on their purpose in the inquiry. Once they have clarified sufficiently what they want to inquire about, group members conclude phase 1 with planning a method for exploring this in action, and with devising ways of gathering and recording 'data' from this experience.

In phase 2, the co-researchers engage in the actions agreed. They observe and record the process and outcomes of their own and each other's experience. In particular, they are careful to hold lightly the propositional frame from which they started, to notice how practice both does and does not conform to their original ideas and also to the subtleties of experience.

This phase involves primarily practical knowledge: knowing how (and how not) to engage in appropriate action, to bracket off the starting idea, and to exercise relevant discrimination.

Phase 3 is in some ways the touchstone of the inquiry method as the co-researchers become fully immersed in and engaged with their experience. They may develop a degree of openness to what is going on, so free of preconceptions that they see it in a new way. They may deepen into the experience so that superficial understandings are elaborated and developed. Or they may be led away from the original ideas and proposals into new fields, unpredicted action and creative insights. It is also possible that they may get so involved in what they are doing that they lose the awareness that they are part of an inquiry group: there may be a practical crisis, they may become enthralled or they may simply forget. Phase 3 involves mainly experiential knowing, although it will be richer if new experience is expressed, when recorded, in creative presentational form through graphics, colour, sound, movement, drama, story or poetry.

In phase 4, after an agreed period engaged in phases 2 and 3, the co-researchers reassemble to consider their original propositions and questions in the light of their experience. As a result, they may modify, develop or reframe them; or reject them and pose new questions. They may choose, for the next cycle of action, to focus on the same or on different aspects of the overall inquiry. The group may also choose to amend or develop its inquiry procedures – forms of action, ways of gathering data – in the light of experience. Phase 4 again emphasizes propositional knowing, although presentational forms of knowing will form an important bridge with the experiential and practical phases.

In a full inquiry, the cycle will be repeated several times. Ideas and discoveries tentatively reached in early phases can be checked and developed; investigation of one aspect of the inquiry can be related to exploration of other parts; new skills can be acquired and monitored; and experiential competencies can be realized. The group itself may become more cohesive and self-critical, more skilled in its work and in the practices of inquiry. Ideally, the inquiry is finished when the initial questions are fully answered in practice, and when there is a new congruence between the four kinds of knowing. It is, of course, rare for a group to complete an inquiry so fully. It should be noted that actual inquiry practice is not as straightforward as the model suggests: there are usually mini-cycles within major cycles, some cycles emphasize one phase more than others, and some practitioners have advocated a more emergent process of inquiry which is less structured into phases. Nevertheless, the discipline of the research cycle is fundamental.

The cycling can really start at any point. It is usual for groups to get together formally at the propositional stage, often as the result of an invitation from an initiating facilitator. However, such a proposal is usually birthed in experiential knowing, at the moment that curiosity is aroused or

incongruity in practice noticed. And the proposal to form an inquiry group, if it is to take flight, needs to be presented in such a way as to appeal to the experience of potential co-researchers.

The Human Process of Cooperative Inquiry

In a science of persons, the quality of inquiry practice lies far less in impersonal methodology, and far more in the emergence of a self-aware, critical community of inquiry nested within a community of practice. So while cooperative inquiry as method is based on cycles of action and reflection engaging four dimensions of an extended epistemology as described above, cooperative inquiry as human process depends on the development of healthy human interaction in a face-to-face group. The would-be initiator of a cooperative inquiry must be willing to engage with the complexities of these human processes as well as with the logic of inquiry. This requires us to recollect our understanding of group processes.

Many theories of group development trace a series of phases of development in the life of a group. Early concerns are for inclusion and membership. When and if these needs are adequately satisfied, the group focuses on concerns for power and influence. And if these are successfully negotiated, they give way to concerns for intimacy and diversity in which flexible and tolerant relationships enable individuals to realize their own identity and the group to be effective in relation to its task (see, for example, Srivastva et al., 1977). This phase progression model of group behaviour – in which the group's primary concern moves from issues of inclusion to control to intimacy; or from forming to norming to storming to performing (Tuckman, 1965); or from nurturing to energizing to relaxing (Randall and Southgate, 1980) – is a valuable way of understanding group development (although all groups manifest these principles in their own unique way, and the complexity of an unfolding group process will always exceed what can be said about it). In what follows, I will use Randall and Southgate's model of creative group process as a vehicle for describing the process of a successful cooperative inquiry group and to indicate the kinds of leadership or facilitation choices that need to be made.

Randall and Southgate distinguished between the creative group, in which there is an exciting interaction between task and people – a 'living labour cycle' – and the destructive group, in which primitive emotions arise, swallow up and destroy both human needs and task accomplishment – Bion's 'basic assumption group' (Bion, 1959). The life of a creative group follows the creative orgasmic cycle that can be seen in all life-affirming human processes such as sexual intercourse, childbirth, preparing food and feasting, and doing good work together. In contrast, the destructive group lumbers between the basic group assumptions identified by Bion –

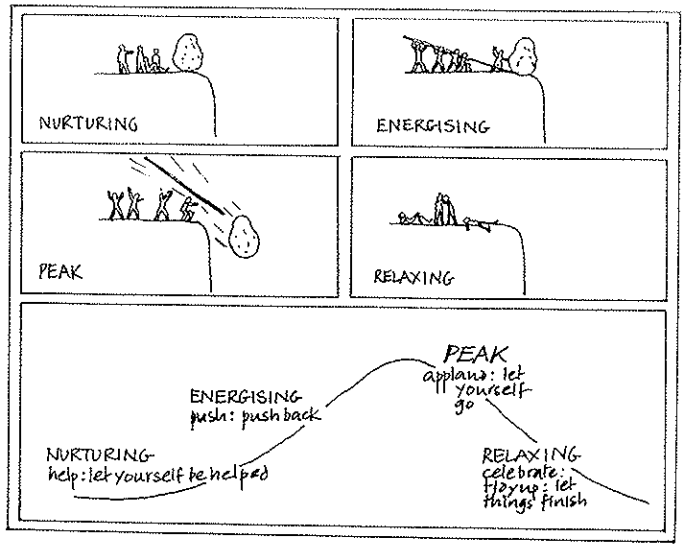

Figure 10.2 *The living labour cycle and the creative group cycle. (Randall and Southgate, 1981)*

dependency, fight/flight and messianic pairing – in its search for relief of its overwhelming anxiety. Between the creative and destructive group process is the intermediate group, which is neither completely satisfying nor completely destructive, but which represents the everyday experience.

The creative group can be described as a cycle of nurturing, energizing, a peak of accomplishment, followed by relaxing (see Figure 10.2):

- The nurturing phase draws people together and helps them feel emotionally safe and bonded. At the same time, early preparatory aspects of the group task and the organizational issues which allow the group to continue its life and work are attended to. The nurturing phase is about creating a safe and effective container for the work of the group, and leadership is primarily focused on those concerns.

- In the energizing phase, interaction intensifies as the group engages in its primary task. A degree of healthy conflict may arise as different views, experiences and skills are expressed. Leadership concerns are with the requirements of the task at hand, with containing and guiding the increasing levels of emotional, physical and intellectual energy which are being expressed.

- The peak in the creative group occurs at points of accomplishment, those moments when the emotional, task and organizational energy of the group comes together and the main purpose to hand is achieved. These are moments of utter mutual spontaneity.

- In the relaxing phase, members attend to those issues which will complete the emotional, task and organizational work of the group. Emotionally, the group needs to wind down, to celebrate achievements, to reflect and learn. The task needs to be completed – there are always final touches that distinguish excellence from the merely adequate. And the organizational issues need completion – putting away tools and paying bills. Leadership makes space for these issues to be properly attended to, and usually those naturally gifted as 'finishers' come forward to lead celebrations and complete the task.

A group which lasts over a period of time will experience cycles at different levels: mini-cycles associated with particular tasks and major cycles of action and reflection. These will be set in the context of a long-term developmental cycle of birth, maturation and death, with early concern for inclusion, through conflicts and cliques of the influence stage to (possibly) the maturity of full intimacy and on to dissolution. This creative group nurturing/energizing/relaxing cycle interacts with inquiry phases of action and reflection to produce a complex rhythm of cooperative inquiry.

A creative group is also characterized by an appropriate balance of the principles of hierarchy, collaboration and autonomy: deciding for others, with others and for oneself (Heron, 1999). Authentic hierarchy provides appropriate direction by those with greater vision, skill and experience. Collaboration roots the individual within a community of peers, offering basic support and the creative and corrective feedback of other views and possibilities. Autonomy expresses the self-directing and self-creating potential of the person. The shadow face of authority is authoritarianism; that of collaboration, peer pressure and conformity; that of autonomy, narcissism, wilfulness and isolation. The challenge is to design institutions which manifest valid forms of these principles; and to finds ways in which they can be maintained in self-correcting and creative tension.

Establishing Cooperative Inquiry: Focus on Nurturing

The key issues in the nurturing phase are:

- identifying potential group members and establishing a group emotional atmosphere in which potential members feel sufficiently at home to begin to contribute their creative energy

- introducing and explaining the process of cooperative inquiry

- agreeing a framework of times and places for meeting which will provide an organized framework for the major cycles of action and reflection.

A key consideration is to provide sufficient time, create relaxed conversational spaces and provide sufficient information for potential group members to make a considered choice about membership. Experience suggests that most inquiry groups are brought together specifically for the inquiry process – they come together around a shared interest or concern, or are members of an occupational group or an organization, so that when they assemble they will recognize their commonality and potential shared purpose. However, it is the initiating energy of one person who brings them together and creates a potential group as shown in the two examples that follow.

Kate McArdle is a graduate student using co-operative inquiry to work with young women managers in large organizations.

> At the end of October I took part in a day celebrating 'diversity' within XYZ. I was given half of a stand promoting women's interests. I covered it with bright yellow posters asking questions such as; 'What is it like to be a twenty-something woman in XYZ?' 'Does gender matter?' I littered the entire floor with bright orange flyers, which asked the same questions, gave the date of an introductory session and my contact details. I was expected to remain on the stand, but I had little interest in being interrogated or speaking to people who were not in the age bracket of my inquiry. I needed to use my voice in the right kind of conversations. I wandered around talking to people who looked as if they were in my 'target audience'. We sat on couches, drank coffee, shared stories about my research and their work and exchanged contact details. (McArdle, 2002: 180)

Carlis Douglas, exploring the question 'Is it possible for Black women to thrive in Britain?' wanted to work with the life experiences of Black women working in organizations to implement equal opportunities policies.

> From my extensive network of Black women, I made a long list of managers and professionals with the type of experience I wanted to tap and outlined some criteria for achieving a successful group process. This became the basis on which I invited women to join the group. I was quickly able to identify potential women for the group, and over a period of 6/8 weeks had long face-to-face, or telephone, conversations outlining my proposal, and requesting their involvement in the research. The first five I approached accepted. (Douglas, 2002: 252)

However, some inquiry groups are actual work or living groups who choose to devote time to inquiry on an issue of particular concern. A group of medical and complementary practitioners working together in an innovative general practice established a cooperative inquiry to explore their interdisciplinary practice (Reason, 1991); an established team of five hospital-based social workers formed an inquiry to explore the tension between prescription and discretion in front-line social work practice (Baldwin, 2001).

Whether the inquiry group arises as an independent initiative or from within an established group, the first proposal to initiate inquiry is a delicate matter: it needs to be clear enough to catch the imagination, address a felt need or interest, attract people's curiosity and interest, and at the same time be sufficiently tentative for potential members not to feel invaded or put upon by yet another demand on their busy lives. Many initiating facilitators of inquiry have spent considerable time talking through their ideas with potential members, sowing seeds in informal conversation. Some have established a reputation in their organization or community as initiators of interesting new projects and are trusted to take a lead; others are able to attract people to their idea, and then have to work to establish an atmosphere of trust and inquiry.

One approach is to write a letter or an email which attractively summarizes the proposal and the method on one side of a sheet of paper and invites people to come to a meeting to discuss the idea in greater depth. It can be a substantial, all-day meeting, with some profile within relevant communities, or a more intimate, face-to-face affair:

> Agnes Bryan and Cathy Aymer, black social work lecturers, were concerned to address issues in the development of professional identity among black social workers in the UK, issues they had identified on the basis of their experience and some prior research. They invited a large group of black social work professionals – practitioners, managers and teachers – to a day-long meeting at their university to discuss the issues and explore the establishment of inquiry groups. (see Bryan, 2000)

> Elizabeth Adeline, an artist creating context-specific installations, wanted to ask questions about her practice, including the relation between the doing part of being an artist which is tactile, playing