# A collaborative inquiry into voluntary metropolitan desegregation

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# HUMAN INQUIRY

## A SOURCEBOOK OF NEW PARADIGM RESEARCH

Edited by

**Peter Reason
John Rowan**

Research can never be neutral.

we knit pat with cycles

WE PUT PEOPLE IN P WHERE THEY MAY LEARN TRUTH ABOUT THEMSELVES

was that research you with last night? That was no research that was my life!

OBJECTIVE
SUBJECTIVITY

COMING TO KNOW

A NEW RIGOUR OF SOFTNESS

RESEARCH WITH PEOPLE

Do RESEARCH ON PEOPLE

Dogs Sniff loudly when doing research.

Give me research orgive me death!

The basis of new paradigm research

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

# A collaborative inquiry into voluntary metropolitan desegregation

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This chapter describes a year-long study of a pilot programme in voluntary metropolitan desegregation among elementary and middle-school classes in the Boston area during the 1975-76 school year.

The objectives and outcomes of this programme will be summarized briefly at the outset of the chapter. Then, the main body of the chapter will be devoted to focusing on the the experience of the research team itself, in order to illustrate one way in which a collaborative inquiry develops and one way in which graduate students can receive training in the research and intervention skills necessary for collaborative inquiry. An overall model of collaborative inquiry as a new paradigm for social science research is introduced in Chapter 11, and a further elaboration of research skills necessary for collaborative inquiry can be found in Chapter 37.

## Setting and Programme

Boston during the 1975-76 school year was anything but a receptive social climate for educational innovation, particularly for a programme concerned with desegregation. In the nation's Bicentennial Year, when Boston might have expected attention primarily as one of the 'cradles of liberty', it instead achieved world attention again and again because of the violence that repeatedly erupted in its schools and in its streets in the first full year of court-mandated desegregation. As the year continued, James Coleman, in an

address to a joint session of the Massachusetts Legislature, would blame court-mandated desegregation efforts in education for 'white flight' from the nation's cities.

Meanwhile, the suburbs themselves were also jittery about the prospect of mandatory *metropolitan* desegregation. A recent court decision had ordered Detroit to engage in metropolitan desegregation because of a history of systematic efforts to reinforce segregated schooling through neighbourhood residential policies.

Amidst this ferment a small pilot programme named *Metropairways* appeared in Boston. Metropairways brought together interested teachers, from voluntarily participating urban and suburban school districts with different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic compositions, to plan joint meetings of their classes one day every two weeks or so. Metropairways was one of several pilot programmes initiated by its parent organization, the Metropolitan Planning Project (MPP). MPP had been founded in 1973, funded by the federal Emergency School Aid Act of 1972, and had spent several years doing demographic research on the Boston metropolitan area, as well as holding public meetings to plan voluntary metropolitan solutions to racial and ethnic isolation. As reported in MPP's monograph *Metro Ways to Understanding,* two of the central claims that emerged from this process were:

(1) that isolation is a problem for majority as well as minority students because both groups are consequently unprepared to function in a multi-cultural society;

(2) that no one can plan for others in an area as sensitive as desegregation, so planning and implementation must be at once voluntary and collaborative.

The voluntary, collaborative qualities of MPP's mission caused a variety of tensions. The communities consulted by MPP often expected MPP to develop concrete programmes. Consequently, MPP's attempts to include the communities in defining the programme frameworks left some with the impression that MPP lacked a coherent sense of mission. From another angle, the Federal Project Officers interpreted the term 'voluntary' in a purely formal way, as meaning School Committee votes (but no direct choice for schools, teachers, and parents) rather than court action. Also, they pressed for a plan which would integrate every school building in the metropolitan area, even after early research showed that to do this would spread minority students so thinly as to isolate them in a different sense. Still another source of tension was the rapid turnover in Executive Directors of MPP: the advent of the third Executive Director in 1975-76 marked a continuing dissipation of any sense of shared history and shared dedication to the original collaborative ideals of the programme.

Nevertheless, the Metropairways Coordinator, hired in the spring of 1975, did a remarkable job of canvassing metropolitan schools and beginning to generate potential pairings between urban and suburban teachers who expressed special interest. These groups of teachers were each to develop curricula collaboratively for their pairing, with parent meetings and school board meetings to test both grass-roots and formal approval of the process.

If citizens were concerned to maintain control of their schools and avoid desegregation, involvement in the very limited forms of voluntary desegregation represented by Metropairways was precisely the sort of action that could protect the suburbs from mandatory, court-ordered desegregation. But so great was the fear of mandatory desegregation in 1975-76 that two suburban school boards, in a series of explosive meetings, voted against the programme, at least partially on the grounds that 'outside forces' were trying to manipulate them into mandatory desegregation.

The following sections provide a close sense of the research on the programme, but the outcomes of the programme can be very briefly summarized here. Of four originally funded pairings, two were aborted by the school board votes just mentioned. A new pairing was created after the first of the negative votes, but the second decision came too late in the year to create still another new pairing. Of the three pairings that actually operated (including 201 students altogether), two were shown by the research to be extremely successful both in teaching basic skills and in encouraging cross-district interaction among students. Both of these pairings were directly influenced by feedback of early research findings, as will be described below. The third pairing experienced administrative problems, which prevented research feedback meetings, and was only sporadically successful. Feedback of early research results appeared both to validate the original findings and to increase the effectiveness of the pairings which received the feedback.

**The Entry of the Research Team**

Metropairways funding source required an evaluation process of each funded programme. The Metropairways Coordinator had originally met the author when both were at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In September 1975 the Coordinator approached the author to test his interest in becoming Director of Evaluation for Metropairways. He agreed to write a research proposal, with the understanding that (1) four students in his advanced research course, 'Diagnosis of Human Systems', would serve as research assistants; and (2) the research would not consist merely of before-and-after questionnaires, but rather would include direct observation of participants' behaviour and feedback of the observations to participants during the year. The Coordinator happily accepted these proposals because she believed that

she and the teachers probably had a lot to learn about how to enact successful collaboration.

The research proposal suggested that the surest way to determine whether Metropairways succeeded in reducing isolation caused by racial, ethnic, and district boundaries was to observe whether children and adults in fact interacted across these boundaries. Neither the mere fact that students were to be brought together in the same place, nor checkmarks on a later questionnaire, guaranteed such interaction. The proposal further hypothesized that teachers would not in fact succeed in planning and implementing curricula which encouraged collaborative interaction among children unless their planning itself exhibited collaborative interaction.

Some MPP staff members seemed somewhat surprised by the research team's decision to focus the research on collaboration. When asked what they took to be innovative about MPP and Metropairways, these persons listed such characteristics as pairing of classes, new curricula, and emphasis on basic skills. The problem with this response was that these characteristics were not systematically related to one another, nor did they appear innovative to the researchers. These characteristics sounded more like a list of politically expedient attributes which, in the absence of a coherent theory of educational practice, were likely to strain against one another and result in one more undistinctive project. That MPP members were surprised by the focus on collaboration suggested that the project as a whole was 'forgetting' its original mission.

Thus, the initial research proposal by the evaluation team amounted to an intervention which prompted the Coordinator and other members of the organization to question what theory of educational organizing guided their work. Through these discussions the Coordinator became enthusiastic about pursuing the implications of the collaborative thrust of the programme. She invited feedback about her own behaviour in meetings, and eventually invited the research team to join in planning three of the staff development workshops for teachers, in order to ask together what collaboration means and to what degree programme members were in fact succeeding in implementing the theory in practice. Through these discussions other members of the MPP staff also came to appreciate that focusing on collaboration did not distract attention from students' experiences in the programme, but rather provided a criterion for the programme's mission of 'reducing... isolation'.

The fact that the initial research proposal itself constituted an important intervention in the programme illustrates a paradoxical quality of successful collaboration. Whereas the notion of collaboration often conjures up an image of 'going with the crowd', resulting in bland and undistinguished outcomes, successful collaboration will not have these qualities. Successful collaboration requires the maintenance of the collaborative process itself, not compromising the principles of collaboration, despite probable pressure to do

so. The person who wishes to work collaboratively tries simultaneously to model and advocate a process of self-disclosure, support of others' efforts to express themselves, and openness to confrontation. Through self-disclosure, support, and confrontation, creative ideas can enter discourse, theories can be clarified, behaviour can be examined, and conflicts managed openly (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Torbert, 1972). Thus, the commitment of the research team to collaboration did not require it to accede to every request for it to change its research design.

## Initial Attempts to Define Collaboration in Behavioural Terms

All major decisions about the research were made by the research team at weekly Friday meetings. One research assistant studied the history of the programme, reviewing documents and doing retrospective interviews of school officials. The other three research assistants studied specific pairings. They were introduced to their pairs by the Coordinator at the first curriculum planning meeting of each Pairway's staff in November.

During several Friday research meetings an initial behaviour coding scheme was developed by the research team to determine the degree of collaborative inquiry at the teacher planning meetings. (This scoring procedure was later also used in observing students' behaviour.) The observer was to register: (1) who spoke to whom (to determine the amount different people participated); (2) whether each comment 'initiates decision' (e.g. proposes a new idea), 'makes decision', 'implements decision', 'agrees with or adds to', or 'explicitly disagrees' (to determine to what degree control of decision-making was shared); and (3) how inquiring each comment was.

A comment could be scored negative, neutral, or positive as to level of inquiry. A comment would be scored as negative if it claimed to speak for everyone, it it treated personal opinion as a non-negotiable fact, or if it changed the topic without testing with others whether such a change was useful. For example, 'We're wasting time; let's make a decision' would be scored as negative because it presents an opinion/evaluation as though it were a fact. By contrast, 'I feel we're wasting time; let's make a decision' would be scored as neutral. And 'This seems like a waste of time to me; I'd like to make a decision; how do others of you feel now?' would be scored as positive. A comment is scored as positive when it opens towards a continuing dialogue about unresolved problems or issues. Thus, informational questions are often scored as neutral because they do not imply continuing dialogue.

The research assistants began to use this scheme immediately to help them keep track of the inquiry level of teacher planning meetings, even though they were not altogether sure what patterns of behaviour represented high degrees or low degrees of collaborative inquiry and had not tested their inter-rater

reliability with the instrument. Using the instrument helped raise questions relevant to refining it. Moreover, in the early stages of feedback to the teacher planning teams, specific examples of level of inquiry on which the research team could agree were more useful than statistical generalizations, since both the teachers and the researchers needed to learn what the categories referred to in concrete terms and what they signified theoretically. The research team's initial sense about what sorts of extreme behaviour patterns would tend to suggest low or high degree of collaborative inquiry is outlined in Table 29.1.

**Table 29.1**   Hypothesized characteristics of collaborative inquiry

| Low collaborative inquiry | High collaborative inquiry |
|---|---|
| 1. Skewed participation, with one or two members making a majority of comments; some members none at all | 1. Participation more evenly balanced |
| 2. Initiating, making, and implementing of decisions limited to few members | 2. Initiating, making, and implementing of decisions widely shared |
| 3. Given decisions initiated, made and implemented by same persons | 3. Given decisions initiated, made and implemented by different persons |
| 4. Little or no explicit disagreement, or else uninterrupted strings of explicit disagreements | 4. Explicit disagreement interspersed with other kinds of comments |
| 5. More negative inquiry scores than positive inquiry scores | 5. More positive inquiry scores than negative inquiry scores |

In the early stages of the research process the research team limited its feedback to programme participants to counts of who participated how much, and to examples of high or low inquiry comments, inviting participants to join in discussing what such findings signified about the collaborativeness of a given meeting. In this way, each researcher could offer potentially helpful feedback to the teacher team he or she was observing without claiming a spurious validity for counts of categories not yet fully defined. Even this limited approach had significant effects on participants, however, since the practice of giving or receiving such feedback was new to most.

The first feedback session with the Coordinator focused on her tendency to do most of the talking at an initial teacher planning meeting. The Coordinator experimented with alternative ways of conveying information to the teachers and at the very next initial meeting of a Pairway cut her participating rate by two-thirds, thereby enlarging the opportunity for teachers to begin working together.

But the feedback process was not immune to criticism. The first feedback with a curriculum planning team similarly focused on the degree to which one suburban district dominated the meeting, but in this case the participants

reacted angrily to the data as not being valuable. The reaction of the curriculum planning team to the data about it served as a different kind of data about that group's receptiveness at that time to collaborative inquiry. Despite the negative reaction of the curriculum planning team, its collective behaviour became more collaborative (i.e. more balanced participation, explicit disagreement, and more positive inquiry scores) in its next session, and its members soon came to respect the research assistant.

## Developing Personal Commitment to Experimenting with Collaborative Inquiry

From November through January, the research assistants and the Coordinator were all struggling to gain a clearer notion of what collaborative inquiry meant, why it was helpful, and how they could encourage it.

During the research meetings and in the 'Diagnosis of human systems' class, the author repeatedly invented structures which could challenge research team members to collaborate together and then to perform a task in public so that examples of incompetent or non-collaborative behaviour could immediately be confronted. If the team were to be effective, it was especially important that members would neither have the impetus, nor know the direction, to change their behaviour in order to become more collaborative. Moreover, research team members also had to learn how to react non-defensively to public disconfirmation, because such disconfirmation is so often what greets the researcher who first offers feedback to persons unaccustomed to hearing their own behaviour described back to them. If the researcher joins the clients in reacting defensively to disconfirmation, then the relationship is likely to disintegrate.

For example, feedback sessions were 'rehearsed' in the 'Diagnosis of human systems' class before being enacted. The research assistant who was faced with anger from the team to which she offered feedback had already practised facing a hostile group earlier that week in the research class. Consequently, she did not take the anger as personally as she might otherwise (though she had not really believed the anger would occur). She could remain balanced and non-hostile and continue to interpret what was happening, rather than having her behaviour unreflectively determined by what was happening. She later claimed that the rehearsal kept her from breaking down in tears at the team's attack.

The kind of learning experienced by the research assistants is exemplified by this report of a class session after the research assistant had on several occasions experienced feelings 'of not being seen or accepted; of confusion, conflict, anger'. The point is not that all professionals will share the particular negative feelings of this person, but that all professionals do share the dilemma of how to learn from experiences which generate negative feelings in them.

X's strong participation... really put [me] off... because I could see X's glee at the attention and power his acting out had gathered him. I had other issues I wanted to discuss and already understood the issue X brought up. Consequently, I was bored and angry and felt that I got nothing out of the time in terms of professional training.... After sharing my own experience... the next person who spoke directed his first two sentences to me, and the remainder of his sentence to X. Again, I felt cut out.... Later, ... I received feedback that my own participation was seen particularly by Y as high assertive/low inquiry.

The same day as this feedback, I experimented with some high inquiry participation. The results were striking. Others in the class immediately began to address their remarks to me. Once after my first high inquiry participation! Again upon my second high inquiry participation! Then a high assertion, low inquiry partici- pation, and again I felt cut off and ignored. Then another high inquiry participation, and again I felt included and spoken to. During these experiments with my own participation and feelings, I confirmed the necessity of coming from my center when making a contribution. In the past I would see some point that I felt was crucial to the discussion, but off center within myself, and so it would come off as high assertion/low inquiry and also have no strength and energy behind it. In addition, a further learning occurred for me.... I realized that I did not have to speak in order to be included, and that when I feel excluded it is often my own responsibility for resisting inclusion that is available to me.

Many professionals develop interpersonal styles by chance, by imitation, or as a result of traumatic experiences, without ever having the opportunity to become aware of the consequences of that style or to experiment towards a consciously chosen and effective style. Like the research assistant quoted above, their behaviour in professional contexts will be controlled by unexamined feelings about inclusion or control or respect or affection. They may, for example, conclude, without even being aware of the possibility of inquiry into the matter, that they are being excluded from a group by others when they are in fact excluding themselves. Obviously, the creation of such self-fulfilling prophecies diminishes one's overall effectiveness in accomplishing tasks. And, if a group as a whole reinforces such self-fulfilling prophecies by not examining its own process, then the group as a whole will become in- creasingly ineffective, and its members will become increasingly isolated and alienated from one another. Instead of reducing racial, ethnic, and socio- economic isolation, such a group would actually increase isolation.

Although the research team and the Coordinator were beginning to

experience the benefits of collaboration inquiry, for the first two months of the project the teachers and administrators involved in the pairings experienced 'collaboration' as just a piece of unfamiliar jargon that someone else was using and imposing on them. 'I'm not concerned with collaboration', said one principal in response to the December feedback session described above. 'I'm just concerned with curriculum.' The author took this comment as a lead-in for his presentation to all the adult Metropairways participants at the January 17 Staff Development Workshop, his first opportunity to present the research design to participants. After the presentation a lively discussion ensued during which the author invited confronting comments and several participants responded by articulating their scepticism about the value of the research, while other participants reported a new interest in collaboration. Still, some were not about to be 'bought' so easily. One later said to the author, 'I assumed you would leave at 11.00 a.m. and then we'd never see you again.' In fact, however, he returned to lead two more staff development workshops in which the question of what constituted collaborative behaviour became increasingly sharpened, as programme events increasingly showed the need for new modes of behaviour if pairings were to be successful. Thus, the research team attempted to structure meetings and to behave in all interactions with participants in such a way as to encourage mutual confrontation and an increasing spirit of collaboration. Nevertheless the research team was also well aware that initially participants were not likely to have a high internal commitment to the evaluation process since they did not choose it; moreover, the focus on collaboration was probably contrary to many teachers' and administrators' initial preferences.

In other words, the research team seemed to be advocating a new definition of the situation for programme participants as much as it was documenting participants' existing definitions of the situation (thus paralleling the relationship of the research team to the MPP staff when the original proposal was written). But the researchers' advocacy was of a unique sort and not merely an attempt to superimpose their own subjective ideology on others. The researchers were advocating a principle which as best they could determine represented the central intent of the programme, and they were testing to what degree participants' behaviour was congruent with this intent. This description makes the researchers' role sound more neutral; but to advocate examining congruities and incongruities among purpose, structure, and behaviour is to advocate working together in a fundamentally different way from bureaucratic organizing (cf. Torbert 1974/5). Thus, the researchers were, in this sense, advocating a new definition of the situation for programme participants, but not a definition which the researchers wished to, or could, impose unilaterally, since the vision being advocated was one of collaborative inquiry.

The two ultimately successful Pairways did develop regular feedback cycles

through which they tested to what degree their planning meetings and their curricula in fact encouraged collaborative interaction. The other three Pairways did not develop regular feedback cycles — two because they were discontinued after negative cycles by suburban school committees and the third because the teachers did not meet at all until the May 22 Staff Development Workshop, when the researcher led them through a retrospective process of conflict-airing-and-resolution.

## A New Definition of the Situation

January was a month of numerous disappointments for the programme. In one week: one suburban School Committee voted against the programme; the camping trip planned for a triad of schools was postponed and nearly cancelled because suddenly, after a camp-site had long been selected, a competitive bidding requirement was belatedly imposed by the agency responsible for the fiscal management of the programme; the parent responsible for one pairing made it clear he was dropping out, thus endangering that pairing; and the first negative School Committee decision led to anxieties that another suburb too might reject the project (as it later did). Thus, every one of the four Pairways seemed endangered. Suddenly, the flavour of the programme was changed from an ordinary classroom project to a politically volatile project involving whole communities. The political emphasis was heightened over the next two months as heated parent meetings and school committee meetings in a second suburb led up to a 'no' vote by its School Committee on March 8, a decision which fuelled still further controversy and parent-organizing within that community.

For the researchers, as for the Coordinator, these events required fundamental recalibrations of effort. The original research design did not anticipate that community political processes would become so crucial to the success of the programme. Of course, the researchers could have continued with their original design, regarding the political events as 'extraneous variables' which interrupted the orderly process of the research through no fault of the researchers. But to do so would have been absurdly unresponsive and particularly ironic given the emphasis on collaboration. Instead, the researchers attended community meetings and sought interviews with school committee members.

The research team had actually begun to become somewhat concerned with wider political processes in early December when members began to notice what seemed like uncollaborative patterns of action by superintendents of several of the suburban school systems involved. It seemed as if the superintendents waited until the last possible moment, after the curriculum had been planned and all preparations completed, before bringing the

programme to the attention of their school committees. It seemed as though the school committees were being presented with *fait accompli*. It seemed as though the superintendents were attempting to control their committees unilaterally, contrary to the spirit of Metropairways. Thus, whereas the general 'liberal' reaction to the 'no' votes in the two suburbs was that 'conservatives' unwilling to collaborate with Boston were responsible, the researchers wondered whether superintendents who did not approach their own school committees in a collaborative manner might not also share responsibility for the results. The researchers were unsure about this interpretation, and they were also unsure whether they should raise these issues since they initially had very little definite data on them.

The researchers initially decided to raise the whole issue of superintendent-school committee relations with the Metropairways Coordinator and to explore to what degree it was her responsibility to urge superintendents to take one approach or another to their committees. It turned out that the Coordinator had scrupulously and self-consciously left the question of how to approach the school committees up to each school district administration, conceiving this issue as one of 'home rule'. The researchers, however, recommended *advocating* an early approach both to community parents and to school committees in the future, on the grounds that an early approach would give a community longer to discuss and come to terms with the programme and would make a school committee feel less put on a spot and manipulated by forces beyond its control.

When a new suburb first indicated an interest in the programme both the research assistant who met with the paired teachers at the first curriculum meeting and the Coordinator, speaking to an assistant superintendent and the principal, advocated that early approaches be made to parents and the school committee. The suggestion was accepted, the school committee immediately gave approval to proceed with the planning phase, and a parent's meeting was held within a week of the first curriculum development meeting. Some open opposition to the programme developed, but after a full discussion of the programme's objectives, did not gain much support. After another parent meeting, the school committee approved implementation of the programme. Later in the spring the Coordinator had the choice of seeking or circumventing a vote by the Boston School Committee related to Boston's continuation in the programme. The alternative being considered by the Coordinator was to work directly through the superintendent's office with the board of community superintendents. Again, the research team urged her to seek the school committee vote, contrary to the conventional wisdom of maintaining as much unilateral control as possible. This time the programme received a unanimous vote in its favour.

Taken together, the two 'no' votes and the two later 'yes' votes form a pattern which suggests that on controversial issues early exchanges between a

school district's central administration and its school committee, strong advocacy by the administration and programme director, opportunities for comprehensive community discussion, and no attempt either to hoard or to circumvent power lead to a greater sense of collaboration between school committee and administration in the immediate situation, to less fear by school committee and community of being manipulated by outside forces, and thus to greater openness within the school district to 'outside' groups in the future. The strategy of collaborative inquiry seems to hold the promise of practical effectiveness on the political, intergroup scale of events as well as on the interpersonal, small-group scale.

## The Characteristic Dilemma of Social Action

During this same period, from January through March, the research team was struggling both to gain a clearer sense of what collaboration meant in each unique situation and, at the same time, to achieve final operationalization of, and reliability in scoring, the behaviour-observation categories which the team had devised in the fall. Both of these projects were complicated and illuminated, in turn, by the changing definition of the situation, described in the previous section, which led the research in new directions altogether.

Upon reflecting together (and the team devoted many moments to such reflection, including a long evening meeting on February 23, which the members entitled 'What collaboration isn't' in an effort to capture the evasiveness of the concept), the research team began to appreciate that its own current dilemma — *the attempt to operationalize what it did not yet fully understand, while being interrupted* — was the same dilemma facing Metropairways as a whole. Indeed, this dilemma seems to characterize all social action. Top-down bureaucratic organizing, empirical scientific experiments, and other attempts at unilateral control, do not really face this dilemma. Instead, these forms of social organizing concentrate only on operationalizing programmes or ideas, striving to prevent interruptions and taking basic assumptions for granted rather than investigating them. The research team came to see that, in contrast to attempts at unilateral control, collaborative inquiry is an inherently more ambiguous process because it not only seeks to achieve pre-defined results, but also seeks to remain open to relevant new insights and interruptions, which may change the very definition of the situation.

These 'philosophical' insights later came to explain the problems which the research team encountered as it attempted to develop reliability in the use of the behaviour scoring procedure. In a series of meetings the researchers listened together to tapes of teacher meetings, compared their attempts to score the conversations, and developed increasingly precise definitions for

each term in the scoring procedure. Nonetheless, they concluded that the scoring procedure was ultimately of most use as a guide to keener qualitative observation of behaviour rather than as a fully definable and quantifiable system.

## Using an Analytical System to Raise Political and Ontological Questions

Two examples will show why the researchers ultimately preferred to rely primarily on qualitative descriptions of behaviour rather than to rely heavily on statistical summaries. The first example was the difficulty in distinguishing between the two categories 'Initiates decision' and 'Additive comment'. The problem was that what began as additive comments often turned out, over the course of several further comments, to redefine the whole situation, so that in retrospect one would have scored the comment as initiating a decision. Or, one person would say something in a subordinate clause to which the next person would add something, leading to a decision on the matter. But who initiated the decision: the first person to mention it, or the second person who gave it prominence?

The second example was the difficulty in determining who should be credited with *making* a given decision. On some occasions the decision was explicitly consensual and it hardly seemed appropriate to credit the person who looked around the group in asking, 'Are we agreed, then, that we'll do X?' with making the decision. But the trickiest occasions were those when one person seemed to make a decision unilaterally and thus seemed clearly to deserve a check in the 'Makes decision' column. Yet the researcher present knew that this person had earlier been urged to take such an initiative by someone else, or else the researcher had seen this person counting how many others were on his side before announcing the decision. Such occasions raise the question whether single persons can ever validly be counted as making decisions even if they do make the decision explicit.

The difficulty of categorizing who initiates and who makes decisions in every instance ultimately becomes an insoluble problem if one's aim is to develop a comprehensive, analytically neat scoring system. This problem is insoluble in principle because political life is precisely not a temporal series of analytically discrete exchanges of similar value, but rather a swarm of exchanges based on attempts to intuit what is relevant and what is interruption, to intuit what others wish, and to intuit what symbols best comprehend a whole situation. Life does not work like the current hypotheticodeductive paradigm of science (and neither does science, in practice (Mitroff, 1974)). Life includes both 'political' interruption and 'ontological' questioning of premises, as well as analytical description; but the fact that social exchange cannot in principle be reduced to an analytically neat scoring

system does not prevent the same scoring procedure from being very useful on many specific occasions to help participants gain insight into their own behaviour. Sometimes the problems noted above simply do not arise. For example, in a given group of four teachers, one teacher may make no comments whatsoever that would be categorized as either 'Initiates decision' or 'Additive comment', instead contributing only in terms of 'explicit agreement'. These data can be fed back to the teacher and can lead to an exploration of the teacher's sense of personal power and interpersonal style. Similarly, one person in a group may appear to make all decisions. Whether or not this appearance is ultimately true, these data can be fed back to the group for further exploration of its decision-making patterns.

Thus, from the point of view of an action research design, in which data collected on any given round of research are tested for empirical validity, political usefulness, and existential illuminatingness by feeding them back to the participants themselves, analytical validity is not the only, nor the final, criterion of truth. A political criterion of validity — does this information help me to act more effectively in given situations? — and an ontological criterion of validity — does this information help me to experience more directly my-real-situation-in-the-world? — complement the analytical criterion of validity — is this information internally consistent and externally replicable? Western science has until the present time concentrated its attention solely on developing increasingly elegant analytical tests of validity. As a result, analytical criteria of validity have become increasingly alienated from political and ontological criteria, and explicit validity testing of all three types remains relatively primitive and rare in most people's lives and in most social settings (including the conduct of social science itself). Given the limited time span of this project, the research team ultimately chose not to develop statistically acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability in the use of the behaviour-scoring procedure, but rather to use it primarily for two other purposes: (1) to raise 'political' questions during feedback and workshop sessions with participants about their decision-making patterns; and (2) to raise 'ontological' questions about the purpose and process of science through this report. Not until social science research actively takes responsibility for its political effects and its ontological implications, as well as for its analytic rigorousness, can it hope to inform our lives together in a balanced way.

Social science research which attempts to report and analyse real events can have powerful immediate 'political' effects on the persons described. The research team found that teachers and administrators read the early drafts of the final report with word-by-word attention, and the research team spent over 30 hours receiving detailed, and sometimes emotional, criticism of the various chapters on each Pairway. This process influenced the researchers to make many revisions and the participants to internalize more deeply how their behaviour affected the programme. Thus, the writing of the report itself

served as an important feedback mechanism to participants and an important validity check for the research team.

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