Chapter Three

Introduction

This chapter describes the beginning of the research process and is designed to take the reader from the point where I formulated my ideas about the research questions, to the beginning of the field work. The field work was centred on a co-operative inquiry group and the participants were all experienced nurses. The journey from beginning this research degree in 1990, and beginning the field work in the spring of 1991, is contained in this chapter. I began this process with two questions in mind, they were:

- what questions do nurses ask about how and why they work together?

- what research methodologies are congruent with nursing practice?

To answer the first question I consulted with my colleagues and this is contained in Chapter 4, 'Preparation for the Field work'. To answer the second question I reviewed my own experiences and consulted the writings of people who were exploring qualitative research. The results of this search provided me with methodologies that were in harmony with the nursing process, and which I believed to be academically sound. The literature that informed these choices of methodology was a major part of the discussion and formulation process. Before commencing a description of this search it is important that the two major decisions I made before entering the research process are acknowledged. One was about the membership of the field work group and the other about making my work 'public'.

Clarifying the Research Project.

In thinking about the membership of the field work group, I considered the relative value of recruiting participants from different work contexts, and of inviting a group of nursing colleagues to join me in my work. I decided that I wanted to work with a heterogeneous group of senior nurses involved in different health settings. This I believed would encourage a wider perspective of nursing and, hopefully, promote a more challenging debate. In order to make the project attractive to this wider group of nurses, I knew that I would need to develop a framework for the field work that resonated with nurses from different fields. In essence I was seeking to find the common recognisable thread that this wider group would recognise as nursing.

The second decision was about whether I wanted to keep this research project 'private', and to work on it in my own time, or whether I wanted to open up my concerns and ideas to a wider audience. I thought about the implications of this choice for some considerable time and I decided on the latter. My decision was based on my commitment to myself to make more available to others the way I worked as a nurse, and to encourage other nurses to do the same. This choice meant that I would need to travel the path of applying to the Nursing Ethics Committee for permission to research within the Health Authority. This made my work public, and also required that I provide some feedback to the authority at reasonable intervals. As a consequence of this decision, a series of events occurred that are a part of this research because they challenged my intent and highlighted for me the need to research in a way that truly reflected the ideas and practices of nurses.

In order to meet the Ethics Committees formal requirements, I also gained support from a nursing colleague who was at the final stage of her PhD. She gave me her perspective on what was expected, and together we designed and completed the research proposal. This was not an easy task, as I felt I had to try and fit my ideas and purposes into the design that we both agreed would be appropriate. The final paper went before the committee and came back to be rewritten. A clearer outline of the purpose, the methodology, and the research

subjects was requested. I was invited to seek an interview with the chairperson to discuss further before submitting a revised proposal.

I took up this offer and used the opportunity to both hear more fully the concerns of the committee and to explain what I had in mind. I went to the interview feeling rather marginalised, wondering how I was going the convince the chairperson that developing a co-operative inquiry group of senior nurses was academically valid as well as being important for nurses and nursing. It became clear during our discussions that one of the members of the committee was familiar with this kind of research and would prefer that I made it more explicit in my proposal, rather than confuse it with other ways of doing research. I negotiated time to think and consider, and to talk with my supervisors before rewriting. I believed that this was necessary if I was to clearly identify an appropriate methodology and an outline that met the Ethics Committee's requirements.

Using Supervision to Clarify the Boundaries.

The supervision session with Judi Marshall and Peter Reason took place at Bath University. My intention for this session was to get some clarity about my thoughts and ideas, particularly on the kinds of research that involved subjects as co-researchers and researchers as co-subjects. I had some relevant literature, but I was not really clear about the appropriate design for the kind of research I had in mind. I was also quite hazy about what my role would be within the research process. I had experience in working with a range of different groups, from psychotherapy to self help groups, therefore I needed to be clear about the differences in working with a group of researchers.

My supervision session at Bath passed through several phases of inquiry in which I recorded the dialogue using a tape recorder. After the supervision session I transcribed the dialogue and identified the phases that highlighted particular issues. This provided the focus for my attention and energy, directing me towards clarifying my intentions and purposes. As a consequence I was very clear that the research field work would be best achieved by setting up a nursing research group to produce the main body of research data. The clarity I achieved at this point provided the catalyst for opening up ideas, concerns, perceptions and questions, engaging me in the process of developing a sense of inquiry into my own practice as a nurse. From this basis the research proposal flowed and I was able to write in a way that was acceptable.

I had taken the first 'public step'. I was committed to following through my proposal and I was much clearer about how I would initiate and manage the 'field work'. Deciding on a process for initiating and facilitating the research group, coherent with my own ways of acting, thinking, and being, was the next step. I wanted the field work to fit with the way nurses work and interact together, and if I was to be authentic in facilitating this activity, then I needed to consider my style of working within a group context. These issues informed part of the search for an appropriate methodology.

There are three aspects to this search, each is equally important and will be considered separately. They are:

- knowledge induced from my own experiences;

- theoretical ideas and practices that inform Methods;

- Developing an appropriate methodology.

I will now pursue each one in terms of developing the methodology for the field work.

Knowledge Induced from Experience.

I experience nursing as an interpersonal activity involving relationships with different people in different situations. Patients are primarily the focus of the nurses attention, however relatives, visitors and other health workers also claim attention and concern. Each nurse is a part of many dyads, triads and groups, and is pressed to adjust and accommodate to different languages and expectations. This pressure of demand can cause the nurse to be distracted and the patient to be neglected. Nurses have learnt to cope with this difficulty by establishing particular patterns of work and by helping each other when pressure arises. These patterns of work ensure the essential tasks are achieved and that both staff and patients are safe. There are two particular ways of working that have been formalised and are of particular interest to this research. The first is the 'hand over', where nurses transfer the care of patients between one group of nurses and another at the end of each shift. The second is the nursing care process that guides the nurse through the interactive process with the patient, from assessment to discharge.

The 'handover' is both functional and a kind of ritual, consequently the agendas that it meets are not always clear. It is a place for giving information about the day to day activities that need to continue through consecutive shifts. It is a space for nurses to exchange ideas and stories about their patients, and the problems or difficulties that are both resolved and unresolved. It is also a place where nurses can give each other support and feedback about the effectiveness of nursing and medical interventions. It is a place where nurse can 'let go' of the responsibility for both staff agendas and patient care. The handover session is the only time when nurses can be together as a total group. This familiarity with, and reliance on, working within a communal frame is an important basis for developing an inquiry group.

The nursing care process is a cycle of events that structures the nursing management of each patient's nursing needs. This refers to the continuous cycle from referral and assessment to review and discharge. The process incorporates nursing work that is independent and prescribed by qualified nurses, nursing work that is dependent on the medical intervention, and nursing work that is interdependent and relies on co-operation between disciplines. My experience of the nursing process as prescribed by the nurse is of a cycle of events that requires knowledge, skills and experiences to be brought together in order to meet the needs of patients. This cycle involves assessing, problem solving, prescribing, intervening, observing and evaluating. The outcome of the evaluation leads into further problem solving and the cycle begins again until the patient has no need for nursing care. Newman (1990) talks of the nursing process as being a research process. This may be so in some instances where the nurse is attuned to ideas about rigor, however, whether that is true or not, the discipline of the nursing process is useful as a familiar basis for introducing the research cycle.

Theoretical ideas and practices that inform Methods.

The theoretical ideas and discussions that have influenced the development of an appropriate methodology fall into two main areas:

- theoretical ideas and practices from my past experiences;

- theoretical ideas and practices from chosen readings;

I intend to present each separately.

Ideas and practices from my past experiences

These ideas and practices are rooted in my experiences as a nurse teacher in New Zealand. As I have already introduced these experiences through 'story telling' in chapter one, I will now focus on the experiences that have informed the way I set up and facilitate group work. The roots of my learning as a group participant are based in the 1970's zest for personal growth, a time when I was involved in the 'T' Group Movement. The 'T' Group or Training Group is an intensive small group aimed at promoting personal growth through group

participation in self awareness activities. It is intensive in terms of the demands on individuals to:

- self-assess;

- self disclose;

- give feedback;

- risk take;

- validate the behaviour of others (Jones, 1972)

My experience of managing groups arises out of my understanding of groups as a vehicle for personal learning. I am a product of those times. However, using group work to facilitate the development of interpersonal skills with students required a more task oriented approach. It is the development of this approach that I will present as both knowledge and skill to take forward into the fieldwork.

The challenge at that time (New Zealand in 1974) was to assist students to develop the interpersonal skills needed to meet the requirements of working with both patients and staff. My perspective was that if students were to communicate effectively with people who found communication difficult, and sometimes impossible (staff and patients), it was important that they developed confidence in a wide range of interpersonal skills. This I realised required the students to experiment with communication in an environment that supported risk taking. Effective communication needed to be learned in a 'live' situation where skill building required practice and personal discovery. I turned to Pfieffer and Jones (1973) 'A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relationship Training' as a resource for building a programme to address these skills. This training resource provided me with the necessary tools to teach students particular skills and abilities using the techniques of experiential learning.

Experiential Learning

This way of teaching and learning stimulated and supported the students' ability to make sense of their experiences and led to personal and group discovery that valued both individual and collective understandings of these experiences. The ability to connect these experiences within the 'classroom' to those in the workplace was also encouraged and pursued. The design skills developed at that time are ones which I have continued to use and adapt to differing challenges. They included:

- goal setting;

- pursuing individual sense making;

- sensitivity to participant response;

- sequencing;

- creating opportunities to test 'understandings';

- collaborating with other facilitators;

- transfer of learning to the workplace.

The experiences relied heavily on investment and involvement by all participants, consequently this was a learning experience for all of us. The content of each experience focused on issues relevant to the group, or a particular individual. Processing the data generated by the group was the central core of the activity because it provided the setting for clarifying the ideas, feelings and questions that are a part of learning. This in turn prepared each participant to make a connection with workplace situations.

The following diagram illustrates the experiential model that became familiar to me: (Pfieffer and Jones References Guide)
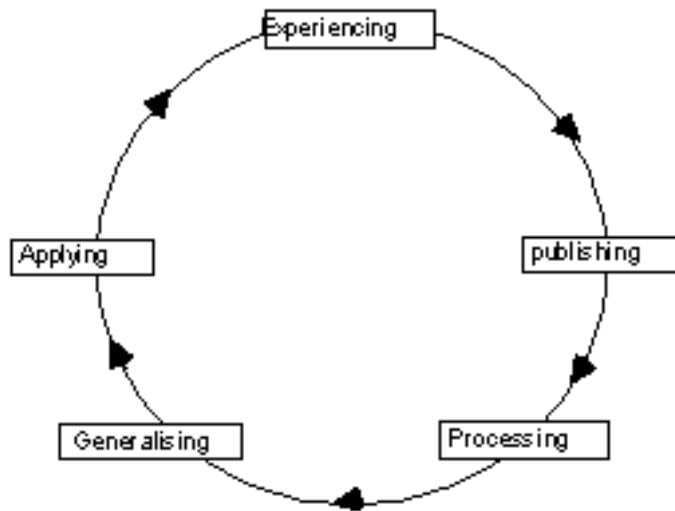
This diagram represents a five step model based on the premise that:

> "experience precedes cognitive learning, and the learning, or meaning, to be derived from any experience, comes from the learner him/herself." (p. 4)

This way of learning was liberating for the students because there was freedom to affirm particular styles and strengths. I also gained a method of teaching that was authentic for me as a teacher and in harmony with what I believed to be the basis of nursing as a caring profession - the ability to communicate effectively with others.

Times have changed since then and I have learnt in many other ways to change and become more aware. However I remain committed to the belief that each individual's experiences are unique to him or her, and that as a teacher my role is to encourage this learning to occur in a climate of support and honest feedback. There is a degree of chance in every experience and no one can predict what each individual will learn. However, keeping this in mind, I have found that providing a setting for experiential learning where the individual's experience is validated, creates a potential for learning that goes beyond that initial situation. The five revolving steps are a part of my 'tool box'. They are not rigid and do not restrict my ability to flow with what is presented, or to adjust to the mood of the participants.

Each of the five steps have a particular focus and provide the context for a particular transaction between the participants. These steps are as follows

- setting up an experience that will involve the participants in an activity which is chosen for its ability to provide a basis for the learning process;

- encouraging each participant to 'publish' or share their reactions and observations with others who have also experienced or observed the activity;

- extending this sharing process to include the dynamics that emerged during the activity through exploration and evaluation;

- deriving some generalisations or principles from the activity that provide connections with other experiences;

- applying the ideas that have been generated to a new experience and evaluating this new experience through presence in it and reflection.

I believe that experiential learning is purposefully immersing oneself in a situation in order to learn through that experience. Therefore, I take every opportunity to develop such situations at work and with colleagues who are having difficulties with being 'heard' and understood. For me, it is very important to be mindful of each person's vulnerability as they take up the challenge and participate in an experience that has the potential to arouse emotions and memories. The value of this kind of intentional learning is inherent in the act of consciously placing oneself in a learning experience, where the potential is present to expose patterns of interaction and thinking that awaken unconscious conflicts.

This new knowledge can provide the impetus for changes in self understanding and in the interpersonal qualities of one's life. Whether these experiences are open to being shared with others lies very much with the individual to choose. Making overt this openness to choice is an important part of learning in this way, because leaps in knowledge and understanding often need time to make sense of and require confidence to speak out about. In these very personal situations, the key role of the facilitator is to ensure that every member is aware of the choice, and that a context is created that supports risk taking.

Experiential learning has been with me a long time and I have tested it out with different groups of people in many different settings. Each time I have learnt more about myself, and others, and the way in which the context can influence what is learnt. In setting up a Co-operative Inquiry group as a 'laboratory' for the field work I drew on my experiences in groups to facilitate and to manage the research process. The next section will focus on the readings that have influenced my choice of research methodologies, and how I planned to implement them.

Theoretical Ideas and Practices from the Literature.

Before I highlight some of the reading that provided the framework and the methods for managing the field work, I need to present and discuss some of the readings that enhanced and clarified the ways I worked and thought about the world. To do this I will begin with the paper written by Guba and Lincoln (1990) in which they discuss and critique post positivism and critical theory in relation to positivism, and then present constructivism as an alternative paradigm to positivism. Having presented this work I will consider the ideas and methods in this writing that connected with my own.

Naturalistic Inquiry

Guba and Lincoln begin by asking the question 'Can there be a Human Science?' and in finding an answer to this question promote Constructivism as an alternative. The argument and the evidence that they provide in coming to this conclusion were interesting and challenging. I was not sure that I fully understood the intricacies of their argument, however it helped me to develop a basis for my own thinking about research. Their critique of post-positivism raised important issues for me, and brought to the surface ideas and theories that I resonated with. Their treatment of these ideas and theories left me wondering at times because I have a resistance to discarding ideas and ways of making sense that seem compatible with my own. To be more explicit and purposeful, I will focus on particular points that contain much of their argument, and then provide my own sense making.

Guba and Lincoln define science as 'our need to know'. They go on to say that conventional science has assumed the form of positivism and is now being challenged by post-positivists, critical theorists and constructivists. In providing a way of comparing these challenges with positivism, Guba and Lincoln pose three fundamental philosophical questions.

- What is there that can be known?

- What is the relationship between the knower and the known?

- How can one go about finding out?

These three questions may be termed respectively the ontological, the epistemological and the methodological. The answers to these questions are the 'basic belief systems' of each theoretical position. These are the starting points, the 'givens' that determine what inquiry is and how it should be practised They go on to say that the rules of science that are extrapolated from these basic belief systems are human constructs and therefore cannot be ultimately proven or disproven. From this point of view the search to find out 'how things really are' is a false one.

To make the point more graphic, Guba and Lincoln go on to present each 'basic belief system' of positivism, post positivism, critical theory, and constructivism within the philosophical framework of ontology, epistemology and methodology. This invites the reader to compare the way in which each belief system is unfolded into research actions. The positivist position clearly objectifies the subject, subverting their interests to those of the inquirer. Post-positivists believe that there are some imbalances created by the positivist paradigm. These imbalances are between:

- rigor and relevance.

- objectivity and subjectivity.

- precision and richness.

- elegance and applicability.

- discovery and verification.

In their terms, the answer would be to redress these imbalances through devices such as: critical tradition (literature), self revelation ('coming clean'), critical community (journal editors and referees) and meta-analysis. Post-positivists continue to assert that manipulative experimentalism remains the ideal inquiry form, conceding only that adjustments must be made because of real-world constraints (page 140).

<u>Critical Theorists</u> acknowledge that because paradigms are human constructions they are not impervious to the influence of human values. Values, they claim, enter into the inquiry at such points as:

- the choice of problem selected for study;

- the choice of the conclusions to be drawn;

- recommendations to be made.

Consequently, they consider that nature is constructed through some 'value window' because it is impossible for us to see nature as it 'really is'. Nature, they say, cannot be seen as it "really is " or "really works" (p 141). Guba and Lincoln, in responding to this claim, point out that although critical theorists acknowledge an interaction between the observer and the

observed (a 'subjectivist epistemology' in other words), they implicitly retain a 'realist ontology' or a belief in a 'real reality' that can be uncovered. This disjunction is, to them (Guba and Lincoln), a fatal flaw in the approach and does not create a real alternative to positivism.

Constructivism is presented as an alternative paradigm which affirms that no 'ultimate reality' exists independently of the knower, but rather is created through dialogue.

The constructivists position is that:

- realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local in their form and specific, and dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them;

- the inquirer and inquired-into are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two;

- individual human constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus.

This ideological position is translated into action in the world through determining the constructs that exist in a particular field of study, and bringing them as near as possible to a point of consensus. The methodology involves the hemeneutic cycle of inquiry which is a process of developing informed constructions within the constraints of both the information available, and the context of the inquiry. As more sophisticated constructs emerge they may replace existing constructs, but they are not seen as more true, only more informed. The aim of the process is to transform the human mind, not the "real world", by inviting each person in the inquiry cycle to hear the constructs of others and make clear their own, so that a degree of consensus is reached between the participants.

Conclusions

In reading this paper I compared the belief systems presented with the way I understood and made sense of the world. I realised that although the argument presented was valid, I did not feel it necessary to discard the way critical theorists develop their research methods. I could hold the different perspectives of critical theory and constructivism in my mind if I reflected on different aspects of my interaction with the world. The analysis of the critical theorists' point of view provided another way of examining my values and the way they influenced the research so far, particularly with regard to my choice of problem for the field work.

I could acknowledge that my choice arose from the value I placed on nursing and my need to transform the way health care is provided, especially by nurses. I was also aware of a passion for fairness and respect for individuality that seems to mirror the criticism that is laid at the door of critical theorists by Lincoln and Guba (1990).

> "If the aim of inquiry is to transform the (real) world by raising the consciousness of the participants so that they are energised and facilitated toward transformation, then something other than an experimental, manipulative methodology is required". (p.142)

I had a 'gut' feeling that this was true but I was not quite sure what it meant for me. The continuation of this critical analysis confronts the idea and purpose of acting in the world and that is often what I saw myself doing. Although in acting in the world I did not seek to eliminate 'false consciousness' and draw people towards a particular point of view, I did make judgements about where I focused my energy and to what purpose. I will revisit both critical theory and constructivism later in the thesis when I describe my preparations for the field

work, because some of the values that influenced my search for a methodology straddle the two perspectives of effective human interaction and shared meaning making. From my understandings of the discourse presented by Guba and Lincoln I formulated the following concepts to take forward.

> • In any research inquiry there are imbalances to be addressed between; rigor and relevance; objectivity and subjectivity; precision and richness; elegance and applicability; and discovery and verification.

> • I have certain values that are important to me and in fact are basic to my own personal integrity. I need to be open to discussing these and also open to others' value positions.

> • The sense that 'reality' is created by our interaction with each other within a particular context. This can facilitate consensus, as well as the acknowledgement that each individual separately constructs meaning.

The process of teasing out the core ideas that were coherent with my research intent gave me a sense of what was involved in pursuing qualitative research. However this process raised more questions - it did not provide me with the necessary link between thinking about ideas, and creating ideas through acting in the world. Nor did it help me to connect with research in a practical sense of noticing the knowledge in the act of doing. I found that Heron (1981) helped me bring some order into this complexity of 'learning to know' and it is his ideas that I will now present.

Co-operative Inquiry

In presenting an experiential research methodology, Heron delineates three ways of developing knowledge. These are defined as:

Propositional knowledge - knowledge about facts or truths as stated in propositions: it is entirely language dependent.

Practical knowledge - knowing how to do something as exemplified in the exercise of some special skill of proficiency.

Experiential knowledge - knowing some entity by direct face-to-face encounter with her/him/it.

These 'kinds' of knowledge are part of a research process that involves the subjects of the research as co-researchers. Heron names this research process Co-operative Inquiry.

In this model, each person involved is both co-researcher and co-subject. Each is involved as co-researcher, contributing to the research propositions at all stages from the working hypothesis to the research conclusions, and as co-subject, being fully involved in all stages of the research action. Heron is very thorough in his explanation of the nature and flow of ideas between the various ways of knowing within each individual, and between individuals. However, the most important understanding that I took into my own research was the clarity about the ways of knowing and how each contributes to the research cycle. Heron (1981) applies these different ways of knowing to the four stages in his research cycle.

The first stage involves the co-researchers discussing the initial propositions and agreeing how these ideas and models can be developed. This also involves agreeing the tools and methods to be used. The second stage is where the research participants encounter each other and the research situation. This involves experientially testing out the ideas and models by entering into the co-subject role. The third stage is when the participants decide to move into the field of practice to encounter and experience the situation as co-subjects. Knowledge at this stage is practical and is achieved by an openness to situations so that learning takes place through encounter and experience. This stage relies for its acuteness on the ability of

the participants to 'bracket off' their latent propositional knowledge so that they are fully engaged in the new experience. Stage two and three are repeated so that sufficient data are available to move to stage four. The fourth stage returns the co- researchers to propositional knowledge where they look for themes, recurring patterns, and further hypotheses to help to clarify and draw conclusions.

These ways of knowing felt coherent with the way I wanted to work with a group of experienced nurses, taking care of both the development of the research as a fieldwork project, and the knowledge about nursing that would emerge from the process. These ways of knowing and how they might be managed within a research cycle were both challenging and appropriately connected with my experience of nursing. However, as the actual methodology is centred on being inwardly aware and conscious, this did not sit comfortably with the way in which nurses, who do not already know each other well, would want to work with each other. Also, the way in which the steps within the cycle are articulated did not feel coherent with the way in which I experienced the interweaving of ways of knowing. I did not feel that I had Heron's clarity of purpose when working with people in a group setting. My style was to move between the layers of being, feeling and doing in a way that creates cohesion within the group and a sense of choice for the participants. The research cycle for me needed to have direction but also a life of its own.

Conclusions

Reflecting now in writing this thesis, I realise that in preparing for this field work much of what I understood as 'research' had been about propositional knowledge, knowledge that involved ideas and theories in the abstract. When I function as a nurse, much of what is expected of me is of a very practical nature and highly visible - fetching, carrying, co-ordinating, recording, reporting, fixing, tasking and so on. My observable knowing is practical and about the task to be done. However, when I think about what nursing is to me now, I find that under the practical, visible, task there is both intuitive and propositional knowledge. The former is generated from experiences and the latter arises out of making sense of these experiences. This important knowledge has developed increasingly over the course of conducting this research.

The world of experience is complex and for me does not sit easily within a process that is clearly defined. However, the way in which Heron presents the subject and researcher as an equal partnership was coherent with the way I saw nurses as working towards equal partnership with patients/clients. It was my intention to research with my own nursing peers and I did not see the skills of self awareness needed to use Heron's model fully as being readily available to most nurses. My experience of helping nurses to gain skills in interpersonal competence, through role play and video work, made me aware that this way of working is new to many nurses. Nurses do not have the models and personal experiences needed to manage the personal issues I believed were a necessary part of Heron's model of experiential learning. Coming to terms with this realisation led me to consider other research cycles that, from my point of view, were more compatible and sensitive to the way nurses work together. The research model that I chose, or developed, needed to match more easily the way nurses thought about, and worked with, the nursing process. A model that would lead more easily into developing the skills of self awareness, interpersonal effectiveness, and group work seemed to be important at this point.

The Research Process

Rowan (1981), in his complex discussions about the researcher-subject relationship provided a very workable and practice-oriented explanation of the research cycle. Before I arrive at the point of discussing this cycle in relation to my intentions, I would like to take a wider view of Rowan's ideas.

Rowan's reasoning about different research paradigms and how they relate to one another in their ability to either alienate, bring about social change, or develop a research cycle rang an accord with my concerns. Some of my ideas about alienation and social change still travelled

with me, and I recognised that some of my own values were part of the Marxist philosophy I studied some time ago. These ideas about the alienation that workers feel when they do not have access to the products of their labour did not seem dissimilar to ideas about research subjects being alienated from the products of the research. As I understood it, Marx focused on the exploitation of the working class to provide profits for the owners of industry. It could be said that in traditional research, the research subject is being exploited by the researcher to provide him/her with a tangible asset - a published paper, a better paid job, status and authority, and so on.

Rowan also refers to the alienating process of treating people as subjects rather than as full participants. He expands this idea of alienation to include four dimensions: work; the product (outcome); the other people; and the self. He goes much further by stating that the researcher is also alienated within this paradigm because of the nature of the research and because the researcher shares the same research culture. I had difficulty in accepting this because I did not believe that the research subject was in any way of equal status to the researcher. I also did not think that being in the same 'research culture' necessarily brings about the same alienation for the researcher. If this were so then the factory owner would be just as alienated as the workers in Marx's analysis, and maybe they are in some complex way.

There was something about degrees of freedom of choice that can or cannot be exercised that was of interest to me and I did not think that this fitted with Rowan's analysis. It is possible that my perspective was more about being a woman in a workplace that is hierarchical and patriarchal, and also highly dependant on women's work. At this point I was reminded of the epistemology of critical theorists and I realised that my analysis exposed the values I held about the sense of powerlessness that nurses often feel in the workplace, and my desire to bring about change. However, given that I did not agree with all that Rowan argues, his cycle of research contained for me a sense of process, logic, and a certain flexibility around translation of theory into practice.

From my knowledge of Rowan's cycle of research and my experience of the 'nursing process', I found that there was an accord, a similar pattern, even though the actual events are different. Both evoke a cycle that is at once closed and progressive - closed in that the stages are repeated, and progressive in that the questions asked at the beginning of each cycle are built on the actions of the previous one. Each model passes through stages and although these stages are not identical, they have some concepts in common. Each begins with sharing information and formulating questions and possible answers. Each passes through stages of testing out and communicating the results of acting in the field, and each evaluates or makes sense of these experience. The nursing process passes through the stages of inquiring, planning, intervening, evaluating and reporting. The research cycle developed by Rowan commences at the point of thinking about the research activity and terminates with making sense of the information and experience arising from the actions taken.

The following diagram presents the complete cycle:
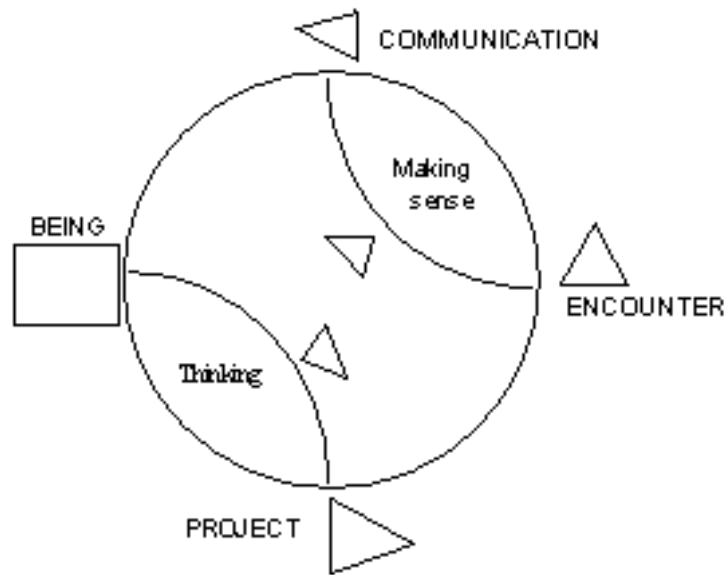
This diagram of Rowan's (1981) cyclical model (p. 98) represents the cycle of experience as the researcher moves from one stage to the next. Rowan's theme is that all research follows the same basic model, different research methods using the mode differently.

> "At one end of our continuum, this is seen as the standard alienated academic research project. ---- At the other end of our continuum, is seen as a dialectical process of engaging with the world."

It was this dialectic end of the continuum that had compatibility with the research I intended to engage in. Rowan's cycle of research passes through the four stages of Being, project, encounter and communication, and although these stages are expressed linearly Rowan states that "--a dialectical cycle may often start with the moment of encounter"

From this dialectical perspective, the researcher first experiences 'being' in an abstract personal way where one is pre-occupied with some kind of internal disturbance. The desire to solve the issue, problem, or 'itch' causes the researcher to think purposefully and search outside the self for information. Once sufficient information is acquired, a plan can be devised to further inform the topic and this becomes the project stage. This leads directly into the encounter stage where the researcher gathers information to inform the inquiry. The researcher then works with this material to make sense of it in terms of the initial questions and the experiences that inform the questions. Through this process, communication becomes possible. There is a rhythm to this cycle as the researcher moves from internal dialogue, to dialogue with others of like mind, to searching for information, and back to internal dialogue and dialogue with like minded people. Finally the cycle moves to communication in a wider context, then back to being. Rowan takes the form of the cycle and applies it to different research methods thereby creating a different pathway. This flexibility allows the co-researchers to plan creatively and respond to the way the research path unfolds.

This shared central focus of understanding about the cyclical process of research seemed to provide for me the basis for a more rigorous approach to researching the practical and experiential aspects of nursing. Rowan's point about research being several small cycles within a larger one allowed for more flexibility within the research, encouraging individual feedback, making sense, and communication as fieldwork progresses. I saw this as being an important way of coping with the various levels of participation, where shared understandings

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could be acknowledged and different realities encouraged. It provided for small cycles of research to be worked through during a group session, for individuals developing a small cycle of research in their own work place, and for contributing to a larger cycle of research. Similarly, cycles of research within the group could be part of a wider research cycle in the organisation, or parts of it.

Conclusion

In exploring the research cycle of Being, Project, Encounter and Making sense, I began to see some connections between Rowan's cycle of research and the way nursing relies heavily on the ability of nurses to really 'be with' another person. To be more effective in their role, nurses need to 'know' what they are noticing so that they can communicate this knowing to others. This is a challenge for nurses, and I include myself, because knowledge of the intuitive kind, gained from responding to needs of others without publishing the hows and the whys, is a part of nursing practice. This research cycle offered an appropriate process to find out 'what is nursing, and how do we help each other develop our nursing practice?' I added it to the ideas already collected, and saw it as process tool to manage the cycles of inquiry.

My thinking, reading and debating with colleagues, both at work and at university, brought me to the point where I was sure that the research I was planning would be qualitative research, and would involve some kind of group work with nursing peers. Having expanded and deepened some of my ideas in order to create a theoretical basis for the field work, I was left with the question, "What actually are the data going to be about?". I needed a method for actually doing the 'live' research that felt authentic and coherent with the way nurses work independently and together. I had always believed that how, and what, people learn influences their personal well-being. Consequently my own interactions at work often had an underlying teaching and learning source, and that influenced my choice of reading about how I would enter the field and do it.

Collaborative Inquiry

I was introduced to Torbert's ideas in my first term at Bath University. His very active way of approaching the subject of research caught my attention and I found his ideas about Collaborative Inquiry and Action Science both interesting and appropriate to the kind of work I was involved in. I now intend to present these ideas and how I saw their usefulness to my research.

Torbert (1981) states that:

> " The model of collaborative inquiry begins from the assumption that research and action, although analytically distinguishable, are inextricably intertwined in practice". (p. 145)

My own reflections at the time were:

> Practice for me has always been complex and unpredictable, and yet always there are strands of familiar actions and understandings that seem to transcend the presenting complexity and confusion. The research journey relies on openness to the unknown, and at the same time alertness to the discordant and the unfamiliar. It is often through this attention to the actions of self and others, that inquiry develops.

Torbert states further:

> "---the capacity of a social system to produce valid data becomes the degree to which confrontation and exploration of possible incongruities is initiated and welcomed." (p.150)

This gave rise to further reflections on my part:

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The need to be consciously aware in any interactional process is one of the key skills in researching a social situation, if the outcome of that process is to be valid. The way in which this conscious awareness is to be learnt and evaluated is not so clear, although it is more likely to develop through acting in the world with others, willing and able to discuss their own perceptions and intentions, than it is through reading and discussing the hows, and whys, of it. Action in the world requires a self-consciousness that is able to monitor, and also provide a 'watching brief' without inhibiting spontaneity and timeliness.

In Torbert's Collaborative Inquiry, action and reflection are the key skills and need to be flexibly used in the context of: reflection in action; reflection for action; and reflection about action. These skills are best used in a context where the researcher and other persons invited to engage in collaborative inquiry develop an "increasing investment and subtlety of focus". This, Torbert claims, unless interrupted, goes through three stages of questioning whether:

1. the initiating actor-researcher and the system engaged will develop a shared model of reality in which a continued collaborative inquiry makes sense;

2. the participants are able to investigate gross incongruities amongst the qualities of their experiences - this requires a strategy for investigating;

3. the participants are able to obtain high quality results in terms of aesthetic appropriateness, political timeliness and analytical validity - this requires that the first two stages of engagement and investigation are effectively transacted.

These characteristics of Collaborative Inquiry seemed useful in the way they bound together the different ways of knowing described by Heron (1981) and Rowan (1981). They also linked with the way research can involve participants in a collaborative process which I have described above. The following statement from Torbert (1981) encapsulated the essential components of people working effectively together as colleagues or peers.

"--what practitioners really require is a kind of knowledge that they can apply to *their own behaviour* in the midst of ongoing events, in order to help them *inquire* more effectively about their common purposes, about how to produce outcomes congruent with such purposes, and about how to respond justly to interruptions." (p.140)

I saw this sense of seeking authenticity as an essential part of being effective as a person. The skills of reflection in action and reflection for action became for me necessary tools to develop for co-researchers and co-subjects.

Torbert (1981) discusses how a living inquiry can be developed that nurtures interpersonal competence and is:

"not a matter of manipulating others successfully in order to achieve one's unexamined ends; it is rather a matter of creating a social climate of inquiry which aids in clarifying both personal and communal purposes and relationships as well as in accomplishing specific tasks". (p.140)

This statement brought together both the need to have rigor in the research design, sensitivity towards the participants and a climate that encourages self-disclosure, supportiveness and confrontation. I will pursue this concept of interpersonal competence in the next chapter where I present the resources I used to develop my understanding of being a co-researcher, co-subject, and group facilitator.

Developing an Appropriate Methodology.

Having covered the theoretical and experiential aspects of research I now needed to develop a structure that would in some way shape the course of the research and foster an appropriate climate. The question still unanswered was - 'How do I initiate and conduct the research field work, in a way that allows me to honour the insights that I have acquired through reading, thinking and debating, and also honour the resources that each member brings to the research process?'

Developing a research group

My research purpose was to set up a co-operative inquiry group with other nurses, to research how peer support and peer appraisal might increase our understanding and competence as a nurse.

I will now describe how the works of Reason (1988) helped to clarify my understanding of this way of managing a research inquiry. He states that:

> "At a minimum for a research strategy to claim the term co-operative inquiry, I would argue that the nature of the involvement of all participants should be openly negotiated, that each should contribute to the creative thinking that is part of the research and that relationships should aim to be authentic and collaborative." (p. 9)

Reason goes on to say that flexibility is implied in the statement and that co-operative inquiry can occur at different points in the cycle if that is the design of the research.

> "--the form of the co-operative inquiry can range from full collaboration through all the stages of inquiry, to genuine dialogue and consultation at the moments of project, encounter, and making sense." (p.9)

From Reason's discussions I have extracted the following key aspects of co-operative inquiry that need to be addressed if this method of inquiry is to be valid (I will discuss validity criteria in more detail in chapter four).

- participatory and holistic knowing- here the focus is on full participation and the ability to enter into the wholeness of the situation where "we seek a knowing-in-action which encompasses as much of our experience as possible" (p 10);

- critical subjectivity - this demands a quality of awareness that shifts from naive inquiry "based on our primitive subjective experience of the world" to a state of awareness where the primary subjective experience is made consciously available as part of the inquiry process. It seeks to bridge the subjective and the objective;

- knowledge in action - this views knowledge as formed in and for action, "more often the knowledge that is really important --is the practical knowledge of new skills and abilities". Thus in co-operative inquiry, education and social action may become fully integrated with the research process.

Validity in this kind of inquiry demands that there is, within the group, a climate that encourages self-knowing, self-reflection and co-operative criticism. Reason presents a clear perspective on the kind of group that is needed to achieve co-operation, self-disclosure, and purposeful activities to meeting the research goals. When a group of people come together to address both group and research issues, this "demands intense commitment and subtle skills of those who would undertake it"(p.19).

It struck me that although it was clear that the initial enthusiasm would come from those who first expressed the 'need to know', in some ways it would also be a journey of discovery, an emerging process that would bring together the skills and knowledge of the participants, with

the possibility of surprise as new learning occurs. My experience told me that this kind of group could not be entirely planned, it would be a purposeful activity that opens each member to experiences at all levels of consciousness, requiring a commitment to both the research purpose and the group itself.

In order to achieve this kind of commitment it was very clear that the research itself needed to have meaning for the potential group members, enabling their energy to flow into the research activity. In thinking my way through this potential problem I decided that I needed to pay attention to certain principles derived from my own experience and the readings. These principles are:

> • setting up the group requires a phase of informing and negotiating with prospective group members to ensure that each member is clear about the purpose of the research and their role as co-researchers and co-subjects;

> • some time needs to be spent with the group members agreeing the purpose(s) and ways of working together;

> • this kind of research is a learning process therefore I need to be prepared to teach some of the skills about group work and research, and learn from others;

> • the vitality of the group relies on the energy of the participants to contribute their ideas and experiences - a climate of openness facilitates this;

> • status and power can alter the way interactions occur and should be openly discussed and negotiated before group members commit themselves to the project;

> • whether a group is heterogeneous or homogeneous will have an effect on the dynamics;

> • there needs to be several cycles of reflection and action planned early on in the life of the group to practice the skills and share experience;

> • leadership in this kind of group is both facilitative and educative, the degree of each is dependent on the experience of the group members.

This clear identification of the principles enabled me to develop a design for the field work that paid attention to authenticity, the unfolding patterns and themes, and my own skills and experience in group work. Before I complete this chapter it is important that I summarise the purposes and methods that I thought would both liberate and constrain the field work. In the interest of clarity I will present it as I understood it at that time i.e.in the present tense..

Purposes and Methods

The purpose is to set up a co-operative inquiry group (Reason 1988) of senior nurses, interested in using an inquiry approach to understanding and enhancing their own practice and the practice of others. My role in this activity is two fold:

> a. to facilitate the inquiry process so that the cycles of action and reflection produce the data that inform the co-researchers, about nursing practice and working as a peer group.

> b. to provide an educational perspective within the group context so that the stages of group development compliment the research process.

The effective use of a co-operative inquiry approach is aimed at developing a healthy working group where group members can test out their understanding and experiences of practising nursing. It is intended that through multiple research cycles using the tools of action and reflection new constructs will emerge to inform nursing practice.

The methodology is based on a dialectic model (Rowan, 1981) in which research cycles are developed through the stages of being, project, encounter and communication. The relationship between ways of knowing- propositional, experiential and practical (Heron, 1981) are the basis for generating hypotheses, and testing these out experientially. Thus a shared sense of purpose is developed from which propositions will emerge as the group members gradually makes sense of their knowledge and experiences. The tools of action and reflection (Torbert, 1981) highlight the need to remain consciously aware of personal process in the midst of action. This is the skill that we, as co-researchers, will need to research effectively in the work situation and in the group setting.

Conclusions

Throughout this discussion of ideas and concepts, I have summarised the particular points about qualitative research that I intended to take with me into the field work. These ideas provided the touchstone for developing validity measures during the research process. I also took with me Heron's (1988) criteria for validity, taking seriously his statement that:

> "The coherence of the conclusions with the inquirers' experience is consummated through coherence in action."

> " New-found practical skills are applied concertedly in their research world."

I do not intend to explain these ideas about validity here because, as the fieldwork progressed, so I became more aware of the ways in which the work we did together might find validity. In presenting the first cycle of research in later chapters, I will describe how validity is questioned and pursued at the 'sense making/communication' stage.

This concludes the telling of my search, for a clarity of purpose and a methodology to achieve it. I am now at the point where I can appropriately present the research that developed within, and as a consequence of, the field work. However, before I do this I will provide a brief description of the fieldwork preparation. It is important to do this at this point because the process of engaging my nursing peers in the research process and the feedback I received influenced both the membership of the group the, and the kind of group I chose to develop. The process of participating in and managing the fieldwork was difficult, not only because we were all bringing our separate experiences to the group sessions, but also because I was expanding my experience and understanding of myself and the research process. This made it very difficult for me to 'stay with' members of the group and value their particular discoveries, difficulties and successes. The next chapter provides an outline of the research preparation and a glimpse of nursing through the voices of experienced nurses.