

**Chapter 3**  
**My first year at CARPP**

*Pergolesi's Stabat Mater accompanies this chapter. I played it often during the period in which this chapter is set, as a source of sustenance and comfort. It is also intended as an homage to my mother, in memory of the beautiful transformation in our relationship in the course of the inquiry described here.*

*In preparation for crafting this chapter I have gathered my writing from March 1997 to January 1998 around me so that I now have ring binders and notebooks strewn around my study. As I reread my diaries I listened to some of the music I used to work with at the time and I have sought out music I find more sustaining here and now (currently playing Vivaldi's Stabat Mater). I have looked at images I incorporated in my Diploma Paper. I've been deeply moved on occasions, as my diary notes took me back to what was an emotionally draining year. I was surprised how 'well I had forgotten' some of the most painful moments and I had to walk away from it on occasions.*

*Now I have to decide on the story I will tell you about my inquiry in the course of that first year at CARPP. Which themes will I surface? How can I do justice to my inquiry over that period? I want to stay inquiring in this process too and allow the story to evolve in the telling. My current sense making will be coloured by additional insights, new frames, and changing perspectives. Stacey (2003) points out that each new experience subtly changes past experience, as we recreate the past from a different present .*

*Revisiting my work from 1997-1998, I experienced both affinity and distance. One powerful moment of being taken back in time occurred when I reread my diary notes of my evolving relationship with my mother and how I made sense of that at the time, in the current knowledge that her life was about to end so soon.*

## **Frame**

In this chapter I would like show you the nature and quality of my inquiry from my first year at CARPP (1997-1998), the Diploma Stage of the CARPP process. I will tell you about the research practices I engaged in, and share the main themes as I perceive those now.

My initial reflective writing covered a range of topics, mostly work related. As the year went on dramatic events in my family began to demand an increasing amount of my attention. At the same time I was learning to trust the process of first person inquiry. My notes became increasingly personal as I wrote about my attention to family dynamics and how I was conducting myself in those. For the purpose of this thesis I have chosen two themes: ‘Self as Inquirer’ and ‘Aesthetics and Presentational Knowing’.

### **3.1 The material upon which I base this account**

There is a considerable amount of writing: notes from the CARPP seminars, typed reflective diary notes, some of them distributed to my CARPP group and returned with comments, filed more or less chronologically. There are transcripts from tapes of my CARPP meetings, letters to my CARPP group and print-outs of emails (CARPP and work related). There is also hand written material, loose leafs interspersing the typed text and note books, which accompanied me on my travels for work across the UK, to Belgium on family visits and on holidays. Finally there is the Diploma Paper: a collection of thematic papers, photographs and poems.

It is difficult to create an *image* of my writing from that period. One could think of it as a stream of notes –reduced to a trickle, in occasional periods of draught-, following my attention in the moment. At first sight it appears somewhat chaotic, but as I engage more with it, patterns emerge. Typically my writing is organised by date, rather than by theme, although there are exceptions in which themes recur under specific headings, e.g.: “On being well and (not) looking after myself”, “On powerful



women”, “Working with the office of X”.

Much of the initial writing consisted of reflections on my work. I was finding my feet as an internal OD consultant and change agent in the Health Professions Agency (HPA), my employer at the time, and was seeking feedback from my CARPP learning group. In the second half of the year, as we settled down in our permanent learning group, my writing became more personal. I started to explore issues of health, my personal history, myself in the context of my family.

I notice this with a sense of surprise. My choice of learning group had been based on the supervisor (Judi Marshall) rather than on the composition of the group. Despite the fact that I was not always comfortable with one of my peers in the group, the stable composition of the group seems to have created a sufficiently safe environment for me to explore profoundly personal issues. Thus, not only did my writing change as a result of different issues coming to foreground, the safety of a permanent group may have had an impact too.

I started to explore aesthetics, both as a (hitherto largely unexplored) theme in my life and as a way of representing what I felt unable to capture in the language I had come to associate with academia. Subsumed in the above themes, are reflections on my CARPP meetings, thoughts (and often doubts) on becoming an action researcher.

Separating out themes feels somewhat artificial as they were deeply enmeshed in my diary. How I conducted myself at work and the issues I was working with continued to take me back to my past, as I found ‘old buttons’ pressed. In this chapter I will refer to how I engaged with my new role at work as it relates to my inquiry into self and my position in the world, because it seems to me how I was working with it at the time. In the next chapter there is more sustained inquiry into my role as an OD consultant and change agent.

The order in which I explore the themes in the rest of this chapter reflects the extent to which they have caught my attention at the time of re-reading my diaries, and the order in which they present themselves as I reflect on my writing of that period.

*My left hand is aching. It is the one part of my body mildly deformed and still occasionally affected by Rheumatoid Arthritis. I gently move and massage it and try to make sense of what this sudden onset of pain might tell me. I notice how my breathing has become shallow, my shoulders are tense and my heartbeat has quickened. Am I afraid? I breathe deeply, stand up, practise a few Tai Chi movements. A thought bubbles up: I can look back, but I don't need to go back. I can appreciate the work I did then from where I am now, a different place indeed. I play Vivaldi's 'Juditha Triumphans' and breathe into the pain.*

*Health then, or ill-health, has come to demand my attention once again. I decide to take up the thread as a lead into this theme of personal inquiry.*



## **3.2 Inquiring into self/ self as inquirer**

In their writing about working with graduate research students, Reason and Marshall stress the importance of a personal process of inquiry:

“...we believe that developing a personal process of inquiry, the first person research process, is the basis from which our students reach out to create a wider influence.” (2001 a p. 413)

The authors explore the personal process of research from three interrelated perspectives: an existential perspective as the here-and-now struggle with one's being in the world; a psychodynamic perspective which views current patterns of behaviour as routed in unresolved distress from earlier experiences; and thirdly, a transpersonal perspective which views individual experience as a reflection of archetypal patterns of the collective unconscious.

The first two perspectives strike me as particularly relevant to the Diploma Phase of my inquiry. I had not consciously come to CARPP with the intention to explore more than my new role at work. However, as I asked myself the question ‘how do I conduct myself as a consultant and change agent’ I began to notice how old patterns were acted out and restricted my capacity to flourish in my work and to find a generative space for myself and for others around me. I found I needed to “take stock and attempt to make sense of my life and experience so far” (Reason and Marshall 2001 d). At the same time, my own ill-health and serious illness in my family presented an added invitation to inquire into my place in my family, my unconscious collusion with limiting patterns and ways in which I could move through them.

### **3.2.1 Inquiry into becoming well**

The inquiry into my personal health had started before I came to CARPP. I had been seriously disabled during the previous two years. Since the prospect of cure from Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) with conventional medical treatment is particularly bleak, I had decided to explore alternatives: homeopathy (my sister had been treated for the same condition with remarkable success), healing, kinesiology, psychotherapy. In



my NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) training I had, with the help of Robert Dilts, explored beliefs that might sustain my illness (Dilts 1990) and to adopt more generative beliefs, with limited success.

At CARPP I continued my inquiry into ‘being well’ in a number of ways. Psychotherapy, martial arts, singing and exploring my personal history were the main arenas for inquiry. I share each one in turn.

### **Psychotherapy as inquiry**

In 1996 I had started psychotherapy with Michael, a psychotherapist/healer. Michael was a Medical Doctor, who had turned his back on conventional medicine because it failed to take the whole person into account. Michael invited me to pay attention to the stories I told myself about myself and my role in the world, and to reflect on the impact those stories had on my sense of self and my well being. Social constructionist would agree. They argue the importance of language in our construction of our world (Shotter 1993 (2002 edition); Gergen 1999) . Rosenwald and Ochberg reflect on the importance of language in the creation of identity:

“Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned. It is this formative – and sometimes deformative – power which makes them important” (1992. p.1)

With Michael’s help I set out to re-write some of my personal (his)story into a more empowering narrative:

*From my Diploma Paper*

*As he (Michael) said, after a particularly intense few hours: “It’s never too late to have a happy childhood”.*

Michael encouraged me to pay attention to patterns being played out between myself and my family, and with colleagues at work; and to explore alternatives, in the first instance by *telling* myself how it could be different, what I might do (differently) next time. At the same time he provided a safe, nurturing place in which to deal with the anxiety generated by my inquiry. On occasions I shared some of my reflective diary notes with him and it was following one such occasion that he encouraged me to seek

*I remember that it was in one of our conversations about exploring meditation and Tai Chi ("you're too much in your head") that Michael encouraged me to also seek other, aesthetic means to 'express myself' and tell my story.*

less ‘brainy’ avenues in my exploration of becoming more of my (healthy) self.

### **Exercising attention in Tai Chi and Chi Kung**

In ‘The Practice of Action Inquiry’, Bill Torbert (2001) encourages the aspiring action inquirer to exercise her attention:

“I cannot emphasize strongly enough how unknown such exercise generally is, nor how reliant we must therefore be on personal guidance by longtime practitioners of attention exercise in ongoing traditions of attentional inquiry. (...) I cannot imagine how anyone can generate awareness, mutuality and competence expansion without: (a) eventually seeking direct tuition in some sort of meditative work; (b) seeking ‘seeking friends’; and (c) framing one’s own organizational roles as action inquiry opportunities” (o.c. p. 251).

As well as seeking ‘seeking friends’ (at CARPP initially) and increasingly taking an action inquiry approach to my work, I set out to develop practices which enhance my awareness of my body-in-the-moment. I learnt to quieten my mind in the standing Chi Kung meditation and to notice the impact of small differences in posture on my strength and resistance. I explored the feeling of groundedness and of moving with, rather than against, adverse forces. I experienced the practice of Tai Chi as generative in its own right and on a number of occasions invited groups I worked with at HPA to join me in a brief Tai Chi practice. To my surprise it was, after the initial reluctance to get up from one’s chair, well received and I found myself running little meditative evening sessions on request.

There are brief references to my Tai Chi practice strewn across my diary notes. I quote an example from November 1997:

I practice Chi Kung to help me develop more internal strength on my exciting journey. I started the afternoon with a short Chi Kung meditation, which made me feel warm and alert. Worth keeping up.

Today was perhaps not such a bad day, after all.



### **Exploring breath and finding my singing voice**

In my inquiry with Michael I discovered not only something about how I disabled myself through the stories I told myself and others, I also learned how I silenced myself by stopping my breath. Gilligan (1993) mentions how women enact, through their bodies, the conscious or unconscious choice not to speak, by ‘narrowing the passages connecting the voice with breath and sound’. I found that not only would my throat seize up when I was about to speak the unspeakable, I simply stopped breathing. I started to pay attention to the flow of oxygen through my body: how and when did my breath become shallow? What did that feel like? What happened when I consciously breathed into fear, pain or anxiety? I started to notice others’ breathing, pace it, and notice what I learned about the state they might be in:

August 1997

It’s bizarre how I seemed to have paid little attention to people’s breathing when trying to pace them. So much for my NLP training. I never need to be bored in meetings again. There is much to learn from noticing people’s breath. I discover shallow, fast breathing – often with women. And notice the deep belly breathing of one of my colleagues who has a deep resonant voice and a calm robust presence. And I begin to notice more and more how my breathing changes as I respond to joy, anxiety, relaxation. I have a few things to learn on the breathing front I think.

I decided to start singing lessons to improve my breathing and my awareness of my breath in the moment. With the help of my tutor I explored breathing, creating space for breath in my body, resonance; I learnt about creating different qualities of sound, finding different quality voices. It was also a nourishing experience, and there are many comments in my diary about returning from singing classes feeling strong and exhilarated. I also found opportunities to share my new ‘breathing space’ with clients.

### **Exploring my personal history with ‘seeking friends’**

Taking my inquiry from the relative safety of a therapeutic setting to other contexts was a tall order. I was a seasoned ‘depreciative inquirer’ where it concerned my behaviour, contribution and expertise. As I brought accounts of work and my research





to my CARPP group, full of doubts about my ability and my contribution, I was regularly challenged: “Could you be kinder to yourself?” (Judi M), “So are you telling us you can’t do miracles yet?” (Margaret P). Judi invited me to honour the work I was doing. Reflecting on our conversation I wrote the following in my diary (I quote literally to keep the sense of urgency I experienced re-reading this quote):

The effect of Judi challenging my description of my work and research was quite extraordinary: suddenly I was confronted with the fact that my description is just THAT: a description – so it can be changed.

And of course I know where I got that description from. How often was I told not to think I was anybody special and not to be pleased with myself and my work? So – knowing where my inaccurate descriptions come from – but having seen evidence to the contrary – why have I not dealt with this & hold on to them? What are the benefits I derive from that? Do I feel safer in my self-deprecating descriptions? Because they are more familiar? Because they give me a place to hide? The surge of joy I felt when Judi interrupted my downward spiral was mingled with fear, no doubt. What am I fearful of then? The unknown?

CARPP colleagues encouraged me to explore my self-criticism and lack of confidence further. During that same period I was working with two powerful women whose behaviour I (and colleagues) experienced as verging on the abusive, which triggered old distress around some of my experiences as the daughter of a powerful and controlling mother. With the encouragement of my CARPP group I wrote an autobiographical account. I quote:

October 1997

I have settled down at my desk, with Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*, to write an account of a difficult part of my history. (...) I feel it is deeply relevant to my life at the moment, and to the direction my research appears to be moving into: powerful women and abuse of power (over the last few weeks I have been increasingly focussed on women trying to cope with feeling exploited or abused by other women exerting their power in inappropriate ways).



There are further notes about my hesitation to share my personal story, my fear that it would make awkward reading and a request to read my story as part of my inquiry, not as a cry for help.

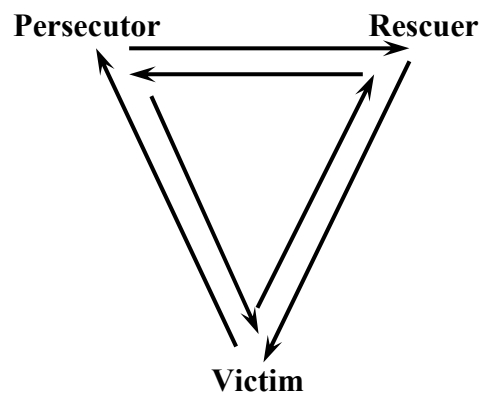
It does, still, make painful reading and I have decided that I do not wish to share it with a wider audience. For the purpose of this thesis I would like to give only an indication of the content: a loving account of a difficult childhood. As a boisterous, wilful and extroverted child, I'd had my run-ins with a mother for whom being in control was hugely important. In my teenage years my mother's world had imploded when my father became critically ill, and I had been parachuted into a 'carer'/rescuer role under very difficult circumstances. It was a messy, ill-defined role. I was caring for my parents, taking on an increasingly parental role, whilst at the same time coping with a continuing role of daughter, which was characterised by my parents' expectations of compliance and observation of many written and unwritten rules.

I explored the impact of my personal history on my current behaviour, sense of self and well-being in different areas: work, friends, and my relationship with my family. The following section describes my inquiry at work. In section 3.2.3 I share my inquiry into my relationship with my family.

### **3.2.2 Exploring my 'self-at-work'**

Looking back, I think I took my inquiry into the influence of "unresolved distress from earlier experiences on current behaviour" (Reason and Marshall 2001 d) as far as I could during the Diploma Phase: registering the connection and exploring alternative behaviour. After I had joined Ashridge Consulting in 2000, I returned to the topic from a psychodynamic perspective in another cycle of inquiry.

In 1980 I had been introduced to Transactional Analysis (TA) whilst working in a women's refuge in Belgium, where we used the model to help us make sense of the sometimes seemingly inexplicable behaviour of our clients. I continued to use the framework in my personal life as well as in my work when trying to make sense of patterns in unsatisfactory but repetitive interactions, it also informed my inquiry



**Figure 3.1 The Drama Triangle**

The capital letters indicate the specific use of the terms Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim in TA

during my first CARPP year. I will explain some of the TA concepts and show you how I used them in my inquiry.

TA was developed by the psychiatrist, Eric Berne, in the 1950's, in response to growing frustration with psychiatry and its debatable results and esoteric terminology. TA became more widely known through Thomas Harris's book: "I'm OK - You're OK" (1973). Hay (1996 p.13) describes TA as

"(...) a wide-ranging set of theories and techniques that can be used by individuals and groups to enable and help themselves and others to grow and develop their full potential. The underlying philosophy is one of self and mutual respect and caring".

This philosophy was congruent with my perspective on what I had set out to do for myself and for others. At the heart of TA lies the *ego-state model* of personality. The model describes three sets of behaviours, thoughts and feelings called: Parent, Adult, Child (the capital letters indicate the TA specific use of the terms):

"When I am behaving, thinking and feeling as I did when I was a child, I am said to be in my Child ego-state. When I am behaving, thinking and feeling in ways I copied from parents or parent figures, I am said to be in my Parent ego-state. And when I am behaving, thinking and feeling in ways which are a direct here-and-now response to events round about me, using all the abilities I have as a grown-up, I am said to be in my Adult ego-state" (Stewart and Joines 1987 p. 11).

The aspect of TA that I used most frequently in my inquiry was the psychological games theory. In TA Games are considered to be repetitive interactions that take place outside Adult awareness, and result in the participants feeling confused, misunderstood and blaming the other. The underlying motivation is considered to be a failed attempt at closeness. Karpman devised the Drama Triangle for analysing and understanding the dynamics of psychological games. He considered psychological games similar to theatrical drama in which the players take on the roles of Persecutor, Rescuer or Victim (see Fig. 3.1)

The *Persecutor* belittles and puts down other people. The *Rescuer* offers help from a one-up position, believing that others are not capable of helping themselves. The



*Victim* puts herself down, and may seek help from a Rescuer, confirming her view that she is not capable of helping herself, or may seek a Persecutor to put her down.

In TA the Drama Triangle roles are considered inauthentic responses to current situations. When people are in one of those roles, they are responding to past experiences, rather than to the present. Usually, someone who is playing a Game will start from one of the positions and then switch to another (Stewart and Joines 1987). Games are outside awareness. They are a way to get attention, to connect with others (called 'strokes' in TA), the underlying presupposition being that we prefer to get negative attention to none at all. They also allow us to re-affirm our deeply held beliefs about ourselves, the world and others (called life-positions in TA), whilst avoiding an 'original pain'. By repeating a sequence we developed in the past to protect ourselves from something, we do not have to deal with the issue in the present. This enables us to maintain the psychological stability we have achieved by learning to think and feel in particular, habitual ways (Hay 1996).

My inquiry focussed on how I tended to get caught in Games and how I could differentiate between a genuine attempt to help and support others and a psychological game being played, at work, with friends and with my family. I found Argyris' 'ladder of inference' (1990) a helpful tool to surface psychological game playing.

I illustrate my use of Game theory using an example from work.

I was working with a particularly troubled office at HPA. It was a central and high profile office and according to many of my colleagues, trying to improve its dynamics was a poisoned chalice. I made extensive use of the TA Game model to help me stay alert to how I was at risk of being drawn into a dynamic of conflict and aggression, in which the players had an interest in maintaining the status quo, despite their expressed wish to resolve the situation. My diary notes about my work with that office are scattered with references to Games being played. I cite a few:





30 October 1997

I explained to B., our professional counsellor, how I felt E was playing a Victim role. I told him about my fear that E is setting herself up, unconsciously, for the big crucifixion and that I'm lined up to be the executioner.

November 1997

I agonised the whole weekend. I so much want this to work for all of them but we seem to go round in circles. I can feel myself getting very tense and frustrated too. From Rescuer to Persecutor I wonder? And if it doesn't work out to Victim?

I had considerable support from my CARPP group in my inquiry into this difficult piece of work. The following extracts from tape transcripts are from October to December 1997:

“I notice that you are moving into the system...”

“Are you protecting yourself?”

“You seem to be willing to go all the way, but I am unclear about their consent and mutual effort. Are you “out there on your own?”

“You don't need more burdens. Does E need to grow up in her use of herself and her feelings?”

“Are you clear about your boundaries?”

Before me a number of senior people in the organisation had made an attempt to resolve the conflict in this office, unsuccessfully. I am pleased to say that, with the help of an external consultant, we managed to establish a workable atmosphere, partly by changing the unworkable structure of the system.

Despite the warm memory of success (and the glowing feedback it got me from many people in the organisation) I am struck, when I re-read my diary notes, by the extent to which I *did* get caught in the psychological game playing: often from an initial need to Rescue. I also notice now how I switched from one position in the Drama Triangle to another. At the time I paid a lot of attention to my tendency to Rescue.



Reading my diary notes now I also find a self- righteous anger and the sense of being victimised. Despite being repeatedly caught in the Drama Triangle, my sustained willingness to stay inquiring under very difficult circumstances over a period of over three months is worth acknowledging. It was my continued attention to the risk of being drawn into the dynamics of the office, my tendency to Rescue, and the complexity of my role as an internal consultant which led me to seek external help. Accepting the limitations of my contribution was an important shift in my initial feeling that I, by myself, was responsible for ‘making things work’, a deeply held belief that originated from my childhood and often led me to getting caught in a Drama Triangle dynamic.

Although I found TA useful, and although it is widely used in management and organisational analysis (Stewart and Joines 1987), it needs to be used with some caution. As a personality theory it tends to focus strongly on the individual and risk disappearing the socially constructed nature of our sense of self and our behaviour (Elias 1991).

TA does have the advantage of using straightforward, every day language. Karpman’s labels became like red flags for me at the time, and were more user-friendly than psychodynamic terms such as transference and counter-transference, which I need to get my head around again every time I use them. The associated risk is that the terms become used indiscriminately and muddy the waters: eg. appropriate anger is dismissed as Persecuting and a well chosen supportive intervention perceived as Rescuing. Exploring the difference between engaging in psychological games and appropriate responses from a place of autonomy was an important part of my inquiry. Sharing my diary notes with CARPP colleagues helped me in that exploration, especially in my work with the ‘troubled office’, where the intensity of the dynamics often made it hard for me to stay inquiring. The question I found I needed to keep asking myself was around autonomy and responsibility, my own and that of others in the situation: “Was my intervention geared towards recognising, validating and supporting the autonomy of others, or was I thinking, acting, ‘for’ them?” It was not always an easy question to answer, and my ‘expert model of consulting’ (Schein 1988) sometimes led me to take more control and responsibility than seemed



warranted. I will expand on my working model of consulting at that time in the next chapter.

### **3.2.3 Self in the context of my family**

1997 was a difficult year. My mother's diabetes was causing considerable problems and she was taken to hospital on a number of occasions. At the same time my father's health was deteriorating in front of our eyes, despite reassurances from his consultant to the contrary. Rather than rushing to the rescue, as I had been wont to do in previous years, I tried to delay my instinctive reaction and inquire into what would constitute an appropriate and measured response: what did *I* need, was I genuinely needed at my parents' home, could I help, if so how?

#### **Using TA to explore family dynamics**

I used TA's Game Theory to help me surface habitual, repetitive and distressing patterns in my interaction with my parents and sister. I found it was not difficult to notice psychological Games being played, to stay out of them was harder. Engaging in inquiring conversations with John, my husband, with close personal friends, with my CARPP colleagues and with Michael, I explored my experience of interactions with family. The perspective of people outside the family dynamic helped me to raise my awareness of the means and the extent to which I was contributing to the dynamic. It was an enlightening and often painful experience.

From 1997 onwards, until my mother's death in November 1999, I made notes in my reflective diary of events, of my response and the effect it had in my family 'system'. That inquiry is still ongoing intermittently.

I found an amazing amount of support. I also experienced how others brought their own family patterns to my inquiry. People hold strong views about family responsibilities, I discovered. In November 1997 I wrote in my diary:

*Chopin's Nocturnes on this wet and windy night.*

*I've just put the phone down. L. wants to be helpful I know. But if anything, I felt more anxious at the end of our conversation than before. I guess I will have to find my own answers. I am not looking for advice. I am looking for help in finding my*



own way forward in this. Inquiring is also opening oneself up to answers, advice & and to all the stuff people have not resolved in their own lives. I am sick with anxiety sometimes. I want to pack it all in, go 'home' to Belgium, be with my parents who need me. And yet when I am there, or here and thoughtful, I know that's not the way forward. How do I hold this 'open mind' without... I don't know, without what exactly. Without feeling I'm letting my family down?

### **Finding a different voice with my family**

In December I had planned to spend the last week of the year to write up my Diploma Paper. It was not to be. I had promised my father that, should he need heart surgery, I would go home and look after my mother. During the week before Christmas the call came: the date was set for New Year's eve. Could I come home to look after my mother?

I had a promise to keep. I said: "Yes, of course", there and then. CARRP and the Diploma Paper would have to wait. I decided I would use my time with my family as an opportunity to continue my inquiry, rather than suspending it. As part of my inquiry into finding my way out of psychological games, I was reading Gilligan's: "In a different voice" (1993) and I decided that my week with my family would be an opportunity to explore my ability to find a balance between my 'felt duty to care' and my 'right to care' or, as I wrote in my Diploma Paper, quoting Gilligan

And so, as I set off on my mission of care for my family, I decided I would attempt to expand my notion of care from "*the paralyzing injunction not to hurt others to an injunction to act responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection*" (o.c., p147).

"In a different voice" (Gilligan, o.c.) critically examines psychological processes and theory, particularly theories in which men's experience stands for all of human experience and thus eclipses women's experience and shuts out their voices. On the basis of three studies Gilligan re-frames women's psychological development as centring on a struggle for connection rather than speaking about women as having a problem in achieving separation, as psychologists had done before her:





- The *college student study* explored identity and moral development in early adult years by relating participants' views of self and their thinking about morality to their experience of moral conflict and the making of life choices.
- In the *abortion decision study*, twenty nine women were interviewed during the first trimester of a confirmed pregnancy at a time when they were considering abortion. The study explored the relation between experience and thought and the role of conflict in development.
- Hypotheses formulated in the above studies were further examined in the *rights and responsibilities study*. From a sample of males and females across nine points of the life cycle, data were collected on conceptions of self and morality and experiences of moral conflict and choice.

Gilligan demonstrates how developmental psychology, from Freud, through Erikson and Piaget, is built on the examination of the experiences of the *male* child.

According to Gilligan the interpersonal dynamics of gender identity formation are different for boys and girls because the primary care giver for both sexes in the first three years is typically female. Female identity formation takes place in a context of ongoing relationships, and girls consequently – experiencing themselves as like their mothers – fuse the experience of attachment with the process of identity formation.

In contrast, boys, in defining themselves as masculine, separate themselves from their mothers, curtailing their sense of empathic ties. Male development therefore entails a more emphatic individuation and a more defensive firming of experienced ego boundaries. Difference is often interpreted in terms of 'better' or 'worse' and, according to Gilligan, this difference in development has been interpreted traditionally as 'women having weaker ego boundaries than men' rather than as 'girls have a basis of empathy built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not'. Consequently, the conception of adulthood favours separation, autonomy and individuation. The difference in the process of identity formation has implications for men and women's moral development. The moral imperative emerging in interviews with women in Gilligan's studies, is an injunction to care, a responsibility to alleviate the troubles of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfilment:



“Women’s insistence on care is at first self-critical rather than self-protective, while men initially conceive obligation to others negatively in terms of noninterference. Development for both sexes would therefore seem to entail an integration of rights and responsibilities through the discovery of the complementarity of these disparate views” (o.c., p. 100).

I was very conscious of the injunction to care and the ‘self critical’ nature of it in my life. Could I, I wondered, find a balance between my felt duty of care for others and my right to care for myself and be cared for? Could I *believe* that I had rights as well as duties, in the environment which had taught me ‘a morality of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation’ (Gilligan 1993). I decided I would give it my best. I set off on my mission of care for my family with a brand new diary, promising myself that I would document my attempts in order to keep focussed on what I was setting out to do, and as a first act of looking after myself, by progressing my first person inquiry which had become so important to me.

I include a lengthy extract from my diary. I believe it gives a picture of my inquiry during in the midst of taking care of my family.

(1 January 1998)

This is the tail end of the first day of the new year. It (life) feels very strange. I have noticed so much, I have written so little since Monday. I had great plans about/for/with this diary when I came to Belgium. It was to be my safe route to maintaining sanity – my rescue from a guilt complex for not reading – an account of my interest in my own moral development. It seems almost like a curse to me now. Almost – but not quite. I add guilt to my already laden heart because I don’t actually manage to sit down and write (although I do register and reflect). But the mere intention to document my journey towards a fuller sense of my own rights –inside a system where that journey is probably most hazardous – has helped me to shift perceptual positions (note: see below)– from first to second to third – frequently and readily – with some truly amazing results.

Why don’t I find time to sit down and write?



There is a fragmentation of our days, generated by hospital time tables in combination with my mother's strict diabetes routine, together with my want and need to get out – without my mum – with time to think – at least once a day - + (seemingly endless) domestic chores + New Year's occasion + concerned calls from relatives + my sister and brother-in-law – make it very hard not to just want to sit down and do nothing but a crossword when I finally get a minute.

That's one side.

There's also this side: I am very rarely on my own. My mother is around. Looking very distressed. Needing attention – even quiet attention. On occasions I could try to withdraw and read/write – but that is not a pattern in my family home and is a violation of unwritten rules. When in a public space you don't expect private time. You get that in bathrooms and bedrooms. Since currently both are freezing neither is very inviting.

But it is also about my own upset. My deep concern for my father and my need to share it with my mother and sister.

Maintaining an inquiring stance was not always easy, as the above extract illustrates. I used the NLP technique of 'shifting perceptual positions' to help me explore my conduct from different perspectives. Knight defines shifting perceptual positions as a technique "for finding congruent solutions that are likely to transform your experience of the whole situation" (Knight 1995). In *first position* I am associated in my own point of view, beliefs and assumptions. I respond to the situation firmly grounded in my own experience. In *second position* I aim to step in the shoes of another person, trying to see the world through their eyes, and to notice what feelings and thoughts emerge from that place. In *third position* I am associated in a point of view outside of the relationship between myself and the other person. I attempt to see the situation as if I were a detached observer (Dilts 1994). Of course I can only ever see the world through my eyes. But making a conscious effort to see it from another's point of view, or to take a metaphorical step back and attempt to reflect on the dynamic between myself and the other, can generate valuable new perspectives at times of feeling stuck. Thus making a genuine attempt to see the world through my mother's eyes I managed to see the anxiety and despair behind the anger she 'presented' to the world, and to respond not to the cover of anger, but to what I found



underneath it at the time. By returning firmly to first position I managed to explore my own needs and to ask for what I needed: quiet time for myself, a hug, time to call friends. It enabled me to pay undivided attention to my encounters with my mother and father – during the daily 15 minutes we were allowed with him. From 3<sup>rd</sup> position I regularly reminded myself what Kathleen had set out to do, and checked whether she was still on track. It helped me a great deal when the dynamic became stressful.

In my diary I also mention how I used Fisher and Torbert's 'four types of speech' (1995). The authors claim we can become increasingly effective by balancing framing, advocating, illustrating and inquiring. They define the four 'types of speech' as follows:

- 'Framing' is explicitly stating the purpose for the present occasion, and the assumptions you think are shared or not shared (but need to be tested out loud to be sure).
- 'Advocating' refers to asserting an opinion, perception, feeling, or proposal for action explicitly in relatively abstract terms.
- 'Illustrating' involves telling a bit of a concrete story that puts meat on the bones of advocacy and thereby orients and motivates others more clearly.
- 'Inquiring' involves questioning others in order to learn something from them.

They invite us to look at our conversational patterns, notice which of the four types of speech we are using, and to add more of the types that are relatively infrequently used. As I started to pay attention to the patterns in my family I became increasingly aware of our tendency to respond to advocacy with advocacy, occasionally giving weight to our arguments by illustrating (which did seem to motivate others, but only to advocate their view stronger). Surfacing our assumptions was not part of our pattern and inquiring appeared reserved for making pragmatic arrangements. In my diary I wrote:

3 January

I have decided to stay for another week, as my father seems so desperately ill. Not sure they know what is the matter and if they do, they're not telling us. We're

### **David Bohm and Dialogue**

The physicist David Bohm is one of the main contributors to the theory of Dialogue, which suggests that breakdowns in the effectiveness of teams and organisations reflect a broader crisis in the nature of how human beings perceive the world. In the process of developing meaning we learn to divide the world into categories and distinctions in our thoughts.

Bohm suggests that this fragmentation of thought is like a virus that has infected every field of human endeavour. Instead of reasoning together, we defend our “part”, seeking to defeat others. Dialogue is a strategy to overcome the thinking which results from fragmentation by refocusing the group’s shared attention. The word “dialogue” derives from two roots: “dia” which means “through” and “logos” which means “the word”, or more particularly, “the meaning of the word.” The image it evokes is of a stream of meaning which flows around and through participants.

In Dialogue, a group of people explore the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that subtly control their interactions. It is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour. Dialogue has no predetermined purpose beyond the interest of the participants in the unfolding and revelation of deeper collective meanings. No firm rules can be laid down for conducting a Dialogue because its essence is learning as part of an unfolding process of creative participation between peers.

Dialogue aims to slow down the process of thought in order for us to be able to observe our thinking while it is actually occurring, through **suspension** of thoughts, impulses and judgments. Suspension is essential to exploration and involves attention, listening and looking. The process of exploration takes place during listening to others and to oneself. Suspension involves exposing our reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt within our own psyche and also be reflected back by others in the group. It does not mean repressing or suppressing them, but giving them serious attention so that their structures can be noticed while they are actually taking place. (continued on page 208)



hypothesising, worst case scenarios mainly. Now I have started to ask, at every visit to the hospital: what is happening, why this, how that, how much longer? I like to think of it as inquiring, I guess they experience it as nagging, being difficult...

Talking about inquiring.

I am struck by our habitual patterns of conversation at home. More like a debating society really. It would be funny if it wasn't so sad. I guess I knew this already, but as I start to pay attention in the moment, I can almost literally see how our conversations go pear-shaped. I find it hard not to get drawn in. I stop and breathe before I speak. And when I speak I try to inquire... I had a magic moment this morning at breakfast. My mother looked desperately sad and anxious, but she sounded angry. So I asked about her anger, about how she felt, what was going on in her head and heart. I learned so much about her, about her childhood as an only child, her parents. And when I advocated I did it very carefully, with many illustrations.

It was a magic moment that, for me at least, changed the dynamic between myself and my mother for ever. It seems to me a moment in which I experienced the power of inquiring in its most existential form. Much later, I read Bohm's 'On Dialogue' (Bohm 1996) (See textbox on adjacent page)

"This is really something of crucial importance, to be listening and watching, observing, to give attention to the actual process of thought and the order in which it happens, and to watch for its incoherence, where it's not working properly, and so on. We are not trying to change anything, but just being aware of it. And you can notice the similarity of the difficulties within a group to the conflicts and incoherent thoughts within an individual" (p.21).

It reminded me of that wondrous morning and how I had managed to bring that quality of attention to our conversation. During those intense few weeks I found a new balance between my felt duty of care for others and my right to care for myself and be cared for. It was put to the test in the course of the next year, during the painful illness and death of my mother. As I encouraged my sister and father to care for themselves and to acknowledge their needs, we all grew stronger and closer. I

This may permit us to see the deeper meanings underlying our thought process. Similarly, if a group is able to suspend thoughts and feelings and give its attention to them then the overall process that flows from thought, to feeling, to acting-out within the group, can also slow down and reveal its deeper, more subtle meanings along with any of its implicit distortions, leading to what might be described as a new kind of coherent, collective intelligence.

Sources: (Bohm 1980; 1985; 1996)

believe it was my sustained inquiry and the nourishment I found in reading and writing that contributed to finding my space in which I could flourish whilst nurturing and caring for others. In that process my beliefs about health had changed profoundly. I wrote in my Diploma Paper:

It was during those agonising weeks in January of this year (note: 1998), as we stood by our father, fighting for his life, and we all came close to going under, that I suddenly understood the obvious: health and well being are not in limited supply. The healthier I am, the more strength I bring into the living system that is our family. My right to take care of myself is not only compatible with my desire to care for my beloved family, it is a fundamental aspect of it.

I discovered how hard it can be to take learning from one system into another. The new sense of self I had acquired in the midst of my family, with my newly discovered right to care for myself and be cared for, was to be put sorely to the test at work, but more of that in the next chapter.

### **3.3 Exploring Presentational Knowing**

“There is an intimate relationship between our conception of what the products of research are to look like and the way we go about doing research. What we think it means to do research has to do with our conception of meaning, our view of cognition, and our beliefs about the forms of consciousness that we are willing to say advance human understanding (...). What succeeds in deepening meaning, expanding awareness, and enlarging understanding is, in the end a community decision.” (Eisner 1997. p.5)

In Chapter One I have mentioned how action research draws on diverse forms of knowing, not just empirical and conceptual, but also experiential, tacit, presentational and aesthetic, relational and practical (Marshall and Reason 2003). In that chapter I also discussed Heron’s extended epistemology, which includes presentational knowing that grows out of experiential knowing and provides forms of expression through story, picture, sculpture and drawing on aesthetic imagery (1996). My

*I have struggled to find 'a way into' telling the story of how I came to be interested in exploring different presentational forms, music, aesthetics. I write thoughts down, gather books and articles around me, copy a few quotes*

*I sit and listen to the sound of traffic on the wet road, and to Handel's Oboe Concertos playing softly in the background. Background – foreground.*

*I am reminded of Weick's (1997) writing about the risk of implying cause and effect by bringing something to foreground, when what is in the 'background' may be more influential in shaping patterns than the events to which we wanted to attribute cause .*

*For the purpose of this PhD I try to tell a coherent story, to explain in a 'meaningful way' what I have been up to: first this happened, then that, and the reason for doing what I did... Truth is, as I see it here and now, that there is not one cohesive story of purpose to tell about how I came to be interested in exploring music, aesthetics, different forms of representation. There are strands that came together and in the process of that coming together something evolved. I will try to tell the story of that evolving. I smile. In Flemish, my mother tongue, strand means beach. It seems a lovely image for this story. All those beaches, running into one another, to be explored and enjoyed.*

*I come back to this writing, hoping to complete this chapter, on a beautiful Sunday morning. I chose Boccherini's Cello Concertos to work with, an unusually robust choice for a sunny morning. The muscular enthusiasm of the music lifts me and gives me a sense of my own strength. I even smile at the haphazard percussion of my downstairs neighbour's home improvements.*

encounter with Heron's framework, and the validation in the action research community (Reason and Bradbury 2001 c) encouraged me to explore different forms of representation which "reveal the more submerged and difficult-to-articulate aspects of the issues involved" (Park 2001). I knew from my professional experience that there was more to knowing than could easily be articulated and that a conceptual understanding of frameworks underpinning one's profession was no guarantee to 'being a good practitioner'. Nevertheless, had it not been for the continued encouragement of the CARPP community, I would have felt compelled to produce a rather dry, conceptual account of my inquiry. Years of socialisation in an implicit positivist paradigm proved hard to shake off. I learned, from experience, the importance of surfacing assumptions around what constitutes knowledge and what counts as evidence (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997):

"(...) our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it." (o.c. p. 3)

The following section describes the various strands of exploring different forms of presentational knowing during the Diploma Phase.

### **3.3.1 The music strand**

Music has always played an important role in my life. As a child I tried my hand at various instruments, with varying degrees of success and enjoyment. Playing an instrument had become difficult following my run-in with Rheumatoid Arthritis. I continued to listen to music with pleasure and discovered it was wonderful sustenance to my reflective diary writing. I chose carefully which music to write with as I began to realise how it shaped my mood and hence the quality and nature of my reflections, and started to make notes about my choices in my reflective diary. Challenged by one of my CARPP colleagues ("Who is Pergolesi?") I began to consider how I might actually share with my readers the music that belonged with the text. It was not until 2002 that I started to bring records to my CARPP meeting and explore ways in which I might attach music to my PhD. In the meantime I occasionally quoted from the lyrics.



### 3.3.2 The photography strand

“If we reflect on the culture at large and ask how we convey what we know, a large number of forms for doing so come immediately to mind. First we tell stories. Stories instruct, they reveal, they inform in special ways. We also use pictures. Pictures depict. They do many things; among the most important is the obvious: They show us what things, places, and people look like.” (Eisner 1997. p.5)

I have been an enthusiastic amateur photographer for a while. John and I share an interest in architecture and my camera has been a faithful companion on our many trips. It is ‘my medium’, more than paint or pencils, and with Michael’s encouragement I dusted off my camera and took to the street, or on occasions just started to record images in my mind, taking mental photographs of the hustle and bustle of daily life around me. And then an invitation to take pictures presented itself to me from an unexpected angle when we moved home, in the spring of 1997. The flat we were moving into needed a considerable amount of work. As we started to reconstruct the place, searching in our mind’s eye for the original grace and beauty of the space, the emotionally engaging process struck me as an appropriate metaphor for my inquiry at the time: gradually stripping away limiting scripts to find more of my ‘autonomous’ self, to become the person I could be. I decided to take pictures of the work-in-progress: tools lying around, a light switch suspended in space where we had torn a wall down, piles of rubble. I did not intend to create a running documentary but to capture and represent at a different, imaginal level what I experienced both in my physical and mental space. I am sceptical of Eisner’s assertion that pictures show us “what people and places look like”. Anyone who has looked at holiday brochures and then visited the ‘promised lands’ will know the power photography has to create impressions that are far from truthful. Harper, exploring the place of photography in social sciences, asserts that “All images, despite their relationship to the world, are socially and technically constructed” (1994 p.406).

It was my intention to use the ‘socially constructed’ quality of my photographs. I tried to capture the elusive concept of social construction in images that were not





documentary in nature. I took pictures of small details of everyday objects in a way that made them hard to recognise, by flattening the perspective through the use of different lenses and used images of a space under construction as a metaphor for my sense of ‘self- in-development’. I included photographs, as metaphorical representations, in my Diploma Paper. Following the diploma phase I continued my photographic exploits, but it was a loosely held strand. It was not until after my transfer from MPhil to PhD that I re-engaged with it fully, and in for me new and exciting ways. I will come back to that in my accounts of my client work.

### **3.3.3 The ‘aesthetics of space’ strand**

The six intensive months of home improvements became an inquiry topic in their own right. As I spent hours pondering over colours, fabrics, textures, light and shapes I continued to ask myself: why and how is this important to me? “Am I selling out to petit-bourgeois values of the ‘beautiful home’?” was one of the less appreciative questions I asked myself. As I started to pay attention to the spaces I was working, living, travelling in and their effect on the quality of my experience I became increasingly aware of the importance of their aesthetic qualities. Tony Hiss describes it well:

“We all react, consciously and unconsciously, to the places where we live and work, in ways we scarcely notice or that are only now becoming known to us. (...) These places have an impact on our sense of self, our sense of safety, the kind of work we get done, the ways we interact with people, even our ability to function as citizens in a democracy. In short, the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become” (1990 p. XI).

Thus, paying attention to aesthetic qualities of space became an ongoing strand in my inquiry. I developed it further in my work with clients.

### **3.3.4 The poetic strand**

“... And perhaps, above all, we have poetry, that linguistic achievement whose meanings are paradoxically non-linguistic: Poetry was invented to say what words



**anxious murmurs**

**tight faces**

**dark rings**

**under eyes**

**and armpits**

**finally the roll call**

**a squirt of antiseptic**

**in our cupped hands**

**the sudden sting to the eye**

**of cheery curtains**

**white and yellow stripes**

**a neat line of parasols on an outlandish beach**

**deafening silence**

**only the eerie**

**sound**

**of nothing**

**but seven respirators**

can never say. Poetry transcends the limits of language and evokes what cannot be articulated” (Eisner 1997 p. 5).

“A poem, according to Robert Frost, is “the shortest emotional distance between two points” – the speaker and the reader” (Richardson 2000, p. 933).

I was surprised to find myself writing poetry during the period my father was in hospital. I called it condensed text, partly as an indication that I did not feel my experiments quite deserved to be called poetry, partly because I was trying to convey the sense of intense engagement in the compact nature of my writing. It was an attempt to ‘evoke what cannot be articulated’, certainly.

Looking back I think that my inquiry was an influential factor too. Taking an inquiring stance generates a reflexive openness. As I inquire, I open my senses to what comes at me. I aim to hear, feel, see with a quality of attention I don’t always muster in the routine of daily life (Torbert 2001). And I am mindful in that moment of heightened attention. In the noticing in the moment I am intentional: I aim to share my experience as part of my inquiry, so I hold those vivid impressions in a way that I will be able to return to them later, for making sense and for sharing. I think now that, if I had not set out with such a purposeful intent, if I had not conscientiously created space to write down my reflections and impressions, I would not have tried my hand at ‘condensed writing’ either. That very moment, when we were allowed our first visit to my father after his surgery, would have perhaps been lost in a vague memory. I asked my sister and her husband. They vaguely remember that we stood outside, waiting to be admitted to the intensive care ward, that we had to have our hands disinfected and that, when we were finally allowed to see my father we hardly recognised him. Having wrought my experience of that moment into a poem, I remember the colour of the curtains round the beds, the smells, the sounds as if I was there again. (See adjacent page)



### **3.4 “Valuable work well done?”**

I have revisited my inquiry from 1997 with mixed emotions: surprise, sadness, anxiety and on occasions with awe and gratitude. Looking back after five years, I am struck by the extent to which the inquiry work I did during that period has had an impact on my life and work. The image that comes to mind is one of carefully preparing a canvas, invisible but to the discerning eye, and yet subtly influencing the quality of the emerging image.

The strongest impact from that period seems to have been on my relationship with my family, although I am aware that may appear to be so because it was most dramatic and ‘in foreground’ at the time (Weick, 1997).

I am grateful to my CARPP group from that era for their continued support and challenge during the Diploma Phase - they and I knew only too well how many times I came close to giving up-, and for the inspirational authors who challenged my thinking and acting in the world. They were, after all, also ‘seeking friends’ (Torbert 2001) and members of the community that validated my first tentative research steps (Eisner 1997).

In Chapter One of this thesis I have discussed how Reason and Bradbury invite action researchers to continually ask themselves the question: “Am I doing good work? Is this valuable work done well?” and the five broad issues they encourage us to address in evaluating the quality of our research (2001 (e)). I will address each of those issues here in relation to my inquiry during my first year at CARPP. Reason and Bradbury (o.c.) point out that there is overlap between the different issues, this is inevitably also the case in my discussion of them.

#### **3.4.1 Quality as Relational Praxis**

This aspect of quality focuses on issues of participation, authority and involvement among action researchers, and may, at first appear less relevant to a first person inquiry. Without attempting to force-fit my inquiry into this framework, I do think it

*I develop Bakan's concepts of 'agency' and 'communion' further in Chapter 7. Here I'd like to offer a broad definition, based on Fletcher's (1994) use of the terms: Agency stands for independence, autonomy and instrumentality; communion for expressiveness, connection and relatedness. Marshall (1989) points out that both modalities have their degenerative tendencies: "Agency can become over-control, destruction of the environment, repression of uncertainty and all but manageable emotions. Communion can be penetrated, flooded and eventually destroyed by external forces or can move at their behest with no voice or direction of its own" (p. 280).*

raises some interesting questions about relationship and the extent to which my inquiry addressed issues of interdependence and empowerment on a micro level.

In Chapter One I have claimed the value and importance of first person inquiry practices. The groundwork for that assertive claim, I believe, was done during my first year at CARPP. I had arrived with vague pre-conceived ideas about what good action research looked like. My model involved working with a group of people to inquire in a topic of mutual interest. To give myself permission to “do what *I* needed to do”, as Judi Marshall succinctly puts it (personal communication, 1997) and to engage in a first person inquiry, I see as an act of agency (Bakan 1966), a tentative step in self-empowerment.

Finding much support in my CARPP group, I was also confronted with considerable challenge from colleagues and friends: “How can this be academic research?” they wanted to know, “How is that contributing to knowledge?” Questions I also asked myself repeatedly, whilst having a sense of the value of what I was doing for my life and my work. Reason and Bradbury (o.c.) point out that all action research is circumscribed by particular interests. I needed to pay attention to what was happening around me, especially in my family.

I believe that my self-reflective inquiry practices did address issues of relationship, power and interdependence. In the first instance my inquiry helped me to address issues of degenerative communion (Marshall 1989). In the context of my family I had hitherto found myself helplessly at sea in asserting my own agency. I used the TA framework of psychological Games (Stewart and Joines 1987; Hay 1996) and Gilligan’s work (1993) on moral maturity as bases for my inquiry into developing a greater awareness of my own needs and create a more sustainable role for myself. Secondly, and seemingly paradoxically, by seeking to find a more generative balance between duty and right, between separateness and connection, I invited a different, more authentic relationship from others around me. For instance, by staying out of ‘Rescuer’ mode, I invited others to find their own strengths. As the TA analysis literature points out, by interrupting degenerative transactions within the Drama Triangle, I can create a space for authentic feelings and needs to emerge (Stewart and Joines 1987).





In summary my inquiry allowed me to see myself and others, in new ways. It also generated new patterns of relating in my family. As my mother said, following a long conversation over breakfast: “I think I see your dad in a new light” (January, 1998).

### **3.4.2 Quality as reflexive-practical outcome**

“Are other people helped by (their participation in) my inquiry?” ask Reason and Bradbury (o.c.). My parents and sister tell me they were. Something fundamental had changed in our family dynamic, they said. And although they found it difficult to articulate that was, and how it had happened, they expressed delight and enchantment with our newly emerging pattern of relating to each other. People at work (involved the difficult office dynamic described earlier) told me things had improved considerably. The power dynamics in the office had changed for the better. Having been involved in the dialogue about the future of the office – a budding second person inquiry? – had helped to create a solution that they felt was right for them, and left them feeling less helpless and more in control of their own destiny.

### **3.4.3 Quality as plurality of knowing**

“Action research recognizes the importance of conceptual knowledge, while also consciously engaging in extended forms of epistemologies.” (Reason and Bradbury, o.c., p. 448).

I will address the different facets of this choice point, the conceptual quality of my inquiry, the extended ways of knowing, and the methodological appropriateness, in turn.

#### **Conceptual-theoretical integrity**

In this first year of my inquiry my engagement with conceptual frameworks consisted largely of seeking and working with frameworks that helped me to make sense of my experience and to explore new ways of being and behaving. I was pragmatic in my approach, looking for tools and models. However, I think my engagement was sustained and valuable.



I will only discuss the most recurring frameworks here.

I used the TA framework to learn to distinguish between psychological games and authentic relating and to develop a greater authenticity in my presence (Stewart and Joines 1987);(Harris 1973); (Hay 1996). I succeeded on occasions, as my successful work in the 'high profile' office and the feedback from my family illustrate. I made extensive use of Torbert and Fisher's four modes of speech (1995) and the NLP concept of 'perceptual positions' (Knight 1995) in my inquiry in the context of my family. Gilligan's work (1993), although conceptual in nature, was a genuine source of sustenance. Revisiting her thoughtful exploration of the importance of caring for oneself gave me the courage to do so in a way that I might otherwise not have managed.

In my diary I found notes about sharing and exploring the above frameworks with colleagues and friends. But my approach was generally one of enthusiastic advocacy, rather than critical exploration.

### **Extended ways of knowing**

Did I draw on different ways of knowing and did they contribute to the quality of my inquiry? I would like to answer a tentative yes, and use Heron and Reason's (2001) extended epistemology to illustrate.

I have already discussed my budding propositional and practical knowing above. My singing, Tai Chi and Chi Kung practice, as well as my psychotherapy contributed to extending my experientially knowing. Becoming aware of my breath, paying attention to my voice, learning to pay increasing attention to how I felt and what was going on in my body in psychotherapy, the grounding experience of standing meditation and careful movement in Chi Kung and Tai Chi, contributed to extending my conscious awareness of 'being' in the world.

I experimented, enthusiastically if not always effectively, with different presentational forms as I brought music, poetry and imagery to my inquiry. Those were early, tentative experiments. They did, I think, 'prepare the canvas' and I worked with them in more depth later in my inquiry practice.



### **Quality through methodological appropriateness**

Judi Marshall describes her first person inquiry practices as scanning ‘inner and outer arcs of attention’ (2001). I recognise both in my inquiry from that period. Inner arcs I find in my seeking out patterns, surfacing assumptions, noticing the language I use to construct my map of the world, noticing my body responding and recording what I noticed. Outer arcs I found in my inquiring conversations: testing my assumptions about what might be going on in the office team with the team members, with HPA’s councillor, with G. my best and most critical (as in questioning with me) friend at HPA, in my family; seeking to influence situations and noticing what happens, what responses I get, how I respond (in another inward arc).

I am aware of a relative absence of cycles of inquiry (Rowan 2001) during this period. It seems as if I am driven ever forward, only occasionally looking back, and sometimes not noticing how I have been ‘here’ before a few times. My diary notes were quite journalistic on occasions too, descriptive, rather than reflective.

Nevertheless, I established a discipline of writing which served me well in later stages of my inquiry. The mere act of documenting what was going on for me at the time was in itself an useful way to stop the often frenetic activity in my life. It also provided useful material for later cycles of reflection, when crafting my diploma and transfer papers and this chapter in the thesis. Further, the awareness that I was not keeping my diary whilst looking after my mother, helped to focus my mind, if only by *noticing* what I was not writing about, as I mentioned earlier.

#### **3.4.4 Quality as engaging in significant work**

Was my work significant? Torbert (2001) and Marshall (2001) illustrate how, at the heart of every first person inquiry is a sustained questioning of the values we hold and the work we engage with. Reason and Bradbury (2001 (e)) point out that any (participative) inquiry, well-grounded in the everyday concerns of people, will necessarily be worthwhile. The significance of my ‘work’ with my family, the extent to which it addressed our everyday concerns was apparent to me at the time. Beginning to disrupt firmly cemented, degenerative patterns, and creating opportunities for happier, healthier relationships mattered to all of us, especially at a time when we were dealing with difficult circumstances of acute illness and

*'Doing PhD research is a lonely business', people tell me.*

*It is, and it isn't I think,*

*It's been a source of connectivity for me, in that first year dramatically so.*

*And of course, it is a lonely process too.*

*I have felt lonely travelling back in time to write this chapter, evening after evening.*

*It is time to reconnect with the world outside, where autumn is announcing itself in an early dusk,*

dependency of both my parents. Knowing now that time was running out, as my mother had less than two years to live, the significance of that work seems even greater.

I feel less confident about the significance of my work at HPA. Certainly my work with 'the difficult office' was appreciated by all involved. But it was a small aspect of my role, and in many other areas I felt considerable more inadequate and unsure of the value of my work. I explore this further in the next chapter.

#### **3.4.5 Emergent Inquiry towards enduring consequence**

I believe I did valuable ground-work in those days with some enduring results. Again, I am more confident about the enduring quality of my inquiry in my family than at work. From 1998 onwards my mother became increasingly ill. There were strained moments, but the way in which we *were* together and looked after one another during that period, and after my mother had died, would not have been possible had we not established a different dynamic in our family. Six years later my sister and father still reminisce with curiosity about the difference I made in their lives in those days. They are not quite sure what happened, or how it came about, but they describe it as a turning point in their lives.

In the next chapter I turn my attention to my inquiry into my practice as a change agent at HPA, during the period following the diploma phase (1998-2000).