

**Students *and* Teachers as Agents of Positive Change.**

**Can Cooperative Inquiry enable learning for both?**

**Abstract**

Cooperative Inquiry (CI) is a form of participatory action research that offers the potential for people to develop their positive change agency through collaborative inquiry. Using case study material this discussion will initially explore how students can be facilitated to use CI to learn how to enable change. A second strand of discussion will focus on the possibilities CI offers teachers who wish to develop their own practice and integrate learning with structured peer-peer inquiry. At the end of the session participants will be given the opportunity to craft their own questions for inquiry going forward.

**Keywords**

**Cooperative Inquiry, Change**

## **Introduction**

The aim of the session is to explore the theory and practice of Cooperative Inquiry (CI) as an approach to enabling positive change and learning for students and peers using case studies to illustrate the process and outcomes.

In discussion the group will consider the potential applications of CI to a range of management education contexts. There will be an intentional dual focus to the discussion. One strand of conversation will explore the possibilities CI opens up for enabling students to develop as change agents. Drawing upon any previous experiences of action research, alongside material presented by the session facilitator, participants will think through both benefits and challenges of CI as a learning process applied to range of different educational contexts.

The second strand will open up questions about the development of teachers as agents of change through the adoption of CI for professional development. The proposition is that educators can role model the development of change agency through their own willingness to learn collaboratively through inquiry.

At the end of the session there will be an opportunity for peer-peer conversations where participants can share their insights and commit to taking action through crafting questions for personal inquiry. The outcome of the session will be a critical appreciation of CI and its potential application to management education.

The target audiences for this session are teachers looking for practical processes that support the development of change agency in students, those with experience of action research wishing to apply their learning to a management education context, teachers concerned about

how to support the development of their peers, and those who are beginning to see themselves as scholar-practitioners wishing to extend their practice into research/inquiry modes.

### **Theoretical and Practice Foundations**

The session will start with a brief introduction to the theory and practice of CI using the following questions to open up the subject

#### **1. What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is said to resist clear definition. It is not a defined methodology but arguably a set of approaches to inquiry that is based on some explicit social values including the need to:

- Enable the participation of all people
- Acknowledge the equality of all people's worth
- Actively seek the wider good of society
- Encourage the expression of people's full potential.

As a consequence, it assumes that:

- All those affected by the problem under investigation should be involved in the process of inquiry
- Participants involved in the inquiry engage in collecting data and reflect on the information to transform their understanding of the nature of the issue under investigation.
- The new set of understandings is then used to inform and implement action plans that are then collectively evaluated.

(Adapted from Stringer, 1996 p.9-10)

## **2. What is Cooperative Inquiry?**

This is a form of PAR. The developers of this approach, Peter Reason and John Heron (2002) suggest that co-operative inquiry is:

A way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself in order to-

- Understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things
- Learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better

It can also be described as a systematic approach to developing understanding and action.

Everyone in a co-operative inquiry group:

- Has a say in what questions are addressed
- Contributes to thinking about how to explore questions
- Gets involved in the activity that is being explored
- Has a say in whatever conclusions the inquiry may reach

In this form of research, the split between researcher and subjects is done away with. All involved act as co-researchers and as co-subjects.

## **3. How does Cooperative Inquiry support learning?**

CI seeks to support the generation of 4 types of knowledge:

- Experiential= knowing through direct face to face encounter with another person or object.  
Almost impossible to put into words.

- Presentational= knowing that emerges from experiential knowing and expresses the knowledge using words and imagery
- Propositional=knowing about something through ideas and theories
- Practical= knowing how to do something, a skill or a knack.

CI suggests knowing will be more valid, richer and deeper if these four ways of knowing are congruent with one another. (Adapted from Heron & Reason, 1997)

#### **4. How does a Cooperative Inquiry group work?**

The four phases of action and reflection will be outlined and illustrated through a case study and supporting material that is currently being submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

##### *Case Study*

The brief for the learning facilitator at the outset included an expectation that an action research process offered an opportunity for post-doctoral non-medical clinicians (post-docs) to ‘develop a common purpose and public narrative in order to influence the system’ (unattributed paper, 2017). Communication with the funder indicated aspirations that such an approach would enable connection between professionals working in diverse fields but with similar educational status. The intention was that by working together on specific inquiry questions they would, over a period of time, develop their change agent skills and professional influence.

The proposition to interested post-docs was a facilitated co-operative inquiry process (Heron and Reason, 1997) where they could co-design, with the support of an experienced facilitator, an action research process consisting of 6 group meetings extending over a year.

At its first meeting in May 2017 the initial inquiry group of six agreed to take a nationally formulated definition of clinical academics and invite colleagues to read it and then ask the following questions:

1. What does that make you think about?
2. What effect, in your experience, do you think they have? (group email 8 May, 2017)

At subsequent meetings group members agreed to undertake Appreciative Interviews (Lewis, et al. 2016), in depth conversations with colleagues in their respective systems, self-reflections, graphic illustrations and group reflections of learning from exploring inquiry questions. Such processes were undertaken either outside group meetings or within the routine bi-monthly meetings. Topic areas explored included questions about identity and identity shaping, the value of the roles they occupied and shaped, the expectation of peers and personal and professional motivations. At the conclusion of each meeting a new set of questions and tasks were agreed. This created the rhythm, or research cycling, of inquiry where gathering together and sharing of insights is followed by the crafting of questions and new actions enacted in the work context of the individual (Reason, et al. 2002).

### *Supporting material*

Alongside this case study I will draw upon experiences of facilitating Cooperative Inquiry processes in the following contexts to illustrate key points:

1. A UK consulting firm where I worked with change agents on their own learning to use conversation in organizational contexts. This 14-month process formed the basis for my doctoral thesis.

2. A University undergraduate programme where staff formed a CI group meeting weekly to inquire into how to change practices that enhanced learning for students and themselves
3. A UK hospital where change agents used a CI process to learn how to act as change agents in their departments.

### **Teaching Implications**

In a recently published paper (Napan, et al. 2018) teaching colleagues in Australia speak with great enthusiasm of the benefits for teaching practice of engaging in a CI process:

‘At the end of the first 18-month phase of our inquiry, we can say with confidence that we asserted the primacy of teaching in our academic practice and that CI provided a valuable platform from which to do so. We managed to successfully integrate our love for teaching with joyful and challenging research, which is being disseminated as widely as possible through conferences, publications, and memorable experiences for students and teachers.’ (p. 263)

Those of us who have engaged with CI as a process speak highly of the way it transforms our thinking and practice. However, there are a range of practical and relational issues that quickly emerge as starting an CI process is contemplated. These include time to establish collaborative relationships, commitment to a lengthy process, power dynamics between group members and the wider organisation, changes in roles for teachers and skill development in action research methods (Woods-McConney, et al. 2016 Napan, et al. 2018 Howard, et al. 2015).

Arguably the result of these concerns, real or imagined in different contexts, means that CI is not seen as natural ‘go-to’ process for transforming either the learning of the student nor the learning of the teacher. This discussion will open up the implications for teachers of management

and explore how challenges might be faced and new experiments take place in the adoption of forms of CI within participants contexts.

The closing minutes of the session will be used to encourage participants to craft questions for inquiry that might guide them in their own practice going forward. In doing so we will recognise that research and inquiry is something that all teachers of management can profitably engage in for the benefits of students and their own professional learning.

**Session Description**

<b>Timing (minutes)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Participant Involvement</b>
0-5	Introductions	Name and reason for choosing this session (including any previous experience of CI)
5-15	Outline of theory and practice of Cooperative Inquiry	Opportunity to ask questions for clarification during presentation
15-20	Presentation of Case Study and supporting material	
20-30	What are the implications for Management Education? Whole group discussion.	Contribute to plenary discussion
30-40	Pairs conversation: What is emerging for my practice as an educator?	Conversation with peer



40-50	Summarising themes around two headings:  - Benefits/implications for working with students  - Benefits/implications for supporting the professional development of teaching staff	Plenary Conversation
50-60	Pairs conversation: Crafting questions to guide our own inquiries+ Closing Check-out	Conversation with peer

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