Co-operative Inquiry: Reflections on Practice

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Co-operative inquiry (CI) is a form of action research which emphasises participation. This paper discusses CI as a research methodology. An overview is given and then greater detail is provided using as a vehicle my use of CI in a particular research study. This study explored whether conventionally-educated systems developers could adopt a richer model of organisations by using metaphors for organisations as cognitive structuring devices. Finally some reflections are given on the challenges CI poses for both individual researchers and the wider academic community.

Keywords: co-operative inquiry, information systems development, metaphors

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1. Introduction

Researchers often have to enter into the complicated, messy, unstructured situations of the organisations they wish to study. Action research is one possible approach. It involves the researchers taking action in an organisation, seeking practical outcomes as well as theoretical ones, and reflecting on both the process and the product (Baskerville, 1999; Baskerville & Wood-Harper, 1998; Baskerville & Wood-Harper, 1996; Checkland, 1991; McNiff, 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Researchers also often have to collaborate with the people in the organisations. However, working with others brings problems of power: who designs the research, interprets the data and assesses the findings' validity? As Brechin writes:

> *"Research tends to be owned and controlled by researchers, or by those who, in turn, own and control the researchers. Those who remain powerless to influence the processes of information gathering, the identification of truth, and the dissemination of findings are usually the subjects of the research, those very people whose interests the research may purport to serve." (Brechin, 1993, p. 73)*

Many academic researchers also collaborate with their students on research projects, for example postgraduates try out their supervisors' theories in real-life organisations, as, for example, in the action research which developed SSM (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Checkland & Jenkins, 1974) However, working with students brings further problems of power: does the students' lower status militate against authentic collaboration, and how do academics guard against students reporting outcomes favourable to an academic's favoured theory or methodology in the hope of gaining approval and better assessment grades?

Co-operative inquiry (CI) is a form of action research which emphasises participation: *all* those involved contribute to the decisions about what is to be looked at, the inquiry methods to be used, the interpretation of what is discovered and the action which is the subject of the research. It is research *with* people, not *on* or *about* people (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason, 1988d, 1994c; Reason & Heron, 1999). This paper discusses CI as a research methodology. An overview of CI is given. Further details are then provided, using as a vehicle my use of CI in a particular research study which involved collaboration with student researchers. Finally some reflections are given on the challenges CI poses for both individual researchers and the wider academic community.

2. Overview of co-operative inquiry

CI is a kind of action research, aimed at acquiring knowledge about *human experience* through action and joint reflection. The most comprehensive guide is Heron (1996). (Additional sources include Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason, 1994b, 1988d, 1994c; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Reason & Heron, 1999; Reason & Rowan, 1981.) In its fullest form the researcher-subject distinction disappears and all participants are both co-researchers and co-subjects. Its defining features are (Heron, 1996, pp. 19-20):

- All subjects are as fully involved as possible as co-researchers in decisions about both content and method.
- There is interplay between reflection and action.
- There is explicit attention to the validity of the inquiry and its findings.
- There is a radical epistemology for a wide-ranging inquiry method.
- There is a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry.
- The full range of human sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry.

It involves two complementary kinds of participation: *political* participation (concerning the relation between people in the inquiry and the decisions that affect them) and *epistemic* participation (concerning the relation between the knower and the known).

The arguments for political participation are (Heron, 1996, p. 21):

- People have a right to participate in decisions about both the method and conclusions in research that seeks to formulate knowledge about them.
- It gives them the opportunity to express their own preferences and values in the research design.
- It empowers them to flourish fully as humans in the study, and be represented as such in its conclusions, rather than being passive subjects of the researchers.
- It avoids their being disempowered, oppressed and misrepresented by the researchers' values that are implicit in any unilateral research design.

The arguments for epistemic participation are (Heron, 1996, pp. 20-21):

- Propositions about human experience are of questionable validity if they are not grounded in the researchers' experience.
- The most rigorous way to do this is for researchers to ground the statements directly in their own experience as co-subjects.
- Researchers cannot get outside, or try to get outside, the human condition in order to study it. They can only study it through their own embodiment, in joint participation and dialogue with others who are similarly engaged.
- This enables researchers to come to know both the external forms of worlds and people and also the inner feelings and modes of awareness of these forms.

CI criticises quantitative, positivist research *on* people (Heron, 1996, pp. 25-26). Such research ignores the human right of people to participate in decisions about gaining knowledge of them (i.e. a lack of political participation). It produces knowledge that is not experientially grounded: the researchers are not involved in the experience examined by the research, and the 'subjects' are not involved in the selection of the constructs which are used to make sense of their experience (i.e. a lack of epistemic participation). Qualitative, interpretive research *about* people is also criticised where the research is designed and interpreted unilaterally by the researcher. However, interpretive researchers do include some participation if they seek to validate their account with their 'respondents'. Interpretive researchers can also be partially participant (in the epistemic sense) if they do fieldwork involving participant observation. Often, however, decisions about what data to gather and the interpretive models used are not decided jointly with the subjects. Hence qualitative research *about* people is seen as a halfway house between exclusive, controlling research *on* people and fully participatory research *with* people (Heron, 1996, pp. 26-30).
CI recognises at least four different types of knowledge (Heron, 1996, pp. 52-58; Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason, 1994a, pp 42-46):

- *Experiential knowledge* – gained by direct encounter; almost impossible to put into words, being tacit and based on empathy, intuition and feeling.
- *Presentational knowledge* – emerges from experiential knowledge; gives the first expression of knowing something, through stories, drawings, sculpture, music, dance etc.
- *Propositional knowledge* – 'about' something in the form of logically organised ideas and theories, as in most academic research.
- *Practical knowledge* – evident in knowing 'how to' exercise a skill.

These four different ways of knowing, and skills for acquiring them, are the 'extended epistemology' of CI – going beyond the theoretical, propositional knowledge recognised by traditional academic research.
The purpose of a co-operative inquiry can be (Reason, 1988b, pp. 221-2):

- Development of professional practice (e.g. Traylen, 1994: health visitors inquiring into their relationships with their clients).
- Liberation of disadvantaged groups (e.g. Whitmore, 1994: single mothers inquiring into the effectiveness of a pre-natal education programme).
- Exploration of human experience (e.g. Heron, 1988: a group of people inquiring into altered states of consciousness).
- Institutional change and development (e.g. Marshall & McLean, 1988: employees of a local authority inquiring into its culture).
- Development of theory (e.g. Reason, 1988c: conventionally-trained medical practitioners inquiring into the theory and practice of holistic medicine).

Any inquiry will emphasise some of these purposes more than others.
The process of CI is an iterative cycling by a group of people between phases of reflection and action (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1994c; Reason & Heron, 1999):

- *Stage 1*. A group of co-researchers meet to explore an agreed area of human activity. They agree the research focus, develop research questions or propositions for exploration, agree to undertake some action which will contribute to the exploration and decide upon a method for recording their experiences. (A reflection phase.)
- *Stage 2.* The co-researchers now become co-subjects, carrying out the agreed actions and observing and recording the process and outcomes of their own and each other's experiences. (An action phase.)
- *Stage 3.* The co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their experience. They may break through into new awareness and creative insights, or become so involved that they lose their awareness of being part of an inquiry group and metaphorically 'fall asleep', reverting to ordinary rather than heightened consciousness. (An action phase.)
- *Stage 4.* The co-researchers meet again to re-consider their original questions and propositions in the light of their experiences. They might modify, develop or re-frame them, reject them or pose new questions. (A reflection phase.)

In my discipline, information systems, there has been limited use of CI. Moggridge and Reason (1996) briefly describe how it underpins student systems development group projects for local community organisations, with a focus on mutual learning by all participants. Alexander (1999) discusses CI's potential applicability in requirements engineering. Peppard et al (2000) used it as part of their research strategy to define a set of 'information competencies'. My use is discussed in the next section.

3. The co-operative inquiry method in use

This section explains CI in greater detail, using as a vehicle my use of CI in a particular research study.

3.1 Purpose of inquiry

The objective was to explore whether conventionally-educated systems developers could adopt a richer model of organisations by using metaphors for organisations, derived in the main from Morgan (1986; 1993), as cognitive structuring devices. A prototype development method, Multi-Metaphor Method (MMM), was created to help fulfil the research objective. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the method in detail (a detailed description is provided in Oates, 2000)), it has its theoretical basis in previous research on:

- Systems development methods (e.g. Avison & Fitzgerald, 1995; Avison & Wood-Harper, 1990; Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Dahlbom & Mathiassen, 1993; Ehn & Kyng, 1987; Fitzgerald, 1995; Hirschheim, Klein, & Lyytinen, 1995; Jayaratna, 1994; Mumford, 1983, 1995).
- Metaphors for organisational analysis (e.g. Bourgeois & Pinder, 1983; Grant & Oswick, 1996; Morgan, 1986, 1993, 1997; Schön, 1983).
- Metaphors in cognitive psychology (e.g. Allbritton, 1995; Black, 1979; Gick & Holyoak, 1983; Holyoak & Thagard, 1996).
- Metaphors in IS research (e.g. Hussain & Flynn, 1999; Kendall & Kendall, 1993, 1994; Lanzara, 1983; Madsen, 1989, 1994; Walsham, 1991; Walsham, 1993).

For this co-operative inquiry we were therefore developing a theory: MMM, summarised as a set of guidance notes which would be used and evaluated. We were also developing professional practice: the work of systems developers, and examining whether it could include metaphors to conceptualise their client organisations. Since the project also involved the development of information system for three organisations, we were also concerned with institutional change and development.

An inquiry can be informative or transformative (Heron, 1996, pp. 48-49). An *informative inquiry* seeks to describe and explain some domain of experience. Primary outcomes are propositions about the domain, and secondary outcomes are the practical skills involved in

generating the descriptive data. A *transformative inquiry* seeks to explore practice within some domain and change it. Primary outcomes are practical skills and changes in the situation which they have brought about. Secondary outcomes are propositions which report and evaluate the practices and changes, and give information about the context of practice. This research project was primarily transformative. We examined our systems development practice and changed it by using MMM to understand the client organisations, in parallel with conventional systems development methods. Practical skills were acquired in using metaphors and reflecting on them, and our interventions in the organisations changed them. Propositional outcomes concerning the use of metaphors and MMM are presented in Oates (2000; Oates, Forthcoming) and the co-researchers' own reports (Findlay, 1998; Lyons, 1998; Thomas, 1998).

3.2 Initiating the inquiry group

An inquiry group can be initiated by *initiators' call* (one or two researchers invite interested people to join them in an inquiry), or by a *call for initiators* (an existing group has a research area in mind and asks one or two researchers to join the group and start the CI method) or by a *group bootstrap* (a group organises itself into a co-operative inquiry) (Heron, 1996, p. 38). Here the inquiry was launched by my initiator's call, as explained below.

In my department all final year undergraduates undertake a systems development project, lasting 20 weeks. Five such students were assigned to me. I saw each individually and discussed whether they might be interested in trying out MMM. Three, Alan, Marcus and Peter, tentatively agreed. Project students normally have weekly 1:1 meetings with their supervisor. I discussed with Alan, Marcus and Peter individually the ideas of CI, and asked whether they would be willing to have group meetings with the other students who were working in a similar area. I reassured them they could have also individual meetings with me if they wished, and leave the group at any time. At a second 1:1 meeting each said he was willing to try out MMM and co-operative inquiry. It must be noted, however, that their 'agreement' might have been in order to please me.

3.3 The participants

Although students, my three co-researchers were not novice systems developers. Each had previous commercial experience of systems development work and would be returning to such work on completion of his studies. Alan's project involved the development of a database management system for Northton Council's Structures Department (responsible for inspection and maintenance of all bridges in the area). Marcus was to develop a database management system for the Diabetes Care Centre of a local hospital. Peter was to examine the potential of the Internet and World Wide Web for Northern DIY (a company serving the DIY market, with several retail stores), and develop a prototype Web site. The investigation into the use of metaphors and MMM was carried out in parallel with their other project activities. I was their project supervisor, a co-researcher, a part-time PhD student and the initiator of the co-operative inquiry. Naturally we each had our own motivations at the start of the project (see Table 1), but we hoped to co-operate to achieve our goals.

Table 1: Motivations of participants

Briony	Learning re use of metaphors and MMM in systems development.
	Practise and learn about CI.
	Get a PhD.
	Fulfil BSc Project Supervisor duties.
Alan, Marcus and Peter	Develop information system for client organisation.
	Learning re use of metaphors and MMM in ISD.
	Get a BSc.
Clients:	Acquire new or improved information system.
	Support student in getting his BSc.

3.4 The first meeting

The initiating researcher of a CI group must consider three inter-related issues at the first meeting (Heron, 1996, pp. 62-63):

1. Initiation of the members into the method of CI so they can make it their own.
2. Emergence of joint decision-making and true collaboration.
3. The creation of an open, sharing climate.

To break the ice I invited the others to talk about their projects and whether they had met that day's deadline for handing in their project specifications. I talked about the ideas of CI, and again said they could leave the group at

any time. I had not, however, been sure how to create an "open, sharing climate" and promote the emergence of true collaboration. In fact, Alan now took over by announcing, "I'm worried about doing this project". This provided the opportunity for the co-researchers to share their worries, and for me to explain my role in supporting them. I then explained that I had worries too: that I would be tempted to use my position to take over the group, and push them to use the metaphors when they did not want to. We agreed that they would stop me if I broke into "lecturer mode", and I stressed that negative feedback (i.e. "the metaphors are not useful") was as helpful as positive feedback.

We discussed the rationale for investigating organisational metaphors during systems development: that most IT developers received little education about organisations, the focus was always on the technology. Our task was to see whether the metaphors had a role to play in their project work. I emphasised that they were the real researchers, as they were carrying out ISD projects and exploring whether the metaphors helped them. I could not do that, but only offer support.

The goal is that, after launching an externally initiated inquiry, the initiating researchers continue as co-researchers, but of *lesser rank* than the main group. Their intention to move from higher rank to lower rank is one they can state at the outset, but it may not be fully successful (Heron, 1996, p. 41). This discussion gave an early opportunity to explain how I hoped the students would be co-researchers, and that their role was more important than mine.

We agreed we would meet weekly, to discuss and support members in all aspects of their project work. After agreeing what practical action the others would take next, the meeting finished. Afterwards I reflected on the meeting in my research diary. I felt it had gone well: each had contributed to the discussion, and we had begun to gel as a group. The others seemed interested in the metaphors and MMM. I wrote notes on our metaphor discussion and then realised that I should share them with the others. The reasons were:

- The notes would illustrate our metaphor usage, and help make the use explicit rather than tacit.
- They would be a resource for everyone.
- Keeping them 'secret' would be against the spirit of CI.
- I could check whether the others agreed with my recollection and interpretation.

I therefore e-mailed my notes to the others and continued doing this throughout the CI research project.

3.5 Subsequent meetings

Like all action research, CI is essentially an *emergent* process, and its success depends on the goodwill and hard work of those involved.

> *"You can't just* set up *a co-operative inquiry group, because co-operative processes have to be negotiated and re-learned by every group in every new instance" (Reason, 1988a, p. 19)*

This section therefore describes the process that emerged over time.

3.5.1 Cycles of action and reflection

Twelve group meetings took place. The others held meetings with their clients and developed their computer systems. At each group meeting we discussed and reflected on activities undertaken and the use of metaphors, and made plans for the next phase of activity. We therefore cycled between action and reflection, as CI requires. We felt we had enough cycles to draw some conclusions from the inquiry, although of course, more cycles would have given more opportunities to explore the metaphors.

3.5.2 Data generation and analysis

I considered tape recording the meetings. Advantages of this were:

- A permanent record of everything said at the meetings.
- In a busy schedule, a reduced need to write up notes soon after the meeting.
- Disadvantages were:
- Knowing the meetings were being taped could be inhibiting.
- Ensuring everyone was within the hearing of the microphone could disrupt the group.
- Removing the need to write notes soon after a meeting meant a danger that proper reflection on it would not occur.
- Taping would reinforce the idea that I was in charge: setting up the recorder and 'lending' tapes to student co-researchers.

This last was the most significant argument. I was trying to reduce any perception of being in charge of the research, so decided not to record the meetings.

Each of us kept research diaries. Other sources of data were: my e-mail summaries of our metaphor discussions, the models

produced during the systems development work, the course deliverables (project specifications, interim reports and final reports (Findlay, 1998; Lyons, 1998; Thomas, 1998)) and the co-researchers' final evaluation questionnaires (see below).

3.5.3 Apollonian or Dionysian inquiry

A CI project can be either 'Apollonian' or 'Dionysian' (Heron, 1996, pp. 45-47). An *Apollonian inquiry* is rational and systematic, with an explicit sequence of plan, act, observe, reflect, then re-plan. A *Dionysian inquiry* takes a more ad hoc, tacit approach to the interplay between action and reflection, allowing learning to emerge creatively as a response to the situation. In practice, any effective inquiry will have elements of both.

For this inquiry the course requirements for deliverables to set deadlines, and the need to construct technical artefacts within the allowed timescale, provided a strong Apollonian element. The investigation into MMM was more Dionysian –- each was free to consider the metaphors whenever the situation seemed to indicate them. Initially I had a plan of topics for each meeting – an Apollonian approach. However, because I welcomed the others taking control of the meetings, my plans became much shorter and were abandoned each time. I therefore moved to a more Dionysian approach. I knew that the others would have plenty of issues to raise, my role was to help them, and identify aspects of metaphor use as they arose. My reduced need for a detailed plan for each meeting is also an indication of how the others moved from dependency on me towards genuine co-ownership of the inquiry process (see next section).

3.5.4 Authentic collaboration

At the start of this project my concerns about authentic collaboration were:

- Whether my academic language, and position of authority over the student co-researchers, might get in the way.
- How to ensure they were treated fairly in the assessment process.
- Whether they really wanted to take part.
- Whether doing research initiated to meet my needs would be useful to them.
- How to use my expertise in relation to metaphors for organisations and research, and yet do the research collaboratively.
- How much I would control what the group did, and how much I could let go i.e. how collaborative I could be.

To deal with these concerns I:

- Discussed the problem at the first group meeting and encouraged the others to stop me lapsing into 'lecturer mode'.
- Arranged meetings not in my office, but a spare classroom, which was more 'neutral' ground.
- Stressed that negative feedback was useful.
- Ensured that the assessors of their reports were staff familiar with interpretive research and/or metaphors.
- Assured them often they could leave the group at any time.
- Stressed that the group meetings were optional, and individual meetings were possible.
- Ensured all had access to the same data (shared e-mail notes on the metaphors, no audio tape use).
- Asked the others what they thought before giving my views, even when questions were directed to me.
- Asked at the start of each meeting what was on their minds. We used their responses to shape the structure of the meeting.

Eventually I realised I had to accept that a power balance was inevitable, but each of us brought different knowledge and experience to the group. I had more knowledge of research and the use of metaphors, but they had greater expertise of the technical aspects of ISD. I needed their involvement in the use of MMM, but they needed my involvement to help them complete a satisfactory project. CI does *not* imply equality, rather, each brings experiences and skills to the group and is willing to share and develop them collaboratively. At the beginning I had to take the initiative, but through my actions and sharing my thinking I could help the others take more control.

This issue of achieving authentic collaboration is discussed in many of the CI accounts (e.g. Marshall & McLean, 1988; Traylen, 1994; Treleaven, 1994), and indeed is a significant issue in all non-positivist research (see, for example, Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). It is an unavoidable challenge where the research was initiated externally by researchers who, obviously, have their own needs or objectives which might not fully coincide with those of the other participants. As discussed in the introduction, it is particularly problematic where academics collaborate with student co-researchers.

Indicators of our successful collaboration and the move from dependence on me as leader include:

- Increasingly those who arrived first started discussing project issues and did not break off on my arrival.
- Each of the others led discussions, suggested ideas to the others, and proposed metaphor-based views.
- Each of the others checked that the quiet ones had nothing they wished to say.

Although I felt there had been authentic collaboration, I wanted to give the others the chance to comment without fear of 'annoying' or 'upsetting' me. I developed a questionnaire, derived from suggestions in Gibbs and Haigh (1985) for evaluating small group work. I asked the co-researchers to complete it anonymously, after the end of our inquiry, explaining that this was their chance to say what they really thought. Their responses show each was happy with the group process and its findings on metaphors, and no one thought anyone had dominated the discussions.

3.5.5 Type of inquiry

An inquiry can be *internally initiated* (the initiating researchers are personally part of the culture or practice which the research examines and so are full co-subjects) or *externally initiated* (the initiating researchers are external to the culture or practice which the research examines and so cannot be full co-subjects) (Heron, 1996, pp. 40-41). This CI work was externally initiated – I was not examining my own interactions with the organisations during systems development, but helping others to do that. I was, however, a partial co-subject, in that together the student co-researchers and I developed a joint understanding of the client organisations, aided by the metaphors of MMM. This means that the work was '*partial form co-operative inquiry*' as summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Partial form co-operative inquiry

	Researcher	**Subject**
Political participation – involvement in research thinking and decision-making	Full	Full
Epistemic participation –involvement in experience and action being researched	Partial	Full

The most desirable form of CI is *full form co-operative inquiry,* where all have full political and epistemic participation and the distinction between subject and researcher disappears. The third, less desirable, form is *supported action inquiry.* Here the initiating researcher proposes action inquiry to another and explains how to do it. The other then researches his/her own experience and is supported, very much in a secondary role, by the initiating researcher. (For further discussion of all three forms, see Heron, 1996, pp. 22-25.) It was a concern that I did not participate fully in the experience and action. This is obviously a problem for all externally initiated CI. A resolution of this is suggested by Traylen (1994). She helped health visitors explore their hidden agendas in their meetings with clients, but was not a practising health visitor herself. She realised she too had hidden agendas in her meetings with the health visitor co-researchers, which could be explored as part of the research, increasing her epistemic participation. Similarly, I realised that I could think of our group as a small organisation, and investigate how the metaphors helped me conceptualise it. For example:

- Machine. Our meetings settled into a regular routine of reporting and planning.
- Organism. At different times the group had different needs, reacting to events in the environment.
- Political system. Being aware of my greater power within the group.
- Psychic prison. The danger of becoming trapped by favoured ways of thinking, including *wanting* to believe that MMM was useful.

3.5.6 Types of knowledge

During the inquiry we told stories (presentational knowledge) of events we had experienced in organisations (experiential knowledge). We used the metaphors of MMM to analyse and re-frame the stories, and evaluated MMM (propositional knowledge). In doing this we learnt how to use the metaphors and map them to organisations (practical knowledge).

3.6 Ending

The co-researchers' systems development projects were completed and reports submitted. We met again for final reflections on MMM and the co-operative inquiry. Since this was after the official end of the student projects, it is evidence of group commitment to the inquiry.

Practical outcomes of the research were:

- Development of computer-based systems for three organisations, with which all the clients were happy.
- Student success. Each student co-researcher passed the project part of his degree and went on to gain a BSc honours degree. I ultimately gained my PhD (Oates, 2000).

Four different types of knowledge were gained:

- Practical knowledge was gained by each member in learning how to use and reflect upon metaphors to understand organisations. We all expect to use this skill again in the future.
- Experiential knowledge was gained and we were each changed by having participated in the co-operative inquiry and systems development projects.
- Presentational knowledge was produced when we told stories of events we had experienced or observed in organisations. This was in verbal form only; none of us used other forms of expression such as drawing or music. We may have lost an opportunity for greater insights because of caution in our choice of inquiry and reflection skills.
- Propositional knowledge was gained about the use of metaphors and MMM. This can be found in Oates (2000; Forthcoming) and the co-researchers' individual reports (Findlay, 1998; Lyons, 1998; Thomas, 1998).

3.7 Validity

Positivist research uses replication to strengthen its claim to validity. For CI, exact replication is impossible, since another group will act and reflect in its own way. However, Heron (1996) proposes a set of eleven validity criteria for evaluating the CI *process*: research cycling, balance between reflection and action, balance between divergence and convergence, inquiry and reflection skills, challenging uncritical subjectivity, chaos and order, the management of unaware projections, sustaining authentic collaboration, closed or open boundary, concerted action, and variegated replication. Unfortunately space limitations prevent their discussion here – for further detail see Oates (2000). A CI study can also be replicable in the sense that the initial perspective, research design and practical content are clearly described, so that the study can serve as a launch pad for subsequent different but overlapping studies (Heron, 1996, pp 156-157). This section has described CI in such detail.

4. Conclusion

This paper has explained CI and its use in a particular research context. It is a research method for enquiring into human experience through full participation, action and joint reflection. Some implications of adopting CI can be briefly discussed.

The belief that research into human experience should be carried out by those doing the experiencing, implies that everyone is capable of being a researcher, research is not an exclusive preserve of academics. Are we academics willing to 'let go' and share our position as researchers? For example, one reviewer of an earlier project, (Oates, 1999) queried whether students could be action researchers. The answer of CI practitioners must be, "Of course".

CI recognises more inquiry skills and more types of knowledge: experiential, presentational and practical, as well as the propositional knowledge prized in academic research. This implies that we must acknowledge our current bias towards word-based, propositional knowledge and recognise the other types as being of equal value to (or greater value than) propositional knowledge. Can we, for example, envisage conferences with drama or dance performances?

The adoption of CI would therefore pose significant challenges for both individual researchers and the wider academic community, but these challenges are worth addressing if we wish to undertake organisational research which respects fully the rights and experiences of all the participants.

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