

Chapter Three

Does method exist?

The application of any type of research method and the defence of the results of inquiry thus obtained implies a view, or views, of what is to count as knowledge. The point of preferring one set of methods over another is to believe that the chosen set will lead to knowledge rather than mere belief, opinion or personal preference. (Lakomski, 1992:193, as cited by Bridges, 1999:608-9)

In this Chapter, I discuss the methodological approaches I chose to use during my work with the YoWiM group, focussing on an overview of co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). What I want to show here are the basic ideas that underpin the methodology - the guiding principles - and to illustrate why co-operative inquiry was an appropriate approach to take in conducting my research. I attempt to find a balance between working with the literature on method and finding space for my own voice to comment on the practice of inquiry and what I feel is either missing or not well articulated in the literature. In making space for this type of discussion, I aim to illustrate how my thesis is going to contribute to how we understand such issues, which I believe it does on several counts.

For example:

- I feel that detailed accounts of practice are scarce, meaning we miss out on being able to develop ideas about 'how I might do this' from the experiences of others. I therefore want to give this detail, where it feels appropriate to do so, to broaden the range of options available to others, particularly those who are considering 'doing' inquiry for the first time.
- I consider that inquiry literature is generally lacking in a rigorous exploration of the considerations required at the very early stages of

group initiation. Therefore my experience of this is detailed in a paper I wrote whilst 'going through' those considerations in the YoWiM group (McArdle, 2002), as well as later in Chapter Four.

- It seems that there is a lack of consensus as to what third-person inquiry is. I feel that my writing on this (Chapter Seven) contributes to the current discussion – clarifying how we might see the differences in the practices that could be described as third-person research, and giving some ideas on the qualities of inquiry practice we might look for.
- There also seems to be little written about what collaboration/co-operation is, and how people evolve as co-subjects. Again, through accounts of the YoWiM inquiry I seek to build on this.
- In terms of methodology, the nature of the extended epistemology has been reviewed through the work of the YoWiM inquiry, and has certainly led me to 're-understand' it. I offer this re-understanding (Chapter Five) again, not by way of showing that 'this is right', but in order to contribute the understanding gained in this work to a wider understanding of what the co-operative inquiry methodology has to offer inquiry practice.

These are just some of the issues that my thesis responds to from a methodological perspective. However, from an epistemological perspective, I find it difficult to articulate how important I have found it to approach my research in ways that 'fit' with me and my beliefs about knowledge and knowledge generation. Action research for me is a way of living my life, not 'just' an approach to my research – I do my research with the values I do my life – there is no sense of separation for me. Judi Marshall's work on living life as inquiry (Marshall, 1999, 2001, 2002) has been instrumental in helping me to explore my ideas around this – if I am living an actively inquiring life then I need to work with methodologies that enable a continuation of this in my research practice.

I say I find the importance of this difficult to articulate because in writing there is a need to acknowledge research approaches and methodologies, a need to discuss how we practically engage with them and so on, and in doing so I find that I can sound like a researcher telling a story about me doing some research. I want to sound like me evidencing how I try to live my values in my practice – a joined up process of being, rather than a separate process of acting and thinking about acting. I found the below from Rowan (1981) at the very beginning of my PhD studies, and it epitomises for me what I believe about research, and why choosing an action research approach ‘matches’ with these beliefs:

Research doesn't have to be another brick in the wall. It is obscene to take a young researcher who actually wants to know more about people, and divert them into manipulating 'variables', counting 'behaviours', observing 'responses' and all the rest of the ways in which people are falsified and fragmented. If we want to know about people, we have to encourage them to be who they are, and to resist all attempts to make them – or ourselves – into something we are not, but which is more easily observable, countable or manipulable... (Rowan, 1981:xxiii)

Wanting to engage people in 'being who they are' means that the process of research is not one that 'falsifies and fragments' – it's messy and complicated and frustrating and delightful. An intention I hold in writing this Chapter is for this account of method not to suggest that 'doing co-operative inquiry' is an orderly, straight-forward business – indeed the complexity of 'doing' is too complex for this Chapter, but I intend that as you read later Chapters you will get a sense of this – of how doing inquiry really takes shape.

In the writing that follows, I begin with brief descriptions of action research and first-, second- and third-person inquiry (I do not do the latter in any depth as this is considered in Chapter Six). I go on to describe co-operative inquiry and include some illustrations from the YoWiM group to show what we 'did' with the method in practice. I end with an encouragement to think about method as a set of ideas, rather than a 'thing'.

Action Research

Reason and Bradbury point to a broad range of traditions from which action research stems, from the usually cited work of Lewin, the critique of positivist science through to the participatory research practices engaged in by those working with the oppressed and underprivileged (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:2). Influences and origins seem too numerous to mention, but the practice of action research is well-documented. Such proliferation is perhaps what makes action research so difficult to define – as Reason and Bradbury point out with their own struggle:

There is no ‘short answer’ to the question ‘What is action research?’ But let us say as a working definition, to be expanded on...that action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:1)

Action research therefore, is not a ‘methodology’, rather it is an approach, orientation or paradigm which shapes our methodological practices and ways of being and thinking, where the primary purpose becomes a liberation of the human ‘body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world’. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:2) Reason and Bradbury discuss how ‘action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:2). However, they follow Heron in their assertion that practical knowledge (‘knowing how’, Heron, 1996b:34) is the primary form of knowing. I’m not sure that I fully follow this thinking – all forms of knowing seem intertwined and interdependent in their initial generation as well as their further development. This is evidenced throughout

my thesis. However, I do agree that the purpose of inquiry towards which we should all look is that which is 'worthwhile' to those involved in the inquiry process. Indeed, a key assumption in action research is that it:

...rests on the belief and experience that all people – professional action researchers included – accumulate, organize, and use complex knowledge constantly in everyday life. (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:4)

As Rorty suggests:

We cannot regard truth as a goal of inquiry. The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring about consensus on the ends to be achieved and the means used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve coordination of behaviour is not inquiry but simply wordplay. (Rorty, 1999:xxv)

Such inquiry is often conducted in the 'near environment' (Maguire, 2002), enabling action to be taken on specific problems in specific situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest five characteristics of action research. They consider that the production of practical knowledge - knowledge that people find useful in their everyday lives - is the primary purpose for action research work; that knowledge is generated in pursuit of worthwhile purposes; that action research is 'only possible with, for and by persons and communities' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:2) both in times of action and reflection; that it embraces different ways of knowing so that we might develop our living knowledge (discussed later in this Chapter); and lastly that 'good' action research emerges over time.

Action Research methodologies, due to the fact that people are 'doing' their own inquiry rather than having research done 'on' them, means that the traditional roles of researcher and researched become irrelevant⁹. Instead, people joining

⁹ Paradigmatically this is 'true' – but living this (all parties in the research process shifting their beliefs about 'researcher and researched') demands continual attention.

each other in the inquiry effort seek to become peers – co-researchers and co-inquirers, to varying degrees depending on the method of research.

*First- second- and third-person inquiry*¹⁰

Reason and Torbert (2001) identify three strands of action oriented research/practice: first-, second- and third-person inquiry. These echo an earlier framing of inquiry practice offered by Reason and Marshall:

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

The key point I take from these articulations is that attending to all three strands individually is important, as is attention to how each nourishes the other. First-person inquiry is inquiry into the inquirer's own experience and practice; second-person inquiry shifts us into partnership with others, and is most usually conducted in small, face-to-face communities, an example of which would be a co-operative inquiry group; third-person inquiries - seemingly the least definable of the three streams - generally extends beyond the small scale of the second-person strand, so that 'rather than being defined exclusively as 'scientific happenings' they [are] also defined as political events' (Toulmin and Gustavsen, 1996). Below I discuss first- and second-person inquiry. I do not enter into as detailed a discussion on third-person inquiry as I explore the whole notion of what this is in Chapter Six.

¹⁰ I use the term 'inquiry' throughout for consistency (except when citing literature), rather than switch between this and 'research/practice' as the literature tends to do.

First-person inquiry

Reason and Bradbury describe first-person research/practice as bringing an 'inquiring approach to (the researcher's) own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:xxvi). Torbert has elsewhere called this Action Inquiry, 'a study that transforms the present' (Torbert, 1991: 228). First-person inquiry 'enables a person to critically explore their own purposes, framings, behaviours and effects and as an outcome of this inquiry to create their own living theories and to improve the quality of their practice' (Reason and Torbert, 2001). First person inquiry practice engages us in questions such as; who am I? What is important to me? How do I frame my world? What are my actions in the moment to improve what I am doing?

Torbert (1976) differentiates between two different types of first-person inquiry practice; 'upstream' attentional awareness-enhancing practices (for example autobiographical writing and meditative practice) and 'downstream' feedback-gathering practices to enable the inquirer's awareness of the effect of their actions. This sense of a continual re-viewing and re-understanding of both internal and external process and understandings is nicely echoed by Marshall (1999, 2001) as 'inner and outer arcs of attention' - with the former she continually pays attention to her own meaning-making and framing processes, in the latter ideas are (explicitly and openly, or more guardedly) tested out with others. Reason refers to such exploration as contributing to a development of 'critical subjectivity':

Critical subjectivity means that we do not suppress our primary subjective experience, that we accept our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are aware of that perspective, and of its bias, and we articulate it in our communications. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing. (Reason, 1994b:327)

Developing such awareness means 'we do not have to throw away our living knowledge in the search for objectivity, but are able to build on it and develop it', (Reason, 1999:212). Furthermore, awareness that our knowing is based upon our 'living knowledge' helps us to understand that holding a perspective is valid, that we do not come to inquire from a 'clean slate'. As Wadsworth states:

In reclaiming the 'I' as critical to inquiry, we also came to real-ize the deeply intersubjective nature of truth construction per se... in this paradigm, active engagement - far from distorting the truth - may become the only way to get at certain truth/s. (Wadsworth, 2001:421)

The development of critical subjectivity through first-person inquiry enables a considerable reflexive capacity. The attention to both internal and external processes means the first-person experience is rigorously interrogated and therefore possible to theorise from. First-person inquiry practices can be therefore seen as personally and interpersonally transformational, and moreover as (re)acknowledging the site of the first-person - the self - as a worthwhile place not only from which to generate knowledge, but a place beyond which the knowledge generated has relevance and significance. If we care not only what knowledge is generated, but also where and how, we can see how knowledge creation is a political act. Marshall suggests:

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

As discussed in Chapter One, relationships where I felt my own experiences 'counted as knowledge' typified the kind of relationships in which I described myself as being able to learn. This re-visioning¹¹ (Callaway, 1981) of self as a place of 'valid' knowledge links clearly to the potentials of first-person inquiry – if we are able to explore the ground on which we stand, then we are legitimising our selves as sites of knowledge – just having a go at first-person inquiry can therefore be a big step, and it can feel risky. Re-visioning the self as knower means that we face up to the realisation of other people 'just being knowers too, just being like me'.

This, whilst being the first step toward democratising the knowledge that is generated, also means that we have to re-vision the position 'others' hold in our lives and to come to terms with that re-visioning. People with power and authority – 'people who are right', 'people who are successful here' – may become 'people who have power in terms of their organisational positioning, but who think differently from me'. Re-visioning others also leads to an acknowledgement of the role we individually take in enabling relationships with others to be how they are – suddenly we have to take responsibility for creating our experience. I could go on here. But my point is that first-person inquiry is not just about keeping a journal of the research experience, or writing down 'what I did today'. It is a political act of knowledge generation about the self, individually and in relation. Just the act of attending to one's practice, or writing in the journal is an act of re-visioning. I want to be clear that first-person inquiry is not something that we 'might easily sit down and do'.

First-person inquiry 'Kate style'

On this point, I want to indicate here what first-person inquiry has been for me. I am not a strict keeper of journals. I write scratched notes when I am working

¹¹ '...re-vision, as looking again, a deliberate critical act to see through the stereotypes of our society...and re-vision in its extended sense as the imaginative power of sighting possibilities and thus helping to bring about what is not (or not *yet*) visible, a new ordering of human relations.' (Callaway, 1981:457)

with groups, eating dinner or watching TV – whenever I need to. If I really need to get to grips with something I have noticed about my practice or a question that I am pondering, I am better able to figure it out by going for a run than I am sitting at a desk. Though I run most days, I was invalidating this as the disciplined practice of inquiry that it had actually become. I wasn't just running - I was running to create space in which I could attend to myself and my questions.

I was on occasion worried about this – I thought I wasn't being a 'good action research practitioner' – I had no neat stack of journals. And then I read Paul Roberts' (2003) thesis, in which a whole section is devoted to his stories of 'inquiry as running'. He too, as it turns out, is not a 'good journaler', he too thinks whilst he runs. There are two points to make here. Firstly, Paul details his practice honestly – he doesn't pretend to do the things that are written about as first-person inquiry practices, he validates running instead. In doing this, Paul enabled me to validate my practice and to acknowledge it here. It is this kind of detail that informs the action research community, and matches one of my aims in writing my thesis (as discussed in Chapter One) – to help raise awareness of choice in inquiry practice.

Secondly, evidencing his practice and mine illustrates how, through having a go at first-person inquiry, we have both 're-visioned' self as knower – in this case knowing that the important thing to do is the thing that works for the individual inquirer, rather than conform to the commonly cited approaches to first-person inquiry work.

That said, I am fortunate in having in my life people who give their time in helping me work things through in conversation with them. I find I have developed a good quality of attention to my practice, I feel quite attuned to how I am being and doing myself (and I am able to choose in and out of this – sometimes I 'tune in' with the intent of 'doing okay', other times I immerse myself in a fuller engagement). I make some scribbled notes - usually in the form of questions about what I am noticing - and I hold a lot of 'stuff' in my head. And then I need to talk them through. My partner Sandy deserves a special mention

here as someone who has always been there for me - he has always listened. And this is why I include this commentary here, rather than within the following discussion on second-person inquiry - he has *listened*. I sometimes need to hear my own voice articulate what I am thinking about - the act of speaking is one which sometimes helps me to do my figuring out. I can't talk out loud to my self (I have tried doing so and I feel ridiculous!) but talking to Sandy has helped me see my way through many a conundrum. I will always be indebted to him for the way he has made space for me to talk my self through.

First-person inquiry confronts us with all kinds of possibilities of what we might inquire into. As discussed in Chapter One, I edited out most of my first-person inquiry writing from that part of my thesis - exploring how I have come to hold the values I do about knowledge and learning meant I had to explore the relationships from which those values stem. And doing this was painful. The key to worthwhile first-person work seems to be in knowing that it is never wasted - the point of doing it/writing it/drawing it is not so you can use it all as 'evidence' in accounts such as this. It's so you may come to know yourself and understand your ways of being in the world.

Second-person inquiry

Second-person action research/practice addresses our ability to inquire face to face with others into issues of mutual concern, for example in the service of improving our personal and professional practice both individually and separately. Second-person inquiry starts with interpersonal dialogue and includes the development of communities of inquiry and learning organisations. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:xxvi)

One of the clearest articulations of second person inquiry is co-operative inquiry. I detail this below with some illustrations from the YoWiM group.

Co-operative Inquiry

I chose to use co-operative inquiry as a method because it resonated with my beliefs about learning, knowledge and knowledge generation. As I discussed in Chapters One and Two, when I began my PhD research I was carrying a lot of questions about voice, how learning might be enabled, and how lived experience could be validated as knowledge. I liked the idea of approaching research in a way that would enable people to collaborate with each other in examining their lived experience, make sense of it, and develop ideas that could shift that experience for the better. The political aspect of knowledge generation with a view towards action, change, and 'transformation' (Reason, 1988) felt like an appropriate offering when aiming to establish a group of people who I considered might experience their voices as silent or silenced within/by their organisation. Starting from the second-person position, with the focus on building a *community* of inquiry, seemed to offer a good way in to the silent stories and co-operative inquiry was one of the most clearly articulated forms of working this way. Much of my initial learning about the method came from reading Heron's work. He defines co-operative inquiry as a method that:

...involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting on it together. Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. It is a vision of persons in reciprocal relation using the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition with which the transparent body-mind can engage. (Heron, 1996:1)

Another reason why I felt drawn to this approach was that it did not require me to be an 'expert' before I could begin my research; rather it was presented as being available to ordinary people, who wanted to conduct inquiry for change in their everyday lives. Doing research with people, rather than on people (Reason, 1988) made sense to me.

There is a not insignificant amount of material published on co-operative inquiry as a method of research – perhaps most notably by Heron, Reason and Rowan throughout the 1970s and 1980s as cited below. More recently the method has been fostered particularly within the Centre of Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath – the intellectual home of my PhD. Below I give a brief overview of this historical development of the method and then go on to outline core methodological considerations.

Co-operative inquiry – a historical perspective

John Heron first began to write about what he then called ‘experiential research’ in 1971 (Heron, 1971). Throughout the 1970s, Heron developed the practice and theory of ‘experiential research’, emerging with three core developments (Heron, 1996): an affirmation of the interdependence between noticing phenomena and trying out new behaviours (Heron, 1977a), a realisation of the importance for peer experiential research in the transpersonal psychology field (Heron, 1975b), and an extension of the co-operative inquiry method to include all elements of social life, as a preventative guard against social oppression and disempowerment (Heron, 1978c).

In 1978 John Heron, Peter Reason and John Rowan and others came together in their establishment of the New Paradigm Research Group in London. The ensuing text, *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook for New Paradigm Research* (Reason and Rowan, 1981a) included the first rigorously detailed account of the co-operative inquiry method (Heron, 1981a, 1981b) – an account based around the notion of an extended epistemology. At this point, Heron and Reason began to jointly develop the co-operative inquiry method through initiating two inquiry groups (Heron and Reason 1981, 1982) and throughout the 1980s the method was practised and refined, leading to clear validity procedures and skills being outlined (Heron, 1982b, revised in Heron, 1988b), and a series of papers taking co-operative inquiry to a wider audience (Heron and Reason, 1984, 1986a, 1986b; Heron, 1985; Reason, 1986, 1988d; Reason and Heron, 1995). Since this time, the

philosophical case for co-operative inquiry as method has been developed most notably by Reason (1988, 1994b) and Heron (1992, 1996), and our understanding of its practical application as an approach to inquiry has been deepened through the works of Yorks and Kasl (2002), Baldwin (2002), Barrett and Taylor (2002), and Mead (2001, 2002) to name but a few.

The Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath, of which Peter Reason is Director, has been the UK academic centre for a range of related forms of participatory research methods, including co-operative inquiry, since the mid 1980s. Reason has published a wealth of work in the field of participatory research, including three key edited texts; *Human Inquiry in Action* (1988a), *Participation in Human Inquiry* (1994a) and *Handbook of Action Research* (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). The latter, alongside Heron (1996), Reason (2002), and various references at www.bath.ac.uk/management/CARPP and www.human-inquiry.com may be referred to for rich illustration of the co-operative inquiry method, with both theoretical discussion and exemplars from the field of practice.

Co-operative inquiry - key aspects of the method

Having discussed the historical development of co-operative inquiry and highlighted the core readings in relation to this, I am now going to outline what I see as the key aspects of the method itself, as a way in to understanding the co-operative inquiry method. These aspects are:

- The defining features of co-operative inquiry
- Different forms of co-operative inquiry group
- Phases of inquiry and the inquiry cycle
- Validity in inquiry
- The extended epistemology/inquiry outcomes

Defining features of co-operative inquiry

Heron (1996) details six defining features of co-operative inquiry, which are further developed and added to by Heron and Reason (2001) as below (making a total of eight), which I illustrate with examples from the YoWiM inquiry group to show how these features were experienced in our practice:

1. All the active subjects are fully involved as co-researchers in all research decisions - about content and method - taken in the reflection phases.
 - Decisions about content: The YoWiM inquiry group formed in response to my invitation to 'explore their experience as young women in P&G' - the inquiry was not limited to a particular research question or area of interest. Therefore, they set their own inquiry 'questions', with some convergence and some divergence. Considerable time was spent finding out what the questions were through engaging in more aware noticing of what was going on in their daily working lives and feeding this back into the inquiry group. Shared questions emerged around how the women were able to be in relationship with their bosses, and the idea of female role models in the organisation.
 - Decisions about process: How we worked together was always negotiated in reflection sessions. As the 'external researcher' I initially offered more ideas to the group about how we might develop skills of inquiry in our practice together, and these were discussed. What felt 'useful' and appropriate was taken on board.
2. There is intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other.
 - We got better at this as we progressed through our time together. Reflecting on and making sense of experience (talking together in our

face-to-face group about what was going on) was something engaged in with growing confidence as our trust in each other deepened – it shifted from ‘things I noticed’ to ‘how I feel about things I noticed’. We got a bit stuck here, finding experimenting with new actions challenging. We acknowledged this was going on, and some members of the group later told me they thought at the time that I might ‘leap in and sort things out’ for them! I didn’t. Awareness of the lack of action grew, almost forcing YoWiM members to ‘have a go at doing things differently’. Which they did, and which sent us off into a much more balanced and rewarding process of reflection and action.

3. There is explicit attention through agreed procedures to the validity of the inquiry and its findings. The primary procedure is to use inquiry cycles, moving several times between action and reflection.
 - We engaged in 16 cycles of inquiry. We would hold a half-day reflection session together, and follow this with a four week period in action. The point Heron makes about this procedure aiding validity meant, in our work, that the act of ‘going away and coming back’ enabled each participant to deepen their own sense of their questions, and enabled the inquiry group, in hearing more from each participant as time went by, to help them attend to what they were individually not noticing or not making progress on, as well as ‘cheering them on’ with the things that were being attended to.
4. There is a radical epistemology for a wide ranging inquiry method that integrates experiential knowledge through meeting and encounter, presentational knowing through the use of aesthetic, expressive forms, propositional knowing through words and concepts, and practical knowing-how in the exercise of diverse skill. These forms of knowing are brought to bear upon each other, through the use of cycles, to enhance their mutual congruence, both within each inquirer and in the inquiry group as a whole.

- I explore the extended epistemology in more depth below, suffice to say here that when working with groups whose experience has not ‘mattered’ in organisational discourse such as YoWiM building the capacity to access untold stories in a choiceful and aware manner was important. Utilising the four ways of knowing, and building skills and competence in doing so, made this accessing possible.
5. There is, as well as validity procedures, a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry. They include fine-tuned discrimination in perceiving, in acting and in remembering both of these; bracketing off and re-framing launching concepts; and emotional competence, including the ability to manage effectively anxiety stirred up by the inquiry process.
- This description sounds a lot more requiring of ‘established skill’ than our experience indicates. It is impossible to know if you are ‘emotionally competent in effectively managing anxiety’ in a group until you’ve had a go at doing it, in that group. What works for one group may not work for another. The point for us was to commit to attending to what we noticed, and to allow each other to attend to things, rather than silencing our selves through worry about ‘not getting it right’. We found just stopping and asking questions such as ‘why are we choosing to do this in this way?’ was an effective way of way of attending to our process and to each other.
6. The inquiry can be both informative about and transformative of, any aspect of the human condition that is accessible to the transparent body-mind, that is, one has an open, unbounded awareness.
- Engaging in co-operative inquiry indicates a desire to change something, to take action of some kind. Retaining a sense of what is open to be inquired into is an important choice in participating in such research, and this shifted for some participants in the YoWiM group as time went by. In the YoWiM group, getting new

information about the organisation and the members themselves was where inquiry began. In consciousness raising processes such as ours there seemed to be a lack of this information – perhaps hence the desire to join the inquiry group.

7. Primacy is given to transformative inquiries that involve action, where people change their way of being and doing and relating in the world – in the direction of greater flourishing. This is on the grounds that practical knowing-how consummates the other three forms of knowing – propositional, presentational and experiential – on which it is founded.

- I believe that if research is undertaken by people, for themselves, they are the ones most appropriately placed to decide what type of inquiry is most suited to their needs. I find the split between informative and transformative inquiry unhelpful, as ‘learning about’ in informative inquiry will inadvertently shift what we know and therefore how we behave, which would make the inquiry transformative. This point aside, in the YoWiM group, through inquiring into all four ways of knowing, members became able to behave in new ways in their daily lives. Relationships with bosses were explored, leading to negotiating different ways of relating (the subtle difference of shifting conversations so that one of the YoWiM group members bosses called her by her name rather than ‘Petal’); the ‘normal’ behaviour of a senior manager was re-described as ‘bullying’, a description that led to this upsetting behaviour as being possible to confront; the realised absence of female role models in the organisation led to the YoWiM group making recommendations to the Lead Diversity Team on ‘how P&G might get in touch with who the real role models are’; holding an inquiring space for a third-person workshop meant that the YoWiM group needed to model different ways of being in front of a large group. Lots of transformations.

8. The full range of human capacities and sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry.
 - Being fully open to the process of inquiry and understanding ourselves as instruments of inquiry again takes time as we are all capable of 'shutting part of ourselves off' to the process. Denying our fear or anger or delight for example, means that our full range of capacities will not be enriching the inquiry process. I am not sure if we ever get to engage this full range, due to our culture, the culture created in any group, and how we might choose to take care of ourselves. The possibility of the above seems more likely if the inquiry process goes on for some time, during which trust in each other can be established.

Different forms of co-operative inquiry

Co-operative inquiry can take many different forms. The inquiry may be initiated by one or more researchers wishing to use the method, who then invite others to join them around a set inquiry topic. The initiators may be internal to the inquiry topic, so they are both fully co-researchers and co-subjects, whilst others may be external to the inquiry topic and cannot fully be co-subjects. The inquirers may form a same-role inquiry, for example they might all be doctors, or they might form a counterpartial-role inquiry where the inquiry explores the practitioner-client relationship, for example the inquiry group may be composed of doctors and patients. Or the inquiry may be mixed-role where the roles of the participants are different.

The focus of the action phase draws a further distinction between forms of inquiry; action phases in inside inquiries include the whole inquiry group in exploration of the nature of that group. Outside inquiries explore what happens in the lives of the inquiry group members, with action phases occurring outside group meetings and reflection phases occurring together. The final distinction I

believe worth noting is whether the boundary of the inquiry is open or closed – the former includes interaction between the inquirers and others in their wider world, the latter is concerned solely with interactions within and between members of the inquiry group. Obviously, when including others, issues arise about how ‘data’ gathered in these relationships will be shared back with the inquiry group. These choices need to be addressed within the inquiry group.

With consideration to the above noted forms of inquiry group, the form the YoWiM inquiry group took was as follows:

- I initiated the inquiry as an external researcher, meaning that we were not full co-subjects. However, our age, gender, educational background and interest in developing our inquiry skills and our practice enabled us to be engaged in our inquiry together. We were all developing our inquiry skills, both when apart from and with each other, so this was our point of fusion as co-subjects.
- Our inquiry was mixed-role, in that the members of the YoWiM group each women in the group fill different roles in the company. They explored their experience as young women who had served three years or less within the company as a first career. In this sense the inquiry could be seen as same-role as the age, gender and experience of the company were the things that enabled a fuller sense of co-subjectivity between the YoWiM group members.
- The inquiry had an open boundary. Stories of ‘what happened’ were brought back to the inquiry group by its members only. Those outside of the inquiry group were often not aware of the involvement of the group members in the co-operative inquiry and as such had no say in how the stories about interactions with them were told. Reason and Heron (2001) state that the absent nature of collaboration in how this data is to be shared back infringes upon the norm of co-operative inquiry. I believe if there is rigorous critical inquiring attention to our stories as we speak them out from our experience, then we learn about how we see what we see. The story I tell from my experience is ‘real’ for me and it was in this arena of embodied sense-making

that we helped each other to inquire into and understand the sense we made of our practice.

Phases of inquiry and the inquiry cycle

As I mentioned in opening this Chapter, I intend that method should not be seen as 'a thing that exists'. The below suggestion from Heron (1996) seems like a useful precursor to the following 'clean' description of the inquiry phases and cycles:

I do not consider that adopting these (phases), explicitly or tacitly, is *the* way to do a co-operative inquiry; it is only a way. There cannot be in this field such a thing as the one and only right, proper or correct method. There can only be my, or your, or our view as to what is a good method. (Heron, 1996:49)

The inquiry group moves through four phases, for ease of writing here I have labelled them phases 1-4, but inquirers may start anywhere in the cycle. Phase 1 is a phase of reflection, moving through to action phases (phases 2 and 3) and back to reflection (phase 4)¹². The four phases together make one complete inquiry cycle. The activities which may be considered during each phase of the inquiry cycle are as follows, (adapted from Heron, 1996, and Heron and Reason, 2001):

Phase 1: A group of people come together to explore a shared interest – they are referred to as co-researchers as all are involved in defining the inquiry agenda. For example, they may be organisational members who want to research sources of stress in their work, (Traylen, 1994), or professionals who want to inquire into an aspect of their practice (Baldwin, 2001 and Mead, 2002). They can be from any walk of life and need not include any professional researchers. They begin by agreeing on the focus of their inquiry and formulating the questions or

¹² This description obviously does not acknowledge the complexity of how such cycles 'happen' in practice, but is a good way to begin to think about these ideas. In practice, holding the idea of 'nested cycles' seems important (for example, in the project 'action' phase, an individual may go through several cycles of action and reflection as they explore their inquiry questions).

propositions they may wish to investigate. They then consider a method for exploring these questions in practice, and agree a set of procedures for gathering and recording the data from this time in practice. They also agree on the time periods to be spent in each phase, for example the YoWiM group met for half a day, once every four weeks.

Phase 2: The co-researchers additionally become co-subjects, in that they are engaged in researching their own experience. They engage in the activities they agreed upon, engaging in actions/experience and observing and recording both the process and the outcomes of this. The group, in whole or part may decide to use the early cycle(s) as time to observe more carefully so they come to a clearer understanding of their experience, and then in later cycles being to try out new actions, as with the YoWiM group. Either way, co-subjects pay attention to how practice does and does not conform to the original ideas they had about it.

Phase 3: This phase is frequently referred to as the touchstone of the inquiry method, where co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their actions and experience. They go beyond superficial understandings, deepening into the experience, which in turn enables them to see old situations in new ways. They may move away from their original questions and into new fields of experience, or they may become so involved in what they are doing they may lose awareness of their inquiry involvement. Such a degree of experiential engagement means that any new practical skills or new understandings are centrally located in the field of meaningful practice.

Phase 4: After the period of time spent as co-subjects, the inquiry group comes together again, to share their data and their thinking about what they have been doing. They reflect this back on their original ideas, perhaps causing them to be reframed, or they may pose entirely new questions. They may also alter the ways they undertake inquiry, for example how they have decided to gather data, as a reflection of this experience.

The inquiry group engages in several cycles, moving between action and reflection, between doing and making sense. The time taken in each cycle is

dependent upon the type of questions under exploration. For example, many short cycles may take place over a short workshop, or each inquiry cycle may last a month, meaning the inquiry may run for a year or longer, as with the YoWiM group. Furthermore, the cycles may overlap and run in parallel with each other. Cycles are said to ideally balance between divergence (group members looking at different issues of interest) and convergence (group members all looking at the same issue) to enable a greater understanding of the whole and its parts. Repeating the process of cycling through the different phases of inquiry enhances the validity of the inquiry findings. Within this cycling process, there are specific validity procedures to attend to.

Validity in inquiry

Heron defines validity¹³ as ‘well-groundedness, soundness, having an adequate warrant’ (Heron, 1996:57), and offers nine procedures to be applied in the reflection phases of co-operative inquiry in order to ‘free the various forms of knowing involved in the inquiry from the distortion of uncritical subjectivity’ (Heron, 1996:59). The validity of any such inquiry may therefore be judged on the following, from Heron (1996) and Heron and Reason (2001)¹⁴.

- **Research cycling:** as discussed above, the co-operative inquiry method hinges on a cyclical process of action and reflection, of ‘going away’ and ‘coming back together’, through which experiential and reflective forms of knowing progressively refine each other.
- **Divergence and convergence:** finding the appropriate degree to which the inquiry group are convergent (where they look at the same issue several

¹³ Validity is something of an awkward idea in research of this nature. In Reason’s recent paper on choice and quality in action research, he uses the term ‘quality’ rather than validity: “What do we mean by quality in action research? (I want to avoid the term ‘validity’, with its reference back to positivist research which suggests that there is one validity)”. (Reason, 2003:5)

¹⁴ I refer back to Kemmis as cited in Chapter One to remind us, in reading the below, that ‘in the end, [participants] are or are not enlightened in their *own terms*. (Kemmis 2001:91, italics mine.)

times) or divergent (where they look at different issues in successive cycles) in their focus of inquiry, is a decision for the inquiry group themselves.

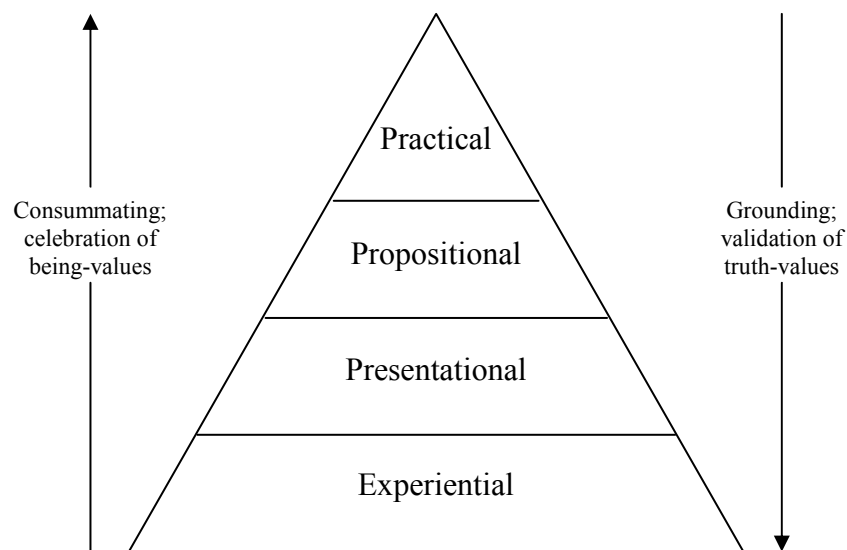
- **Authentic collaboration:** it is important that the inquiry group 'make the method their own' to enable a dissipation of the initiating researcher's role as methodological expert. Further, the full and authentic engagement of all inquirers, both in action and reflection phases is necessary. This requires equality of influence in decision making and of voice - the inquiry can not be seen as truly co-operative if some people's voices are privileged over others, and some aren't heard at all.
- **Reflection and action:** whilst largely dependent upon the topic under exploration, an appropriate balance between action and reflection needs to be found to enable the reflective and experiential forms of knowing to refine each other. Furthermore, in the reflection phase, a balance between presentational and propositional ways of making sense has to be struck.
- **Challenging all forms of uncritical subjectivity:** these forms include not noticing or not voicing aspects of experience which make evident limitations of a conceptual model or programme of action, unaware fixation on false assumptions, unaware projections which distort the inquiry process, and lack of rigour in inquiry method and in applying validity procedures.
- **Chaos and order:** the allowance of an interdependence between chaos and order will enable an avoidance of premature closure to feelings of confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, disorder and tension. Whilst there is no certainty that chaos will emerge, an awareness of this as a legitimate outcome of inquiry is helpful.
- **Managing distress:** if co-researchers are willing to explore their full lived experience, it is likely that some aspects of their lives which are 'uncomfortable' and/or hitherto unexplored will be surfaced. These may be unawarely projected - distorting the process and content of the inquiry.

Therefore the group must be(come) willing to openly address emotional upset as and when it is present and to identify un-spoken anxieties in the group.

The purpose of the above procedures, as stated, is to 'free the various forms of knowing involved in the inquiry from the distortion of uncritical subjectivity' (Heron, 1996:59). The process of 'going away and coming back', by design, engages us in different ways of knowing what we do and how we are. The above validity criteria enable us, in our sharing with our inquiry group, to acknowledge, engage with and inquire into our different ways of knowing. We do this not only through words - just as different ways of knowing are engaged with, sub-consciously or otherwise, in the action phase, so too are they in the reflection phase. These ways of knowing are discussed below.

The extended epistemology and outcomes of inquiry

Epistemology, a theory of how we know, is extended in the case of co-operative inquiry as it goes beyond the principally theoretical, propositional knowledge generated within academia (Reason, 1999). Knowledge generated within co-operative inquiry begins in relationship, through the participation in inquiry practice with others. Epistemology in co-operative inquiry holds within it four forms of knowing (each of which is subjective), as shown below:



Bipolar congruence of four forms of knowing. (Heron, 1996)

Experiential knowing means ‘knowing through direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place, process or thing’, ‘participating in the being of what is present’ (Heron 1996), opening ourselves as fully as we can to all that constitutes our lived experience.

Presentational knowing is giving expression through creative media such as story telling, and two and three-dimensional art forms.

Propositional knowing is ‘knowing about’ something, through ideas and theories, most often expressed in informative statements.

Practical knowing is ‘knowing how’ to do something, demonstrated in a skill or competence.

Throughout my thesis I bring these ideas to life, evidencing how they informed our practice (particularly in Chapter Five). What seems important to note here though, is that the above ways of knowing are not just ‘things’; they are processes we invite each other to engage in. The very invitation to notice them is a meta-communication – saying something about ‘what it is okay to do, how it is okay to be, in this space’, as well as opening up the space for other ideas that may have not yet been shared. The invitation is a catalyst in this sense. Moreover, in the YoWiM group we found the *process of engaging* in ‘different’ ways of representing our knowing imbued with meaning, as well as the ‘end result’. For example, with the sculpting, physical movement exercises and drawing we did, the ‘doing of it’ was as important as ‘the outcome’, and in some cases more so (for example, the ‘empty chairs’ exercise as discussed in Chapter Five). It opened up new conversations grounded in experience and enabled us to continually locate ourselves in interesting questions about what we had done, what we might do better, and what we might do next.

Therefore the four ways of knowing have implications for the validity of the knowing which falls from the co-operative inquiry. A sense of congruence between them - where knowing is grounded in experience, gains expression

through our images and stories, becomes understood through ideas and notions which sit well with us and is understood and consummated through worthwhile action in our lives - enhances the validity of the knowing. Such enhancement leads to knowing which has greater depth and an increased sense of place in our daily lives, as opposed to sterile concepts of 'what we ought to know'. I discuss this idea further in 'Naming as Knowing', Chapter Five. Reason (2003) however warns us not to fall into a trap of thinking we are generating knowledge just by engaging in these four forms, suggesting that each has 'characteristic threats to quality':

The potential error in *experiential knowing* is to be trapped in illusion, to create a defensive inquiry which guards against the discovery of the new... The potential error in *presentational knowing* is to stay with the same old stories, to repeat them to oneself and to others so they recreate existing realities and confirm existing beliefs... The potential error in *propositional knowing* is to be held within the hegemonic paradigm and uncritical acceptance of taken for granted theories... The potential error in *practical knowing* is the failure to empirically test practices against outcomes. (Reason, 2003:30)¹⁵

Inquiry Outcomes

Heron (1996:37) details four main kinds of inquiry outcomes, which correspond to the four types of knowing. These by no means form an exhaustive list - an inquiry may have elements of one, some or all of the outcomes he suggests.

1. Transformations of personal being through engagement with the focus and process of inquiry.

¹⁵ As I discuss throughout my thesis (particularly in Chapter Six), if, as I believe, the practice of action research generally and co-operative inquiry particularly are grounded in the intention of developing skills in all whom are engaged, these 'threats' or 'errors' will not only be less likely to be a characteristic of our work, but will be spotted and inquired into more readily and with a greater degree of competence.

2. Presentations of insight about the focus of the inquiry through dance, drawing, drama and all other expressive modes.
3. Propositional reports which are informative about the inquiry domain and the inquiry method.
4. Practical skills that are related to transformative action, participative knowing and collaboration used in the inquiry process.

Again, I list these here as an introduction to the method, and suggest throughout my thesis how they were evident in the YoWiM inquiry group.

Summary

The above gives a broad overview of the aspects of the co-operative inquiry method I believe are necessary to detail here. Throughout this thesis I shall illustrate how the YoWiM inquiry group adopted this method, how we made it our own, and what learnings may be taken from this experience. By way of ending this Chapter I want to raise a last question... Does method exist?

By writing a section on methodology, there is an implicit assumption of method as a 'thing that exists'. The above is a necessary question particularly when approaching research for the first time, and particularly if, like me, the researcher intends to use a specific method. I want to encourage a 'question mark' over method being a 'thing' - like a recipe we might use to make a cake - and suggest an approach, early on, to understanding 'method' as a guiding set of ideas that may be more or less helpful in any context. So rather than getting it wrong or right - judged on how 'well' we have stuck to the method - I would be looking for evidence of appropriate choices being made by those they affect, which in some instances may be strongly method related, other times not. I like the way Reason and Bradbury discuss this idea:

In action research knowledge is a living evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience... This means action research cannot

be programmatic and cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods, but is, in Lyotard's (1979) sense, a work of art. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:2)

The YoWiM group did not 'do' co-operative inquiry. We did *a* co-operative inquiry. The methodology is carried and created through our use of it in the inquiry group. My thesis seeks to illustrate how this method 'was' in our practice - how we made it our own and how the methodology became more real because of our actively interpreting it.

A note (for the neophyte?) on reading 'methodology'

When I began working with the co-operative inquiry method, I engaged with the readings I have referenced in this Chapter and they gave me useful introductory guidance and advice - particularly in relation to where I might pay attention to encourage participation from a facilitative perspective and to the basics of the inquiry cycle. They made 'doing co-operative inquiry' feel doable. The translation of this into action, in my experience, has brought me to tell a story that is methodologically a lot messier and a lot less orderly than the core methodological readings suggest. I think an awareness of this before embarking upon an inquiry is probably helpful, but I also know that if Heron's (1996) text represented the complexity of inquiry rather than being the orderly, straightforward account that it is, many of us would perhaps re-consider going ahead!

I think both ideas need to be held lightly - the order along with the messiness. It seems that without the former we may not understand how we might begin, and without the latter, we may never know the richness and variety of our practice as inquirers - how doing this really is.

I want to emphasise the importance of the experiential and presentational in order that sense might be made of the propositional. This integration of different ways of knowing and how they inform each other is, as I see it, at the heart of

inquiry practice. From my experience, when I've been 'doing it' and I then write about it, I can use phrases that assume understanding on the part of my reader that 'this isn't exactly how it is, but you know what I mean'. For example, the words from Heron above, taken literally, say 'each person *is co-subject* in the experience phases *and co-researcher* in the reflection phases' (Heron, 1996:1, italics mine). I know when I read this *now* (following some experience of 'doing inquiry') that we come to be co-researchers/subjects - we aren't so just because we join a group, as suggested when Reason and Bradbury (2001:2) state that 'good action research emerges over time... as individuals develop skills of inquiry'. Heron's text (1996), as with many such others, gives us an idea of what our inquiry group might ultimately be - phrases like the 'co-researchers' do mean different things in each group - we are not all talking nor writing about 'exactly the same thing'.

I think bearing the position and experience of the author in mind enables more inquiry into the potential of inquiry work. Awareness of different accounts, different ideas, along with a growing awareness of the questions emerging out of the literature, serves to bring the choices of inquiry practice to light as ideas to be 'tried out'. I suggest this based on my working theory that no one - old hand nor neophyte - is doing inquiry better than anyone else - we're all just doing it in our own unique way. Getting as naked as we can in locating ourselves in the research accounts makes more visible the sense behind the choices we make (and the lack of sense behind others!). I'm trying to encourage that we read and write about inquiry (methodology) as an inquiring practice.