# CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH PURPOSES AND APPROACH; METHODOLOGY AND VALIDITY

In this chapter I will describe the nature of my work, and my purpose and focus in researching it in action. I will then explain my understanding of knowledge, moving on to a discussion of educational and research approaches relevant to my work as a facilitator/trainer, and paralleled in it. Having outlined the nature of my research and placed it within the Action Research family, I will describe the set of methods which I have used to carry it out, discussing their limitations and possibilities. In the last section I will explore the question of validity, closing with some more general concerns and hopes.

### THE NATURE OF MY WORK AND MY RESEARCH PURPOSE

In my work as a facilitator of cross-cultural training workshops in nonviolent approaches to conflict, my purpose is to help participants to develop their capacity for constructive action. The workshops (whose content and nature will be more fully indicated in Chapter Four) have been held in a wide variety of places and have brought together participants from many areas of conflict. Often, the group was in itself multi-cultural, even where participants came from one geographical region; usually the facilitators were from a cultural background (or backgrounds) different from those of some or all participants. The particular focus of my research is respect. Although I thought a great deal, when I began my research, about the concept of respect as I understood it (as outlined in the previous chapter), it has been essential to the purpose of my inquiry that I should be open to the meanings with which others invest the word, and to observe the ways in which its meanings and implications for me seem to be echoed and contradicted in other cultures. The breadth of my research focus, using a word and concept of such indefinable - endlessly definable - meaning, applying it to both the process and content of my work, has seemed, at times, questionable, and has indeed been questioned. Nonetheless, for me the intricacies of the word's meaning and application are a matter of fascination and challenge: not to be denied. The aims and values of my work, and their implications, the relationships and events to which they respond, are not simple. The complexities and contradictions cannot be reduced: only recognised and managed; at times enjoyed, often struggled with.



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At times I have felt dissatisfied with the word: felt it inadequate for my meaning. It can sound cold, detached, almost legalistic, lacking the warmth and outreaching energy of 'goodwill' or 'care' (though that depends on its use and context). Its strength lies in its provision of a kind of bottom line: a minimum basis for constructive human interaction. Its endless openness to interpretation in application has presented me with great difficulty; but it is also a strength because it will not allow me to become fixed in my opinions or to delude myself that I have arrived at 'the truth'. I shall discuss this further in my concluding chapters.

As I noted in the previous chapter, my research has four threads: the meaning and usefulness across cultures of the concept of respect; the respectfulness (honesty and utility) of my theory; the respectfulness of my facilitation, and the inquiry process itself. So my research questions have been about the style, quality and usefulness of my work as a facilitator, and the universality of the values on which it is based; whether it is useful to work across cultures, and if so on what common understandings; how the relationship between trainer and participants can be respectful at all, when the trainer is of a different culture from participants - particularly when the trainer's culture is, in world terms, the dominant one. Trainer style (in my case quite largely elicitive) is clearly a key consideration here. My writing will contain reflections on the effects, in my training workshops, of my own personality and of my national and racial identity and gender - both on my own behaviour and feelings in the trainer role, on the way I understand that role, and on the ways others may perceive me.

I have aimed to make respect the core characteristic of my way of being as a facilitator, expressing itself both in the way in which I conduct myself in relation to participants and co-facilitators, and in the way I structure workshops and choose processes. (This seems, as I reflect now, an extremely ambitious, if not overweening, project; and also altogether appropriate and necessary.) At the same time I have tried to observe and record participants' responses to the concept of respect (and related questions), and their own understanding of it.

I have been engaged in a constant process of developing and adapting my theory about conflict transformation, in the light of its apparent relevance to - and conformity with - participants' understandings and experiences. I wish my theory to be rooted in experience and to be



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formulated for practical application. At the same time I see it as provisional and changing, rather than as finished, and having the status of 'heuristic device' rather than of 'truth'. This is in line with my general theory of knowledge, as subjective and provisional, as I will go on to explain.

## MY POINT OF VIEW AS RESEARCHER: ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY.

In this section I shall explain my understanding of knowledge and its sources, and of what there is to be known. What I write will be a kind of 'credo' - first person: some of the things I believe. These things are not intended to be objective in any way or to represent 'Truth'. They are formed by my upbringing and personality; by reading, conversation, exposure (conscious and unconscious) to ideas mediated in many ways, and by my own thinking and shaping. A few written sources will be cited as such.

While I embrace post-modern scepticism about 'objective' knowledge and 'reality', and while I acknowledge the subjectivity of all human knowing, I would not wish to deny that there is being to be known - and indeed not known - through human existence, experience and reflection. I support Reason and Heron's thesis that 'the mind makes its world by meeting the given' (Reason and Heron October 1996: 5). While the meanings that we make, both individually and socially, are a response to the wider being of life as we participate in it, at the same time the meanings we construct shape our experience and understanding of that participation. We are not fixed and separate selves, acting and accumulating knowledge, as a discrete commodity, in a vacuum. We exist, think and act in relationship: relationship both to other human beings and to beings, and being, generally. This being-in-relationship has been described as 'intersubjectivity' (Crossley, 1996: 14): self-definition and actualisation through recognition of and interaction with the other. It embraces Buber's notion of the 'I-Thou' relationship, which in Crossley's words 'depends upon participation in a common intersubjective space, a between'. The consciousness or knowledge generated by this engagement with the other is described by Reason and Heron (1996) as subjective-objective or participatory - created by the interaction between the subject and the wider 'given'.



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I believe in the possibility, at least, of another more basic or fundamental form of knowing: knowing that is in itself 'given': knowing-by-being. (See Shotter, 1993.) Here I prefer the word 'understanding' to 'knowledge', since the former suggests embodiment: a personal or social standpoint, and, at the same time, contact with the ground, the earth which supports us and of which we are part: the wider being which we must know in our bones because it is in our bones. Skolimowski (1992) would describe this as 'participatory knowing'. As Charlene Spretnak puts it, we are 'self-reflexive manifestations of the universe' and capable of 'differentiation, subjectivity and communion' (Spretnak, 1993: 32). I include within this putative knowing-by-being the moral knowledge (con-science or 'knowing with') which is able to respond to what Reason and Heron describe as the 'axiological question' of 'what is intrinsically valuable in human life'. It seems likely that, if there is such a thing as instinct (as it would appear from other forms of animal life that there is), we are born with instinctive impulses which could be described as moral, since morality (as I understand it) is about what makes relationships work constructively for the common good.

This is not, however, to deny that moral awareness is shaped by culture and context, nor that we are faced by endless moral dilemmas within the codes we construct. Our moral sense is simply that: ours - both singular and plural, personal and collective. From a Western perspective the individual is the custodian of her/ his own conscience; and as a Westerner I hold that position strongly. I recognise that to someone from a collectivist rather than an individualist culture, the Western emphasis on individual conscience, responsibility and rights may seem a distortion; but I feel that, while there may inevitably be differences of emphasis, the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism is in some ways a false one. The conscience of the individual is developed socially, within a cultural (and possibly sub- or counter-cultural) context. Whatever points of view we hold, we are likely to have a sense of community with like-minded others, and to define ourselves also in relation to those from whom we differ.

Like the rest of our knowing, our moral knowing - our conscience, values and motivation - exists as a function of, and in relation to, the wider 'given'; but it is at the same time and by the same token unable to comprehend or encompass (as against understand) the given. Our moral knowledge, like the rest, must remain subjective - partial - and provisional. Looking at the damage and deprivation we, as a species, inflict on each other and our environment, it is easy to



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question the idea of moral knowing, innate or otherwise; but I nonetheless believe it is present in us and that to deny its being or ignore its promptings is to deny hope and appreciation, and any sense or possibility of fulfilment.

Paulo Freire, writing about education as a dialogical process, rather than a means of filling people's heads with received truths, was unequivocal about the need for 'the objective transformation of reality'. While he did not wish, he insisted, 'to dismiss the role of subjectivity in the struggle to change structures', he did want to 'combat subjectivist immobility'. In his words, he was propounding

> 'neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism ....., but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship' (Freire, 1972: 27).

My daughter, Becky Francis, in her PhD thesis, explores the apparent contradiction of wishing to marry a clear feminist stance and aims with post-modern research perspectives and aims. She argues that while theoretically embracing constructionism we may nonetheless experience ourselves as having 'agency, moral obligation, and preferences for different kinds of discourse' (Francis 1996: 30); that we need narratives in which to situate our lives, and that there is a distinction to be made between authoritarian and libertarian truth discourses. I certainly would want to make such distinctions and to choose and develop my own narrative accordingly.

N.J.Rengger (1995: 182), rejecting the 'arid rationalizations of many unreflective moderns' and 'the triumphalist and .... false 'relativism' of some (perhaps equally unreflective) postmoderns', insists that recognising the 'fragmentary, often (at least) aporetic character of human ethical choices and the lack of universal purchase of instrumental rationality ' does not mean

> 'that we cannot make judgements about the right and the good. We can and we must. Of course, such judgements are never final. Given this, we have to have political arrangements for acknowledging and dealing with errors and mistakes'.

I imagine we have to have academic and personal arrangements for such purposes, too; but to hold moral purposes humbly, as this suggests, seems vital for me in my work as a facilitator and as a researcher. The very nature of my work presupposes espoused values and moral choices; but it also requires openness to other viewpoints and a desire to learn from them.



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Although I consider all that I think and do, including my purposes, to be open to challenge, it is hard to imagine that any effort or work could be undertaken without purpose, or that purposes could be value-free, or indeed free of a moral - or counter-moral - frame. My personal inquiry takes place within a moral frame and a value-based life-purpose: a desire to be part of a movement for change - personal, cultural and structural; change to reduce human cruelty and suffering and increase the possibilities of human fulfilment. My purpose in facilitating educational processes, a purpose held both passionately and tentatively, is to contribute to the search for just, constructive relationships. My research purpose is to increase my understanding of that work, and myself in it, so that I am able to do it more choicefully, with greater confidence, and as helpfully as I can. 'Action', wrote Freire, 'will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection' (Freire 1972: 41). 'Critical reflection' is what I have tried to engage in myself, at the same time as creating processes for it in my work with others.

The value of respect at the centre of my research is based on the notion of individual-in-community-in-context (or communities of individuals in context); on the exercise of moral responsibility in human relationships. It involves the recognition and honouring of the being of others, both as - and for - being distinct, separate and individual, and as - and for - being part of the rest of being, their place in the scheme of things, participation in the web of interdependence. By this understanding I hope to avoid, as far as possible, the choice between an individualist and a collectivist approach to values and morality.

## ACTION RESEARCH AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MY WORK AS A FACILITATOR

### General correspondence between the two

In this section I want to discuss different forms of action research and the ways they relate to my work and my research. I think I was drawn to action research not only because it made sense at the rational level - being directly useful - but because of the familiarity of its assumptions, purposes and patterns. The methodology I evolved for my research is based on repeated cycles of



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theorising, planning, action and reflection. The idea of such learning cycles was familiar to me from my background and training in the nonviolence movement, and is fundamental to the kind of training workshops which I facilitate. The correspondence between action research methodology and the nature of my professional practice pleases me greatly. It is also potentially confusing, in terms of levels of reflection. I have tried to keep these distinct in my writing, but it has not always been easy.

The assumption behind my work is the assumption behind action research: that, in the words of Reason and Heron (1996: 6) 'practical knowing is an end in itself; and intellectual knowing is of instrumental value in supporting practical excellence'. Whereas action researchers have had to argue for the recognition and harnessing of the subjectivity of any inquiry process, the importance of the role and viewpoint of every actor is taken for granted in the participatory processes of ANV and CR training. The purpose of my workshops is to provide a context to act on these assumptions: to give participants an opportunity to develop certain skills together, through practice, and to develop a greater capacity to act effectively, through reflection on experience and theorising about it.
I wish now to discuss more particularly the relationship between the kind of training workshop I facilitate and the two forms of research with which they have most in common.

**Participatory Action Research**

The form of action research most closely related to my work (as against my research) is Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is based on Freirian ideas about the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' and holds the purpose of revolutionising approaches to knowledge - its ownership and use - and redistributing its power. In the words of Comstock and Fox (1993: 109), referring to the work of Orlando Fals-Borda,

> 'Power includes the ability to define what is factual and true, and the more powerful are able to a impose a conception of the world that supports their power..... . Participatory research is a method of destroying the ideological bases of current structures of power by giving a voice to those who dwell in what Freire ... calls the 'culture of silence'.



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Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) explain PAR as a process for empowerment through conscientisation (Freire's term): the bringing of implicit knowledge into consciousness and making it explicit. It is a process which starts from where people are, 'their experiences, knowledge, perceptions and rhythm of work and thought' and 'stimulating the people to undertake self-analysis of their life situations' (p. 136). This is how I would want to describe my workshops.

PAR, then, embodies a radical approach to education and to power, described by Fals-Borda and Rahman as being Gandhian, Marxist and humanist in inspiration: a very similar approach to that of nonviolence as mediated to me through the movement of which I was part, incorporating as it did the thinking of Gandhi, Freire and 'liberating education' (along with liberation theology), and the purpose of changing the structures of power. Often the participants in workshops I facilitate regard themselves as members of oppressed groups: oppressed by powerful neighbours, by the continuing effects and structures of colonialism, or by war itself. They see the workshops as a means of empowerment for action to change their situation.

The 'models for empowerment' (see next chapter on workshop content), which I use very often, were designed by Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr (1990) specifically as tools for conscientisation, group building and preparation for co-operative action. They provide the framework for a joint process of awakening and formulating understanding. They help participants to become aware of the nature and dynamics of the relationships under scrutiny, and of the possibilities for transforming them. In Freire's words, 'Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information'. These acts of cognition are brought about through a process of 'critical and liberating dialogue' and 'praxis'. Therefore education has to begin with

> 'the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students.'

(Freire 1972: 46). In the workshops I facilitate, I aim to use a largely elicitive approach in training, drawing out rather than putting in knowledge. I see myself as a facilitator of the discovery, development, organisation and application of knowledge and skills, and I learn from and with workshop participants, as they learn from and with me. Through their engagement in



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the workshop process, and through their evaluation and feedback, they have provided the material for my research.

I wrote at the outset of my research:

> **'I want to make respect the core characteristic of my way of being as a facilitator, expressing itself both in the way in which I conduct myself in relation to participants and to my co-facilitator(s), and in the way I structure my workshops, using a largely elicitive approach, offering a framework for the exploration of the group's own experience and wisdom, though also respecting their desire to learn from what I have to offer and respecting my own depth of reflection and range of experience.'**

In that last clause I recognised that the role of trainer/ facilitator and the role of participant were not the same, just as in PAR, in Fals-Borda and Rahman's terminology (1991), the role of the ‘animator', 'stimulator' or 'facilitator', is not the same as the role of the oppressed with whom they work; just as the educator's role, as described by Freire, is not in practice the same as the role of those (s)he engages in critical dialogue. Freire describes the educator's task as that of problem-poser and dialogical partner, and although he does not make this explicit, this presupposes some authority to fulfil this role being given to the educator by the co-educated.

Comstock and Fox (1993), writing about 'Participatory Research as Political Theory', discuss the different positions and arguments within PAR on the relationship between the popular knowledge generated through PAR and the viewpoint of the outside researcher, acting as animator of the popular research process. On the one hand, the need is recognised to challenge and critique the (possibly 'false') consciousness of the participants; on the other hand, high value is placed on their self-analysis and self-critique. This dilemma is the same as the one I raised in my previous chapter, in my discussion of some of the issues around cross-cultural training and culture critique.

There is tension, then, between the student-teacher and teacher-student concept on the one hand, and the distinction nonetheless made between the role of the facilitator of the educational process and its other participants. It is a tension which I experience in my work and the way I think about it. I am helped and at the same time provoked into further unease by Peter Reason and John



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Heron's thinking about authority, in their discussion of 'A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm' (1996). Using the term 'hierarchy' to describe the exercise of authority (referring to the work of Bill Torbert), they propose that educational processes calculated to promote 'human flourishing' (the purpose which provides research with axiological validity), will enable 'a balance between people of hierarchy, co-operation and autonomy'. The hierarchical exercise of authority 'is authentic when it seeks the developmental emergence of autonomy and co-operation' (Reason and Heron, 1996: 5).

William Torbert (1991), exploring the notion of balance in the exercise of leadership and the process of inquiry, discusses the role of what he calls 'unilateral power' in 'transforming leadership'. Again, the goal of the leader's power is to contribute to the autonomy of those in relation to whom leadership is exercised. While the function described by Reason and Heron and by Torbert - the function of contributing to the developmental emergence of autonomy and co-operation - is a function I endeavour to fulfil, I remain uneasy. If I am invested with that function by others, if it is recognised and wanted, then it can be said that I have been given authority to exercise it. (See Boulding 1978). That seems to me, however, to constitute 'authority to', rather than 'authority over', and so not to be hierarchical. And while I often accept a leadership function, I would not accept the kind of authority with a group which says, 'What I say goes, whether you like it or not'.

I feel more comfortable with the thinking and terminology of 'Women's Ways of Knowing'. In the chapter on 'Constructed Knowledge', the authors describe the function of the 'connected teacher'(Belenky et al, 1986: 227):

> 'A connected teacher is not just another student; the role carries special responsibilities. It does not entail power over the students; however, it does carry authority, an authority based not on subordination but on co-operation.'

In this model of teacher authority, it is used more to support than to challenge, and a teacher's task is 'to discern the truth inside the students' (p. 223). Challenge is seen as synonymous with doubt, and it is claimed that women on the whole find being doubted undermining, not energising.



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More often than not, I work with gender-mixed groups. I am sure that different participants have different expectations and preferences in terms of the leadership exercised within the workshop process. I have not focused in my research on whether or how I have behaved differently towards participants according to their gender; but the manner of my exercise of leadership is constantly under question, including the tension involved in holding the balance between equality and difference; between openness to what emerges and the role of challenge.

'Animators' of PAR apparently feel entitled to challenge the 'false consciousness' of the oppressed, when it is detected. They also see themselves as taking sides with the oppressed. PAR is undertaken with clearly defined political purposes and viewpoint, which overlay the research process with a strong framework and, perhaps inevitably therefore, boundaries for thinking. In this it is very reminiscent of nonviolence training. (As I suggested in the last chapter, CR is not so ideologically - or stylistically - prescriptive, but is probably just as definite about what constitutes constructive or destructive behaviour.) This element of closedness has a bearing on the question of facilitation and challenge. If there are already answers, the facilitator's questions are not really open ones, and 'wrong answers' will need to be somehow marked as such.

While I want to be genuinely open to the experiences and views of others, I also wish to feel free express, as a facilitator, the values and understandings which are important to me. Equally, in my research process, I have tried to be genuinely open to what might emerge, while at the same time acknowledging and holding to (albeit, in the end, provisionally) these same values and understandings. I have at the same time benefited and learned from the skill of my own supervisor, who has demonstrated to me the possibility of being thoroughly supportive while at the same time drawing me to greater clarity and self-challenge.

My workshops, then, share the emancipatory purposes behind PAR, and I bring to them much of the passion and conviction which characterise PAR's discourse; discourse which coincides quite closely with that of ANV. However, in my work this strong ideological frame is softened by a more pragmatic openness, which corresponds to some extent to the CR approach. My facilitation style is, perhaps, on that account, less directive than, I feel, that of PAR animators must be. I hope that my research attitude, as well as my work, is characterised by value-grounded openness.



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Peter Reason and John Heron, cited above, have written extensively about Co-operative Inquiry, which is the other approach bearing some correspondence to my work. I will go on to discuss that correspondence and its limits.

**Co-operative inquiry**

According to Peter Reason (1994), in his presentation of 'Three Approaches to Participatory Inquiry', Co-operative Inquiry is rooted in humanistic psychology, and the concept was first formulated by John Heron (1971), and developed over the years that followed by both Heron and Reason. Heron's reasoning was that those who were the subject of research, being indeed self-determining human subjects, should not be objectified but regarded as co-researchers, 'co-subjects', and actively included in the design and execution of the research process. Not all those involved in the 'inquiry group' thus formed would have the same role, however. For instance, the initiators of the research may act as facilitators. Through discussion in the group, the goals and procedures of the research are agreed, and are then applied in the everyday work of the participants, who meet periodically to compare their experiences and findings. The outcomes of this co-operative research process, in terms of visible products, may be several, including such things as a report owned by the group as a whole, and a dissertation or thesis written by the initiator.

The role of the co-operative inquiry facilitator(s) can be compared to my role as workshop facilitator, except that although the participants and I have an agreed agenda and questions, I do not usually participate in all aspects of the process I facilitate. My primary function is to facilitate the learning done by others. My workshops consist of cycles of learning in which an idea or question (for instance about the dynamics of hostility) is presented, then tested or elucidated in dialogue. The dialogue may include the facilitator at some point, but may also be held largely between participants, in relation to their already existing experience. It may also be experimented with in some way: through experiential exercises, or through theoretical application to participants' current reality outside the workshop. The cycle is completed by reflection on what



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has emerged from this exploration process, and the formulation of tentative answers to the original question, or the confirmation, modification or elaboration of the original idea.

The inquiry process contained in my workshops does not constitute 'research' in the formal sense. A great deal is condensed into a very short time, and the experience-based and experimental processes take place on site and within the group, rather than being carried out largely elsewhere by individual group members in their daily work. Participants will, however, draw very much on experience in their own lives and contexts. The purpose of the workshops, like the purpose of Co-operative Inquiry, is to generate experience-based, practical knowledge that will be of direct relevance to those involved in the process, helping participants to equip themselves with new frameworks for understanding, and new ideas and skills for use in action.

Although these workshops have constituted the action element in my research cycles, my primary purpose in them has been to fulfil my role as (co-) facilitator in the co-operative endeavour of inquiry into conflict and its handling, and the practice of related skills. My secondary but overarching purpose of ongoing research has been one I held alone. I alone have been responsible for it, and at the same time I have been dependent on the participants' engagement with me in the workshop process in order to have anything to learn from and reflect on. And I have needed the 'triangulation' provided by the feedback of participants on the workshop process. I have also needed feedback from colleagues (who knew about my research) on more specifically focused research questions (for instance, about some aspect of my behaviour or theorising), and on my workshop accounts and interpretations.

The knowledge-generating process of workshops has not, in itself, constituted my research. It has, however, been a major part of its process and provided the material for my ongoing reflection and writing. I am both reflecting and learning with participants within the workshop process, and reflecting on and learning from these same events on my own account, at another level and with wider references. One challenge for me has been to achieve a level of awareness and recall which is outside the workshop process, reflecting on it, at the same time as being thoroughly engaged in what is happening in the moment.



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I hope that, in addition to developing new ideas and skills, at least some workshop participants go home with a new level of awareness - particularly self-awareness - for their own day to day life and practice, in order that they may be able to act more choicefully, and therefore powerfully, in the implementation of their skills and ideas. Raising my own level of awareness has been, perhaps, the most important, overarching purpose of my inquiry. For this and other reasons which I will explain, my research approach - as against the nature and purpose of my workshops - coincides most closely with that of Action Inquiry.

**Action Science and Action Inquiry**

The personal process of reflection in action - of working to increase my own awareness in practice, and my understanding of that practice and of the assumptions which underpin it - can best be described as Action Inquiry. This research approach was developed by William Torbert and others from the concept of Action Science, elaborated initially by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1974). Its rationale is summarised thus by Argyris (1985: 1):

> 'We are accustomed to distinguishing between theory and practice, between thought and action, between science and common sense. Action Science proposes to bridge these conceptual divides.'

Action Science proposes the use of 'critical theory' to 'engage human agents in public self-reflection in order to transform their world' (Argyris, 1985: 2). This will mean openness to what emerges, rather than an attempt to control outcomes, and a recognition of the subjective involvement and personal responsibility and choices of the researcher. Since it is the researcher who poses as well as solves problems, Argyris and Schon (1974: ix) argue for the need to 'become aware of both espoused theories and tacit theories that govern behaviour'. Schon enlarges on the notion of practitioner awareness (in surprisingly unaware sexist language) in 'The Reflective Practitioner' (Schon 1983). He suggests that the examination and testing of frames and theories for and in action is one of the purposes of action based research. My exploration of the meaning and usefulness of the concept of respect, as a fundamental value for constructive approaches to conflict, has been a kind of fundamental frame-testing exercise, carried forward through repeated cycles of action and reflection. The ideas and diagrams which I have used and



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developed, to help those involved in conflict understand its structures and characteristics, and their possibilities for action, have been secondary, theoretical framings. They too have been tested and modified in action, through successive research cycles (which will be described more fully in the next section).

Action Inquiry, like Action Science, integrates research and practice. 'In action inquiry the practitioner integrates study and action, taking the role of an 'observing participant.' (Torbert, 1991: 228). Reflexivity is one of its preconditions, since it is a process in which 'The researcher's activities are included within the field of observation and measurement along with the study of other subjects'. (Torbert 1981: 147). Reason and Heron describe the quality of awareness needed as 'critical subjectivity', which 'involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing' (Reason and Heron 1996: 3 and 4). I hope to demonstrate that I have subjected my experiences and responses to what I have experienced in the course of my research to this kind of critical examination.

Schon (1983), discussing the way in which we can combine these different forms of attention, argues that our primary knowing is tacit or intuitive, knowing-in-action, and this can be brought into, and elaborated through, successive layers of consciousness. Reflecting-in-action, thinking on one's feet, which brings intuitive knowledge into consciousness, can also, in turn, be reflected upon, to produce theories for action. So also, the entire process of learning through action may become a matter for study. In a similar vein, Bill Torbert ( in Reason and Rowan 1981: 148) is clear that an 'attention capable of interpenetrating, vivifying, and of apprehending simultaneously its own ongoing dynamics and the ongoing theorizing, sensing, and external event-ualizing' is the 'primary medium' of 'human inquiry'. I hope to give evidence of a quality of attention which embraces these different levels of reflection. To develop the capacity to work with such awareness was one of the main purposes of my research.

In Torbert's thinking, the researcher's attention must operate not only at different levels, but in four distinct 'territories of experience': consciousness (or vision); strategy (or thought); action (or embodiment) and the outside world. (Torbert, 1991: 227, 228.) In other words, the researcher has to learn to bring into awareness all these things: what is directly experienced, the thought processes which that experience engenders, the actions which result from that thinking, and the



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external circumstances within which these internal processes take place. Action research is based in the experience of embodying thought in action in the outside world; but the key to valid discovery through that action is the inquirer's capacity to hold together, in the midst of action, an awareness of her/ his own inner world of needs, values, past experience and the way that existing world will be influencing current perceptions, and the purposes she/ he holds. The interpreting and further thinking done by the researcher in relation to her/ his action and its apparent effects, will also be influenced by this inner world, and at the same time will change it.

These four worlds of experience that Torbert describes as distinct territories are in practice experienced together. What is important for the researcher is to include them all, and their relationship, in awareness, relating thought to action - acting reflectively; relating her own inner experience to what appears to be going on outside; relating her thoughts to the inner ground from which they spring; watching how the inner world of understanding and purpose affects her actions. According to Torbert (1991: 232) the 'action inquiry paradigm'

> 'functions to widen awareness rather than to restrict it, and invites testing of any implicit assumptions and incongruities that may be embedded within it or within practice purporting to be based on it.'

Noticing one's own assumptions is a hard task, but one which sheds a great deal of light on one's own behaviour - its nature, motivations and effects - and on the corresponding assumptions and behaviour of others. Observing incongruities between what appears to be happening in different territories of experience - and between different episodes of it - can not only alert the researcher to unfounded or misplaced assumptions, but create new openings and bring fresh insights. In order to be open to the recognition and acceptance of incongruities, the researcher must be not only alert, but open. This calls for awareness of her/ his internal preconceptions and defences, and a willingness to be challenged and to change. At the same time, holding to any purpose presupposes a degree of steadfastness, or a sense of direction. Keeping alive an embracing awareness, keeping boundaries open, at the same time as maintaining an effective focus, is far from easy. It requires not only vigilance but, according to Torbert, balance: balance between 'inquiry and effectiveness, awareness and action, timeless principle and timely practice, dynamic



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change and stability' (Torbert, 1991: 232). This question of balance is one to which I will return in my conclusions.

Whereas Torbert describes four territories of experience for inquiry, Heron (1992) describes four forms of knowing. The object of the inquiry process is to bring our primary, subjective, experiential knowing into awareness, and to relate it to the other three forms of knowing: that is, presentational, propositional and practical. Behind these forms of knowledge, according to Heron, lie four human worlds: the world of emotion; the world of imagery; the world of discrimination and the world of action. Through the exercise of presentational knowing, what is experienced is given form which communicates that knowledge (whether in words or art of another kind); through propositional knowing, experiential and presentational knowing are translated into concepts. Practical knowing, the ability to do things, enables all the other forms of knowledge to be expressed in action. In bringing the world of experience and emotions into the world of imagery and presentation, intuition is needed; in the movement from presentation into theory reflection is needed; for the transfer of theory into practice, 'intention' is needed. The interaction of these worlds, like the interaction between Torbert's territories, is constant, and portrayed by Heron as cyclical.

I note with interest that Heron's diagram (1992: 158) both clarifies his thinking for me and provokes my own arguments - which is the effect I want my own diagramatic presentations to have on others. While it is useful to be aware of these separate worlds of being in which we live, and the different forms of knowing open to us, my experience of presentational and propositional knowledge is that they constantly inform each other, in perpetual interaction, rather than in simple cyclical sequence; and for me presentational and practical knowledge overlap each other substantially. I want the presentational forms and propositional content of this thesis to give evidence of, and do justice to the practical knowing which is my primary goal, and was the intended outcome of my inquiry as a practitioner, and to the thinking and theorising which have informed it. At the same time, the task of presenting my knowledge has contributed to it. It has involved in an intense and fruitful way a further phase of thinking about what I have experienced, through which new understandings have emerged. Since I work as a trainer, practical knowledge for me is very much about presentation, and therefore propositional knowledge about how to present ideas is one of the research outcomes I have been looking for.



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The principles of Action Inquiry outlined above are closely related to the question of validity, which I shall discuss later. Validity is an outcome of good research practice, of which one aspect is dialogue with colleagues. I shall discuss next my own research situation in this regard, and the way I dealt with it.

**Solo inquiry**

Torbert's idea of Action Inquiry is that it will be conducted in a 'community of inquiry', a 'group of people ....committed to discovering propositions about the world, life, their particular organization(s), and themselves that they will test in their own actions with others.' (Torbert, 1991: 232). I do not have regular colleagues, and when I embarked upon my research I was very new to my work. It never occurred to me as a possibility that I could invite occasional colleagues to form a group with me and enter into a co-operative, research process. I felt like a beginner among relative experts, and something of an outsider coming in. It was partly to overcome this sense of inexperience and lack of expertise relative to others in my field that I decided to work for an Action Research degree. I wanted to 'catch up' - so I had to do it on my own. I would not have had the confidence to invite others in my field to join me. If I were starting again now, things would feel different; but in so far as that is true it is because I have been on what has at times felt like a lonely journey.

This aloneness has been offset by many things: primarily by the support, challenge and stimulus which have come from time spent with my CARPP supervisor and colleagues. Our regular research group meetings have provided me with a base to report back to. Through describing episodes of my work to others, and through their questions and observations, I have been helped to clarify my thinking and check my reactions and interpretations, and given new ideas to consider. Through listening to their accounts of their working and thinking I have found new perspectives on my own. I have also had the company of working colleagues, who have been co-actors and thinkers during workshops, and have given me feedback afterwards, both on my performance of my role and on my accounts and interpretations. I have learned, as I said earlier, through interaction with workshop participants, who have provided me with primary material for



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reflection and given me feedback, both personally and via the workshop evaluation process, on the content and facilitation of my workshops. I have been further challenged, stimulated and helped in my thinking by endless conversations with particular colleague-friends.

Judi Marshall's description (1981) of her own research process encourages me to think that to be the sole carrier and author of a piece of research has some benefits, as well as drawbacks. She articulates a feeling and viewpoint which I recognise: that to interpret data from one's own, personal perspective, without 'arguing the toss' with other people, has its own value, and that to look at the data from different perspectives

> 'might be trying to intellectualize it and bring it down ....... And while it is important for me and for others to recognize my bias, it really is what I can give as a researcher, it is my contribution' (Marshall, 1981: 399).

Clark Moustakas, writing on 'Heuristic Research' (1981: 211), quotes Polanyi:

> 'Into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is known, and .... this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his [alas, sic] knowledge.'

The kind of personal knowledge about which Judi Marshall is writing, and which I am trying to develop, is already the outcome of intersubjective processes. In the end, however, the interpretation, presentation and conclusions are those of one person: personal. Writing on 'Research as Personal Process', Peter Reason and Judi Marshall (1987: 112) assert that 'All good research is *for me, for us, for them*.' It is firstly for the researcher, relevant to her/ his world and action. At the same time it will be relevant to those who live and work in the same field of action. I will also produce some insights which are of more general use and application in a wider academic community. I wanted to become a more aware and effective practitioner. That was my primary purpose in undertaking my research. But I intended also that the level of my attentiveness, as well as emerging theories of action, would have both an immediate and a longer term impact on the way I worked as a trainer, and therefore on the participants of my workshops. My research has been for the 'users' of my practice. I hope it may also be of interest



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to fellow trainers, doing similar work in a cross-cultural setting. Lastly, I hope in this thesis to offer some ideas about training, intervention more generally, and the nature of conflict, which will be useful not only to practitioner colleagues but in the wider world of thinking about human conflict and responsibility.

## MY METHODS FOR ENGAGING IN ACTION INQUIRY

I have been pursuing this research, since the Spring of 1994, through cycles of theorising, planning, action and reflection. Since the pattern of my work is unpredictable, and its nature varied, I needed a research pattern which was as simple and flexible as possible, and which would nonetheless give me a clear frame to hold onto, particularly since my respect-related questions were so complex and wide-ranging in themselves. I therefore decided to use each relevant workshop that I facilitated (I run other workshops which are not cross-cultural or specifically about nonviolent approaches to conflict) as a cycle of enquiry which I entered with a question or experimental task in mind, which I would carry with me through the workshop, recording what happened as I went, and reflecting on it afterwards and writing down my findings. The new ideas and perspectives which emerged would be further tested in subsequent workshops, incorporated into further cycles of inquiry.

Sometimes I went into a workshop with particular questions in mind, some specific aspect of my being-at-work to observe, some model or theory to test. At other times I stayed with my overarching questions about the meanings and applications of the concept of respect in the workshop. This included the ways in which I embodied (or did not embody) respect in my way of working. It also included respect as embodied (or not) in the honesty of the theoretical content of my training input: its correspondence to real life, its roundedness, its capacity to help enable and contribute to lasting change.

I kept a journal from the outset, chronicling workshops in detail, describing my own feelings and responses, and sometimes including thoughts and observations of a more general kind, about the nature of respect and particular aspects of training. (Keeping a journal was not an entirely new habit. I had, at different times in my life, and to differing degrees, kept note-books for recording



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and clarifying thoughts; so the writing-thinking process which has been so crucial to my action research was an intensification of practice which had been, hitherto, occasional.) I then wrote accounts, often quite detailed, based on my journal records, of entire training workshops, which usually lasted a week or more. These accounts were descriptive, reflective and evaluative, and in all of them I maintained a focus on the concept of respect. The notes on which they were based were written daily - or more often nightly - and sometimes several times a day, and included a record of feedback from the daily evaluation process used in the workshop. At the end of a workshop, I added to these notes my own post-workshop reflections and responses to the notes, and new thoughts prompted by participant evaluation and feedback from colleagues - a record of which is included in my accounts. These workshop records include detailed descriptions of particular moments of interaction, specific things said or done, and more general thinking which arose from the particular context in which I found myself. They also include reflections on my experience of enquiring in action. Together they constitute the 'basic empirical material' (Reason and Rowan 1981: 149) for this thesis.

(Taping of any kind would have been logistically difficult in my workshops, and its management potentially distracting and disturbing to me and participants. It would, additionally, have produced an unmanageable amount of data, unless it had been selective; so I preferred to do the selecting as I went. Since the use of memory (sometimes aided by notes) to record detailed observations in workshops is a skill I have had to develop as a facilitator, I have not experienced this as a problem - except in as far as it required me to write up my recollections and observations late at night, and was tiring.)

Since the records of my work and reflection-in-action constitute the empirical data for my research conclusions, my research's validity will rest on their quality: in terms of care and detail, and of reflecting multiple levels of awareness and inclusion of uncomfortable data; in making multiple cross references between different viewpoints and implied perspectives, and including corroborative evidence. I need to convince my readers of the attempted honesty of my accounts and the reasonableness of my interpretations, while owning them as mine. I will explore the question of validity in my next chapter section.



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VALIDITY

I want to begin this discussion not with the question of the validity of data, but with the more fundamental question of validity of purpose: what Reason and Heron (1996: 5) call the axiological criterion. Is my research 'intrinsically worthwhile'? My purpose is to enable myself to contribute more usefully to the development of human capacity for the constructive handling of conflict (and thereby to a reduction in the suffering caused by the violent expression of conflict). I believe that is worthwhile. If co-responsibility and mutual care are fundamental human values, as intersubjectively established social norms would suggest, and if such workshops make any contribution to the overall purpose for which they are designed, as I believe my accounts will suggest, then I can claim that mine is a worthwhile human endeavour. As Kvale points out in his discussion of 'The Social Construction of Validity', 'Deciding what are the desired results involves values and ethics' (Kvale 1995: 35). Validity understood in this way concerns fundamental values and motivation, and the will and passion to act. Practical knowledge presupposes a grounding of understanding which gives rise to purpose.

Taking an ethically determined purpose as given - cf Reason and Heron's 'axiological' validity (1996) - Kvale names three forms of research validity: validity as 'quality of craftsmanship'; 'communicative validity' and 'pragmatic validity'. There are many ways in which different forms of validity can be categorised. Although I would prefer to be a craftswoman or person, Kvale's categories will provide me with a useful framework for my own discussion. I shall explore them in turn, explaining how I am expanding or adding to them.

**Validity as quality of craftsmanship**

This aspect of validity includes, in Kvale's meaning (1995: 27),

> 'continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings. In a craftsmanship approach to validation, the emphasis is moved from inspection at the end of the production line to quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production.'

It involves the practice of attention to all four of Torbert's territories of experience, and constant awareness of Heron's worlds of intention, feelings, intuition and reflection.



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I have attempted to maintain the craftsmanship of this breadth of attention, both in the action of my practice and in the quality of my writing, the presentation of my experiences and reflections. What will be decisive is the measure of awareness, or 'critical subjectivity' I have been able to develop, 'arguing and thinking (Billig, 1987) within myself and with others, through the discipline of the many cycles of action and reflection, and rigorous record-keeping, that I went through. One thing to be judged is whether I was able, in my subjective reflections, to find some distance from the events in which I participated, and to be aware - as far as this is possible - of the personal assumptions and perspectives which provided the basis for my reading of them, and of the emotions which they engendered, checking my records for honesty in relation to my own recollections and understanding, and reflecting on them again at a distance.

Such a quality of awareness can be maintained, according to Reason and Rowan (1988), only if the researcher engages in 'some systematic method of personal and interpersonal development' (Reason and Rowan 1981: 246). Without such attention, they argue, the researcher's perspective on what she/he experiences is in danger of being clouded or distorted by personal disturbances and projections. I do not believe it to be possible to see into myself with total clarity. Oversights are, by definition, unseen, and the more fundamental an assumption is to one's being, the more likely it is to remain undiscovered and taken for granted. However, I have used my research process itself, my interactions with others, and my discussions with myself while writing, to bring these shaping elements into consciousness, as far as possible.

In addition, my hours in Quaker Meeting have punctuated these years of my research with opportunities for letting distorted things straighten themselves out. The shared silence works for me in such a way that anxiety and self-concern slip away, letting different elements of my being and living fall into place. At times I have gone into Meeting with some knot of a question in my mind and come out with that knot untied: untied not by being picked at but by being left alone to untie itself. This is an experience I cannot adequately describe; still less explain or prove; but it has been important, at certain points, in my dealing with information and reaching clarity, and therefore as part of my research process.



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The most important thing for me to address in myself has been my 'need' to excel in what I do in order to avoid feelings of inadequacy. I find balanced evaluation of events in which I am involved, particularly of my role in them, extremely difficult, and my desire to find I have 'done well' can induce me, albeit unconsciously, to 'improve on' the facts. I have tried to become less self-judging; partly for the sake of my own comfort, and partly for the sake of accurate representation and balanced evaluation - and evaluation of evaluation. I have two opportunities for representation and therefore distortion: firstly in relation to the 'given' of the workshop itself, as I record it, and secondly in relation to my accounts of those workshops, as I reflect on and re-interpret them - at which point my memory will also come into play, with attendant emotions, which may or may not be the same as the emotions experienced either at the time of the workshop or at the time of writing.

As I prepared myself for one workshop, I wrote in my journal,

'**Serious evaluation is as important as it is challenging. I think I have become quite good at opening myself to the evaluations of others: in the workshop context, both colleagues and participants; less good, perhaps, at evaluating those evaluations. I am so afraid of being defensive that I maybe fail to discount or set in context (sometimes take with a pinch of salt) feedback - particularly negative feedback - which my head could tell me is either unbalanced or otherwise unhelpful, inappropriate or unimportant.**

**I am afraid of being defensive because I am over-exacting towards myself: immoderate. Anything short of total success is in danger of being regarded as total failure. Because I am aware of this tendency of mine to catastrophise, I am able to an extent to wrestle with it; but it is a struggle. My own internal evaluations, as well as my receipt of the feedback of others, also tend to take on the dynamic of a struggle between darkness and light, rather than an acceptance of both - and of twilight and dawn. I would like them to be more relaxed (not lax). I think that way I might be happier and more capable of sound and balanced judgement; also more enabled, as against disempowered.**'

To learn this balance for myself has become one of the underlying goals of my research. It is clearly vital to my 'critical subjectivity' (Reason and Heron, 1996). In addition to this work of 'managing unaware projections and displaced anxiety' Reason and Heron list several other areas of attention for the achievement of critical subjectivity, which it has been helpful for me to check. 'Attending to the dynamic interplay of chaos and order' for me has meant allowing things



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their own life, resisting the desire to control or tidy up - and therefore distort - information. This will be a challenge for me in the final reflections contained within this thesis, particularly since I have given myself such a broad research focus. There is such a wealth of variety in what I have done - the nature of the groups, the geographical locations of workshops and conflicts addressed, the dynamics set in play by the bringing together of different groups of individuals, the challenge of working with different co-facilitators - that it would have been tempting to select out and organise information, or to begin to shape conclusions at an earlier stage, in order to narrow the focus of later cycles of inquiry. However, I find support in John Shotter's observation (1993: 19, referring to Wittgenstein), that

> 'our commitment to thinking within a system from within an orderly or coherent mental representation - the urge in reflection to command a clear view ..... in fact prevents us from achieving a proper grasp of the pluralistic, non-orderly nature of our circumstances.'

I have, in the midst of the pluralistic, non-orderly nature of my research theme, attending, in Reason and Heron's words (1996: 5), 'to the dynamic interplay of chaos and order', maintained my focus on my four sets of questions throughout my research. I have also allowed my attention to be drawn to specific aspects of those questions, and surprising new angles, so that my initial framework has not been too restrictive to allow for reframings, or too rigid to allow for changes of emphasis and direction. (For instance, in Harare my initial focus was on testing workshop material and format, but the issues that arose and demanded my primary attention were those of North-South relations, group dynamics and the role of the facilitator.) In Torbert's terms, I have tried to maintain a balance between inquiry and dynamic change on the one hand, and effectiveness and sane stability on the other (Torbert, 1991: 232).

I am not sure whether Kvale (1995) would include sufficiency of material in his 'craftsmanship' category, but it seems to me that having enough detail of different kinds, an encompassing as well as focused attention - 'thick description' (Geertz 1925) of events internal and external - must be necessary to the validity of findings; also having enough comparable data to reflect on. To this extent, quantity is an aspect of quality. According to Reason and Heron (1996: 5),



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> 'Research cycling is itself a fundamental discipline which leads toward critical subjectivity and a primary way of enhancing the validity of inquirers' claims to articulate a subjective-objective reality'.

I have been through many cycles of research, taking each workshop as a cycle, including its preparation, evaluation and reflection. The different workshops have been varied in many ways, but their purpose and style, and my research purposes, have been constant. I have described many workshops in considerable detail, and with many levels of attention, relating the contents, dynamics and outcomes of one workshop to those of another, trying to identify what was constant and what was contradictory or different, and to make some provisional sense of that, where I could. I have also heard many different voices within a given workshop, which I have needed to try and understand, both in relation to each other: comparatively, and together: cumulatively.

These, then, have been some of the elements in my struggle to maintain the quality of my research attention and recording. I will go on to consider Kvale's next aspect of validity.

**Communicative validity and corroboration**

Communicative validity for Kvale 'involves testing the validity of knowledge claims in a dialogue'. I have tested the validity of my tentative formulations of knowledge (I do not think I make 'knowledge claims') with a variety of categories of people, all of whom were in some way well qualified to help me in my thinking. In Torbert's account of Action Inquiry (1991: 229),

> 'the data is first fed back to participants in the research, wherever possible, in order to heighten awareness of incongruities, to serve as a corrective to further practice, and to test the respondents' perceptions of the validity and usefulness of the results.'

In one way my workshop participants are participants in my research; in other ways, as I have explained, they are not. Although much of my thinking is done interactively with them during the course of a workshop, and I sometimes tell them, informally, about my research, my research



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is nowhere on the explicit, collectively owned agenda of workshops that I facilitate, and often not mentioned at all. This could be seen as a lack of appropriate openness on my part; I see and intend it as a separation of my research purpose from my primary professional purpose and function as training facilitator, and a protection of the integrity of that primary purpose. (See the introduction to my Moscow account in Chapter Eight.) The participants and organisers of a workshop have (or certainly should have) a common understanding of its purpose - one which I share - and it is my job to help see that purpose fulfilled. It is relevant to my research purpose but does not coincide with it.

Corroboration or triangulation mechanisms and resources are an important form of validation for my 'evidence' at different stages, or within different layers, of my research, supplementing my subjectivity with other voices and giving me the benefit of other perspectives. I have tried to make this possible within the workshop process itself (e.g. through other expressed points of view or comments made within the evaluation process), within some subsequent process (e.g. discussion and evaluation with colleagues), and in relation to my draft account and its interpretations.

One form of triangulation for my own perceptions, as well as a form of primary information is participants' workshop evaluations, given personally and through workshop evaluation procedures, sometimes in plenary sessions, sometimes via their base group process and representatives, and sometimes in written evaluations after the workshop has ended. Generally speaking, the feedback I receive from participants is not specifically given or elicited in relation to my question of respect. I feel that opportunities for evaluation and feedback should be related to the workshop's primary purpose, and free of questions which introduce an agenda not shared by participants. Furthermore, were I to ask separate questions in relation to myself, questions of such a personal nature, I am not convinced I would receive very honest answers - any more than King Lear could expect honest answers from his daughters when he asked them how much they loved him. I feel strongly that to ask for feedback of such a personal and value-laden nature would be intrusive and unfair; an abuse of my position and function, and therefore disrespectful. I believe also that the reliability of feedback so obtained would be suspect, to say the least - especially when given by participants from more deferential, less frank cultures.



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So although I have relied heavily on participant response and feedback in my self-assessment, I have chosen to make deductions indirectly, from other evidence, such as the overall dynamics of a workshop, and the relationships formed, and from feedback not framed in terms of the respectfulness or otherwise of my behaviour. I have some evidence of the impact of workshops in the form of letters from participants, and subsequent meetings and conversations. In addition, I have asked colleagues (co-facilitators and workshop organisers) for specific personal feedback directly related to my research; feedback about some aspect of my behaviour, or material I use, or both. What I have done also, with recent cycles of research, is to send a copy of my research account to a colleague, or colleagues, for comment, as a means of checking my description and interpretation of events. I have been encouraged by the degree of confirmation this has provided, though maybe the absence of any major challenge or disagreement has been unhealthy. This form of corroboration by colleagues will be included in my data chapters with my workshop accounts.

Sometimes information is so general as to be easily overlooked as evidence, or left undigested - for instance, the overall way a workshop goes; the ethos that develops within the group; the openness and engagement of participants; the inclusion of those who were on the edge - the way they relax and become part of the group; the way we can laugh and cry together; the progressive devolution of power; our readiness to change course in response to changing energies and interests; and the final sense of something completed and something begun. Of course none of these things - or the failure to achieve them (which is not necessarily a failure), or other difficult or unwelcome unfoldings - can be laid at the door of one person. To think so would in itself be a profound disrespect, and a sign of creeping megalomania! However, since I am considering as one element of my research the way I fulfil my role as trainer/ facilitator, it is important for me to try to see how the progress of a workshop relates to my behaviour - how I have contributed to what is happening.

Although I have not been part of a group of researchers working together on the same inquiry, bringing my experiences, findings and dilemmas back to my supervisor and CARPP research group, as described earlier, has been invaluable for me, providing a home, a constant context, for the processing of feelings, ideas and information. My workshop accounts were read by my supervisor, and episodes from them described to members of the group. They gave me much



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needed feedback, challenging my assumptions and interpretations; supporting me in my endeavours to shape new understandings and questions. (Three of my CARPP colleagues came from a different cultural background from my own, being Afro-Caribbean as well as British, while I have no non-European background that I know of.) This was additionally helpful, given the cross-cultural focus of my research. I have aimed to be open to the questions and comments of colleagues, taking them seriously and being ready to shift my own position, but also weighing and evaluating them, and not abandoning my own point of view too eagerly.

Perhaps most importantly, I have tried to be in critical conversation with myself as I wrote and as I re-read what I had written, both as I transferred my journal notes into written-up accounts and as I re-read the provisionally finished writing, before and after receiving others' comments. I did not usually change my accounts as such, once they had been presented to others to read, except by small clarifications, or occasionally filling in some larger omission. I wished not to disguise what my original reactions and reflections had been. However, I often added new reflections in the commentary framing my accounts, or incorporated this feedback into my ongoing process of questioning and learning.

These, then, are the ways in which I have tested my records and interpretations, and develop my thinking. I agree, though, with Kvale (1995), when he warns against over-reliance on the views of others for validation, saying it may 'imply a lack of work on the part of the researcher and a lack of confidence in his or her interpretations' (cf Judi Marshall, 1981, above). In the end I have to take responsibility myself, both for the data I have presented and the sense I have made of it, affirming my right to speak with my own voice.

Bill Torbert (1991) claims that the 'parts of speech' which need, for effective communication, to be kept in balance, are framing (providing the context for what is to follow), advocacy (proposing or presenting an idea or question), illustrating (clothing ideas with the flesh of experience) and inquiry (exploring the meanings and testing the effects of the things advocated). Again, these tasks are given in sequence, and whereas I recognise the importance of all four, I have found that the order in which Torbert places them has not always been appropriate, or simple, for me. I have struggled with framing, finding that it could emerge only from a long struggle with what I had experienced. My written accounts of workshops I have facilitated -



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which could be seen as illustrations of what I experienced in relation to my research questions, could not be framed in advance, but only after a long period of struggle to understand or digest their meanings for me. (This is similar to the way in which presentational and propositional knowledge (Heron, 1992) interact with each other.) The tentative 'advocacy' which has emerged has been made possible by that struggle to frame what I have experienced, and making any closure on the inquiry process, in order to complete this thesis, has been difficult. But knowledge has to find some stability in order to be effective.

I will now move on to the third of Kvale's aspects of validity: the pragmatic.

**Pragmatic validity**

According to Kvale (1995), the most important form of validity is the pragmatic: whether the things done on the basis of the researcher's interpretations prompt changes in behaviour. I want my research to have practical outcomes, particularly for myself, so that its benefits may be passed on to workshop participants. I do not wish my conclusions to be prescriptive in relation to the behaviour of others, though they may suggest some ideas for 'good practice', given certain values and objectives. And at the same time I would not want the idea that practical knowledge is paramount (Heron 1992) to invalidate the knowledge of those who are not able to express their knowledge in action. Sometimes, for instance in situations of severe oppression, the primary knowledge of experience and understanding, knowledge of what is valued, is not able to be expressed and tested practically for a long time; in extreme cases, maybe never at all. To me, that would mean only that that knowledge had to maintain itself without external validation. Nonetheless, given the possibility of action, one vital test of the validity of knowledge will be in its practical use.

Although the pragmatic validity of my research will be dependent on its craftsmanship and its communicative (or presentational) validity, it is the most important form for me, since it is the one which determines whether I have achieved my purpose of 'contributing to human flourishing' (Reason and Heron 1996) in the way I described at the beginning of this section. I want to increase my capacity to contribute usefully in three ways. First, I want to increase my own



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awareness in action. Secondly, I want to increase my own effectiveness in action by applying that awareness and by understanding what it is to live out the respect I try to promote; thirdly, I want to increase the subtlety and cogency of the fundamental understandings which provide the basis for my work, and the clarity and usefulness of the content and presentational forms of my theory. My theory may consequently be of use to others working in my field, as well as to the participants in my workshops. I shall need to demonstrate, or at least give evidence to suggest by what I write, that the first two goals have been to some degree achieved. The third cannot be fully demonstrated at this point, but some indications may be given.

The usefulness or fitness-for-purpose criterion of validity will be perhaps most readily assessed in relation to the theoretical contribution I have been developing. My thinking about the relationship between ANV and CR, and the way I have structured their combining in workshop agendas, has been tested many times. My thinking about stages and roles in conflict, which has emerged from this combining, and in turn has contributed to it, is intended as a tool for use by practitioners, both in conflict transformation itself, and in conflict transformation training. Its usefulness, therefore, needs to be assessed at both those levels: does it help people be clearer about their own situations and how they can act in them, and does it constitute a well-honed training tool? To put it another way, does my theory correspond to, and help in relation to, participants' lived reality, and have I devised ways of introducing it, and enabling participants to engage with it, in such a way that its usefulness, such as it is, is readily available - and maximised -through the training process?

One important and unexpected form of evidence of usefulness, in relation to the ideas I have developed and put on paper, has been the way they have been adopted and published by others, in manuals, handouts, articles, and used in workshops by others. I suppose the fact that people who know me and my work invite me to do more, and that those who have worked with me are happy to have me again for a colleague, is also evidence of a general kind. I notice that my discussion of usefulness has brought me back to the question of evidence - and affirmation.

I have found in the process of writing that these different aspects of validity seem too closely involved with each other to be kept apart. I will close this section with some more general reflections on validity, claims and purposes.



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**Concluding reflections**

According to Clark Moustakas, in his discussion of 'The Validation of Heuristic Research', the final question for the new paradigm researcher must be, 'Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?' (Moustakas 1994: 33, 34.) He quotes Polanyi as describing the process of researching and sifting, reflecting and revisiting, as one in which 'certain visions of the truth, having made their appearance, continue to gain strength both by further reflection and additional evidence. These are the claims which may be accepted as final by the investigator and for which he [sic] may assume responsibility by communicating them in print.' I have no wish to make claims, certainly not final ones; rather to describe a process of exploration. I am sure the most important things cannot be measured or proved. Nonetheless I do recognise the process which is being described, and have reached a sense of strengthened conviction in some areas, tentative gropings towards understanding - even perhaps provisional conclusions - in others.

John Law (1994: 14, 15), discussing how to combine some sense of moral direction with the uncertainties inherent in human existence, is delightfully unpretentious in both style and approach. He recommends that 'we should not get dogmatic about what we turn up, about the stories that we tell', not 'take them too seriously...... puff them up into hegemonic pretensions'. Research is to be regarded as a process, 'So a modest sociology will seek to turn itself into a sociology of verbs rather than a sociology of nouns'; and (p. 18), 'a modest sociology, whatever else it may be, is surely one that accepts uncertainty, one that tries to open itself to the mystery of other orderings.' I want to hold both that openness and a moral, caring passion. Is that possible, I wonder? And is it possible for me be constantly rigorous and at the same time leave room for intuition and imagination? I need to hold both energies together, find a balance; but maybe that is necessarily the balance of oscillation: they cannot co-exist in the moment.

I also want to make space in my conclusions for 'unattached' reflections: thoughts that have been developing in me during this research process, or have leapt into consciousness at some point



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within it - maybe during a car journey or some conversation. They cannot be attached to some specific moment or episode in a research cycle, but have grown in the seedbed of this exploratory phase in my life, and emerged from the rich muck of impressions, information and stimulus which I have wallowed in and struggled to give form to during the last three years and more. These thoughts I will present as ideas for exploration, hints of possibilities, shadows and glimmerings of suggestions, distant beacons of conviction - not as 'knowledge claims' - and I hope that as such they will be seen to have a valid place in my thesis.

Kvale (1995: 37, 38), argues that, whereas a 'critical attitude towards knowledge claims' is necessary,

> 'When elevated to a dominating attitude, ruling the discourse of research, the quest for validation may ..... be self-defeating. A pervasive attention to validation becomes counter-productive and leads to a general invalidation'.

I think that must depend on the nature of the attention. I would like to apply a watchfulness that is relaxed and alert, rather than tense and hawk-like; which makes space for flow and expansion, but returns regularly to checks and connections. And although I wish to have accomplished a scholarly piece of work with practical usefulness, I also want to draw the reader into experiences and feelings: to share something of what I have lived and felt in this working inquiry.

Beyond the production and validation of a thesis, I have been (re)searching for the capacity to be Schon's 'reflective practitioner'. I do not, however, want to lose the capacity for immersion, and 'spontaneous, intuitive performance' (Schon 1983: 49). I have sometimes been afraid that by becoming too reflective I would reach a stage of perpetual self-consciousness (as against self-awareness). I want to have developed the ability to reflect in the moment, but not to have lost the ability to lose myself in the moment (hoping still to be able to recall the moment for future reflection if need be). Such immersion, losing oneself in the business of participation, brings together the knower and the given, obliterating, in that moment, the distinction between them. It provides the material for the kind of reflection which leads to the articulation of knowledge. To be conscious of something is to have choice about it, to be able to continue or change or adjust it - as Schon describes it in the case of the baseball player, who notices that something works and repeats it. But sometimes thinking too much about the way to play a game makes a player lose



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the rhythm of it, lose the knack, the ability to incorporate subtleties of action too fine to be distinguished or consciously deployed. I so not want to have lost the capacity to lose myself in the training game.

I suppose I am looking for a capacity to be both reflective and unreflective: to move in and out of immersion and reflection. I want to find rhythm, and I know that if I try too hard I may make it less likely. I also want to find balance: the kind of balance William Torbert (1991) writes about. I believe in the kind of human development that he describes; and at the same time I am uncomfortable with the hierarchical way in which he describes it; which is to acknowledge an apparent contradiction in myself. While passionately motivated towards action for change, a quest for progress at all levels, I have another, very different but co-existing sense of what I want and what is appropriate: a sense which is related to being in, rather than trying to control and shape; a sense of the cyclical nature of things. I want to grow and change, but also to accept myself as I am.

Maybe the kind of 'living awareness' which Torbert (1991: 231) sees as the goal of Action Inquiry is the key to the way in which these two approaches can be held together, through the development of a capacity for transformative presence, and a process, a way of being, at the same time accepting vulnerability, fallibility, and affirming - celebrating - possibility. And although I no longer believe in progress as a global project with a fixed end, I can commit myself to the attempt to live creatively in the world as it is, being part of a process of building and rebuilding. My hope is that the research process in which I have been engaged will have helped me and others to participate in that process.



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