

In-powering spaces: a co-operative inquiry with young women in management

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Dedication

For my Mum and Dad - Maxine and Kevin McArdle.

This is your achievement too.

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Sandy: You are fabulous. My happiest memories of my PhD years are of meeting and falling in love with you, Dr Smith. You make me better at being who I am. Here's to a life of loving each other...

Abstract

My thesis focuses on evidencing the practice of co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). I explore key themes and questions that emerged as I worked with this methodology for the first time, having established a co-operative inquiry group of young women managers within Procter & Gamble UK for the purpose of my PhD research.

At the time of embarking on this work, accounts of the detail of practical engagement in inquiry process were sparse. Progress has since been made. My thesis contributes to this progress by raising questions about practice and evidencing the detail. Through this, I offer ideas about quality of practice – ‘the educative edge’ of action research - and a re-visioning of the co-operative inquiry extended epistemology – ‘Naming as Knowing’.

Part I: Beginning

Chapter One: Setting the territory

Chapter Two: Getting started

Chapter Three: Does method exist

Chapter One

Setting the territory

What is my thesis about?

My thesis is about my engagement in the practice of co-operative inquiry with a group of young women in management (a group that became known as 'YoWiM'¹), and the key learnings that emerged from this practice. It is about the doing of inquiry practice, how we made the co-operative inquiry methodology our own, how we developed inquiry skills, and the questions, inquiries and learnings that were borne of this process.

One of my overarching intentions as I write is to explore, as much as possible, the practice of co-operative inquiry itself as a method for participatory research. This intention stems from my observation, when beginning my PhD research, that this kind of detail – the messiness of 'doing inquiry' – was missing. I felt I had little idea of how other people had 'done inquiry' and what questions had emerged for them through this practice. Through sharing my account of doing a co-operative inquiry, I hope to provide other neophytes with ideas that may help them when they are trying to figure out 'how to do' inquiry of their own, and to offer to the action research community some interesting ideas and questions about the practice of co-operative inquiry specifically and action research generally.

In writing about 'doing' I cover five key learnings from my experience of working with the YoWiM group (Chapters Four to Eight), discussing the practice of co-operative inquiry, facilitation choices, voice, and questions about third-person research. The messiness of doing inquiry meant that these key learnings were, in practice, embedded in each other – their separation here is therefore somewhat artificial, though necessary. As I 'write up' I want to contribute what I have noticed and learnt, to the field of action research. I can say with certainty

¹ The names of all involved, both in the YoWiM group and in the wider P&G organisation, have been changed.

that the key learnings presented here are important to the practice of inquiry and therefore deserve attention. So, I have attempted to disentangle them from each other - for ease of illustration - whilst wanting to retain a sense of the messiness.

Each 'key learning' Chapter is therefore written as a stand alone piece, containing the relevant literature and stories from practice. In this sense, the structure of my thesis is somewhat 'non-traditional' - I have not written a literature review that informs the rest of the thesis. Instead I have chosen to embed the literature that informed my thinking and practice alongside the stories of that practice. This makes sense to me as it mirrors how I have experienced inquiry. I did not set out with an orderly set of questions, or being well read on voice or collaboration. I was not a skilled facilitator who had a clear sense of 'how to do this'. I was a young woman doing co-operative inquiry and facilitation for the first time. I was inviting the women to join me in a space where they could find out what their questions were and explore the themes that emerged. So, I read what seemed useful as I went along - ideas from the literature were fed into the group where they seemed to fit, ideas from the group sent me hunting into the literature, and so on.

Given the above intentions, below I outline the structure of this , which is broken down into four sections:

- *'How I came to do inquiry'*

I feel it is important to give you a sense of the context in which this inquiry is set, so the first section 'how I came to do inquiry' sketches out where I come from, who I was and where I was in my life when I commenced my doctoral studies. Beginning my thesis from such an account honours the background of first-person inquiry writing and feels to me like important grounding; how I placed myself at the time of beginning this inquiry inadvertently shaped my experience of it, and that experience is what is represented here. Where I 'come from' feels very much part of my thesis.

- *YoWiM: an overview*

Following this, I move on to discuss the YoWiM group. My thesis is not written to explore the life of the inquiry group as a step-by-step process. Instead, I take a thematic approach - I draw out the 'Key Learnings' that have energy and explore them (as outlined below in 'Thesis Structure'). So, in 'YoWiM: an overview' I take some space to sketch this step-by-step process out in brief, as a way of indicating who was involved, the context of the inquiry, the content of inquiry and an outline of 'what happened when', to enable you to form an idea of the inquiry as a whole. This will perhaps serve as a useful tool to contextualise later writing into a particular stage in the group's life.

- *In-powering spaces*

My thesis title reflects something of what I believe about the types of spaces which might be described as true communities of inquiry. I have given these the name of 'In-powering spaces'. I offer up a discussion of this idea at this early stage in my writing with the invitation to you to bear it in mind as you read - perhaps as something of a yardstick by which to measure my later discussion. As you will later read, ideas around naming have become important to me throughout this inquiry - it matters therefore to me that this thesis is named well.

- *Thesis structure*

Lastly in this, I lay out the structure of my thesis. Within this I outline the 'Key learnings' from the YoWiM group - the most important themes and ideas that grew out of the YoWiM inquiry. My exploration and interrogation of these throughout my thesis is a reflection of what has occupied my thinking and my developing practice for the past four years. These themes and ideas form the bulk of my thesis.

I shall now explore each of the above in turn.

How I came to 'do' inquiry

...other people...remind me to accept that there may be much I need to say for the sake of others that may not move or gratify me, that may not make people see me as “so smart”. Or there may be much that I must say that I would rather keep silent – secret. Often I stopped myself from editing, from working to construct “the politically correct feminist thinker” with my words, so that I would just be there vulnerable, as I feel I am at times. (hooks, 1989:3)

hook’s commentary on the issues surrounding authorship resonates with me - particularly in relation to the challenges I have faced in deciding how I locate myself as ‘inquirer’ within my thesis. Questions such as ‘what do I need to write to illuminate how I have come to inquiry’ and ‘why do I hold these particular questions?’ have needed to find an appropriate balance with what I want to write - what I feel okay about making public. Figuring out what these boundary issues are and how I want to respond to them has been challenging.

The writing below, ‘coming to where I am’, is my response to this challenge. I intend that it sketches out my orientation to inquiry by giving you access the story of my upbringing that feels relevant here. I consider that I have chosen to feel less vulnerable than hooks (1989) suggests she does in her writing. I am also aware something seemingly inconsequential in the opinion of the reader may in fact be something that feels terribly naked-making on the part of the author. I am trying to hold this tension, to give enough of my self so that my story makes sense, and to keep enough back so that I, and others my story involves, do not feel naked. Devault’s discussion (1997) on writing from personal experience mirrors some of the questions I have pondered in deciding how and what I should write:

When we write from personal experience, we must consider how these formulations speak to our responsibilities to other people who appear in the texts. If I write about my parents or teachers for example, do I need their consent? What about friends and acquaintances? Do I have an obligation to identify characters in my story, or the right to do so if I wish, even against their will? What if they remember things differently? (DeVault, 1997:223)

Coming to where I am

I am twenty-eight years old. I began my years as a PhD student at the University of Bath in October 1999, aged twenty-three. I am a white, heterosexual woman and would perhaps be described as middle class (though I notice how uncomfortable I am with such labels). My parents – an English father and an Australian mother, have a happy 30-year long marriage. I lived the first twenty years of my life in the same house my Dad built on six acres of land in the middle of some fields in rural Shropshire (except for the first six months, as I was born in Australia), surrounded by dogs (of varying degrees of obedience) ponies (of varying degrees of viciousness) and mud, which I spent many hours in my early years making into ‘pies’ and ‘cakes’ with my dog Bunjie, in a shed.

I have one sister who is two years older than me. My mother, since having us, has never worked outside of the family home. I suppose our family set-up could be described as ‘traditional’: my Dad has always been, and remains, the sole wage earner. Working class roots formed my Dad’s outlook on life – hard physical work (often conducted away from home in three-week-long stints interspersed by a weekend at home), coupled with fourteen days holiday per year. He has remained however, self-employed his whole life – wanting always to be his own boss. The hard work continues, but has paid off. For the past fifteen years or so, he has run his own small civil engineering company. My parents still live in the same house, but the dogs are more obedient, the four

horses that stroll around in the nicely maintained fields are well mannered and talented, and the mud has been replaced by a stable yard.

My sister and I attended the local schools. Firstly, the primary school about three miles away from our home which had, at its most populated, twenty-eight children aged from four to eleven in attendance inside two wooden huts. We were split into two classes, with one teacher per class and one-on-one reading slots with mums who used to come in to listen to us stumble our way around our story books once a week. We had 'Assembly' with the local vicar every Friday, one school trip per year (to a local-ish zoo or a museum) and gave entertainment to everyone's parents via various church services (Christmas, Harvest, Easter) and the annual school play.

I have very few memories of these early years, but they are all happy. I enjoyed school – I was popular and enjoyed my friends, I always did well with my grades and found most things pretty straight-forward, I always got lead parts or thereabouts in the school plays (though I never wanted them), was good at sports and anything that involved art and won lots of prizes for both. I also met the first teacher I really enjoyed, Miss Watson. She was the first teacher I had met who brought warmth to our school. She hugged us and kissed us on the tops of our heads if we had done well and held us if we fell or were sad. The teacher before her had put people over her knee and smacked them if they had got their spellings or sums wrong. Miss Watson showed us what had gone wrong, checked we understood and sent us off to have another go. She taught me how to crochet and I would sit with her on the front step of the school sometimes, both crocheting cushion covers in the dinner hour. At the end of the school day my sister and I would walk, cycle (or in later years) be driven home, upon which time I would disappear outside to play with my dog until I was called in for tea. My parents speak of me as being 'very independent' from the 'first moment'.

Upon turning eleven, I followed my sister to the local secondary school – reached via the school bus. About four-hundred children aged eleven to sixteen years attended. Again these were happy days: good grades, lots of sports and arts associated accolades, the dreaded lead in school concerts, lots of friends,

academic prizes. I met the second teacher I really liked and admired, Dave Farlow, who taught Art & Design. I spent pretty much every break and lunch time for five years holed-up in the art studio sculpting with clay. He noticed and encouraged the talent he saw in me by letting me find my own way, but always offering his advice. I remember once I was making a large sculpture and he was finding it hard to explain an idea he had and wanted to 'do' what he was talking about to my sculpture. I said no. So we talked some more and I later went on sculpting by myself. He respected my need to own my work: to learn by doing it myself. Five years flew by. Fun at school, followed by going home to ride my horse, do all the outdoors jobs (feed the dogs and a few calves and chickens, muck-out the stables) and do my homework. Saturdays were spent washing hair and sweeping up at a hair salon in a local village, to pay for entry fees for my horse in Sunday show-jumping classes.

An almost straight A-grade record led me to Sixth Form College in our local town, for two years of A-level study. Here my passion for art was somewhat inhibited by the fact that the design tutor at the time was more inclined to date his students than teach any of us anything of any use. None of the creative process I had developed had space to breathe. My other subjects, English Language and Politics, were okay, but the material and its delivery failed to capture my imagination. We were being taught to remember facts so we could pass exams. I lost sight of how any real learning might happen.

With hindsight I can see that I detached myself from the college. Whilst I attended primary and secondary school I felt a sense of them being 'my school', I enjoyed being at school and I had a sense of a very rich experience. At Sixth Form I felt no attachment. I had lots of friends in class, but outside of class I only ever went out with one close girlfriend from secondary school who was at Sixth Form too. I got special permission to spend the allotted weekly half-day of sporting activity at home riding my horse (or doing whatever I wanted to do - no one from college ever checked). I never played on a single college team or competed in a single college sporting event in two years.

Even so, I was happy throughout this time. My subjects were straight-forward, but my sense of my studies as un-engaging meant I did the bare essentials in terms of study, and hardly any revision for my exams (I vividly remember picking up my politics file the night before my A-level exam and flicking through it for not even half an hour, whilst I watched television). I came out of sixth form with a B for English and a C for Politics. I got an A for Design by sculpting at home and working on glazes and firing with Dave Farlow at my old school. My A-level design tutor invited a photographer from the local newspaper to come to college and photograph me and my work by way of advertising the Design department at college, when I was really an advert for the Mary Webb School.

I then spent a year at the local art college, gaining a BTEC qualification and a place at a reputable art school for degree level studies. However, shortly after I had begun the BTEC course I had applied for a place on various business degree programmes, having decided that I didn't want to make a career as an artist upon completion of the BTEC course. I decided to take up an offer from the University of Bath to join their Business Administration programme as I had fallen in love with Bath when I attended an open day. The University felt like a place where I could flourish: the course was competitive both in terms of acceptance onto it and its culture (I thrive in competitive environments), the sporting facilities were second to none, the campus environment gave the place a close knit feel, the city of Bath was idyllic, and the whole environment felt very rural. It felt like home. And I wanted to be part of it.

So, in October 1995, I arrived in Bath to begin my undergraduate studies in Business Administration. Four of the best years of my life ensued. I thoroughly enjoyed the course. I found it quite easy - I worked hard enough when it mattered and hardly missed a lecture (except for the entirety of an economics course, having decided that I would never understand anything that was going on). I did a lot of running and swimming, I played a lot of sport. I was popular, and had a lot of friends. I was lucky enough through those four years to build wonderful enriching friendships with several people who enabled me in lots of different ways to realize what matters to me. The pattern of life means that for a variety of reasons most of us are no longer in touch, or that the nourishment of

our friendship has lessened, but we mattered more than anything to each other at that time.

My experience of my undergraduate years was not the stereotypical UK 'student' experience – I didn't drink or take any other type of drug, lie in bed all day, engage in casual sex or run up debts. Thanks to my parents I could always look after myself as they bought me a little car, so I didn't have to worry about how I would get home at night. They also paid higher rent so I could always afford to stay in good, safe accommodation. I worked happily and got good grades, I spent time with my friends, did a lot of exercise, lived a good, healthy, nourishing life. I skipped through my degree, but noticed the total absence of any relationship between staff and students. I would describe most of my lecturers as disinterested – they would arrive in class, give the lecture with literally no interaction with the students, and then leave. In four years of study I never had a conversation with a lecturer outside of class – I never felt inclined to. I had not met any lecturer I particularly liked or admired, so I just remembered the stuff I was supposed to remember and passed all my exams twice a year. My studies didn't challenge me too much, and I may have not realised just how much this challenge mattered to me had I not taken course options offered by Professors Peter Reason and Judi Marshall in the fourth and final year of my degree.

Peter and Judi's courses stood apart from all of the courses I had taken in the degree programme. They ran them in ways that invited me to really think, to engage with the material being presented, with them as lecturers and as people. I was being encouraged to explore what mattered to me, to interrogate why and to invite comment on my written work on terms that I suggested. I felt I was being valued as someone who had things to learn and to teach. I was both delighted and disappointed: delighted that this gift of learning had found its way into my life, and disappointed that I had to wait until the final year of my degree for it to happen.

Alongside this, my 'Final Year Project' (FYP) team, consisting of four fellow students and me, were undertaking some work for Procter and Gamble for the

purposes of the FYP which accounted for a substantial chunk of our final year grade. I remain unclear about how this came about, but I asked Peter if we could talk through our project with him and get some advice on how we might approach it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Peter introduced us to action research and grounded theory. My clearest memory of stumbling upon action research and subsequent conversations and readings about it throughout my final year is one of 'This makes sense!' I felt like I had found my niche, like someone had given a name (inquiry) to my approach to my life, like what I later came to know as 'doing research with people rather than on them' was really an okay thing to believe in. At the time I felt an intuitive sense of this being 'right'. I found I relished the process of taking this deepened, more grounded understanding into my FYP and into my life as it gave structure to some of my ways of being and enabled them to be richer and more meaningful.

As part of the FYP, we were required as a group to write up the research, which was then examined by two members of staff, to whom we were required to make a presentation and then be examined, collectively and individually, by viva voce. As a team we had requested that Peter be our examiner due to his knowledge of the field of action research that we had tentatively begun to explore. He agreed. We were later to find out that our project had received a very high grade, but even on the day of the viva we felt strongly that we had done well. Through my individual viva I had become clearer on the role I had played in attending to the process of the research we had undertaken – the processes we had engaged in within our FYP team, the processes I had built into the research design as a whole, and the process of how we worked with the team of twenty-five managers at Procter & Gamble. I began to really understand the role I had played and what I was 'good' at.

I had planned to take a day off from studying on the day following our viva. The work leading up to submitting the report and then preparing for the viva had been intense. I planned to swim and enjoy a relaxing day before doing any more work. For some reason, I drove up to the University and went to check my email. Sitting there in my inbox was an email from Peter, congratulating me on the work I had done for the FYP and inviting me to do a PhD with him, pending

the award of a scholarship. I was delighted, excited and simply over the moon. I said yes, found a flat for the summer, and waitressed my way toward the day when I would find out if my application for a scholarship had been successful. It was. A wonderful holiday, another flat, another set of house-mates, and I was all set to begin my PhD studies. It was September 1999.

On reflection...

With the benefit of hindsight I can see how my experience of my parents and many of the various 'adults' who entered my life through my education shaped my understanding of what learning could be about, some because they modelled practices I admired because I saw and felt them 'working', others because their approach had the very opposite effect – an effect I would like to believe was unintentional, but I'm not sure I do. Those who worked in relational ways that respected the position of others, those who didn't try to make others agree with them or do it their way, those who responded with respect to the context in which they worked, those who acknowledged the experience of others as real and valuable, those who created spaces where learning could happen – are the people who, in glimpses, I saw the ways I wanted to be. There were lessons they all taught me, quite possibly unbeknownst to them, about how I wanted to be and what I wanted to believe about the world. My parents, Miss Watson, Dave Farlow, Peter Reason, and Judi Marshall all had part in my learning this, and I am grateful for it.

I can see that I have always needed to learn, always wanted to learn, (only ever been able to?) in *relationships*, where I felt supported, encouraged and challenged. As more of my life passes, I can see that I link the notions of voice and learning with each other very strongly. I explore what voice is for me in Five, and the links between voice and learning throughout my thesis.

However, prior to beginning my Doctoral studies, I had not come across the notion of voice - had not read anything of it. I knew, in a very bodily sensed way, that I learnt in ways that were meaningful to me when I could share my

ideas, however undeveloped, and have these responded to in ways that suggested the listener was interested in helping us to think together. I found it difficult to learn in relationships with people who would judge what I said as right or wrong, and instead responded better when I could talk about what I felt and have this respected – not necessarily agreed or disagreed with – because it was my experience.

I sometimes used my voice to draw attention to what I felt was wrong, or what was inhibiting learning – and sometimes I got into trouble for it. I remember one occasion at school, when I was about fifteen. One of the girls in my class become pregnant accidentally and had a termination, and everyone knew. Two or three boys were gossiping about her and making sucking noises, to imitate the sound they believed a termination machine to make when ‘vacuuming out the baby’, as they put it. This was all going on loudly enough for the girl to hear, but quietly enough for the teacher not to. I felt they were doing wrong and that by us all sitting in class and not saying anything we were doing wrong too – we were supporting them by the fact we were not doing anything to stop them. So I started telling them to be quiet, asking them if they realised how they may be upsetting the girl. This escalated sufficiently to get the attention of the teacher, who asked what was going on. So I told her – I said the boys were being horrible and saying really hurtful things about the girl. Even though everyone already knew about her termination, the girl turned around and started shouting at me for ‘telling everyone’. Our teacher told her to calm down and told the boys to stop being childish. I was sent to our dreaded head of year (the second worst punishment in the school, one step down from being sent to the head mistress) where I received a severe ‘telling off’. I am still not clear what I was ‘told off’ for, but I am clear that nothing was done to address what was wrong in the system. I just felt that I had raised above the ‘silent’ the fact that a girl was being bullied when she was at her most vulnerable. I also felt that in doing so I could have contributed to her feelings of being the ‘topic of conversation’, of being bullied.

There were other occasions though, when rather than my voice ‘getting me into trouble’ it got me heard. An example of this happened in my religious studies class, in my final year at secondary school, again when I was about fifteen. Given

that it was an optional GCSE class, the attending students had all chosen to study it for their exams. The class was comprised of two boys and about twenty girls. We covered topics ranging from abortion to confirmation, sex to religious ceremonies. We had gotten to a point in the term when the teacher, Ann Duggan, came to the decision to request that the two boys should study alone in another room as she found them continuously disruptive. They would laugh and joke quite a lot, more often I felt out of embarrassment over the subject matter, and because it meant they didn't have to talk about sex, for example, in front of a room full of girls.

I went to see the teacher after class to express my opinion that the class was already greatly imbalanced in gender terms, and that if the boys were to leave, then the rest of us would miss out on their point of view or understanding, and I felt that we could all lose out if this were to happen. I told her my ideas on why they were just messing around and not answering questions 'sensibly' and that rather than let this either just go on, or them be excluded, I felt a better solution was possible. The teacher invited me and the two boys to meet with her and discuss the options. The boys were allowed to decide to stay in class, but they had to each sit with a girl (each of the desks seated two people) and to 'shape up and participate'. In the ensuing classes, I received the unsurprising jibes from classmates (the boys included) about 'only wanting the boys to stay because I fancied them', about 'getting special treatment from teacher', and about 'getting my own way'.

Though I remember these jibes, the memory is not one of hurt or a feeling of being bullied. I clearly remember simply responding either with agreement, or by asking them why they were happy to do nothing to enable the boys to stay, or why they would consider being in a class where we would only learn about a female point of view. And I remember very clearly feeling our teacher had done the right thing – she had allowed alternative ideas to be expressed and she had demanded that the boys take responsibility in making their own decision as to whether they should stay in the class. She had opened-up her self, and us, to the choices that were available, rather than rigidly sticking to her original idea. Ann

Duggan modelled good practice for me that day - I learned so much about power, authority and agency in one afternoon.

The above are some of the most poignant memories I have in relation to what I understand about learning and how it was made possible for me. Values around voice, agency, respect, mutuality, power and relationship seem central and it has only been through the interrogation of my own first-person inquiry that I have come to understand how these values guide my attention in my life, and indeed in my inquiry practice with others. Their relevance here is obviously in how they shaped my facilitative practice with the YoWiM group (see Seven) - what I attended to as well as what I didn't.

YoWiM: an overview

My thesis is based on themes that have emerged through 'doing inquiry' with the YoWiM co-operative inquiry group I initiated for my PhD research. In August 2000, I approached several multi-national organisations to take part in the research which I proposed would comprise of a co-operative inquiry group of young women managers. Jon - a member of the Lead Diversity Team (LDT) within Procter and Gamble UK (P&G) - responded with great interest immediately. The LDT, comprised of senior managers, had been created to explore issues around diversity within P&G UK and to sponsor action around key issues, of which 'Women in P&G' was one.

I met with Jon, and later with Anna (who both became sponsors of the research) to explore the possibility of establishing the inquiry group within P&G. Following negotiations around methodology, 'deliverables' (guaranteed end results), methods of recruiting group members, who the internal sponsors should be and the role they should take, and funding for the research, I invited young women on the management development programme within P&G to form an inquiry group (all as discussed in Four).

The group, YoWiM, all of whom self-selected to join, consisted of 'young' women. For the purpose of recruiting I defined this as 'women who were in the first three years of employment within P&G, following University graduation'. I was interested to work with young women to explore the issues that were important to them in the early years of their career, given that much of the literature I had explored on women in management focussed on women who were in senior or middle management.

The inquiry process began with the 'inquiry call' (Heron 1996) in October 2000 and ended with the YoWiM group meeting with members of the LDT to discuss their inquiry in February 2002. Our cycles of inquiry were four weeks long, with a half-day session spent together at the end of each cycle, on-site at the UK Head Office – the office at which most of the women were based. Given that co-operative inquiry was our underpinning methodology, my thesis is predominantly focussed around themes from the experience of second-person inquiry. However, the YoWiM group also engaged in first- and third-person inquiry to varying degrees during our sixteen cycles. Fourteen of these cycles involved just 'our group' working face-to-face, engaging in the understanding of and 'making our own' the co-operative inquiry method, telling stories and making it okay to ask new questions of ourselves, each other and the wider organisation. The thirteenth cycle, at the beginning of October 2001, was what we referred to as a third-person inquiry – a half-day session involving over thirty other young women from P&G and eight of the most senior P&G women managers in the UK. Indeed, attention to understanding the relationship between first-, second- and third-person inquiry informed a lot of our decisions and shaped the process and content of the YoWiM inquiry.

The YoWiM group activities, in both the action and reflection parts of the co-operative inquiry cycle, took place, as mentioned above, on-site at the Head Office, where most of the women worked. The one exception to this was when we closed the YoWiM inquiry in October 2001. For this, the inquiry group moved to the University of Bath for a two-day residential inquiry closing (as discussed in Eight). Though the group continued to work together for four months after this time, the inquiry closing marked the end of the time we had

contracted to work together, my moving out of the group, and an end to our pattern of meeting in a structured way.

Through working together in the YoWiM group, we created a totally new space inside P&G – one that held qualities and values that are apparently otherwise largely absent from how the YoWiM women experience their organisational life. Throughout the time spent together in our inquiry group, the creation of a totally new and ‘safe space’ became something that was valued hugely by all members. I discuss what I mean by ‘safe’ in Chapters Four, Five and Seven particularly, but here I want to highlight that this safety was created through shaping our space with attention and awareness of what our developing needs were. This attention and awareness deepened as YoWiM group members inquiry skills deepened - noticing how the way we sat (a close circle of chairs, no tables), the way we spoke and listened, the different kinds of knowledges we made space for through exploring the extended epistemology, affected ‘what was possible for us to do here’.

To give an overall sense of the process of the YoWiM inquiry group, below I detail the timings of the inquiry and key incidents or themes from each meeting. I also give a Chapter reference, where relevant, to indicate where in my thesis the particular issue is most evidently addressed.

2000	What happened
August: Research proposal sent to various organisations.	P&G call a meeting within 2 days of receiving my proposal. (Chapter Four)
September 7 th : Meeting with Jon of P&G (Diversity Lead Team senior member and eventual senior sponsor)	I arrive ‘suited and booted’ and spend a couple of hours listening to Jon talk about why ‘Diversity’ matters to P&G. He thinks it would be ‘great’ if we could join up through my research. (Chapter Four)
September 21 st : Meeting with P&G (Jon and Anna)	I am asked to prepare a presentation. I’m unable to deliver this as the meeting is spent listening to Anna

	<p>tell Jon her view on Diversity at P&G. I see Anna seeking to impress Jon by showing her awareness of the issues, as he is very much a senior organisational member. Jon and Anna confirm commitment to the inquiry and the associated budget. I spend time explaining my perspective on access, outcome and budget. I am asked to prepare a paper for Jon to 'pass up the organisation' to 'sell the University of Bath as a research institution to P&G'.</p> <p>(Chapter Four and Appendix One)</p>
2000	What happened
End September	I am informed that my paper received the required buy-in from P&G. Budget and access are now guaranteed. (Appendix One)
October 27 th : 'Diversity Day'	I have a display stand, alongside many other stands in the atrium at P&G for a day-long 'celebration of Diversity'. I am the only 'external' there – all other stands are run by 'Proctoids' ² (P&G employees). I spend the time strolling around talking to young women and distributing a flyer I have made advertising the inquiry. (Appendix One)
December 8 th : First YoWiM introductory session at P&G	'Meeting' - 26 young women attend a morning long session (with lunch) to hear about my proposal. We sit in a huge glass sided room, in a big circle of chairs. Jon and Anna both attend and have a 'slot'. (Chapters Four and Five)
December 13 th : Second YoWiM introductory session at P&G	'Meeting again' - 16 young women attend a morning long session (with lunch). Most of them attended the session on the 8 th , but there are a couple of new faces. December 8 th and 13 th are both about modelling and talking about 'what could this be like?' (Chapter Four and Appendix One)

² This is the term used by P&G staff to denote themselves as employees of P&G.

2001	What happened
January 30 th	'Deciding who we are and why we're here' 12 young women confirm their commitment to the inquiry group. We meet for our 'first' YoWiM session. (Chapter Four and Appendix One)
February 21 st	Exploring practice: where are the role models?
March 21 st	'Conflict' (Chapters Five and Seven)
April 18 th	Role models and relationships.
May 16 th	Looking at behaviours in the work place.
June 13 th	Energy dip.
July 16 th	'Re-discovering each other' – Reconnecting with Ann.
July 31 st	Where do we go from here?
August 29 th	What have we learnt and what have we achieved?
September 24 th	'Preparing to go public' – preparing for the third-person inquiry. (Chapter Five)
October 3 rd	'Third-person inquiry' – Peers workshop. (Chapters Five and Six)
October 19 th and 20 th	'The importance of ending' – YoWiM relocate to Bath for the inquiry closing. (Chapters Seven and Eight)
November 29 th	'Figuring out how to speak the silence back to the organisation'. (Chapter Five)
2002	What happened
February 5 th	'Speaking the silence back to the organisation' – Meeting with Lead Diversity Team. (Chapter Five)

In-powering spaces

As the YoWiM group worked together, the question of how we 'named' issues became an important theme, as when for example we 'named' the unpleasant behaviour Sarah was trying to deal with as 'bullying' (see Chapter Five). This

makes the naming of my thesis similarly important to me – I need for it to echo what the inquiry achieved. The notion of ‘in-powering’ first came to me on reading White, McMillen and Baker (2001). They discuss the need to move towards ‘an inclusive model of group development’, stating:

...where the...team is working in a truly collaborative manner and not dominated by the team leader, the power is shared and literally becomes an internalized energy that strengthens each team member to perform at his or her best. (White, McMillen and Baker, 2001:12)

The notion of internalised energy being a spin-off from true collaboration, where power is shared, resonates with my experience of working with the YoWiM group. Needless to say, ‘in-powered’ or ‘inpowering’ is a word play on empowerment. I find ‘empowerment’ a problematic word – one that can conjure up ideas about something that is *done to the disempowered* by the (more) powerful. In this way, it has no sense of agency on the part of the ‘less powerful’. However, Barrett for one gives a clear account of how empowerment can also be about something that emerges from *within*:

Participant’s understandings of empowerment were grounded in feeling strong and resilient from within – not needing the approval of those in positions of power to proceed and having enough information on which to base decisions. From an action research angle, difficulties became data. Reflections revealed how one kind of power – empowerment – can be viewed as positive and therapeutic, whereas any other variety of power – related to control and gate keeping – can lead to feelings of powerlessness and frustration. (Barrett, 2001:297)

The sense of empowerment coming from within feels more appropriate, and is what I am trying to articulate with ‘in-powerment’. Kemmis (2001:91) mirrors this idea helpfully:

This conclusion [that action research is first and foremost *research by practitioners*] has been forced upon me by Habermas’s dictum that ‘in the

process of enlightenment there can only be participants' (1974:40). That is, others cannot do the enlightening for participants; in the end, they are or are not enlightened in their own terms. (This point also applies to 'empowerment', another aspiration of many advocates of action research.) (Kemmis 2001:91)

Essentially, my aim is to articulate how, in research that utilises participative approaches to inquiry as I have here, there needs to be a sense of reframing what power in the research relationships is about. This reframing may well be evident as a process. For example, the fact that power is openly discussed in a group would for me, count as an act of reframing – a framing that suggests power is negotiated and relational. And if power is negotiated, it becomes something that each of us has – it becomes internalised. I enjoy the way Gaventa and Cornwall link up the ideas of power and the significance of it being internalised:

...power can be seen as a more positive attribute as well, as in the power to act. And in some cases power is seen as an attribute growing from within oneself, not something which is limited by others. This 'power within' is shaped by ones identity and self-conception of agency, as well as by outside forces held by 'the Other' (Kabeer, 1994; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Rowlands, 1995). (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001:72)

In my writing I raise questions about naming in a deliberate attempt to gain some clarity over meanings we assume are shared. In naming my thesis, I did not want to fall into the trap of the assumption of shared meaning that 'empowering spaces' might bring. That said, I do not use the term 'in-powering' for clarity - I am not assuming people will know what it means. Rather, I use it to provoke discussion around what it means – to provide the possibility of clarity - and indeed to consider whether there is evidence within my thesis of the YoWiM space being an 'in-powering' one.

Thesis structure

Authorship obviously fundamentally shapes the structure of any written work, so here I account for the authorship choices of the YoWiM group prior to mapping out the structure of my thesis. Accounting for authorship choices is customary in co-operative inquiry – I aim to state not only what our choices were, but also why we made them and the implications of how they might be understood as inquiry practice.

Exclusivity of authorship: an outcome of authentic collaboration

I have written this thesis without the collaboration of any of the YoWiM group members. We agreed that we wanted for each other to be able to put our individual accounts of our work together ‘out into the world’, and that in doing so we were to take responsibility to present these accounts as ‘my own’ – as not ‘co-authored’ or as ‘speaking from a place other group members might now speak from’. I feel this position matters in two ways:

1. Writing-up is a part of ‘my’ inquiry

Firstly, I see myself as a researcher working in the context of a piece of collaborative research. This thesis is my account of this work. Heron (1996) suggests that exclusivity of authorship ‘is clearly a limitation on any claim that the findings of the inquiry are based on authentic collaboration’ (Heron, 1988c as cited in Heron, 1996:102). I feel it is important to acknowledge this position in relation to ‘authorship’ in the classical sense Heron refers to - the written text - particularly when exploring what we mean by ‘collaboration’ and ‘authenticity’ in inquiry practice, as I do in Eight.

However, I also feel it important to consider how we might prop-up the very ideas of ‘experts’ and ‘expert knowledge’ when we take Heron’s above caution literally. When doing so, we may buy-in to the idea of every written text purporting to be the one universal truth; of written text being the only form of

authorship that counts; that inadvertently only those who produce text can be authors. Is the 'written author' the only voice of authority on lived experience? Are we not authoring – giving storied accounts of our experience – every day, in all that we do? I accept Heron's very necessary caution on what counts as authentic collaboration, but I don't think this necessarily leads us to question the authorship of a text. Rather, if I think through his point fully it makes me aware of the need to carefully frame what I mean by authentic collaboration.

I too would like to encourage caution in my self and others before we begin to equate some types of authorship as 'less collaborative' (and therefore less valid?) than others. Indeed, I have been encouraged in my belief that this need not be the case by Heron's own work on the extended epistemology (Heron 1996, see Chapter Three) which shows that we know things in many different ways and that we experience other people's knowing and our own in these ways. This indicates very clearly to me that *we author our lives in every moment* by our bodily response (experiential knowing), our creative or physical expression³ of this (presentational knowing), our verbal articulation and theorisation (propositional knowing), and our lived evidencing of what we know (practical knowing). We are authoring as we breathe, it seems, without the express collaboration of others, without the suggestion that our lived-authorship represents their reality in addition to our own. But we do this in the knowledge that all four ways of knowing that we simultaneously experience, make sense of and evidence, are born of the continually co-authored relationships we are engaged in – and are by definition themselves co-authored.

If we take these ideas into our practice during inquiry, and then drop them when we come to define authorship, then the possibility of inquiry in its fullest form seems to be lost. Rather than seeing a text written by one member of the group – in this case the initiating researcher – as being illustrative of 'exclusivity of authorship' and therefore framing its very existence as a 'limitation on any claim that the findings of the inquiry are based on authentic collaboration' (Heron,

³ In Chapter 8 I discuss my thoughts on how I have come to understand presentational knowing as something subtly different from the definition given by Heron: "By presentational forms I mean all non-verbal art forms, plus verbal forms used for expressive, evocative-descriptive and metaphorical effect" (Heron 1996:90)

1988c as cited in Heron, 1996:102), I suggest that we utilise the extended epistemology at all stages of the inquiry, including the stage of 'writing-up'. If we see the written account as just one way of sharing the propositional knowing we have gained from inquiry, then we can see it as more data to inquire into, rather than as the final truth that speaks for all participants.

Furthermore, this approach acknowledges that the 'writing-up' is a process of inquiry that is relevant and important for some participants and not for others – an illustration of divergence in the process of inquiry, rather than the final word. Indeed Richardson (1994) asks that we consider writing as a 'method of inquiry' because of its power to encourage self-reflection and sensemaking.

Further to this assertion, written in August 2004, I have chosen to make the amendments my examiners requested during my PhD viva in September 2004, visible in my 'finished' thesis. I have chosen to do this because I have always wondered what has shifted, in theses I have read, between submission for viva and final draft. Evidencing the voices of my examiners (Elizabeth Kazl and Mark Baldwin) and myself, as we sat and explored my work together in my viva seems like an obvious thing to do if I want to use my viva as an inquiry into my written account. In terms of the visibility of these changes in my thesis, there are two places where amendments were requested: One and Six. These are indicated by a change of font from 'this font' to 'this font'.

The discussion over the previous couple of pages has at its heart questions about validity in inquiry practice - questions about 'what counts?', 'who decides what counts?', 'how does it count?' and 'for whom does it count?' These questions are embedded throughout my thesis. And they are bigger questions than just questions about the validity of inquiry practice. They are questions about knowledge and how it is constructed, questions about power and agency and gender. They are questions I carry as central in my life.

2. Writing alone as honouring voice

Secondly, and in sharp contrast to Heron's above ideas, I present my thesis as sole-authored not from a position of apology or limitation, but from one of celebration that as a group we built trust in each other to continue hearing our *own/ed* voices speak our *own/ed* knowing out into the world. Taking ownership of our individual voices and what we say was a key theme in the YoWiM group, as I shall evidence later (Five). It seemed appropriate that as a group we should actively seek ways to enable each other to continue the owning of our voices when telling stories from our experience together. Creating a space in which only the jointly authored stories would be presented as 'true', or as the ones that might represent authentic collaboration (or in which we required our stories be 'approved' by the rest of the group) seemed only to remove the possibility of us generating space for our individual voices to be valid and to be heard. We didn't want to create more 'silent talk' as a result of our time together, as hooks says:

It was in that world of woman talk...that was born in me the craving to speak, to have a voice, and not just any voice but one that could be identified as belonging to me. To make my voice, I had to speak, to hear myself talk... (hooks, 1989:5)

Giving each other permission to author our own accounts, to find our own stories and tell them in a voice that each of us 'identifies as being our own(ed) voice', is in my opinion strong evidence of authentic collaboration. It is not about speaking for other group members. It is about speaking for and from myself – something that has to happen if I am to be able to identify my own(ed) voice, if I am to honour the work done in the YoWiM group, and if I am to honour my need to say what matters and have it count.

Reason (1998) discusses the possible options when writing a 'report' based on the work of a co-operative inquiry group. Whilst very much based in Heron's perspective, it offers a helpful guideline. He acknowledges the impracticalities of writing as a whole group, and suggests, amongst other options that...

Another solution is for the group to agree that any member can write whatever they like, but that they must clearly indicate the status of the writing and who has been involved. (Reason, 1998:38)

This is what the YoWiM group decided to do, as discussed above, and what I have endeavoured to be clear about in framing my thesis. However, in the context of this writing forming a thesis, Reason goes on to say:

Of course, if the inquiry is set up as part of someone's Masters or Doctoral research, the situation is rather different, because we are confronted with the ideological clash between the normative university requirement for such research to be the candidate's original work, and the ideas of the co-operative paradigm. In practice this problem is usually surmountable, because the student can be seen as the 'primary researcher', and can write their view of the project in some form of consultation with members of the group. (Reason, 1998:38-9)

For the purposes of the YoWiM inquiry group, and my writing of this thesis, I suggest that our 'consultation', which happened on and off throughout the life of our group, meant that we found different ways of communicating the 'work' of our group and that we embraced the idea that each of us could 'write whatever we liked'.

Reason's above solutions forms part of a Chapter aimed at 'providing some practical help' (Reason, 1998:20) to people pondering the issues of working in co-operative inquiry groups. Heron's (1996:100-102) suggestions on writing, as detailed above, also centre around the *appropriateness* of how to write given the nature of the co-operative inquiry group. Neither however seem to me to look at writing inquiry reports – alone or with others – as a continuation or celebration of the inquiry process of voicing, though Reason clearly states that his ideas 'cannot substitute for the inventiveness and application of the people actually involved' (Reason, 1998:20). The emphasis seems to be on explaining why reports are not written collaboratively, rather than on explaining why the approach to writing taken by the group is appropriate for them. The latter seems

to me to be embedded in the practice of inquiry and honouring to the development of the inquiry group towards becoming a community of inquirers, the former embedded in method.

This may seem like an insignificant point - why does it matter that the above seems to be so? The point here for me is that for people new to the practice of inquiry, gurus do define the territory of 'what is possible' and 'what counts'. And whilst Heron and Reason's accounts may not be intentionally rule binding, as Reason cited above clearly states, it can seem difficult to go outside of that which has clarity to that which is about 'the inventiveness and application of the people actually involved' particularly when being new to inquiry. The reason then, for exploring the above, has been to 'create possibilities for inquiry practice by writing them out' - to 'make the road by walking' (Horton and Freire, 1990, as cited in Wadsworth, 2001:426).

Considering how my thesis is structured in terms of authorship, I shall now detail its structure in terms of writing:

Part One comprises Chapters One, Two and Three: In Chapters Two and Three I discuss further my orientation to inquiry and how the choices of Action Research in general and co-operative inquiry in particular are therefore appropriate methodological choices for me to make.

Part Two comprises Chapters Four through Eight: My thesis is focussed around five core areas of learning that have emerged through the inquiry practice undertaken in the YoWiM inquiry - as detailed below each forms a within Part Two. I have decided to structure my thesis around these ideas as they are illustrative, in different ways, of the development we individually and/or collectively experienced through being involved in the YoWiM group, and the questions related to the development of inquiry practice that became most pressing for me as the inquiry progressed. I stress that I am not presenting these ideas as 'the right ways to do inquiry' or as 'the most important ideas in co-operative inquiry group practice'. They are simply (and complexly!) what I

consider to be the most exciting and interesting ideas that emerged in the YoWiM group.

In terms of the overarching rationale behind approaching the writing of my thesis this way, I consider it to be this: When I joined the PhD programme at Bath, I searched and searched for stories of practice, for accounts of how other people had done inquiry work and how inquiry had addressed their questions. The scarcity of these accounts has driven me to make 'telling the story of how the YoWiM group did things' public, so that other 'neophytes' like me might broaden the range of ideas they have to draw from when 'figuring out how to do this'.

The clearest feedback I have received to this effect to date was from Elizabeth Kasl, as detailed below:

I'd like to share something with you. I teach a course in participatory inquiry, concentrating on participatory action research, action learning, appreciative inquiry, and cooperative inquiry. Last Fall, a student in my class found your on Peter's website and posted information about it in our "resources corner". Soon, everyone was reading it and found it very, very helpful. You were cited in several of the term papers. This spring, I did a workshop on cooperative inquiry for a leadership group associated with the New York University's Leadership Centre. I included your in the material they were to read ahead of time. At the workshop, several people referred to "that beginner's" point of view, noting it was helpful to them. Thought you would enjoy knowing. (Kasl, email correspondance, 19/06/04)

In hoping that my approach to writing my thesis adds to this contribution, the five key learnings from the YoWiM group that I discuss are:

- **Chapter Four: 'The importance of beginning'** discusses the elements of practice I feel are of particular importance in the very early days of forming an inquiry group. I refer to a paper I wrote on this stage (McArdle, 2002), and rather than regurgitating it, I use the paper as a

piece of writing that illustrates what my attention was drawn to at the time of 'beginning' the inquiry (when I wrote it). I draw heavily from it, using longish extracts. I put these alongside accounts from the group members for the purpose of checking out the assumptions I made at the time and to consider whether these have shifted.

- **Chapter Five: 'Voice - enabling the silence to be heard'** goes into some depth around ideas of voice in inquiry and illustrates the development of voice within the YoWiM inquiry group. This - the longest by far - is the place in my thesis which is most full of 'others voices'. It is driven by the observations and practice of the YoWiM group members, rather than my methodologically/academically driven questions which underpin the other Chapters. I very much feel that my role in this is one of creating space for the YoWiM group members *practice* to tell their story of voice. I seek to illustrate what they talked about and how notions of voice informed their talking and their practice. Embedded in this account are ideas of how the work the group did on voice informed my understanding of the extended epistemology.
- **Chapter Six: 'What is third-person inquiry?'** is a Chapter that explores its title question - it does not answer it! Through my thinking, reading and talking with others, I noticed that none of us seemed able to answer this question in a way that gained agreement. Then, on embarking on what I have referred to as third-person inquiry with the YoWiM group, it became more obvious to me that if I felt I was 'doing it', I should at least say what I was doing and why it counted as third-person inquiry. The trouble is that in saying you are doing something, you have to define what the something is... and I have discovered that I can't find a definition 'out there' in the field of practice. So, I have approached my response the above question from the position of 'this was third-person inquiry *for us* because...'

- **Chapter Seven: 'My facilitative practice'** draws on ideas about the role of the facilitator in action research and considers my developing practice in light of this. I structure this discussion around Wadsworth's Six Facilitation Capabilities (Wadsworth, 2001), as I have found them to be useful practice informing ideas throughout the time I spent with the YoWiM inquiry group, and indeed up to the present time. This has been heavily informed by the observations of the YoWiM group.
- **Chapter Eight: 'The importance of ending'** explores what ending means in a co-operative inquiry group setting, and illustrates how ending happened in the YoWiM group.

Part Three is comprised of Chapter Nine.

- **Chapter Nine: 'Passion'** is where I consider how I am left on my completion of the YoWiM inquiry and at this stage of my life. I look at the questions I am holding. I consider issues around my own invisibility and visibility and how ideas on voice, generated in the YoWiM group, have helped me to explore these. And I discuss, with some joy, how my life is enriched by my experience of inquiry to date.

Closing Chapter One: Finding 'my question' after I've 'finished'

I am writing this closing section following my PhD viva. It replaces an earlier 'closing' that cited – at some length – Heron's suggestions about what might be useful for others in an inquiry report (Heron, 1996:102). The way I framed my inclusion of this was as 'a way of thinking about what you might like to see as you go through this thesis'. During my viva, my external examiner, Elizabeth Kasl, said to me that this had put her 'off track' – rather than offer some ideas about what might be useful to read in my thesis as I had intended, the phrase 'inquiry report' set the expectation that my thesis would be a 'write up' of the co-operative inquiry undertaken with YoWiM. This is not what my thesis is about, so I am grateful that Elizabeth called my attention to the need for some clearer framing here in Chapter One. I offer this framing below, in the form of an excerpt from the audio

tape of my viva, as a way of evidencing the messiness of the research process I discussed earlier – just as members of the YoWiM group took time to find their inquiry questions (as I discuss in Chapter Five), here I was, in my PhD viva, articulating mine for the first time...

Elizabeth: I don't think I found an actual research question. If I were to pressure you - which I am about to do - and say 'what question did the thesis answer?' what would the question be?

Kate: The question that I believe the thesis answers is something along the lines of **'If we were to have a sense of what doing action research in practice feels like, what would it feel like?'**

Elizabeth: That's a wonderful question. I think that's the question you answered.

Kate: Oh? Really...?

Elizabeth: Oh I do...you are right, that's exactly the question you answered. And that would have helped me enormously if you had said 'this is my question'. Say it again, say it again...

Kate: **'If we were to have a sense of what practical engagement with action research – inquiry - looks like, what would it be, what would it feel like?'**

Elizabeth: Looks *and* feels like. I think you have both of those things.

Kate: The texture of it. Yes.

Elizabeth: Because then there's room...because then all of your Chapters make total sense. It puts you at the centre.

The question we found:

'If we were to have a sense of what practical engagement with action research – inquiry - looks like and feels like, what would it be?'