

CHAPTER 2

Inquiry Methodology

Is it too confronting to use qualitative, participative, self-reflective, action-based inquiry approaches with potentially contentious issues? At times, often, I think we have to take the radical path in content and method, to make a double leap. Otherwise the limitations in orthodox methods stifle the radical potential of inquiry. (Marshall, 2001: 437)

Generative research

It is something of a curiosity to me that writers on feminist epistemology seem to locate themselves in a relatively conventional place when it comes to the generative potential of the act of conducting 'research'. It is as if much of this thinking and writing, having progressed, as noted in Chapter 1, from practical questions to questions on the nature of knowledge, have paradoxically taken feminist research off the street, as it were, and into the academic realm. Feminist epistemologies have tended to sit as academic critical positions- albeit powerfully articulated ones - accessed by those within a research community who seek them, rather than as a body of radical or generative research practice located in communities. Feminist scholarship seems somewhat divorced from feminist research action within the realm of 'feminisms'. (There are, of course, some notable exceptions: Lather (1993, 1997) is clearly working at the intersection of practice and theory: hooks (1991, 1994) writes about her lived practice at the intersection of race and gender and largely rejects conventional academic conventions. Marshall (1999, 2000) is centrally concerned with the living of inquiry. Also, Rapaport, Bailyn, Fletcher and Pruitt (2002, in press) are articulating a model of action research concerned centrally with gender.)

Harding argues that feminist research is characterised not so much by its particular method, but by its choice of topics, and its way of prioritising and affording significance to otherwise ignored aspects of women's lives. Feminist research seeks to "generate problematics from the perspectives of

women's experiences" (1987: 7), and in doing so "often requires alternative approaches to inquiry that challenge traditional research habits and raise profound questions which are no longer marginalised as deviant" (184). But much of what has resulted, particularly in relation to research on organisations and management, might be deemed 'feminist' in its content, but in seeking to stay within academic discourse, does not apparently challenge the methodological parameters within which it is conducted.

In a searching critique of feminist research practice, Stanley and Wise write:

"we feel that few feminist discussions of research do anything other than choose between the alternatives already available. They seize upon existing models of research and depictions of research methods: naturalistic or positivistic, qualitative or quantitative, hard or soft. We not only see this as no answer to the kind of problems we have outlined (and the problems raised by feminism itself), but we also feel that the identification of values as a 'problem' by feminist researchers doesn't even lead to the identification of the right kind of question" (1993: 159)

At the same time, a debate is taking place within social research more generally on what might be termed the politics of research practice, and the criteria by which research might be judged in the light of a 'postmodern turn' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln suggest there are two 'crises' to be addressed – a crisis of representation (how do 'realities' come to be adequately captured in texts?) and a crisis of legitimation (by what criteria, and on whose authority, are judgements of worthwhile work to be made?). This raises, in turn, questions about the ethics, *generative potential* and *purpose* of post-positivist research perspectives (Reason and Torbert 2001, Reason and Bradbury 2001, Lincoln and Denzin 2000).

Lincoln and Denzin describe current thinking on the nature of qualitative work as newly entering a 'seventh moment', where each 'moment' represents a disjuncture with and progression from previous forms of practice. They suggest the seventh moment will be increasingly concerned with five themes: issues of text and voice - who is speaking, who gets heard, how to include a

‘cacophony of previously-excluded voices’; emergent forms of ‘existential, sacred performance text’ - where the ‘text’ itself takes on significance as an opportunity for transformation; the possibility of narrative as a political act in its own right; questions of reflexivity and being vulnerable in the research text; and inquiry as a moral act, concerned with the development of critical moral consciousness. The future, they suggest, lies in creating a

“sacred, existential epistemology [that] places us in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical relationship to the earth, to nature and the larger world” (2000: 1052)

This is a very different articulation of the act of research, which until recently has been located as critically and crucially un-connected with its author and context. Elsewhere, Lincoln comments:

“The seventh moment is where we set aside our wedded bliss to paradigms and our belief that if I do naturalistic inquiry, somehow that will be better than what someone else does. We set that aside, and we begin to say....the purpose of research becomes to move towards social justice, to quit debating about method, to move to an action arena, guided I hope by an ethic of social justice” (1997: 10)

Lather (1991) sees the ferment of current uncertainty as opening an opportunity for methodological innovation:

The courage to think and to act within an uncertain frameworkemerges as the hallmark of liberatory praxis in a time marked by the dissolution of authoritative foundations of knowledge....in an era of rampant reflexivity, *just getting on with it* may be the most radical action one can make” (1991: 13)

Working from a somewhat different starting point, Reason and Bradbury offer a working definition of ‘*action* research’ that has many echoes of the position reached by Lincoln and Denzin:

“a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment” (2000: 1)

Reason and Torbert have attempted to articulate action research as a potential ‘successor social science’ (2001, in press). They acknowledge that ‘action research’ embraces a wide spectrum of practices and underlying philosophies (see also Reason and Bradbury 2001, Raelin, 1999) and outline three approaches to inquiry, which they see as aiming to increase the validity, practical significance and *transformational potential* (my emphasis) of social research:

“Whereas the primary purpose of research in the academic tradition is to contribute to an abstract ‘body of knowledge’ available to third-persons, the primary purpose of research/practice after the action turn is a practical knowing, embodied in the moment-to-moment action of each research/practitioner, in the service of human flourishing and the flourishing of the eco-systems of which we are a part”

They continue:

“Empirical positivist research, based on a realist ontology and a correspondence view of truth, is driven by the methodological imperative of removing the bias of the human researcher through watertight methodology.....The action turn returns the fundamental questions concerning the quality of knowing to the practice of the knowing person in community These forms of research/practice are not dominated by methodology; rather they use methodology...to enhance the inquiry capacity of persons, organisations and communities” (2001)

The shift from ‘research’ to ‘inquiry’ being articulated here (see also Reason 1988, 1994, Reason and Bradbury 2001) is important. ‘Research’ is an activity carried out primarily by designated ‘researchers’, usually professional/academic, with the intent of generating propositional knowledge. Inquiry, I take it, is more centrally democratic and participative in intention and application, and is concerned with ways of being, asking questions and generating knowledges which take seriously

their own status as social practice. This opens the knowledge-generation ‘research’ process to forms of knowledge beyond the propositional – to what Reason (1988) calls an ‘extended epistemology’, encompassing experiential, practical and presentational ways of knowing, as well as propositional forms.

Maguire (2000) echoes my own observation that there is surprisingly little explicit correspondence between the growing community of action-researchers and feminist scholarship. She writes:

“many recent primers still offer little discussion of how feminist scholarship informs action research” (2000: 58)

She cites Greenwood and Levin, who conclude that there have been “only a handful” of systematic attempts to link feminism and action research, and call for an intensification of this effort, in order to enhance both (1998: 185). Whilst both feminist research and action research embrace a wide variety of methods, Maguire points to several concerns they share: a move from ‘studying women’ to theorising gender, as a process affecting women *and* men; awareness of multiple identities and the interlocking of different oppressions; questions of voice and silence, in the context of relationship; the prioritising of everyday experience; and a commitment towards unsettling and hence changing power relationships, including that within the research process. (2001: 61-65)

Reason and Torbert delineate three broad types of research/practice that are action-oriented in their sense, which they call first-, second- and third-person inquiry. This reflects an earlier depiction, by Reason and Marshall:

“all good research...speaks to three audiences..It is for *them* to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes...it is for *us* to the extent that it responds to concerns for our praxis, is relevant and timely...[for] those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is for *me* to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher’s being-in-the-world” (1994: 112-3)

First person inquiry is conducted primarily around the inquirer's own experience and practice: second-person inquiry is carried out amongst partnerships and small, face-to-face communities, whereas third-person inquiry is conducted with large-scale communities and stranger-groups. Reason and Torbert describe first-person research/practice as bringing an "inquiring approach to (the researcher's) own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting" (2001). This is concerned with research as personal process (Reason and Marshall 1987). Torbert has elsewhere called this Action Inquiry, "a study that transforms the present" (1991: 228). Although not explicitly framed as a feminist practice, the congruence with feminist concerns with first-person experience is clear. Reason and Torbert suggest this embraces 'upstream' attentional, awareness-enhancing practices such as autobiographical writing, meditation, psychotherapy and others, and 'downstream' practices designed to gather feedback and promote awareness of the inquirer's effect in the world, such as journal writing, and using audio and videotapes. It also involves developing what Reason has called "critical subjectivity" which:

"is a state of consciousness different from either naïve subjectivity of 'primary process' awareness and the attempted objectivity of egoic 'secondary process' awareness. Critical subjectivity means that we do not suppress the primary subjective experience, that we accept our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are aware of that perspective, and of its bias, and we articulate it in our communications. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing" (1994: 327)

First person inquiry "enables a person to critically explore their own purposes, framings, behaviours and effects and as an outcome of this inquiry to create their own living theories and to improve the quality of their practice" (Reason and Torbert, 2001).

Marshall (1999, 2001) reflects these ideas in a form of self-reflective inquiry practice which involves framing research as "political process and life process" (2001:433). This encompasses both "inner arcs of attention" in which she notices her own meaning-making and framing processes, and "outer arcs of attention" in which tentatively developed ideas are tested, sometimes explicitly and openly, sometimes in more guarded ways, with others. She seeks, she says, "an alive interplay, a generative,

appropriate combination and dynamic” between these inner and outer movements, whilst also making use of disciplined cycles of engagement and reflection in pursuing inquiries into particular themes or puzzles.

Marshall is explicit about the politics, including the gender-politics, of research practice:

“Who researches and how; whose experience is researched and how that is named or categorised; what discourses gain currency and hold power; what forms of inquiry and writing are favoured by mainstream power-holders; and much more are political issues. “Creating knowledge” is political business. Living practice is thus politicised.” (1999:158)

For me, drawing on feminist framings, inquiring explicitly from my perspective, and finding a way to write that process, takes on a strong significance - a significance in terms of the quest to put in the ‘public’ world the denied voice of the first person. Marcus notes a similar nuancing in the way the idea of reflexivity is being used in social research: there is a ‘weak’ form of reflexivity, which involves the researcher locating her/himself as present in the research. But for feminists, there is a ‘stronger’ form in which reflexivity is “the signature of a distinctively feminist cognition”. “As such” he continues, “reflexivity is a performed politics” (1994:569). First person research, in so far as it engages in ‘critical subjectivity’, also moves beyond this ‘weak’ form of reflexivity – because first-person experience is not just acknowledged, but is interrogated, theorised from, and in the process, transformed. Both action-research (in the Reason/Torbert/Bradbury sense) and feminist concerns for the voice of the first person claim this is a worthwhile place to generate knowledge that is of significance and relevance beyond the first person.

Through a personal and reflexive account from a first-person position, I am also attempting to explore what knowledge, research, inquiry might help us - planetary citizens - develop the wisdom we might need to help us live well now and in the future. In this way, I am clearly echoing the purposes of action inquiry and the ‘seventh moment’ as discussed above. I am not looking for a

feminist-modernist outcome, but am experimenting with the idea that a “masculinist” epistemological, political principle is playing a part in the global mistake we are currently making, and that perhaps “successor sciences” will be ones in which a “feminine-ist” principle is ascendant. Curiously, this would involve being both more self-reflexive and more other (and world) reflective.

Towards a feminist reflexive first-person inquiry approach

And so, I begin to have some names for my starting place, resting in my experiential contradiction. I am conducting an inquiry, a form of participative action research, from a first-person position. Echoing Marshall’s “open boundary between research and life” (1999), this concerns inquiring into my being-in-the-world.

In choosing to ground myself within feminist approaches, I have located myself in a minority place in terms of ideas– whilst working/acting in a mainstream position, as a business educator. I am seeking to inquire into this place – to be interested in the contradictions I experience, and from there to try and create some sort of change, in myself, in my surroundings, or in both. In so doing, I am also trying to make some comment about the status of the ideas and knowledge I am grappling with. So this is an inquiry rooted both in experience/being and in ideas/thinking. My purposes are multiple:

- to offer a situated account from where I am - even though that is a place in process - exploring the paradox of the marginality I sometimes feel, and contributing to a growing number of voices who seek to unseat the positivist ‘voice from nowhere’
- to move between this account, and my practice/work/living itself. This is not a distanced academic exercise, even though it starts from and is strongly rooted in the territory of ideas. I am seeking to inquire into and theorise about what I do, actively and in process: the inquiry and the practice co-exist as such intertwined threads that I have difficulty

demarcating boundaries between them - and I do not try to do so. In this sense, therefore, this is action inquiry.

- to hear myself (or selves, see below): much as a skilled counsellor reflects her clients' thoughts back to enable the speaker to know better what she is saying, so I intend, through inquiring, to move towards a stronger sense of 'myself', to achieve some sort of articulation of my own experience of my realities as highly managed (by me), operating on many different layers, offering no easy routes as to what action to take at any given time.

Having established that 'first-person inquiry' names this place, I am still faced with the methodological challenge of how to access, as the equivalent of 'research data', my experience. Marshall (2001) describes in some detail her ways of doing this. I have chosen to do so principally using autobiographical stories. In so doing I am echoing both an honourable tradition of how women convey and build knowledge through storytelling, and a growing body of qualitative social research on the role of storytelling and narrative in accessing personal experience (Clandinin and Connelly 1994, Reissman 1993, Ewick and Silbey 1995, Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992, Griffiths 1995, Reason and Hawkins 1988, Ellis and Bochner 2000).

In the rest of this account, I will offer a number of 'stories'. First, there are two stories I tell myself about ideas – theories of organisation from feminist perspectives, and ideas about global business and business education. These form the context of meanings within which I am locating the stories that follow. They represent to me the macro-context or 'global' within which the 'local' (my practice) is enacted. I then move through a series of cycles of stories of my practice, and sense-making, reflective pieces on those stories, as I attempt to inquire into my here-and-now in two areas: my educational work, and my work to help build a new organisation (see diagram, page 5).

My sense of method as I embark on this is embryonic: following inquiry principles, I am consciously moving between reflection and action, and inner and outer awarenesses (Marshall, 2001). I am

seeking to pay attention to my purposes, intentions, behaviour, and the outcomes that follow (Reason and Torbert, 2001). I am also noticing my developing understanding of what a ‘feminist first-person inquiry practice’ might be as I do so. I will consider this question again at several points, and return to it in the final chapter.

The stories have been constructed using my journal writing, memory, and in some places – as indicated in the text - audiotaped conversations with others, and letters. I began keeping a ‘research journal’ as soon as I began this inquiry process, in the form of a notebook (and computer files) in which I talked to myself. This was not a daily ‘what I did today’ diary, but a space into which I ‘dumped’ thoughts, feeling, reflections and stories about what I was encountering – particularly straight after events or occurrences that moved me in some way, and often done on trains or planes. I tended to use this more when I was confused, distressed or angry about what I was experiencing than when I was not. In Rowan’s (1981) terms, this journaling represented a thinking/contemplation place in the research process (see Introduction). I also used the journal very actively in conjunction with reading, as ideas or concepts I came across spoke to me in some way of my experience, perhaps capturing or articulating a half-formed idea, or enabling a re-framing of a puzzle. In the course of conducting this inquiry, I have read widely – seldom *just* for the purposes of this inquiry, more for as part of my ongoing work/practice – as part of teaching, supervising the work of students, preparing to make presentations, writing teaching materials, and so on. But since the boundary between my inquiry and my practice is an open one, all of this has seemed to fall within, have relevance to, the inquiry. The reading underpinning this work, and feeding into my journal processing, has spanned across the interconnected territories of substantive issues of business and management – particularly in relation to the social and environmental responsibilities of business - epistemological issues, and methodological issues. As well as my journal, therefore, I have been drawing on several folders of notes on reading, engaging these two sorts of ‘data’ with each other.

Although this is a first person inquiry, I have also engaged with others in inquiring into what I am doing. I have asked colleagues and friends to help me by talking with me, again seeking to create reflective space, and giving me an opportunity to test my sense-making processes out with someone

else. In the early years covered by these stories, this was primarily with a former colleague at the university, with fellow participants in the CARPP programme, and with the CARPP supervision group. More recently this has been with colleagues with who I have been working in various capacities through my current organisation. I made audio-tapes of many of these conversations, and have used them as an additional stream of ‘data’, through which to hear myself. On a couple of occasions I have sent written sections of this account to people involved, and asked them for their comment. At other times, for reasons I will discuss further in Chapter 7, I have chosen not to.

I have, therefore, a lot of ‘data’ which underpins this account but which I have not included. I have *constructed* this writing, selectively placing within it material through which I intend to communicate to you, an unknown third person, something of my inquiry journey. The map is not the territory here, and at the same time, constructing the map and living the territory as an ongoing process of reality-creation are dynamically interconnected.

Stories are usually characterised by having a temporal dimension, a plot, characters, and an ending or closure (Ewick and Silbey, 1995). Reissman comments “narrators create plots from disordered experience, giving reality a unity which neither nature nor the past possesses so clearly” (1993:4). In some sense, this entire study is a story – each example of practice is given in temporal order, indicating some sort of progression (plot?) unfolding for both the reader and the inquirer. This is a construct I offer, having selected my stories to give you – and myself - a ‘picture’ of my experience. As Ewick and Silbey say: “stories...are told with particular interests, motives and purposes in mind” (1995:206). Gergen, however, has noted a difference between what she calls ‘manstories’ and ‘womanstories’, with the latter more “fragmentary, multidimensional, understated and temporally disjunctive” (1992: 132). She suggests that many biographical manstories draw on a ‘monomyth’ involving a heroic quest, testing, overcoming adversity and triumphant return home. Womanstories are usually less clear, more many-threaded. Maybe, she suggests, stories don’t need discernible story-lines.

I do not suggest that stories of experience – especially *my* stories of *my* experience – are accurate depictions of a reality. Rather, they are evocations which re-present the experience – and in making that representation, I am departing from the immediacy of the events, which in any case I am accessing through journal notes and memory. I am, however, trying to use story-form in a ‘womanstory’ way, to suggest complexity, multiple possibilities, and my own awareness of simultaneous inner and outer events which together constitute the experience for me. I am working with more than an observer could observe, because I am including my meanings and sensemaking in the inquiry frame. Stories have the capacity to represent and speak for the storyteller, and at the same time be open to multiple interpretations. They invite, in effect, the participation of you, the reader, to read meaning into situations in a way that non-storied writing does not.

In writing in this way, I am aware that I am not just reporting on my experience – if such a thing were possible. I am engaged in a process of active reality-creation – indeed, that generative possibility is one of the purposes for doing this: the process of articulating helps me towards a new sort of awareness and knowing, which in turn affects how I act. Griffiths notes that autobiographical descriptions of experience are always revisable:

“it is quite possible that as I continue to think, and theorise, and observe, that I will understand more and my situated-self-understanding will change accordingly” (1995: 14)

And, as I have explored above, from a feminist point of view, elucidating personal experience in this way is to work politically – to locate this way of working within a claim for its political relevance. This kind of reflexivity is a way of tracing out the workings of gendered-power-systems as they are enacted at the micro, interpersonal level, and simultaneously is an act of self-creation/resistance. Writing about my personal experience is a means of accessing this first-person place of political activity.

Griffiths (1995) delineates principles for a feminist methodology that works with personal experience, and cites autobiography as a likely technique. She suggests this needs to be conducted

through developing critique rather than via a confessional or literary approach, echoing Reason's idea of critical subjectivity:

“Critical autobiography makes use of individual experience, theory, and a process of reflection and re-thinking, which includes attention to politically situated perspectives” (1995: 70)

Similarly, Ewick and Silbey distinguish between stories which are “hegemonic” – playing a part in rehearsing and strengthening everyday taken-for-granted ‘truths’ which de-politicise the social, and by contrast “subversive” stories, which:

“recount particular experiences as rooted in and part of an encompassing cultural, material and political world that extends beyond the local” (1995: 219)

It is precisely these kinds of connections I am seeking to make, not just as stories told, but as active, lived practice, as I raise questions for myself about the nature of the action I *could* or *should* be taking.

All of the above suggest, perhaps, that conducting first-person inquiry is a relatively straightforward process of moving between ideas and accounts. My experience has been that this is not the case: it is an untidy, sometimes frustrating, sometimes distressing, always intriguing and for me ultimately rewarding personal journey. The notion of *cycles* of action and reflection has been particularly important to me as I have developed my inquiry practice. In some senses the accounts contained here from Chapter 5 onwards represent *points* of encounter and reflection which sit within a back-drop of ongoing, messy, at times difficult processual work: an active, inquiring attention to what I am doing, with all its contradictions. This work is not dramatic: it consists of thinking, reading, talking to others, listening to tapes of discussions, discussing and thinking again, asking questions of myself, trying to take another look at what I have been doing. It has then informed the attention I have brought to the moment of encounter, which in turn has generated more thinking and puzzling. The capturing of this process in written form has then added a further layer of encounter and sense-making, another opportunity to try and arrive at an understanding. And as this work has progressed,

my understanding of what this process involves and demands of me has shifted - as I hope I am able to demonstrate in the stories.

I will return to many of these issues later in this account. But before moving on, I need to raise briefly – again to be pursued later - questions about the ‘self’ whose experience I am working with – the nature, in fact, of the “I” who is featuring so prominently in this writing. One of the dangers of working with personal experience – apart from becoming self-obsessed – is that of becoming pre-occupied by ideas of the unitary ‘self’, the essential (gendered) person behind the scene. That is not my concern here. Rather, I concur with Griffiths:

“a self is made and makes itself in the changing circumstances in which she lives, and in a direction strongly affected by her own understanding of herself”

or, echoing Marx:

“we collectively make ourselves, but not in conditions of our own choosing” (1995: 79)

I have said, above, that I am seeking through this process, among other things, to hear myself/selves, and in so doing to create some sort of stronger sense of ‘myself’. I have also begun this inquiry with a strong sense of uncomfortable and, for me, untenable, lived contradiction to which I must attend. This leads to questions as to what a good inquiry might be, and on what basis that might be judged.

Validity questions

If, as explored in this and the previous chapter, ontology, epistemology and social research method are all in states of positivist/post-positivist contestation, questions of validity in research/inquiry become equally problematic. Lather (1997) has traced moves in relation the validity questions in qualitative research in the last two decades, concluding that the topic poses questions which “can neither be avoided nor resolved” and which in the end is not about epistemological guarantees, but practices that are “situated, multiple, partial, endlessly deferred”.

She suggests that the validity debate has moved through at least three post-positivist phases. She calls the first of these “regulatory validity”, which in some ways paralleled positivist validity canons by attempting to substitute different but equivalent criteria for establishing the knowledge claims

made by qualitative work. She includes ideas such as triangulation, thick description and transferability in this group, citing Lincoln and Guba's early (1985) work as an example. This was followed by "successor validity", which sought to supersede positivist attachments to single corresponding truths, moving from "a set of epistemic concepts to a space of relational practices in situated contexts of inquiry". Lather thinks her own "transgressive" validities – ironic validity, paralogical validity, rhizomatic validity and voluptuous or embodied validity (1993) fall within this phase. Their possible problem, she suggests, is that they still, at least potentially, retain a policing function, demarcating the borders between what is accepted and not-accepted. She quotes Sheurich (1996): "they are "Imperial" in allowing the same and disallowing the different" and hence refer back to the "Same/Other power binary" of the western knowledge project. To move beyond this, says Lather, is to work with "situated, constitutive validity", drawing on immanent criteria and experimental practice. This is a place for not policing, but self-reflection – practices of validity "that approach the complications of the word and the world". It is important, she argues, to retain validity questions, so as to work with the unresolved/unresolvable tension between the "inadequacy of thought and its object" and an interest in "how discourse does its work" – as a place of innovation which at the same time serves as a reminder about the partial, shifting and located nature of any conceptual and textual representation of a complex and dynamic world.

Lather's provocative writing offers both opportunity and challenge, to locate validity practices within the context of inquiry work itself, to be reflexive about this process – and not to be fooled into moving outside the sort of knowledge claims that can be made in such circumstances and with such awareness. In such conditions, it seems to me, the specific - and shifting - purposes of the inquiry become key.

Other voices within the territory of action research offer different perspectives. Fisher, Rooke and Torbert (2000) have characterised Action Inquiry (first-person inquiry) as concerned with 'continual quality improvement'. As I begin, I am carrying some of these sorts of concerns into my inquiry - how might I do what I do better, more effectively, with greater skill? But as soon as I frame this question I know that it is too constraining: the better question is, with what purpose am I doing what I am doing? In pursuit of what? At the outset, living in contradiction, I know that I want to change or resolve something in the way that I am living/working, but it is not simply that I want to be better at what I am doing: it is rather that I want it to serve a different end.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) cite several dimensions on which a situated validity might be fashioned, suggesting that each action-inquirer might combine these in different ways and with different emphases, as their purposes and practice requires. These are: relationship and participation through the inquiry practice; practical outcomes; ways of knowing; purposes – whether this was a

worthwhile activity; and developmental potential, the possibility of there being long-term or enduring change of some kind as a result of the work. In articulating these broad dimensions of validity, Reason and Bradbury are moving away from the tendency that I feel sometimes exists within action research to hang all claims on practical (even observable) outcomes from inquiry. The action/ achievement dimension of action research threatens at times to become heroic and individualistic and to depart from its congruence with a more feminist/experiential epistemology: can I only claim validity for what I am doing here if I can ‘prove’ that I have brought about change in the ‘outside’ world (see also Marshall, 1999)? I will explore this further below (Chapter 6).

At this stage it seems appropriate, therefore, to sketch out what my first ideas of situated validity – stemming from my purposes and practice in this inquiry - might be. The purposes I have outlined above suggest that I am carrying agendas ‘for me’, ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Reason and Marshall, 1994), each of which might suggest different criteria to work with.

First, since I have begun my inquiry with the uncomfortable energy of lived contradiction, one criterion of validity for what I am doing may be that my values/action mismatch is somehow shifted. I have stated my intent to offer a situated first-person account, but to engage this accounting with my practice. *Being* differently, as opposed to *doing* differently, would testify to the validity of this process. In conventional terms, providing evidence of this is problematic, but it carries no less significance than the other first-person claims in this account. This is, as it were, the ‘humanist’ dimension to this work, the part of it that is for me, about helping myself to become more fully the person/s that I am (Rowan, 2001). Rowan quotes Carl Rogers “to will to be that self which one truly is, is indeed the opposite of despair, and this is the deepest responsibility of man” (my respect for Rogers’ work permits me to forgive his language). I have begun this work, if not in despair, certainly carrying some distress. I have no strong attachment to the single-entity humanist self in Rowan’s (and Roger’s) thinking, and at the same time feel a need to *be* different, intertwined with and as part of my other more political concerns.

Second, I have put a lot of personal investment in this writing, making myself vulnerable, and wanting to share with you, the reader and therefore a participant in this process, my uncertainties, self-doubts, confusions and convictions, in the belief that my represented experience is both unique and entirely ordinary. I have chosen to do this partly, to echo Lather, out of an interest in 'how discourse does its work' and hence a belief that this first-person place is worthwhile. I am not exceptional and at the same time I am powerful, as I believe all people are: the day-to-day struggles of purpose, practice and multiplicity which form the basis of the stories I offer here are the often disregarded micro-processes of reality co-creation, and hence, I believe, a worthy subject of social science inquiry. This is a micro-political dimension to this work, the work of creating subversive stories, of creating and disseminating 'other' kinds of discourse in relationship to the mainstream/malestream. Its validity, I suggest, will rest in the attention I can bring to these processes, and the extent to which I can hold them in connection with the mainstream story, both here in my writing and in practice.

Third, I identify this as a feminist inquiry, an inquiry 'advocating feminism' because it is informed by a particular intent - to contribute to some broad idea I have of 'gender equity', which is not about relative numbers of men and women in powerful positions, but for me is a transformational aspiration, concerned with re-valuing certain kinds of behaviour, which may be carried out by women or men. It means a greater valuing of diversity, different ways of being, different priorities, rejecting dichotomies in all their multiple manifestations, participation, collaboration, respect for different kinds of knowledge. I see this as a feminist inquiry because my 'meta- purpose' is to challenge and change values, cultures and practices in management and business education that denigrate and deny the validity of women's lives. My hope is this will connect into, somehow contribute to, movements to render unacceptable the worldwide abuse - physical, sexual, economic - of women by men. I recognise this as much as a men's project as a women's, and I now associate it (partly as a result of this inquiry, so something I will return to later) with changing human behaviour to create sustainable ways of living, caring in the broadest sense, participation in the broadest sense, between people and planet. I see a coalition of values, initiatives, voices around these issues, and locate feminist analyses and actions as one alongside others. I might therefore ask myself, at the end

of this inquiry, whether I am playing such a part, and how I might judge this. This is a macro-political dimension to this work.

And finally, there are undoubtedly practical, action dimensions to what I am doing. As Lather suggests, in the face of uncertainty, I am acting. I do not aspire to remove all inconsistencies between my purposes and my actions – ‘womanstories’, it seems to me, will not demand such things - but clearly I am offered ‘data’ from the outside world as to the effect of my actions, and I would not be engaging fully with my life-world if I did not pay attention to that. I might ask, then, what the practical outcomes of this work have been. In particular, I said in the last chapter that I was concerned about how to bring mother-consciousness into business education – and revisiting that question will therefore form part of a judgement about the validity of this work.

A reflection as I move on: if writing is a form of inquiry, where has this taken me?

These first two chapters have involved a wide-ranging consideration of the roots of Western thought, and the epistemological critique made of it by feminisms. I have identified some of the difficulties of moving to an alternative position when there is only the censoring “father tongue” to speak in. Participative action research approaches seem to be struggling to articulate a way out of this impasse, without getting trapped in the linguistic reductionism of deconstructive postmodernism. Feminisms politicise this censoring in gender terms, pointing to the dynamic of masculinist power, which trivialises certain sorts of knowledge, with deeply serious consequences for all humans, and the more-than-human world. I am moving forward in this inquiry, then, with a keen awareness of the uncertainty of both the conceptual territory in which I am working, and the impossibility of *not* participating in these discursive practices, working as I am with the education of business managers.

These processes are evident in management discourse - and hence in management education - which is reductionist and non-participative in its foundation, its root and expression. Management discourse is an active expression of ‘disenchantment’. So now I can frame what I am doing (in my

research/living) as taking some tentative steps towards evolving the educational practice that might express a 'successor paradigm' (an idea I will hold with increasing irony as this work continues): that of mother-consciousness.