

Empirical, behavioural, theoretical, and attentional research skills necessary for collaborative inquiry

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HUMAN INQUIRY

A SOURCEBOOK OF
NEW PARADIGM RESEARCH

Edited by

Peter Reason

John Rowan

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

COMING
TO
KNOW

Do RESEARCH WITH PEOPLE
ON PEOPLE

OBJECTIVE
SUBJECTIVITY

Research can never
be neutral.

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

A NEW RIGOUR
OF SOFTNESS

Dogs Sniff loudly
when doing
research.

Give me research
or give me
death!

The basis of new paradigm research

We knit pat
with cycles

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Empirical, behavioural, theoretical, and attentional skills necessary for collaborative inquiry

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An earlier paper (see Chapter 11 of this book) introduces a new model of social science based on three assumptions at variance with current 'normal' social science. This new model of social science assumes:

- (1) that researchers are themselves active participants in the situations researched and that the researcher-situation relationship deserves to be studied;
- (2) that the framework and variables of studies themselves change in the course of study; and
- (3) that an important way of testing the validity and significance of social knowledge is to feed data back into the setting researched, studying how this feedback influences further action.

Together, these three assumptions provide a framework for systematically learning in settings of organized action — a framework for an 'action science', as opposed to a merely reflective science — a framework for a collaborative enquiry among all participants in the given setting, as opposed to an inquiry unilaterally defined by the self-designated researcher 'on' other respondents.

A number of studies over the past 20 years foreshadow this model of science. Five of these studies are briefly summarized below, in order to anchor the theoretical model proposed in the earlier chapter in concrete illustrations. These five examples lead to the question, what kind of graduate training is necessary for aspiring action scientists? This question receives attention in the main body of this chapter.

Five Partial Examples of Action Science

The five partial examples of action science to be summarized here derive from the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, and organizational behaviour. Only the fourth and fifth of these studies were originally conceived as including the researcher's own attitudes and behaviour as part of the data to be studied. In each of the first three examples, the researchers discovered only as they proceeded that their own attitudes and behaviour required study if their reports of the phenomena they encountered were to be valid.

Martin Duberman's historical study of Black Mountain College (1972) can serve as an interesting initial example of a research report which traces the mutual influence process between the researcher and the subject of research. Since Duberman was not present during the life of the college (1933-56), one might suppose that the question of mutual influence was moot; but Duberman recognizes that his way of interviewing people who were there, his views on education, and his deepest personal presuppositions may all influence what data he collects and how he analyses it. Consequently, he provides his readers with data on how he conducted his interviews and with excerpts from his personal journal reflecting on the relationship between his experiences and those at Black Mountain. Moreover, the influence process works the other way as well: Duberman's study of the approach to teaching and writing at Black Mountain influences his own attempts to write, and his final chapter reflects his new experiments with his own writing style.

A second example of incipient collaborative inquiry is Charles Hampden-Turner's recent book, *Sane Asylum* (1976), about the Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco, which is dedicated to the rehabilitation of criminals and drug addicts. When Hampden-Turner first visited Delancey Street on behalf of a foundation, he found an intense, unconventional educational environment. In seeking to study the organization, Hampden-Turner was challenged to participate in it himself. The book describes not only the Delancey Street Foundation as though from some neutral standpoint, but also Delancey Street's diagnosis of Hampden-Turner. In effect, this is an institution devoted to self-study in action on the part of its own members, and it challenged the visiting social scientist to join in such self-study. It seems likely that if Hampden-Turner had not been willing to do so, he could not have completed the research.

Carlos Castaneda's tetralogy (1968, 1971, 1972, 1974) about his apprenticeship to an American Indian 'sorcerer' provides another example of a conventional social scientist — this time an anthropologist out to study alien cultural practices — who is challenged by his subject to engage in self-study in action. Don Juan, Castaneda's 'informant', turns out to be a real 'man of knowledge' who teases Castaneda toward a genuine interest in developing a trained, interpenetrating attention. Over time, Castaneda carefully records his

own subjective experience, his interactions with Don Juan, and Don Juan's words. After close to ten years of apprenticeship with Don Juan, new experiences force Castaneda into a fundamental re-evaluation of the world-view and theory of action he had adduced up to that time. Fortunately, his record of experience was sufficiently complete to permit him to return to his earliest meetings with Don Juan and re-evaluate their significance (as reported in the third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*).

Don Juan so choreographs experiences for Castaneda that the latter's attention gradually comes to include 'non-ordinary' states of reality which encompass and interpenetrate his ordinary thought and action. With these new experiences of attention comes increased motivation to attempt actually to listen to the ordinary jumble of thoughts and feelings which Castaneda finds in himself. His repeated, depressing discovery that he lacks sure purpose and that his thoughts and actions lack congruence reveal a need for approaching his own life in the attitude of a 'warrior', becoming 'impeccable' in ordinary thought and action (a realm Don Juan names the 'tonal'), so as not to be distracted from the play of a different realm of spiritual purposiveness (which Don Juan names the 'nagual'). Gradually, Castaneda journeys from a state of consciousness in which his ideas about himself have little correspondence with his actual moods, actions, and effects toward an attention which traces the actual transformations in his experience as they occur.

Argyris' studies of business executives (1962, 1965, 1974, 1976) provide an example of a social scientist using numerous empirical methodologies to study organizational cultures and then feeding back the results to the acting systems in an effort to encourage self-study in action and, ultimately, more effective operation. In his feedback sessions Argyris refers not only to data already collected about the system in question, but also to the quality of the interactions in the feedback session itself. To do this requires an attention to oneself and to others which simultaneously spans both espoused theories of action (what each believes in doing) and patterns of actual behaviour (what each actually does). As Argyris has become increasingly aware of how difficult it is to encourage such a quality of attention in others, Argyris has turned increasingly from short-term consulting relationships with the other acting systems to longer-term educational relationships (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Argyris, 1976).

The final example of collaborative inquiry is the author's study of his own organizing practice in *Creating a Community of Inquiry* (Torbert, 1976a). In this case, the social scientist was, from the outset, a member of the organization in question and sought to study himself in action in order to increase his effectiveness, while also encouraging other participants to engage in self-study and collaborative inquiry. Asked in 1967 to create and direct an OEC Upward Bound Program for some 70 high-school students in New Haven, the author viewed the aim of creating a genuinely educational school

and the aim of conducting genuinely informative social research as mutually supportive, integratable aims. During the first year of the programme, the author was the only person who regularly pursued the integration of these two aims. He found some repeated incongruities between his espoused values and his actual behaviour (for example, he espoused working through conflict but actually feared to provoke or face it). Meanwhile, other members of the school tended to regard the data-collection (such as the taping of staff meetings) as 'Bill's research'. The author had not anticipated how unconvincing he would be, and how little interest and how much resistance others would manifest, about the ideal of collaborative inquiry.

At the end of the first year, the seven-person core staff began to find the research of interest and of direct use in diagnosing organizational problems, in developing a more articulated and a more deeply shared sense of purpose, in increasing personal effectiveness, in improving the quality of staff meetings, and in reaching specific decisions. A month largely devoted to self-study by the core staff as a group led to the development of a unique selection process for new staff members. This selection process used research and feedback as part of its decision-making process and ultimately invited applicants to participate in their own selection. At this point in the school's development, the aims of creating a genuine school and of doing significant social research seemed to be increasingly mutually supportive and integrated.

During the second year of operation, however, various political events, such as riots in the city and at the local high schools and the assassination of Martin Luther King, generated more hostile, more polarized relationships, particularly among newly hired staff members. Divisions between the revolutionary and the conventional, between black and white, and between research and action tended to be treated as absolute and unbridgeable. In the short time available, the core staff did not fully succeed in winning new staff members' allegiance to the peculiar integration of collaboration and inquiry which the core staff itself was only just beginning to recognize, value, and enact.

Thus, the author came to recognize through painful personal experience both how difficult it is in the first place to integrate research and action, no matter how much sense it may make in principle, and how difficult it is to maintain an integrative organizing design, once it is achieved, against culturally prevalent modes of organizing thought and action. This overall insight suggested the need for a theory of qualitatively distinct historical stages of organizing which would illuminate both the possibility and the difficulty of achieving more sophisticated and more effective kinds of organizing than is conventional in our culture. Although he had not been sensitive to the issue of historical stages during the conduct of the school, the author's voluminous record of experience in tapes, documents, and journals permitted him to reconstruct a theory of stages of organizing which applied not only to the

overall development of the school, but also to each of five sub-cycles of its development. This theory has since proved of use in describing and intervening in other educational settings (Torbert, 1974/75) and in creating successful new settings (Torbert, 1978). Thus, one result of this episode of self-study in action was the development of a theory generalizable to the rest of the researcher's own life (and also potentially generalizable to others interested in educational organizing). A still more important but less visible result (especially in a scholarly paper like this one) was the intensification of the researcher's *practice* of inquiry from moment to moment and the concomitant relaxation of his *retorical espousal* of inquiry.

Implicit in the brief summaries of five studies above (and explicit in the theoretical presentation of Chapter 11) is the notion that collaborative inquiry spans four different 'territories' of human reality, and thus requires research methodologies capable of registering these four different qualities of reality. The four distinct qualities of reality are: (1) the outside world; (2) one's own behaviour; (3) one's own and other's thinking and feeling; and (4) the dynamics of human attention as it gains, loses, or changes focus and as it narrows or widens the number of qualities of which it is aware. At any given moment the attention may include all four qualities of human reality and their interaction within awareness, or it may include only one quality (e.g. the outside world; as when we are so identified with a movie we are watching that we altogether forget that we are there sitting in a theatre, feeling and interpreting what is going on).

Training in Research Methods Relevant to Collaborative Inquiry

In collaborative inquiry research methodologies which provide access to all four of these qualities of human reality are necessary, and the prospective action scientist requires training in all four types of methodology.

At present, graduate programmes in the social sciences conceive of and teach research skills primarily as skills in the development, validation, administration, and analysis of empirical research instruments, such as unobtrusive measures (Webb *et al.*, 1966), questionnaires, behaviour rating systems, interviews, and field notes. As noted in Chapter 11, different empirical research instruments offer more or less direct access to each of the four qualities of reality, and it would therefore be peculiarly inappropriate for a prospective action scientist to be trained to treat only one empirical methodology as valid.

In collaborative inquiry, empirical data are approached from a fundamentally different point of view than in conventional, reflective social science, and prospective action scientists therefore require different emphases in their training in data analysis. In terms of statistical analysis, the

conventional social scientist prefers to use parametric tests to discover overall patterns and differences among sub-groups in the largest possible sample, with an interest in generalizing to a wider universe of similar situations. By contrast, the prospective action scientist often finds non-parametric statistical tests more appropriate to analysing data from small groups of people who are willing to engage in mutual self-study (see Siegel, 1956).

Moreover, in collaborative inquiry the primary interest is not in generalizing to other settings, but rather in applying knowledge to improve actors' effectiveness in the situation under study. Consequently, the prospective action scientist should develop skills in analysing data from each member's point of view. Of special interest are incongruities between a member's espoused values and actual behaviour, or incongruities between a member's description of self and other members' descriptions of that person. Such apparent incongruities can generate conversation which can lead either towards more valid research instruments or towards a more inclusive, less distorted view of their own social reality by the group engaging in the inquiry.

In searching beyond the 'central tendencies' of data to particular incongruities, it is helpful to aggregate the various frequency counts onto one master data sheet in order to be able to scan the entire complex of relationships both before and after statistical tests on relationships among particular variables. Because new variables and new hypotheses emerge in the course of study, the prospective action scientist must develop the confidence not just to 'manipulate' data through statistical tests, but also to 'play' with data in such as way as to discover unexpected patterns.

Non-Instrumented Research Skills

Although different empirical research instruments allow more or less direct access to each of the four qualities of reality (to repeat: (1) the outside world; (2) one's own behaviour; (3) thinking and feeling; (4) attention) (Torbert, 1972), *empirical research instruments register each of these qualities only as they manifest themselves in the outside world*. Moreover, there is invariably a time lapse between the collection of data, the coding and analysis of the data, and the feedback of data into the world of social action. The prospective action scientist, however, wishes to encourage a culture in which participants can study themselves while in action, recognizing their own behaviour, thought, and attentional dynamics as they occur, and also correcting incongruities as they occur. This kind of self-study-in-action requires, first and foremost, the development of a kind of attention which can continually (and perhaps, ultimately, continuously) register one's own behaviour, thought, and attentional dynamics. And self-study-in-action also requires specific kinds of behaviour and thinking conducive to discovering what is going on in social

situations rather than assuming one knows to begin with. In short, in a social science which includes self-study in action, not only the quality of a researcher's empirical product is at stake, but also the quality of his or her ongoing behaviour, thinking, and attention is at stake. The question arises what kinds of behaviour, thought, and attention are conducive to disciplined research.

In one sense, this question is not new; all social scientists realize that there are behavioural skills to effective interviewing, that good theory makes the difference between an indigestible mass of data and a fruitful study, and that *how* a researcher attends to *what* problems makes the difference between a mediocre and a distinguished career.

But in many senses, the insight that valid scientific inquiry requires disciplined skills in all four 'territories' of human experience will transform the institution of social science as we now know it and, with it, the entire society. To bring the quality of ongoing behaviour, thinking, and attention into question in the training of social scientists is to become responsible for the quality of graduate programmes as action settings. From the point of view of the model of collaborative inquiry, a graduate department in the social sciences that does not study and seek to improve its own teaching and administration is, at best, a bad joke. As social scientists master the behavioural, emotional, conceptual, and attentional disciplines necessary to research their own lives with others, they can for the first time help others in this regard as well. (Of course, there is no guarantee at present that social scientists will be among the first to choose to master these disciplines.)

In Chapter 36 in this book, on training for new paradigm research, Shulamit Reinharz offers a useful list of research skills, above and beyond the design and analysis of empirical data-collection instruments, required of a researcher committed to a model of collaborative inquiry.

What would courses focusing on the development of disciplined research behaviour, thinking, and attention look like? The skills that Reinharz describes are primarily behavioural skills taught in some counselling psychology, group dynamics, organization development, and clinical research methods courses today. In such courses students can be challenged to become aware of their own behavioural patterns through others' feedback, to develop more effective inquiring behaviour, and to theorize about the very activity in which they are currently (emotionally) involved in such a way as to expose and test their own most primitive assumptions about social life (see Argyris and Schon, 1974). Beyond these courses, the prospective action scientist might well seek training in dance forms such as tai chi, judo, or the Gurdjieffian movements, all of which cultivate direct, moment-to-moment sensual awareness.

It is much harder to envision what courses in disciplined research thinking and feeling, or disciplined research attention, would look like.

Traditionally, disciplined research *thinking* has been associated with philosophical conversation, but few departments of philosophy boast such a conversation at any given time, and one searches without notable success to find a philosopher since Socrates who views everyday life as the setting for questioning conversation. What is at stake here is not the learning of social scientific or philosophical theories, not talk about theories, but *active theorizing* — an uncomfortable, disconcerting, virtually unknown process — a wondering what is going on. A brief excerpt from a memoir on Wittgenstein suggests the flavour (D.A.T.G., 1951):

Usually at the beginning of the year Wittgenstein would warn us that we would find his lectures unsatisfactory, that he would go on talking like this for hours and hours and we would get very little out of it. ... And, if we had to work hard, Wittgenstein worked tremendously hard. He spoke without notes. Each lecture was obviously carefully prepared — its general strategy planned and numerous examples thought up. But in the lectures he thought it all through again, aloud. Members of the class would chip in briefly from time to time, though usually to make a suggestion in response to some question which was posed. At times Wittgenstein would break off, saying 'Just a minute, let me think!' and would sit for minutes on end, crouched forward on the edge of a chair, staring down at his upturned palm. Or he would exclaim with vehement sincerity: 'This is as difficult as *hell!*' (p. 26).

Related to the difficulty of pointing to, or developing, courses which exemplify and teach disciplined research thinking is the difficulty of envisioning courses that develop disciplined research feeling. Indeed, the very concept of 'disciplined research feeling' is probably unfamiliar to the reader, an apparently awkward conjunction of terms. The sense of the phrase and exercises related to developing disciplined research feeling are probably best described in contemporary literature by the leading innovative theatre directors of our time (e.g., Grotowski, 1970; Schechner, 1973). In brief, just as one can distinguish between passive thought which works with preconceived, taken-for-granted categories and active thinking which questions how to categorize, so also can one distinguish between passive feeling which works with predetermined, taken-for-granted likes or dislikes and active feeling which questions the value or significance of an occasion. Only a person who seeks the disciplines of active thinking and feeling can tolerate, or encourage, collaborative inquiry in ongoing social settings.

If activities which encourage disciplined research thinking and feeling are difficult to find in academia as presently organized, the very notion of disciplined attentional research is likely to be even more unfamiliar. The effort

is to achieve a quality of attention which simply registers one's other functions (thinking, feeling, moving) and one's perceptions of the outside world. Perhaps the closest traditional discipline is Buddhist 'vipassana' type of meditation. The following brief dialogues are transcribed from group meetings wherein the participants attempt attentional research while they speak. The dialogues do not prove anything empirically. Instead, they are presented here to *illustrate the possibility* of attentional research.

Question: I try to observe all the functions at the same time — thought, emotion, moving, and instinctive. I attempted to separate each in an experiment while walking along the river. I am confused about what observing really is. My mind starts to grasp and think.

Response: There is no direct connection between the place that observes and words. We have very little experience bridging that gap. It's difficult to put words to it. The idea we have about observation is intellectual, but what observation tastes like... to observe an emotion is to participate in it, what is it that knows? Can I be interested in that? How can I turn toward what is observing in such a way that both the observation and thought continue? What is that movement?

Question: I had an experience at school last Monday. I felt more of a demand on my attention — how to be more here — that seemed to come back to me at two different times. I really felt that when I put more attention on myself, it expanded to the other things in the room. And it seemed for that time almost as though the children were working with more attention too, even if only for a short while. I feel it as a possibility in me, but there is so much else that forgets to have attention and is interested in other things. I guess I want to have some thread that I can call on.

Response: When you voice that wish, have you searched to see if there is some thread you can follow, that you can hold onto?

Question: It's different — at some moments I do, others it's more difficult.

Response: How does one treat those moments in all their variance? See, maybe this moment is a moment I feel I am less here — I have had an experience of knowing more than this. That memory of a deeper moment can be of use if I start to look *now*. What are the limits of my sense of being here? Am I including all of my body? Now I don't respond to that with a yes or no, but I see, with a search in myself. I find that this search brings me closer — that this is the thread, the connection I could follow. Always the remembrance of these times can be a motivation to look at this moment.

Question: I find it very hard to stop internal dialogue. As I try to collect myself when I sit in the morning, I am only able to find quiet for a brief moment... and then the internal dialogue goes on again. I realize I left it and I start again. I find it disturbing. The ability to work with the attention seems to go in patterns. There are some good weeks and some bad weeks. As I'm teaching, at home with my family, I'm not aware of this internal dialogue going on, but when I remember it and try to find quiet, it's all full of internal dialogue.

Response: And yet it's not always like that. What's the difference?

Question: I'm not sure.

Response: Are you sometimes quiet?

Question: Yes.

Response: What's the difference in you then?

Question: Then, my attention is really there.

Response: But what makes it possible for your attention to be there? Try to see. When you find yourself in internal dialogue, try to see what holds you there. What is the attraction? When you are free of it, try to see what has freed you. Anything else will just be words and explanations. It's the only way you can find out what is up to you in that situation.

Training for collaborative inquiry must somehow include four types of research skills appropriate for all four qualities of reality — skills in the design and use of empirical research instruments, behavioural skills in generating social environments conducive to inquiry, and skills in active thinking, feeling, and attending. While it is possible to design environments which introduce students to each of these types of skills separately, the ultimate aim is, of course, to use all these skills simultaneously in ongoing social settings. Because it is all too easy for beginning students to become ideologically and religiously attached to the importance of one or another of these skills, it is of special importance in training for collaborative inquiry that students engage in real-world projects with close, clinical supervision. The conflicting and confusing real-time demands of such a project emphasize the art of interweaving the four types of research skills. Chapter 29 describes a particular example of collaborative inquiry in which graduate students received research training. That chapter supplements the present chapter.