

Characteristics of Action Research:

Introduction to Action Research

Action research has a long history, going back to social scientists' attempts to help solve practical problems in wartime situations, in both Europe and America. Many trace its origins to the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940's to design social experiments in natural settings, and he is credited with the phrase "Nothing is as practical as a good theory." But action research practice draws on a wide field of influence, including critical thinking (Kemmis, 2001), liberationist thought (Freire, 1970), pragmatism (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) and feminism (Maguire, 2001; Stanley & Wise, 1983). While many of the original forms of action research espoused participation, power was often held tightly by researchers. However, more recent developments place emphasis on a full integration of action and reflection and on increased collaboration between all those involved in the inquiry project, so that the knowledge developed in the inquiry process is directly relevant to the issues being studied. Thus action research is conducted *by, with and for* people, rather than being research *on* people.

It is important to understand action research as an orientation to inquiry rather than as a methodology. Thus a recent text describes action research as:

"...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities." (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:1)

We use these five characteristics, drawn from the Handbook of Action Research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) to structure our discussion of the characteristics of action research. They are portrayed schematically in the five part model in the accompanying text.

There are many different definitions of action research; another we have found useful is:

"While much social research can remain content with 'interpretations after the event' development research faces the problem of establishing a continuous and interactive relationship between theory and practice. It faces not only the problem of how to understand events and practice, it also faces the problem of how to infuse events and practices with a certain understanding." (Toulmin & Gustavsen, 1996b:25)

Another definition which reflects action research as "living life as inquiry":

"Action Research ... is a move away from a primarily reflective science about others and toward critical inquiry-in-action by individuals, groups, organizations and the wider community... [The aim of action research] is to bring scholarship to life, is to bring inquiry into more and more of our moments of action-not just as scientists, if that happens to be our profession, but as organizational and family members, and in our spiritual, artistic, craft, exercise, conversational, sexual, and other activities. The action turn in the social sciences is a turn toward a kind of research/practice open in principle to anyone willing to commit to integrating inquiry and practice in everyday personal and professional settings." (Reason & Torbert, 2001)

While we emphasize that action research is an attitude to inquiry rather than simply a methodology, we here outline some of the significant "ways of doing" action research, a list that is not intended to be exhaustive.

Organizational Change and Work Research

There is a long-standing tradition of action research in organizational settings which aims to contribute both to more effective work practices and to a better understanding of the processes of organizational change. This approach draws on a variety of forms of information gathering, involves feedback to organization members, and leads to problem solving dialogue. This tradition is well represented in recent publications, such as Coghlan & Brannick (2001), Greenwood & Levin, (1998), Toulmin & Gustavsen (1996a).

Co-operative Inquiry

A co-operative inquiry group consists of people who share a common concern for developing understanding and practice in a specific personal, professional or social arena. All are both co-researchers, designing and managing the project, and also co-subjects, participating in the activity researched. A typical inquiry group will consist of between six and twenty people. As co-researchers they participate in the thinking that goes into the research-framing the questions to be explored, agreeing on the methods to be employed, and together making sense of their experiences. As co-subjects they participate in the action being studied. The co-researchers engage in cycles of action and reflection: in the action phases they experiment with new forms of personal or professional practice; in the reflection phases they reflect on their experiences critically, learn from them, and develop theoretical perspectives which inform their work in the next action phase. Co-operative inquiry groups thus cycle between, and integrate, four forms of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001).

Action Science and Action Inquiry

Much attention has been given by action researchers to the relationship between the theories we hold about our practices and what we actually do; to put it colloquially, do we "walk our talk"? Action science and action inquiry are related disciplines that offer methods for inquiring into and developing congruence between our purposes, our theories and frames, our behaviour, and our impact in the world. These practices can be applied at individual, small group, and at organizational level. Their overall aim is to bring inquiry and action together in more and more moments of everyday life, to see inquiry as a "way of life" (Friedman, 2001; Marshall, 2001; Torbert, 2001).

Learning History

Learning history is a process of recording the lived experience of those in an action research or learning situation. Researchers work collaboratively with those involved to agree the scope and focus of the history, identify key questions, gather information through an iterative reflective interview process, distil this information into a form which the organization or community can "hear" and facilitate dialogue with organization members to explore the accuracy, implications and practical outcomes that the work suggests (Roth & Kleiner, 1998).

Appreciative Inquiry

Practitioners of appreciative inquiry argue that action research has been limited by its romance with critique at the expense of appreciation. They argue that to the extent that action research maintains a problem-oriented view of the world it diminishes the capacity of researchers and practitioners to produce innovative theory capable of inspiring the imagination, commitment, and passionate dialogue required for the consensual re-ordering of social conduct. If we devote our attention to what is wrong with organizations and communities, we lose the ability to see and understand what gives life to organizations and to discover ways to sustain and enhance that life-giving potential. Appreciative inquiry therefore begins with the unconditional positive question that guides inquiry agendas and focuses attention toward the most life-giving, life-sustaining aspects of organizational existence (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001).

Whole Systems Inquiry

Large group interventions or processes are events designed to engage representatives of an entire system, whether it be an organization or a community, in thinking through and planning change (for descriptions see Bunker & Alban, 1997). What distinguishes them from other large meetings is that the process is managed to allow all participants an opportunity to engage actively in the planning (Martin, 2001). Rather than aim at a single outcome, in dialogue conference design (Gustavsen, 2001) and whole system designs (Pratt, Gordon, & Plamping, 1999) the role of the researchers is to create the conditions for democratic dialogue among participants.

Participative Action Research

This term is usually used to refer to action research strategies which grew out of the liberationist ideas of Paulo Freire (1970) and others in countries of the South. Participatory action research (PAR) is explicitly political, aiming to restore to oppressed peoples the ability to create knowledge and practice in their own interests and as such has a double objective. One aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people-through research, through adult education, and through 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 elite members.

In keeping with the emphasis of PAR on inquiry as empowerment, specific research methodologies take second place to the emergent processes of collaboration and dialogue which empower, motivate, increase self esteem, and develop community solidarity. Community meetings and events of various kinds are an important aspect of PAR, serving to identify issues, to reclaim a sense of community and emphasise the

potential for liberation, and to make sense of information collected (see for example Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Selener, 1997).

Citizens' Juries

In most citizens' juries a panel of non-specialists meets for a total of thirty to fifty hours to examine carefully an issue of public significance. The jury, made up of between twelve and twenty people, serves as a microcosm of the public. Jurors hear from a variety of specialist witnesses and are usually able to discuss as broad or as narrow a range of issues as they see fit. They have time to reflect and deliberate freely, can scrutinize the information they receive from witnesses whom they interrogate themselves. They are asked to develop a set of conclusions or a vision for the future which may not be unanimous (adapted from Wakeford, 2002).

Public Conversations Project

The Public Conversations Project aims to foster a more inclusive, empathic and collaborative society by promoting constructive conversations and relationships among those who have differing values, world views, and positions about divisive public issues. Through such conversations, people whose differences have led to polarization, stereotyping and marginalization can develop better relationships with each other when they participate in an effective dialogue. Conversations are designed so that people deliberately avoid repeating their habitual, unproductive ways of relating, and instead:

- develop new modes of communicating that lead to mutual understanding, respect and trust;
- state their differences constructively, so that they can be truly heard by people of other perspectives, perhaps for the first time;
- enrich their own reflection on the issue by hearing other perspectives, aspects of which they may find surprisingly resonant with their own experiences and values;
- discover and appreciate their common concerns and - if the participants wish - use these as a basis for collaboration and problem-solving; and
- decrease the toll of the conflict-on resources, on individuals, organizations, and society (adapted from the Public Conversations Project website).

Characteristics of Action Research: Knowledge in Practice

"A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being economic, political, psychological, spiritual of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part." (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:2)

Some philosophers clearly support the idea that practical knowing, rather than abstract knowledge, is the appropriate end of inquiry:

Toulmin writes in *Cosmopolis*:

"Since 1945, the problems that have challenged reflective thinkers on a deep philosophical level... are matters of practice: including matters of life and death... The 'modern' focus on the written, the universal, the general, the timeless - which monopolized the work of most philosophers after 1630 - is being broadened to include once again the oral, the particular, the local and the timely." (Toulmin, 1990:186)

Macmurray, in his celebrated Gifford Lectures, argued that:

"... 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)

As Macmurray also pointed out, the concept of "action" is inclusive:

"In acting the body indeed is in action, but also the mind. Action is not blind... Action, then, is a full concrete activity of the self in which all our capacities are employed." (Macmurray, 1957:86)

More recently Rorty, arguing from a pragmatist view, writes:

"We cannot regard truth as a goal of inquiry. The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring about consensus on the ends to be achieved and the means used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve co-ordination of behavior is not inquiry but simply wordplay." (Rorty, 1999:xxv; see also Reason 2003)

John Heron argues for "the primacy of the practical" that our practical knowing is the "consummation" of our inquiry. (Heron, 1996a, 1996b)(Heron 1996a & b)

Greenwood and Levin, in their *Introduction to Action Research*, suggest that

- Action research is context bound and addresses real-life problems
- Action research is inquiry where participants and researchers cogenerate knowledge through collaborative communication processes.
- Action research treats diversity of experience and capabilities as an opportunity.
- The meanings constructed in the inquiry process lead to social action, or reflections on action lead to constructions of new meanings.
- The credibility and validity of action research knowledge is measured according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems and increase participants' control. (Greenwood & Levin, 1998:75-76)

In asserting the importance of practice, we are not advocating a compulsively "action-person" approach to inquiry and living. Exploring and valuing qualities of being are also key aspects of action research.

Characteristics of Action Research: Participation and Democracy

"As we search for practical knowledge and liberating ways of knowing, working with people in their everyday lives, we can also see that action research is participative research, and all participative research must be action research. Human persons are agents who act in the world on the basis of their own sensemaking; human community involves mutual sensemaking and collective action. Action research is only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus." (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a:2)

"... participation affirms peoples' 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 & Bradbury, 2001:9)

Selener, in his review of participatory action research, defines it as:

"...a process which integrates research, education and action... A major goal of participatory research is to solve practical problems at the community level. Another goal is the creation of shifts in the balance of power in favor of poor and marginalized groups in society.... One of the greatest obstacles to creating a more just world is the power of the dominant hegemony, the ideological oppression which shapes the way people think." (Selener, 1997-12, 26)

Greenwood & Levin and Gustavsen place democracy at the heart of action research:

"Our own view... equates democracy with the creation of arenas for lively debate and for decision making that respects and enhances the diversity of groups... AR aims to enable communities and organizations to mobilize their diverse and complex internal resources as fully as possible." (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, 11)

"In defining relationships between subjects we actually do have an institution to which we can link: an institution that has existed for 2,500 years, albeit precariously, just for this purpose-the institution of democracy... not a theory but a family of practices linked to a set of ideas." (Gustavsen, 1996:26)

And Fals Borda and Rahman argue that democracy is part of the culture of common people:

"The general concept of authentic participation as defined here is rooted in cultural traditions of the common people and their real history..., which are resplendent with feelings of an altruistic, co-operative and communal nature and which are genuinely democratic." (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991:5)

This harks back to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed:

"The methodology... requires that the investigators and the people.. should act as co-investigators." (Freire, 1970:85)

Kemmis draws on Habermas' work to show how action research starts with opening a space for new conversations:

"The first step in action research turns out to be central: the formation of a communicative space which is embodied in networks of actual persons, though the group itself cannot and should not be treated as a totality (as an exclusive whole). A communicative space is constituted as issues

or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of divergent views. Part of the task of an action research project, then, is to open communicative space, and to do so in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do, in the knowledge that the legitimacy of any conclusions and decisions reached by participants will be proportional to the degree of authentic engagement of those concerned." (Kemmis, 2001:100)

From a feminist perspective, Lather states:

"I [engage in] feminist efforts to empower through empirical research designs which maximize a dialogical, dialectally educative encounter between researcher and researched... What I suggest is that our intent more consciously be to use our research to help participants understand and change their situations." (Lather, 1988)

But our emphasis on democracy doesn't mean that there is no space for authority or individual autonomy, rather the research should aim to enhance human association 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 (Torbert, 1991). Collaboration roots the individual within a community of peers, offering basic support and the creative and corrective feedback of other views and possibilities (Randall & Southgate, 1980). Autonomy expresses the self-creating and self-transfiguring potential of the person (Heron, 1992). 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 find ways in which they can be maintained in self-correcting and creative tension.

Characteristics of Action Research: Many Ways of Knowing

Action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge. It draws on diverse forms of knowing as we encounter and act in our world, not just empirical and rational ways of knowing, but also including the experiential and tacit, the presentational and aesthetic, the relational and dialogical, and the practical.

Reviewing the many expressions of this extended epistemology, Reason & Goodwin wrote :

"...there are ways of knowing other than the empirical and the rational which characterise traditional Western Science (Gergen, 1994; Heron, 1996). In particular, these various moves assert that knowing lies not so much in the mind of individual actors, but arises in relationship and through participation (Heron & Reason, 1997): as Gergen asserts, not cogito, ergo sum, but communicamus ergo sum. (Gergen, 1994:viii)

"Maybe most celebrated and acknowledged, although still not integrated with conventional research, is Polanyi (1962), who described clearly his concept of tacit knowledge, a type of embodied know-how that is the foundation of all cognitive action. He rejected the notion of the objective observer in science or any other area of inquiry, expressing his belief in engaged practice that necessarily joins facts and values in a participatory mode of understanding.

"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). 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, in the voices of ordinary people in conversation.

"Shotter draws on a social constructionist perspective, while Park (2001), writing in the context of participatory research and drawing on the emancipatory traditions of Freire (1970), Habermas (1972) and others, has identified representational, relational and reflective forms of knowledge. Representational knowledge provides explanation through identifying the relationship between discrete variables, or understanding through interpretation of meaning. Relational knowledge is the foundation of community life, and its development fosters community ties as well as helping create other forms of knowledge. Reflective knowledge has to do with normative states in social, economic and political realms, it concerns a vision of what ought to be, what is right and what is wrong, and arises, Park argues, through the process of consciousness raising, '*conscientization*'.

'Reflective knowledge involves actors themselves critically analysing and evaluating questions of morality and values relating to their life issues and the proper actions to take.' (Park, 2001:86)

"Abram, drawing on the tradition of phenomenology, and in particular Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, shows how perception itself is based in relationship so that

'... in so far as my hand knows hardness and softness, and my gaze knows the moon's light, it is as a certain way of linking up with the phenomena and communicating with it. Hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, moonlight and sunlight, present themselves in our recollection not pre-eminently as sensory contents but as certain kinds of symbioses, certain ways the outside has of invading us and certain ways we have of meeting the invasion.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:137)

"We do not discover primary qualities but participate in relationship with qualia. As Abram has it, this means that there is

'...underneath our literate abstractions, a deeply participatory relation to things and to the earth,

a felt reciprocity....' (Abram, 1996:24)

"From a feminist perspective, Belenky and her colleagues write of 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Clinchy, 1996) distinguishing between connected and separated knowing. Separated knowing adopts a more critical eye and plays a 'doubting game', while connected knowing starts with an empathic, receptive eye, entering the spirit of what is offered and seeking to understand from within. Feminist scholars generally have emphasized relational aspects of knowing (e.g. Bigwood, 1993) and of the practice of management. (Fletcher, 1998; Marshall, 1995)

"Torbert - who builds on the foundations offered in Argyris' work (e.g. Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985), but has extended it considerably to draw on constructive developmental theory and the traditions of seeking an integrative quality of awareness - describes the process of developmental action inquiry as addressing three questions: how to develop a quality of awareness that attends both to its origins and to action in the world; how to create communities of inquiry; and how to act in a timely manner (Torbert, 1999). Torbert's work has emphasized the importance of a quality of attention which is able, moment to moment, to interpenetrate four territories of attention: an intuitive knowing of purposes, an intellectual knowing of strategy, an embodied, sensuous knowing of one's behaviour, and an empirical knowing of the outside world. Action inquiry is thus described as

'...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, 1991:219)

"Peter and his colleagues have argued (Heron & Reason, 1997; Reason, 1994; Reason & Torbert, 2001) for a participative paradigm for inquiry in the social sciences, in which it can be seen that a knower participates in the known, articulates a world, in at least four interdependent ways: experiential knowing, in which we resonate with the presence of other, presentational knowing, which draws on aesthetic imagery, propositional knowing which draws on concepts and ideas, and practical knowing, which consummates the other forms of knowing in action in the world. We have defined co-operative inquiry as a systematic process of action and reflection in which co-inquirers cycle through this extended epistemology.

"While all the above descriptions of extended epistemologies differ in detail, they (and a rich range of others with similar intentions) all go beyond orthodox empirical and rational Western views of knowing, and assert, in their different ways, that knowing starts from a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition. They assert the importance of sensitivity and attunement in the moment of relationship; they assert the importance of knowing not just as an academic pursuit but as the everyday of acting in relationship and creating meaning in our lives. They thus echo the 'science of qualities' to which post-modern biology points, and invite us to consider how to establish an organizational science of qualities." (Reason & Goodwin, 1999)

John Heron's extended epistemology (see Heron, 1992; Heron, 1996) is a way of thinking about the many ways of knowing, which we draw on a lot at CARPP:

Experiential knowing means direct encounter, face-to-face meeting: feeling and imaging the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing. It is knowing through participative, empathic resonance with a being, so that as knower I feel both attuned with it and distinct from it. It is also the creative shaping of a world through imaging it, perceptually and in other ways. Experiential knowing thus articulates reality through inner resonance with what there is.

Presentational knowing emerges from, and is grounded on, experiential knowing, clothing our encounter with the world in the metaphors of aesthetic creation. Presentational knowing draws on expressive forms of imagery, using the symbols of graphic, plastic, musical, vocal and verbal art forms. These forms symbolize both our felt attunement with the world and the primary meaning embedded in our enactment of its appearing.

Propositional knowing is knowing in conceptual terms that something is the case: knowledge by description of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing. It is expressed in statements and theories that come with the mastery of concepts and classes that language bestows. Propositions themselves are carried by presentational forms - the sounds or visual shapes of the spoken or written word - and are ultimately grounded in our experiential articulation of a world.

Practical knowing is knowing how to do something, demonstrated in a skill or competence. It presupposes a conceptual grasp of principles and standards of practice, presentational elegance, and experiential grounding in the situation within which the action occurs. It fulfils the three prior forms of knowing, brings them to fruition in purposive deeds, and consummates them with its autonomous celebration of excellent accomplishment.

Characteristics of Action Research: Worthwhile Purposes

"Action research is not about knowledge for its own sake, but knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile purposes - which we may describe as the flourishing of human persons, communities, and the ecologies of which they are part. Just what is worthy of our attention is, of course, a form of inquiry in its own right... A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being-economic, political, psychological, spiritual-of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part." (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a:2)

Lincoln and Guba argued in "Naturalistic Inquiry" that qualitative research is not value neutral:

"... the positivist or conventional paradigm of inquiry asserts that inquiry is value-free... ironically, we may note, that assertion is itself a value claim that bears investigation. On the other hand, the naturalistic paradigm asserts that inquiry is value bound, specifically, that it is influenced by the values of the inquirer, by the axioms or assumptions underlying (it), and by the values that characterize the context in which the inquiry is carried out." (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:161)

Denzin writes with regard to "standpoint epistemology":

"In contrast to the realist regime, the new writers seek a model of truth that is narrative, deeply ethical, open ended, and conflictual, performance and audience based, and always personal, biographical, political, structural, and historical... The new writers question the 'natural' relationship between narratives, truth and reality - that relationship that sees the text as mirroring the external world. The intent, instead, is to create reflexive text." (Denzin, 1997:266-7)

Many forms of feminist research explicitly aim to be woman oriented:

"The purpose of feminist research must be to create new relationships, better laws, and improved institutions." (Reinharz, 1992:175)

"Feminism... sees inquiry as comprising not just the mechanical observation of nature and others but the intervention of political and moral illumination." (Harding, 1986:241-2)

"I am not a social scientist interested in more participatory research, but an educator and activist exploring alternative paradigm research as one tool in the multifaceted struggles for a more just, loving world." (Pat Maguire, quoted in Reason & Bradbury, 2001b:1)

And Ella Bell makes a similar claim that research into race must be in the service of social change:

"The Death of White Sociology opened my eyes to the idea that research could facilitate social justice and radical organizational change. Research when done in the hands of Joyce Ladner, Kenneth Clark, William Cross and Andrew Billingsley was a force for social equality and economic emancipation in the torn war zones of inner city communities... the roots of action research was deeply embedded in the progressive research on race.

The tenets of the Black liberation research approach are: (1) to move beyond traditional methods, by (2) creating knowledge for the sake of economic, political and social change in the Black community, and (3) without forsaking rigorous social investigation. Research was a tool to dismantle the master's house, and to achieve social justice. It was also to be used as a building block in the creation of Black social institutions... Under these circumstances, the role of the

Black social scientist was to be both scholar and social activist." (Bell, 2001:48,51)

Practitioners of appreciative inquiry argue that the questions one asks are fateful and thus shape the purposes of research.

In their original formulation of appreciative inquiry, Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) argue that action research, especially in the guise of organizational development, has largely failed as an instrument for advancing "second order" social-organizational transformation (where organizational paradigms, norms, ideologies, or values are changed in fundamental ways) because of its romance with critique at the expense of appreciation. To the extent that action research maintains a problem-oriented view of the world, it diminishes the capacity of researchers and practitioners to produce innovative theory capable of inspiring the imagination, commitment, and passionate dialogue required for the consensual re-ordering of social conduct. If we devote our attention to what is wrong with organizations and communities, we lose the ability to see and understand what gives life to organizations and to discover ways to sustain and enhance that life-giving potential.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) call for a social and behavioural science that is defined in terms of its "generative capacity" (Gergen, 1982), that is, its "capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social action (p. 136). They offer appreciative inquiry as a mode of action-research that meets these criteria." (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001)

Characteristics of Action Research: Emergent Developmental Form

"Since action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, in many ways the process of inquiry is as important as specific outcomes. Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals develop skills of inquiry and as communities of inquiry develop within communities of practice. Action research is emancipatory, it leads not just to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge. In action research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun. This means action research cannot be programmatic and cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods, but is, in Leotard's (1979) sense, a work of art." (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a:2)

Marshall writes about inquiring with intent, often with multiple intentions which unfold over time:

"Inquiry involves intent, a sense of purpose. This may be held tacitly. There may be multiple intents, in accord or discord. Often intents unfold, shift, clarify or become more complex. Working with this aspect of inquiry is vital to self-reflective practice." (Marshall, 2002, 435)

"Often these days I state overtly that an issue, event, theme, dilemma or whatever is an inquiry for me. This is a deliberate means to keep my questioning open and to help it develop. Doing so heightens my attention inwards and sharpens my external testing of developing ideas and of my own practice in action. It gives me a frame for noting my ever-provisional sense-making as I proceed, articulating it - to self and others - as part of the process of inquiry. I use such practices to guide and support me in living my life as inquiry as well as to study 'topics' as an academic researcher." (Marshall, 1999:435)

Lincoln and Guba describe the naturalistic paradigm as emergent:

"... within the naturalistic paradigm, designs must be emergent rather than preordinate: because meaning is determined by context to such a great extent; because the existence of multiple realities constrains the development of a design based on only one (the investigator's) construction; because what will be learned at a site is always dependent on the interaction between investigator and context, and the interaction is not fully predictable; and because the nature of mutual shapings cannot be known until they are witnessed. All these factors underscore the indeterminacy under which the naturalistic inquirer function. The design must therefore... unfold, cascade, roll, emerge." (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:208-209)

And Reason and Goodwin draw parallels between emergence in inquiry and the principle of emergence in complexity theory:

"The principle of emergence is similarly central to co-operative inquiry. It is not possible to 'set up' a co-operative inquiry and expect it to work in a particular way; rather the form of the inquiry process emerges in response to the particular people involved and focus of inquiry, the context, and so on. Just as the rhythm of the ant colony emerges through the interaction of its members, and the pattern of a Mandelbrot set emerges through iteration with divergence and convergence, so the process of co-operative inquiry emerges over time. The knowing is in the active, iterative process of co-creating a world through aware action, not in a goal or outside purpose.

It also appears from experience that the precise focus of inquiry can only emerge through the process of iterative inquiry cycles. An inquiry may be launched with a particular set of concerns and interests that the participants wish to explore. They may think they know exactly what they want to find out, or they may know that their interests lie within a general area. But the actual outcome arises from the unpredictable emergent process of the group and of the inquiry cycles.

It is not possible to set up a co-operative inquiry group with a specified goal; it is only possible to facilitate its emergence. This means establishing an iterative process, nurturing a deep experiential engagement with the issues to be explored and allowing the pattern of inquiry activity to emerge... To put it more prosaically, in co-operative inquiry you throw the issues of concern into the pot of human being, making sure that there is an iterative process with rich interconnections, and the particular unique inquiry will emerge (for better or for worse, we might add, for it is in principle impossible to predict whether any particular inquiry process will be 'successful' or not)". (Reason & Goodwin, 1999:306-7)

As we made the video recording for this part of the resource, we realized that we could see four dimensions of emergence in action research:

1. emergence around the inquiry topic, as cycles of action and reflection contribute to a wider and deeper understanding of the issues to hand, pose new ideas, questions and possibilities;
2. emergence of the community of inquiry, as those involved engage together and with their questions, as they face questions of inclusion, control, and intimacy (Srivastva, Obert, & Neilson, 1977) the quality of their dialogue and inquiry increases;
3. as people engage in the educative process of an inquiry group they may be enabled to make individual developmental transitions in the sense that Torbert uses this term (Fisher, Rooke, & Torbert, 2003);
4. in a wider sense, this will add to the capacity of those involved and the wider community in which they are located to initiate and sustain inquiry practices. One inquiry may lead to the capacity to respond with inquiry to future issues and challenges (see e.g. Eriksson & Hauger, 1996:34).

Forms of Action Research: Introduction

Many different practices can be called action research and many different terms are used by different schools. One way to provide some perspective on this diversity is to distinguish approaches in terms of the focus of practice: whether the spirit of inquiry practice is carried by: an individual researcher themselves, a group of researchers working together, or whether there is an attempt to create a 'movement' inquiry in a wider system such as an organization or community. These forms have been named first, second and third person action research respectively. We find this a useful way of talking about research, but it is to be used cautiously. This framing does help us to pay attention to how the different forms of action research may, indeed need to, interrelate as the section Student Stories demonstrates.

- First-person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. First person research practice brings inquiry into more and more of our moments of action-not as outside researchers but in the whole range of everyday activities.
- Second-person action research/practice addresses our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern-for example in the service of improving our personal and professional practice both individually and separately. Second person inquiry starts with interpersonal dialogue and includes the development of communities of inquiry and learning organizations.
- Third-person research/practice aims to extend these relatively small scale projects so that "rather than being defined exclusively as 'scientific happenings' they (are) also defined as 'political events'" (Toulmin & Gustavsen, 1996). Third person strategies aim to create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who, because they cannot be known to each other face-to-face (say, in a large, geographically dispersed corporation), have an impersonal quality. Writing and other reporting of the process and outcomes of inquiries can also be an important form of third person inquiry.

We suggest that the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies: first person research practice is best conducted in the company of friends and colleagues who can provide support and challenge such a company may indeed evolve into a second-person collaborative inquiry process. On the other hand, attempts at third person research which are not based in rigorous first person inquiry into one's purposes and practices is open to distortion through unregulated bias. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001b:xxv-xxvi)

Forms of Action Research: First Person Research

"First-person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting." (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:xxv-xxvi)

"Our aim is to bring scholarship to life, to bring inquiry into more and more of our moments of action - not just as scientists if that happens to be our profession, but as organizational and family members, and in our spiritual, artistic, craft, exercise, conversational, sexual, and other activities." (Reason & Torbert, 2001)

Judi Marshall and *Living Life as Inquiry*

Judi Marshall has contributed to the notions and craft of inquiry as an everyday practice, in a series of papers: *Researching Women in Management as a Way of Life* (1992), *Living Life as Inquiry* (1999), *Self Reflective Inquiry Practices* (2001) and *Living Systemic Thinking* (in review). These have led her through successive definitions of inquiry, from *research as personal process* through *research as political process* to *inquiry as life process*. Her contribution to this section of the video is based on the idea of *living life as inquiry*, which refers to:

"A range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving/being which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut....

Living continually in process: adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question....

"Seeking to:

Open to continual question, and active inquiry, what I know, feel, do and want....

Monitor my espoused and enacted theories, possibly with others....

Maintain curiosity about what is happening and what parts I am playing in creating & sustaining patterns....

Pay attention to the 'stories' I tell about myself and the world as constructions....

Testing, and generating, research ideas in my life experience...."

Attentional disciplines:

Inquiring through inner and outer arcs of attention
Engaging in cycles of action and reflection
Being both active and receptive

Inner arcs of attention:

Attending to assumptions, patterns, emerging sense-making, energy etc.
Inquiring with intent - purposes held lightly
Scanning - for breadth
Tracking - for sustained curiosity
Note-taking

Outer arcs of attention:

Turning puzzles, issues, potential problems into engaged inquiry
Tracking my behaviour/being
Questioning
Inquiring with others
Note-taking (maintaining the inner arcs)

Argyris and Schön: The Reflective Practitioner and Action Science

Early work on what we now call "first person" inquiry can be found in Argyris and Schön's now classic *Theory in Practice: increasing professional effectiveness* (Argyris & Schön, 1974) and Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983). Much of this work centres on the distinction between espoused theories and theories in use - between what people say they do and what they actually do. Argyris called this work "action science". (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985)

"The goal of action science inquiry is to help practitioners discover the tacit choices they have made about their perceptions of reality, about their goals and about their strategies for achieving them. The fundamental assumption of action science is that by gaining access to these choices, people can achieve greater control over their own fate... If people can find the sources of ineffectiveness in their own reasoning and behavior, or their own causal responsibility, they then possess some leverage for producing change. Data are collected first and foremost for the purpose of helping people understand and solve practice problems of concern to them." (Friedman, 2001:160)

Bill Torbert and Action Inquiry

Bill Torbert's PhD and early work was closely associated with Argyris. His articulation of collaborative inquiry in *Why Educational Research has been so Uneducational* (Torbert, 1981) sets out twelve qualities for attention in action. This chapter is well worth re-visiting, including as it does such challenging phrases as:

"The primary medium of research is an attention capable of interpenetrating, of vivifying, and of apprehending simultaneously its own ongoing dynamics and the ongoing theorizing, sensing, and external event-ualising." (in Torbert, 1981:148)

Torbert distinguishes what he calls "action inquiry" from Argyris "action science" by seeking congruence not just between espoused theories and behaviour but between four "territories" of attention:

"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 between mission, strategy, operations and outcomes. It is the source of the 'true natural sanity of awareness'... A kind of scientific inquiry that is conducted in everyday life..." (Torbert, 1991)

Torbert articulates these four dimensions in different ways in his writing: the best starting point for his work is *Personal and Organizational Transformations through Action Inquiry* (Fisher, Rooke, & Torbert, 2003) which is available from the Harthill group contact@harthill.co.uk. The simplest way to summarise this contribution is to say that any acting system, including an individual inquirer, requires valid knowledge of:

First Territory	Intentionality: purposes, aims, intuitions, attention, vision
Second Territory	Planning: tactics, strategies, schemes, ploys, game-plans
Third Territory	Action: behaviour, skills, pattern of activity, deeds, performance
Fourth Territory	Outcomes: results, events, occurrences, observable behavioural consequences, environmental effects, assessments

We need to work at this because of the limitations to our awareness:

- Our attention doesn't register a great deal of what occurs.
- Our attention at any moment is limited by the very narrow cognitive-emotional net we apply to our perceptions.
- Our own action shapes much of the knowledge we receive from others and from the environment.
- We are rarely aware of our own behaviour and others' reactions as we act.
- What we know about the outside world is ordinarily about the past, not the present, is drastically unsystematic and incomplete, and is rarely tested in the present.

An important key to the notion of action inquiry rests in Torbert's original phrase "collaborative inquiry": a major point of acting more awarely and inquiringly is to increase *mutuality between persons*, to develop communities of inquiry within communities of practice.

One specific conversational tool which may help in this, based on the four "territories", is the "four parts of speech" which suggests that all inquiring conversations should contain an appropriate balance of:

- **Framing:** referring explicitly to the purposes of the present occasion: the problem you are addressing, the assumptions you hold (which may or may not be shared), the perspective on the present situation, and so on
- **Advocating:** explicitly asserting an opinion, perception, feeling, option, or proposal for action
- **Illustrating:** telling a bit of a concrete story that puts flesh on the bones of an advocacy, grounds it in specific detail, and thereby orients others more clearly
- **Inquiring:** this can mean questioning others in order to learn from them - inquiring as to their frames, advocacies etc; testing how they see yours, and so on. It can also mean opening your own framing, advocacy and illustration to inquiry. (Fisher *et al.*, 2000:24-25)

Torbert has also drawn on developmental theory to articulate stages of personal development and parallel stages of organizational development. These are related to the action inquiry process in that, in the early stages of personal development, the individual's frames are relatively narrow, becoming more encompassing in later stages so that they can integrate an attention to framing itself. The later stages of development can be called "post-conventional" in that the personal processes they represent are infrequently found among those who have not undergone some form of intentional personal development, which might include spiritual practice, meditation, martial arts, and the process of action inquiry itself.

Jack Whitehead and Living Educational Theory

Our colleague Jack Whitehead is in the School of Education at the University of Bath and also a core member of staff in CARPP. His work has focused on teachers, educators, educational managers and his own educational practice. His form of first person action research often works with the generic question: *How can I improve my practice?* (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996). This question is then made more specific as people identify facets of their own learning edges. Jack has developed his approach to education through years of practice and publishing (Whitehead, 1989, 1993). A sample of this work can be found on his website, which also offers papers and theses from students who have worked with him.

Key notions that Jack works with are:

Seeing oneself and experiencing one's "I" as a **living contradiction**, often not practising what one espouses, and working (kindly, but developmentally) with this tension.

Living educational theories: these are the descriptions and explanations which individuals produce for their own learning in their enquiries of the kind, "How can I improve my practice?" They are grounded in a concern for connected knowing enacted in practice, rather than giving primacy to abstract theorising, especially that which separates the living practice of educating into abstract disciplines of knowledge.

Embodied values: seeing the touchstone for how we judge ourselves as our capacities to live out our values such as equality, life-affirming energy, living a productive life, freedom and influencing the education of social formations:

"My embodied values as explanatory principles.

In my explanations for my educative influence my values constitute the reasons for why I do things. I think of my values as embodied in what I do. They form the goals I set for myself in living a productive life. I often feel a desire to resolve a tension when I experience the denial of values such as freedom, care, compassion, justice and enquiry, and explain my actions in terms of my desire to live my values as fully as possible." (Whitehead & Delong, 2003, p. 195)

In his practice as a supervisor of research students, Jack places priority on helping people identify their values - often a developmental process which is emergent, long-term, significantly connected to their distinctive life journey - and becoming more able to enact these in their practice (Whitehead, 1999). His aim is to assist the practitioner-researchers he supervises to legitimate in the academy, the embodied knowledge of their professional practice through the creation and testing of their own living educational theories. Living theory doctorates can be downloaded from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living.shtml>

Influencing the education of social formations: sometimes action research is criticised for being an activity which influences only local issues. Jack and his students have shown, through their work, the capacity for action research to address significant inequalities and other denials of educational values, and thus influence the social formation. (Whitehead, 1993, Whitehead & Delong, 2003)

Forms of Action Research: Second Person Research

Co-operative inquiry is one articulation of second person research and the one we draw on most at CARPP. The original initiatives into experiential inquiry were taken around 1970 by John Heron (1971). These developed into a practice of co-operative inquiry as a methodology for a science of persons (Heron, 1996), which emphasises first-person research/practice in the context of supportive and critical second-person relationships, while having the potential to reach out toward third-person inquiry practice. Co-operative inquiry follows a logic of cycles of action and reflection, a logic which takes place within a learning community which is a co-operative inquiry group. See Reason (2003).

Co-operative inquiry can be seen as cycling through four phases of reflection and action drawing on the extended epistemology described in **Resources: Many Ways of Knowing**.

In *Phase One* a group of co-researchers come together to explore an agreed area of human activity. They may, for example, be professionals who wish to develop their 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. In this first phase the participants agree on the focus of their inquiry, and develop together tentative questions or propositions they wish to explore. They agree to undertake and track some action, some practice, which will contribute to this exploration. Phase One 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 purposes in the inquiry. Once they have clarified sufficiently what they want to inquire about, group members conclude Phase One with planning a method for exploring this in action, and with devising ways of gathering and recording "data" from this experience.

In *Phase Two* 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 does and does not conform to their original ideas, and also 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 Three 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, they may simply forget. Phase Three 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 Four*, after an agreed period engaged in phases two and three, the co-researchers re-assemble to consider their original propositions and questions in the light of their experience. As a result they may modify, develop or reframe their initial ideas; or reject them and pose new questions. As they plan the next cycle of action, they may choose 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 Four 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 outlined above 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, experiential competencies 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, 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 will emphasise one phase more than others; 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.

While co-operative inquiry is a clearly set out methodology, second-person research/practice is always present, albeit underdeveloped, in everyday life. Maybe the most fundamental form of second-person research/practice is friendship. Certainly all forms of education, psychotherapy, consulting are, at their best, forms of second-person inquiry, albeit tacitly. Indeed, most forms of professional practice can be forms of mutual inquiry: for example, the doctor patient relationship, often seen as based primarily on medical expertise (and at its worst blatantly authoritarian), can be reframed as an inquiry to which both doctor and patient bring their own different knowledge, skills, and arenas of action. Thus a significant contribution of second person research/practice may be to make explicit and systematic these everyday, tacit forms.

Forms of Action Research: Third Person Research

Third person action research aims to bring inquiry into a wider community of some kind. There are many forms that this might take. Within the framework of forms of action research, third person research is the least clearly defined at this stage, is used to refer to a wide range of potential practices, and is an aspect ripe for further development.

Third person action research might mean:

- Participatory action research, working with a community to develop their self-awareness and action for change.
- Seeking to spread inquiry throughout an organization. In this sense it often builds from and supports first and second person forms of inquiry. See *Student Stories* of Geoff Mead, Kate McArdle and Charles Ainger for examples.
- Working with different stakeholder groups in a geographic region on reflective action regeneration projects. See Gustavsen's work below.
- Writing and publishing with the intention of raising questions and debate rather than providing answers, and finding forms of representation which facilitate this. For example, Marshall (1995), an exploration of *Women Managers Moving On*, is shaped and written to invite the reader to reflect on their responses to the stories told, and on their own sense-making and assumptions about the issues raised.

Reason and Torbert (2001) give more information on features of third person action research.

In the course of third person research more "traditional" forms of data gathering may be used - interviews, questionnaires, quantitative methods, historical research, etc. However, they are not used unilaterally and extractively by an external researcher, but rather as part of a community endeavour.

Below we highlight the work of Bjørn Gustavsen and his colleagues, who are working with regional action research, to generate wider effects than single cases can achieve. This work is important not only for its effects and practices, but also for the contribution it is making to thinking about scale issues in action research.

The work of Bjørn Gustavsen and colleagues

Bjørn Gustavsen has especially clearly framed the question of how action research can have influence beyond the immediate context of a project. This, he argues, is an enormous challenge to action research as an approach to inquiry and a movement for social change. The emerging answer seems to be in two parts:

First, we should think not just in terms of a move from a single case to many cases and thus to generalized conclusions, but to think in terms of creating *social movement* through the creation of networks of organizations and communities engaged in inquiry. (Gustavsen, 2001, 2003) Thus what we are calling third-person research/practice aims to extend the relatively small scale projects of first and second person inquiry so that

"rather than being defined exclusively as 'scientific happenings' they (are) also defined as 'political events' ". (Toulmin & Gustavsen, 1996)

The second, and closely related, approach to third person inquiry is through the use of large scale inquiry events. There are a number of different forms of this reviewed by Bunker and Alban (1997) and Martin (2001), variously called future search, dialogue conference (Gustavsen, 2001), the appreciative inquiry summit (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, & Yaeger, 2000; Cooperrider, Sorensen, Yaeger, & Whitney, 2001), working whole systems (Pratt, Gordon, & Plamping, 1999).

"... large group interventions or processes... are events designed to engage representatives of

an entire system, whether it be an organization or a community, in thinking through and planning change... ; what distinguishes them from other large meetings is that the process is managed to allow all participants an opportunity to engage actively in the planning... a large group process, even when it is a brief event, can be designed as a form of action research that exposes collective knowledge and assumptions and uses these to generate the knowledge and power that lead to change." (Martín, 2001:200-1)

Gustavsen (2001) portrays these events as relationship building, primarily about developing an inquiring network, and contrasts them with "single product" events:

Schematic comparison of single product event and relationship building event

<u>Single product event</u>	<u>Relationship building event</u>
Discover the systems properties of a common environment	Recognise a plurality of environments and environmental characteristics
Discover the truth	Create more potential for identifying and interpreting experiences
Create a joint vision	See what visions are present
Agree on a plan	Explore the possibilities for carrying through a number of plans
Create a strategic alliance	Create overlapping networks with the capacity for making real a number of plans simultaneously
Organise a one-dimensional feedback and learning process	See how different actors and actor groups can pursue their own learning needs while at the same time helping others to pursue their needs
Create one single grand story that can be shared by all	Create openings for a plurality of stories that can be linked to each other in different ways

There is considerable debate among action researchers with regard to this issue of scale, with some arguing that action research is irrelevant if it cannot address macro-scale issues, while others are concerned to retain qualities of awareness and in-depth dialogue, and fear these may be lost in large scale work. Gustavsen has continued to address this issue, for example in a paper in press (at 2003) with the Journal *Concepts and Transformation*, which is hosting and continuing debate. He writes about a form of action research in which energy and attention is more widely distributed:

"First and foremost: the idea is not to replace the single case with a number of cases but to create or support *social movements*. A social movement is a series of events that are linked to each other and where the meaning and construction of each event is part of a broader stream of events and not a self-sufficient element in an aggregate. There is little point in replacing the single case with a number of disconnected cases. What is here called a social movement can emanate from many sources and pertain to a wide range of themes; in the case of this author the core concern has been democracy and participation, with a main focus on the role and significance of work

"At this point we need to turn to what is involved in working with social movements rather than single cases. If we use action research in a distributive way to create social movements it becomes more important to create many events of low intensity and diffuse boundaries than fewer events that correspond to the classical notion of a 'case'. Instead of using much resources in a single spot to pursue things into a continuously higher degree of detail in this spot, resources are spread over a much larger terrain to intervene in as many places in the overall movement as possible." (Gustavsen, in press 2003)

An example of third person research

A compelling example of inquiry that builds networks and encompasses a third person dimension is the Quebec *Collectif pour une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté*, aimed at developing a legislative framework for eliminating poverty in the Province:

"The proposal itself was constituted in two stages. Firstly, in 1998-99, the Collective began to ask for contributions from everyone on what such a piece of legislation should contain. To do

this, it developed and widely distributed an animator's kit which allowed groups across Quebec to organise hundreds of meetings which took all forms, from kitchen meetings to more formal assemblies. The pedagogical approach was carefully worked on in order to allow the development of a broad and independent network. The Collective also ensured the participation of people living in situations of poverty, particularly through the hiring of a person with much experience in the field. At the end of June, over 5000 suggestions on what the legislation should contain and over 20,000 comments on the initial text had been collected.

"All this collective wisdom was carefully compiled during the summer. In the fall of 1999, the first version of the proposed legislation was written based on this material. The work of the drafting team was closely examined by a legal expert, specialised in the drafting of legislation. On December 9, 1999, the Collective returned this version to its network, asking everyone to validate it over the following months in the context of grassroots 'parliamentary' sessions which once again involved thousands of people. At the same time, the content committee and the drafting team continued to work on assuring judicial accuracy. On April 20, 2000 the Collective and its network adopted the final version of the *Proposal for an Act on the Elimination of Poverty* in a final 'parliamentary session'. This is the proposal with which the current political work is being done." (See <http://www.pauvrete.qc.ca/0englis.htm>)

Linking first, second and third person forms of action research

In our view, the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies:

- first person research practice is best conducted in the company of friends and colleagues who can provide support and challenge;
- such a company may evolve into a second-person collaborative inquiry process;
- attempts at third person research which are not based in rigorous first person inquiry into one's purposes and practices are open to distortion through unregulated bias.