Chapter Eight

The importance of 'ending'

Making a special space for us to end our inquiry had always been very important to me. When I wrote the research proposal for P&G in August 2000, I built-in a two-day residential 'inquiry closing' to be held at the University of Bath. Before we had even begun, it already mattered to me that we (whoever 'we' were going to be) should have some time away from 'work space' – with no emails to check, no colleagues to explain our whereabouts to, no late starting due to work crises – to focus entirely on our inquiry and to have time and space to close meaningfully, and well. This chapter seeks to explain why I believe taking care over ending is important, and to tell my account of the ending process we joined each other in, after the twelve months we shared together as the YoWiM group.

Our inquiry closing, in October 2001, marked the end of the time we had 'contracted' to work together. However, the group continued its work together for an additional four months - in a more ad hoc fashion and largely without my participation. This time was spent working through plans of how they would 'speak more of their silence back to the organisation' and carrying these into action in a meeting with the Lead Diversity Team in February 2002. The group asked me for advice during their planning stage - predominantly on the process they might create for the final meeting, which they invited me to attend. I have discussed this in Chapter Five.

Why writing this Chapter matters

As discussed (Chapter One), I feel that detailed accounts of inquiry practice – what people have actually done – are largely unreported. At the time of working with the YoWiM group, nowhere could I find good quality accounts of what ending had meant to groups, how they had developed a shared understanding of this, or what structures they had put in place to enable them to end in ways that

honoured their group experience. I have learnt that the choices made in the 'beginning stage' and the 'ending stage' of the YoWiM co-operative inquiry group were important indicators of how we practiced co-operative inquiry. I have discussed 'beginning' in Chapter Four, here I focus on 'ending'.

The resonance between the beginning and ending stages strikes me as important. The beginning processes in the YoWiM group laid the foundations for much, if not all, of what followed. I indicate some of these below. Though these processes became more deeply embedded and lived in our inquiry practice as it matured, the intention to model them in the very first sessions played a big part in making 'an inquiring future' possible. Beginning, as discussed in Chapter Four, seems to be more about processes of inquiry than content:

- **Modelling equality of relationship**: Physical layout as shaping what is possible in inquiry (with a circle of chairs you can't 'stand at the front and lead'), creating the space for each of us to speak.

- **Valuing the knowledge of new and different communities**: The explicit self-selection for involvement, the previously un-felt peer-only membership. Such processes indicate the values we each bring to the inquiry group, the co-researcher/facilitator intention, the ownership of knowledge and the notion of being the only experts of our own experience.

- **Joining each other in setting own(ed) agendas:** Encouragement in the search for and use of 'own(ed)' voices, allocated uninterrupted time to tell stories, acknowledgement and naming of wanting and needing to speak and to be listened to.

- **Attending to self and other:** Reframing how we might understand (often counter-culturally) processes in groups, for example in considering the value of the silence of others: 'people are really listening to me' rather than falling into the norm of devaluing it, 'I've confused them, they're bored, I've failed'; and the silence of our selves: 'I know that in choosing

to be here, I am not choosing into a competition to speak first', 'listening well is valued here', 'I don't have to rush in thinking this through'. Schweickart's (1996:306) discussion of the Filipino meaning and tradition of silence, where 'thoughtful silence' is understood as an agentic position, resonates here.

- **Helping each other to build, rather than destroy:** Considering what others might need from us when we respond to them, learning to respond with words that build on what we've heard, that evidence our attention and our intention to the stories (in doing so owning our position, our standpoint), exploration and sharing rather than winning and losing. Really listening, it seems cannot happen without being able to really talk, as Belenky et al state:

> The capacity to 'really listen' goes hand in hand with the capacity to 'really talk'. In 'real talk' domination is absent, reciprocity and cooperation are prominent. (Belenky et al., 1986:145-146)

- **Reframing responsibility in relationship:** Encouraging a re-visioning of how we might hear the challenges, questions and comments of others, from: 'I have to listen to everything people say', 'their feedback usually leaves me feeling angry/upset' to: 'I have a choice in what I take on board'; 'I am responsible for negotiating how I feel about the feedback'.

The ending processes seem to resonate with those of the beginning at many levels:

- **Shaping the future:** On a second-person level, the closing (or in some groups of which I have been a participant, the stopping) phase of any group seems to be a time that group members remember. From my experience with groups so far, it seems that people remember beginnings, endings and critical incidents. Therefore, it seems that the experience of closing a group shapes what follows, in terms of what people can take forward from their experience of that group.

- **Deciding what we 'know':** The above inadvertently means ending processes are in a way a defining moment of 'learning/deciding what we have learnt here' in two ways.   Firstly, on a process level, are we evidencing in our practice, right here right now that we are 'walking our talk' – are we 'doing inquiry' as we have defined it, are we keeping it real? Are we all deciding what processes we need to have in place to enable us to end in ways that feel right? What sense of agency do 'I' have in this? Do I understand what we need, or that I can find out if I don't?

  Secondly, on a content level, what truths are we creating about our experiences in this group? What story/ies are we building about this group? What am I leaving this knowing?

- **Defining inquiry for us:** Considered in light of the above, I feel that a closing is a process in which we may make valid what inquiry is for us – a process in which we (re)affirm what we define as inquiry and inquiry skills, such as the naming of attentive listening as an inquiry skill. In doing so we create the possibility of giving ourselves permission to carry these practices forward as 'practices' or 'skills', validating the place such skills have in our facilitative repertoire outside of the inquiry group. This face-to-face shared reaffirmation seems essential if these skills are not to be invalidated by others, or 'disappeared' as 'relational practice' (Fletcher, 1999).

- **Raising awareness of living our values:** The above point begins to map onto Torbert's (2001) earlier mentioned notion that first-, second- and third-person inquiry are necessarily interconnected and mutually generating. By validating 'what counts' as inquiry skills with each other in the second-person space, we surface and test-out our beliefs about our practice from the first-person level. In creating/defining/understanding 'truth' generation as a local practice – something that happens in communities of inquiry (particularly those, I would suggest that allow for the intertwining of the first- and second-person inquiry streams) – I

suggest that we make possible the living of our truths outside of the inquiry group space.

If I feel supported in living a truth of 'really listening to each other is a valuable thing to do', then I may feel braver/more able to encourage this local truth to exist in the 'more than local' context, irrespective of whom I am working with, what kind of meeting I am in, or what behaviours my 'organisation' values. This suggestion tips us into Torbert's third-person territory – if we 'know' that we have created a different type of 'now' in the small face-to-face inquiry group over time, we might raise our own awareness that we can create a different type of future with other/bigger groups of people, in other organisations.

In this Chapter, I shall illustrate how the closing processes in the YoWiM group informed my above ideas, as I feel this is a useful contribution to the literature on inquiry practice given the gap around reporting of this nature. When beginning my doctoral studies, I found an example of such a gap in Herons work. Heron (1996) acknowledges that some kind of 'final round' or 'reflection phase' might take place in order that the whole group can review the preceding cycles. However, he does not offer forward any ways in which this might happen except to suggest, through citation of De Venny-Tiernan, Goldband, Rackham and Reilly (1994) and Heron and Reason (1981) that some collective agreement about what is 'true for us [group members]' should emerge (Heron, 1996:98-99). A discussion of the possible inquiry process of ending is entirely absent and Heron focuses instead on notions of 'completion', stating:

In these early days of such a highly participative method, arriving at a satisfactory point of completion is a very relative matter. Different inquiries, depending on their overall length, topic and membership, will achieve different degrees of it. (Heron, 1996:99)

He then goes on to cite a substantial list of examples of 'outcomes' from co-operative inquiry groups, for example:

> The women's staff development inquiry generated substantial transformations of personal and professional identity and decision-making, and initiated diffuse organisational change. (Treleaven 1994, cited in Heron 1996:99)

Heron clearly states that the primary outcome, after having involved ourselves in an inquiry process that enables us to know that we, as normal 'non-expert' beings may acquire and apply real knowledge, is 'a way of being in the world that sacralizes it with a participative awareness shared with others' (1996:100):

> The outcomes of such inquiry combine a way of being present in the world, a revisioning of its patterning, propositions that articulate it, practices that transform it. The middle two of these can be expressed in forms apart form the inquirer, in artistic portrayals and reports. But the first and last are inseparable from the inquirer, and since they have been forged in collaboration with others, this creates a deep bonding. Hence the ending of any inquiry is a celebration of this deep bonding and a mourning that the active welding of it has come to an end. So there needs to be some full acknowledgement of all this. (Heron 1996:100)

However, Heron clearly states that written accounts of the co-operative inquiry group processes have an important role to play in enabling others to learn about such practice (Heron 1996:102). In his listing of what might be included in such an account, except for a suggestion that a summary of each research cycle, detailing what happened in each action and reflection phase, would be of interest, he lists nothing related to valuing an account of how such groups close, or end.

It is necessary to acknowledge that every text differs in its purpose, and it is clear from Heron's text that a discussion of how such groups end is not a key aim. Whilst holding my questions about why Heron chose this approach, in this Chapter I seek to offer forward my account of our ending in the YoWiM group to contribute, alongside the work of other inquirers whose PhD theses have been

published over the past couple of years (Mead 2001 most particularly), to a growing body of knowledge with which this gap might be filled.

My purpose in doing this is not so we might at some future point take all these accounts and decide upon 'a best or right way' of doing this - quite the opposite. My purpose is to offer up this account as a way of broadening the choices of fellow inquirers, not as a way of restricting them. By increasing our awareness of the processes others have engaged in, I suggest we accomplish two things:

1. We increase our awareness of the modes we have available to us, in which we might act: *'I can see that there are some other ways I might choose to do this.'*
2. Mapping the territory of experience by sharing our accounts tells us as much about what has not been done, as what has: *'I wonder why no one seems to have tried 'this' idea? Maybe I should give it a try?'*

So, rather than being prescriptive, I suggest that offering these stories forward is a description of both what has, and has not been done. I propose that the power of the latter is that it invites us to engage in boundary pushing inquiry approaches – approaches that through our lack of knowing 'about' them enable us to challenge ourselves fully, in every aspect of our experience of 'doing inquiry', as nothing is familiar. Again, my attention to wanting to 'end well', to give ending a space to fully be part of our inquiry, mirrors this process. I didn't have accounts from others about how ending might be, and as a result I found myself being exceptionally attentive to the ending process in which we engaged.

This can be juxtaposed with my understanding of the phases of the co-operative inquiry cycle, which I read widely about before I began working with the YoWiM group. I felt I understood a lot of the structural aspects of how a co-operative inquiry group might function from the considerable reading I had done around the work of Reason and Heron particularly. I felt I had a good idea about the rhythms of inquiry practice and the skills I needed to develop and attend to in myself and others. Creating ending structures was a process that the prior experience of our inquiry gave birth to – our ending emerged from what had gone before. Therefore, it was driven by what inquiry had come to mean to us,

rather than what 'literature' suggested we might do. As such, the process of our closing might be seen as illustration of practical knowing – 'knowing how to exercise a skill' (Heron 1996:52). The skill in evidence, as I will show, is one of being a community of inquirers.

Additionally, if as Heron suggests (1996:101) 'the proper outcome… is something within persons' then quality in such inquiry might only reasonably be located in individual inquirers' accounts of whether they are indeed 'transformed instruments of inquiry' (Heron 1996:101). Throughout this Chapter I attempt to illustrate how members of the YoWiM group describe them selves as having been 'changed' by the inquiry process.

Ideas that shaped the closing of YoWiM

Below I draw together some of the ideas we were holding when deciding how to close our inquiry together. The fact that these ideas - generated by the YoWiM group - shaped the inquiry closing, is evidence of the way the YoWiM group members were attending to the significance of process. This is an inquiry skill in itself. Furthermore, the act of co-designing our closing - through talking together about what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it - is indicative of how power in our group was shared on both process and content levels.

This sharing is not something that emerged at the closing – we made steps throughout the life of the inquiry to become co-facilitators and co-inquirers. Back-tracking on this position of power being shared would perhaps have been an easy mistake to make in the emotional tide of ending our work together. As Reason suggests (1988b), people in the process of ending a group may well be experiencing a range of emotions, from loneliness and hurt to pleasure and a feeling of satisfaction. These can hijack the ending process, and ending is therefore an obvious time for a group to fall in on itself and become dependent on its leader (or in this case, the initiator). Shrugging off responsibility, scapegoating, denial, fleeing the ship are all possibilities as a group faces up to

saying good bye (Randall and Southgate, 1980). We, however, managed to continue in the spirit of working with each other in taking responsibility for process and content, as evidenced below:

Shedding our skin

Our group's ending took place at the University of Bath and was the only time we met as a group away from the P&G offices. We were very much 'on my turf', and this undoubtedly had an effect on power in our group – the organisational boundary had been shed, I was no longer a visitor, the rest of the group were no longer at work, we were wearing jeans and t-shirts rather than formal work-wear, the surroundings were familiar only to me: what was possible to come to know through our inquiry processes was given new space to breathe.

I believe that the relocation of our inquiry opened up new possibilities. This new-found liberation from the inquiry container of the P&G offices that we had become so familiar with, meant that in a way, everything that happened was new and different. Whilst we continued with many of the patterns of our inquiry process, for example the circle of chairs, the discipline of 'really listening' (Belenky et al., 1986:145), the 'Dionysian' emergent ways of making sense, 'with sharing acting as a catalyst to new understanding and action' (Heron 1996:46) the new inquiry container meant that in a way we saw our process as if for the first time. The new space gave us distance (geographical distance, as well as a distancing of the familiar), enabled us to take a step back and appraise our process which was so strongly associated with 'being on-site' at P&G. This illustrates the importance of the relationship between context and Freire's (1970) notion of conscientization. The type of consciousness we can achieve seems to me, from my experience with the YoWiM group, fundamentally bound to the space we create in which we aim for this 'coming to know' to happen.

This in turn makes an important link to the wider discussion around power and knowledge.

Knowledge, as much as any resource, determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom. Through access to knowledge, and participation in its production, use and dissemination, actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualisation of the possible. *In some situations, the asymmetrical control of knowledge productions of others can severely limit the possibilities which can either be imagined or acted upon*; in other situations, agency in the process of knowledge production, or co-production with others, can broaden these boundaries enormously. (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001:72, italics mine)

Gaventa and Cornwall make an important point here in relation to how the controlling forces (we feel are) acting fundamentally affect knowledge production. If we consider that the above could refer not only to knowledge generation in which we play no part, but also to the knowledge we do participate in creating, as being affected by the control we feel in the inquiry context (a control that we feel is not generated by the members of the inquiry group, but by the setting of the inquiry, the control we feel acting in the spaces we create for our inquiry), then a geographical shift could help us to shake off this shadow.

If we can consider that to a very great extent, the organisational context within which the YoWiM group members worked could be described as 'severely limiting the possibilities which can either be imagined or acted upon' we can see that the types of spaces which redress the knowledge-power balance are those which facilitate 'agency in the process of knowledge production, or co-production with others', through the realisation that this 'can broaden these boundaries [of what is possible] enormously'.

So, if type of space is an important element in broadening the boundaries of what is possible, the situation or 'context' within which that space is created undoubtedly has an effect – *where* we locate inquiry can fundamentally shape what it is we come to know.

This is not new learning, in as much as every inquiry group makes some decisions about where it will meet and why. However, if we are being truly attentive to our inquiry processes, we will raise our awareness about why we make such choices and this will lead us to attend to such questions as:

- *'Why are we choosing to locate this inquiry 'here' (at our place of work/in the home of one of the participants et cetera)?'*
- *'What, do we believe, is the relationship between this and what it is we seek to 'know'?'*
- *'Why do we believe this? From whom or what do we receive messages that help us to form this belief?'*

Again, the inquiry process brings to our consciousness the assumptions on which our actions are based and either just helps us to notice these, or, additionally, lead us to inquire into them.

Questions about location obviously matter at all stages of the inquiry. As I discuss in Chapter One, when contracting with P&G I felt very strongly that we should meet within the context of the YoWiM group's work. I felt this would keep the inquiry focussed around the working lives of the women involved. With issues such as corporate sponsorship (and its relation to the time available for the women to partake in the inquiry group face-to-face) to consider, this focus mattered as I considered it would relate directly to the external validity the inquiry group would have.

So location, or context, is not just a matter to consider when ending. However, it does seem to be an important consideration when we look at the above three questions. Though the two-day closing at Bath was my intention at the beginning of the inquiry process and was something members 'bought into' when they joined, with time this became a plan that we inquired into. In planning to end we considered how we might do it in alternative ways – none of which matched-up with the driving energy to 'take our group out of this space [P&G] so that we might see this space more clearly' (YoWiM, August 2001).

Finding our stories

Through the process of inquiry with the YoWiM group, we had really worked to make the co-operative inquiry method 'our own' and had considered in what ways we were accessing our knowing as we went along. Sometimes this was done with clear reference to how our ways of knowing were 'named' in Heron's (1996) terms. For example, when reflecting back on the YoWiM third-person inquiry:

> Running the third-person inquiry in that way was evidence of *practical knowing* I think - showing that we can do this, that we can model these inquiry skills for others, not just do them when we are on our own [with each other in the YoWiM monthly meetings]. (YoWiM, October 2001)

At other times this consideration was spoken in ways that did not use these terms directly:

> Do you see how taking the time to tell your story [presentational knowing] helped us to understand what you are going through, and to see how our stories were nested in yours - how they relate? (YoWiM, April 2001)

Whatever form we used to articulate the experiences of the group members, we tried to enter into them - drawing, body-sculpting and storytelling - with attention to why we would choose to do this. We wanted to continue attending to the types of knowledges we made space for in our ending together – for no more complex a reason than that expressed below by one of the YoWiM group members:

> Noticing what we make space for, and deliberately doing different
> things like drawing and using our bodies, has meant that I have been
> challenged to confront more about myself – stuff that otherwise
> would have stayed inside, that even I might not have known about.
> (YoWiM, August 2001)

Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest:

> Each particular way of knowing raises questions concerning quality in its
> own right… Does it promote further knowing by raising new questions or
> by allowing us to 'see through' old conceptual frameworks so that these
> are newly experienced as more limiting than enabling? (Reason and
> Bradbury, 2001: 448-9)

In light of the above example, it seems reasonable to answer 'yes'. We were
choosing into, with awareness, working a rich palette of ways of knowing
because we knew through experience that they helped us to interrogate our
'self-authoring'. They had helped us to avoid the 'potential error in
presentational knowing of staying with the same old stories, repeating them
to oneself and to others so they recreate existing realities and confirm existing
beliefs'. (Reason, 2003:30)

Having not read any accounts of how ending might include further
exploration of the extended epistemology, I was interested to see how we
would 'work' this. Would we be able to remain fluid in our practice of
inquiry or would we get too conscious of 'trying to do all these ways of
knowing?'

In parallel to our earlier idea that a different context might enable us to see
our now familiar practice of inquiry with new eyes, I wondered if using new
presentational forms might also have this effect. I emailed the YoWiM group
by way of sharing this question, and invited their ideas of what we might do.
Being a keen artist and sculptor myself, I felt excited about introducing

ceramic sculpture as a medium through which we could work. This felt very much like something I could offer to our group. Lucy offered to lead us in some meditations. We were paving the way towards a closing that would interrogate our experience beyond the stories that were 'in our heads' ready to be told, worked on, polished and polite.

Processing our stuff

In approaching the end of our work together, there was an awareness that the space we had been nurturing over the past year or so was no longer going to exist within the organisation. The work we had done on voice (as detailed in Chapter Five) meant that we knew we needed to create space for celebration, not only of our work together, but also by way of acknowledging our uncelebrated achievements of the past. All of us in the YoWiM group could be described as 'high achievers' for our age in terms of our educational background and we had shared stories during our time together of the possibility of celebrating of success and ability being silenced in our lives. Stories of 'it always being the kids who didn't do so well at school who got extra help and who were praised for doing simple things well' abound. Those who achieved went by unnoticed, silencing ourselves when we 'knew the right answers' or when we had 'got good results' because not doing so would 'make the others who weren't doing so well realise we were much cleverer'. University education perpetuated the system of silencing us. We were all now in organisations that wanted for us to remain quiet.

Through working with the YoWiM group for twelve months we had heard a lot of theses stories. We wanted to make space in our ending to bring our sense of achievement into the centre, to explore how it felt to celebrate, or even just to do it (without exploration) – the inquiry element was less relevant. Creating a space for celebration was not a methodological nicety: it was something that simply had to happen, for us, and for all our past silenced celebrations. We also wanted to process any left over hurt, confusion or anger from our experience together in a space that could contain this, with people who cared enough to welcome it and work it through. We

felt it was not the responsibility of the wider system to pick this up after our work together had ended.

What matters when we plan for endings?

In summary, the ideas we were holding about what ending means and how we might 'do' it were borne of our inquiry practice together over time. What we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it were therefore unique to us, but essentially covered four areas which might be attended to at the ending of any such group:

- We were looking at ending as a way of defining our experience together
- We wanted to achieve some clarity on what we had learned both in terms of content and process
- We needed appropriate closure for our group, wanting to gain a sense of ownership of our grief, delight, resentments and appreciations through voicing them
- We wanted to work with a sense of openness to the inquiry group ending in its current form and being reborn to continue its work.

How we ended

I shall now move on to discuss the five themes that emerged from 'doing ending' with the YoWiM group. The above intentions are an illustration of what we had individually and collectively reflected upon as needing space for. Speaking these to each other by way of preparation required a shift from first-person to second-person inquiry – getting in touch with our individual needs and getting these on the agenda. I cannot help but refer this back to my point in Chapter Three on first-person work as being a re-visioning (Callaway, 1981) of the self as a site of valid knowledge. Getting things onto the agenda (that may well not be important to others) is evidence of that re-visioning, and in illustrating below

how these 'agenda items' bubbled up through our two days, I intend to evidence that YoWiM group members had come to hold a strong sense of having re-visioned themselves. Staying in touch with the wider system, and actively making plans to feed learnings from the inquiry into this 'third-person' space, also as detailed below, is another way of seeing how inquiry skills can be legitimated as 'liveable' beyond the intimacy of the small face-to-face group and how the re-visioned self is also therefore legitimated – the impact of living first-person inquiry in a third-person space. Reason (1999) phrases the roles of first- and second-person inquiry as supportive of a shift into the third person space – an idea that made sense in the YoWiM group:

> The co-operative inquiry strategy starts by building a second-person community of inquiry… as the co-researchers move into the action cycles of the inquiry they will need to practice a form of first-person research practice… This second- and first- person inquiry can then support third person inquiry in the wider community, either in intentional forms of participatory research, or as a direct impact of individual action. (Reason, 1999:223)

I felt the challenge, as we moved to Bath to end together, was whether we could individually and collectively work the tensions between individual and collective agendas for ending. Could we 'all' get what we needed to get? Could we maintain our sense of…

> …supportive, yet disinterested curiosity – journeying with each other's inquiry – so individuals are encouraged to be less concerned about 'getting it right' and thus more lovingly curious about their own behaviour. (Reason 1999:221)

Attention to this seemed important in ending – as this was our last chance to 'get what we needed'. Could we remain conscious in the midst of action (Torbert, 1991)?

Theme One: Context matters

Just being in a different space shifted what we spoke about as we warmed up our voices on the first day:

> I am delighted that we have managed to do this in a different venue. Here we are all sitting around in our jeans and stuff this morning. It feels so nice. I think we were right in choosing to do this here, it feel like it's going to make a big difference to what we can talk about, and what we can draw out of our work together. (YoWiM, October 2001)

> Being here I feel more relaxed. I wanted for us to come to Bath, to consciously decide to be away from work. I feel like I can say different things here – it's not that I don't want to in our work situation, it's just that I feel better knowing I don't have a meeting I should be in, or a pile of work on my desk just down the corridor that needs doing. I had to talk my way out of the office quite severely to get here but I was determined to do it. I was having these conversations about the work that I 'ought to be doing' and I had a real sense of not feeling guilty. My work is important, but I know this is really important to me, and I decided that I deserved to be here after all the energy we have all put into this. (YoWiM, October 2001)

> I want to be able to remember to listen to you all and to me. We've all got to do that, and not be too unsettled by being somewhere new. (YoWiM, October 2001)

There are two points to pick up from the above:

- **Changing the context of the inquiry group changes the on-line experiential knowing:** Suddenly the context of the inquiry becomes visible, not only in the immediate sense, 'Not be too unsettled by being somewhere new' but also in a sense of looking back and noticing how the P&G context affected our inquiry process, 'I feel better knowing I don't have a meeting I should be in, or a pile of work on my desk just down the corridor that needs doing'. This raising awareness of our experience through being somewhere new, mirrors the process of beginning when women walked into the first session and were highly aware of how it was different to their usual experience of what happened at P&G (as discussed in Chapter Four).

- **How we are being is presentational knowing:** I had not thought of presentational knowing this way until we met to close our inquiry group. I had always worked with the interpretation given by Heron (1996) – that presentational knowing could take the form of dance, storytelling, artwork and so on. I had neglected to see that self-presentation is an act of knowing. How we dress and how we behave tell something of what we know of our experience, or what we hope for that experience: 'Here we are all sitting around in our jeans' is not just a comment about dress, it is about being together differently, opening up new possibilities by creating a different kind of space. This links to the above point about context – our enacted presentational knowing shapes the context and hence the inquiry.

Theme Two: New stories emerge

Making space to review and 'get closure of' the process of inquiry did matter, and this was indicated by the emergence of new stories. Some of these were about things that felt confusing or unresolved, some of them about celebrating things we had done well – all of them were new information. For example:

The diversity amongst ourselves in terms of our individual characteristics and the kinds of skills we have developed has felt like a good resource for me to draw from. Going forward with doing things differently feels more possible as I know I have all of you to support and challenge me – you see things I don't and you make me learn, but you're on my side. Some of us have drive, some sit and cogitate and contemplate, we do have people who just kind of throw random ideas in, people who energise us and people who keep us together. Relying on that diversity and learning from it has been really important to me. (YoWiM, October 2001)

Honesty has been an important difference in making me want to be here. I can be honest with you all, but I feel we have gone beyond that as we seem to value what each individual can give in terms of honesty and to know that might not be the same for everybody. I know that some of you find it more difficult to interact and be as honest as others in the group, but I think we've got to a level where we know what we can expect of each other, so if we aren't doing our best, or if we sense that someone is holding back, we can respond to that. That has come over time; it's taken a long time. (YoWiM, October 2001)

The idea that skills emerge in action research work, that they take time to develop and come into use, maps onto the point made by Reason and Bradbury:

Since action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, in many ways the process of inquiry is as important as specific outcomes. Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals develop skills of inquiry and as communities of inquiry develop within communities of practice. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:2)

Theme Three: Process matters after all!

By way of illustrating this point, I include below an excerpt of a conversation between two YoWiM group members as we sat in our group reflecting on our inquiry. This is quite lengthy, but I feel that reading their voices indicates not only content (which is what I would represent if I summarised it) but also the inquiring attention that characterised a lot of our conversations. As a way in, I shall suggest what I think some of these attentions are:

- Bringing first-person reflections into the second-person space
- Owning behaviours and choices on- and off-line
- An awareness of the inquiry skills we have developed
- An acknowledgement of the potential for transferability of these skills into the third-person space/wider organisation

I indicate where I feel these attentions are most evident through writing in *italics*.

> … since I've worked in P&G, this is the best team as a team to actually achieve things and get them done and work together, and appreciate each other. And we're doing it over and above whatever work we have to do. All of this and were focussing on group process, you know, *that's what we are actively attending to and thinking about.* I've worked in lots of teams and we've been trying to get results and work towards a solution or whatever, *but I've always been quite cynical in other teams… but I can't be like that in this group, even if I want to be, and I have tried quite a lot, especially when things weren't going very well, and even about this weekend.* But I just can't. I don't know. It's a pretty powerful thing.

> I want to elaborate on a couple of things you said, like how we are now functioning as a really good team. Being here [closing inquiry in Bath] today and yesterday and having space to really see that has been

important. But *it has taken a long time* and we have focussed on group process. *How many times in the business do people just think 'that's 'an extra', all that team stuff?' 'That's 'an extra' – maybe if we've got two hours in a team meeting in December we might slot that in and do a bit of work on effectiveness'.* I would say to them now 'well you probably won't get anywhere because it takes time, it takes patience and it does take focus and it's worth doing at the beginning'.* If we'd [P&G business team] sat down and actually focussed on what each person could give and attended to that at each meeting, how much further would we [P&G business team] be now in terms of working effectively? One of the things I want to specifically pull out of what you said is that you have to have patience to get to where we are, because we've gone through some uncomfortable, unhappy phases. So a big learning for me personally, because I always try to do things quickly – I want to see results fast… is to have patience and make sure everyone understands that doing things well takes time but it's worth doing. *Noticing and working with the processes we are creating and are involved with is not a little extra – it's core and essential, and integral to delivering results. And it's only through doing this work with YoWiM that I have finally come to realise that I play a part in creating the processes that are part of P&G, before I just thought they happened to me.*

The key thing for me here in our closing process, was that we did meet our intention of finding these new stories, mapping them back out to the P&G context, and considering how we might be able to be 'changed instruments' as a result. By this I do not mean that we engaged in a process of inquiry that radically changed the sponsor organisation, but our way of using co-operative inquiry meant that it could ultimately be seen as a tool for 'modifying the near environment, - where you stand in the short haul' as Patricia Maguire (2002:264) phrases it:

> Jill Morawski contends that one of the greatest challenges for feminist scholars is "modifying the near environment in which researchers conduct their science, learn, teach, and judge the efforts of other scientists" (1997: 677). (Maguire, 2002:264).

Naming this theme 'process matters after all!' and the above discussion, are indicative of an attention to process so counter cultural it is hard to describe. If however, through the process of inquiry we are to be 'changed instruments' who are able 'to modify our near environment' then we need to attend to what we do, how and why. Working with co-operative inquiry means that attention will be focussed here, and will deepen as we develop inquiry skills. But we struggled with attending to our process. One particular member of our group was very focussed on timings and agendas and task – describing her self above as 'cynical' about group work. She would sometimes comment in a way that suggested our attention to process was misplaced - 'here we go again, getting everyone's opinion on it, why can't we just do 'X', 'Does everyone need time to speak or could we just hear from a couple of us', 'this is taking too long' – and it would have been easy to go along with her ideas. But in building an inquiring community, we needed to begin to learn how to be inquiring with each other, rather than model the prevailing task focussed culture of P&G. As Bradbury and Reason note:

> … in a pluralist community of inquiry – whether it be a face-to-face inquiry group, an organisation or a community – different members are likely to hold different questions with different degrees of interest. Some will be most concerned with relationships, some with action, some with understanding, some with raising awareness. (Bradbury and Reason, 2001:449-50)

For her to end inquiry by describing our group as 'the best team [I've worked in to] actually achieve things and get them done' felt like the strongest indication that something had shifted. If this particular group member saw the value of attending to process, 'changing the near environment' felt like it would be easy!

**Theme Four: Mapping life re-visions it**

Most of our first day in Bath was spent building a 'life line' of YoWiM (as pictured overleaf), and was essentially the process that enabled us to meet the four criteria for ending that I summarised earlier in this Chapter: to end in a way that defined our experience together; to achieve some clarity on what we had learned both in terms of content and process; to gain appropriate closure; to work with a sense of openness to continue our work. We did not talk about what we were writing on our post-it notes whilst we built the life line. We decided to do this as a way of keeping our critical incidents 'un-edited' – we just stuck notes down where our own energy drove us to do so.

There are two core issues around how this was done that illustrate how we worked as co-facilitators and co-inquirers:

- **Framing**

  Our intentions to define our experience led us to decide to map our whole process. The framing of this exercise, that I led on the day, was one of inviting everyone to build their own individual life line, plotting the things that they saw as 'critical incidents'. Each of us would then tell the story of our individual lifeline to the whole group.

  This invitation was renegotiated, creating a process where by a life line - the entire length of one wall – was co-created on paper with individuals adding post-it notes of their critical incidents.
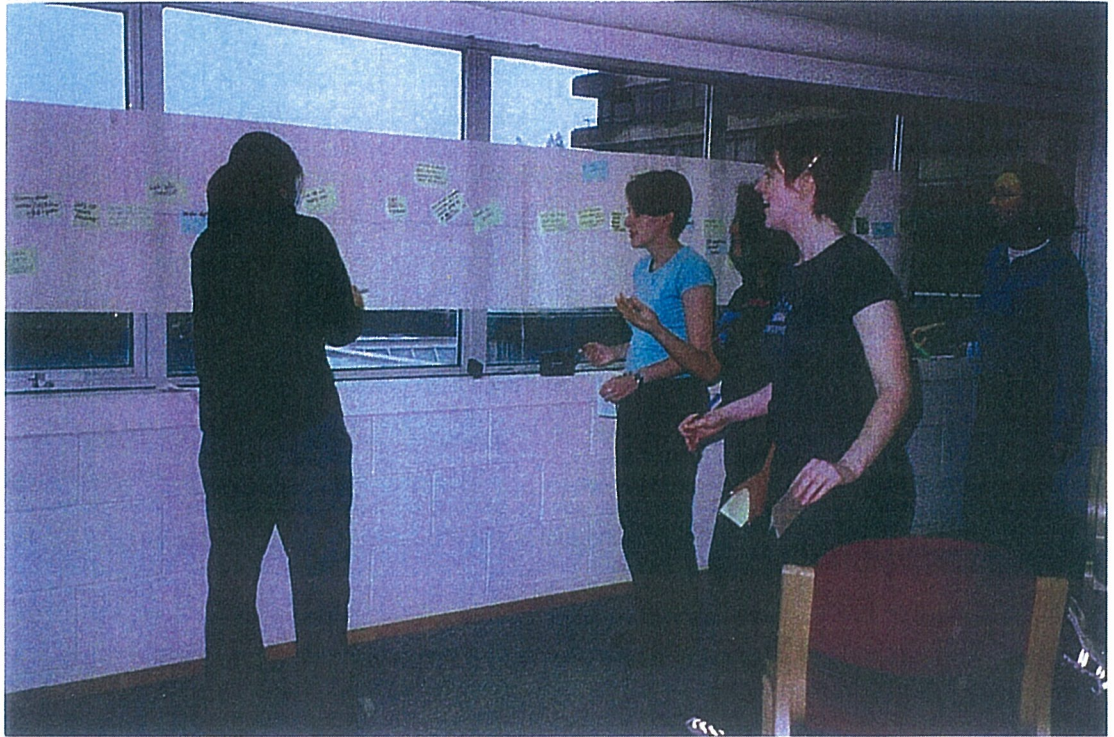
Though a very simple illustration, it indicates how ideas were thrown into a melting pot and tended to emerge as more appropriate for the task at hand, rather than being tightly held onto by the initiator (of the inquiry, or of the idea). Heron (1996) suggests such behaviours are of the kind that indicate the emergence of a community of inquirers.

- **Maintaining voice**

The fact that we all individually decided what to add to the lifeline meant that we created the possibility for appropriate closure – instead of sitting in our group space and having to raise uncomfortable issues 'cold', writing a post-it note and sticking it on a wall meant that we had a way to express them before we spoke them. Sticking these onto a co-created life line meant that we could see if others held similar feelings – often someone would stick up a post-it note that would lead to a flurry of additions from others!

When we had all completed our process of making post-it note additions, we took a break and then began the process of telling the YoWiM lifeline story. The story that flowed was of a chorus of voices – with different members of YoWiM taking on the process of 'telling' the story when we reached one of their post-it notes. There was also choice around this – we did not speak every post-it note.

This chorus of voices meant that our ending did give us a sense of defining our experience as a group and getting appropriate closure. For example there were lots of notes around Norma and Fiona's decision to leave the group as discussed in Chapter Five, though these were predominantly focussed around worry for Ann: 'I hoped Ann did not feel as though Norma and Fiona's leaving was her fault', 'Ann hasn't been with us for a while, how can I make her feel okay about coming back?'. We then talked our way through this. There were apologies for not 'doing better at the time'. In places where there were lots of post-its they were often filled with different opinions about something we had done and the stories and discussions that flowed from these enabled us to get clear on what had really gone on for each of us and to reach a sense of shared understanding.

For example there were two post-it notes side by side, referring to the 'who do you meet as an equal?' exercise that I had run (as discussed in Chapter Seven), that read: 'Brilliant standing/kneeling exercise' and 'Horrible standing/kneeling exercise'.

These kinds of differences had not emerged so clearly in the practice of our inquiry up to that point. Our method of tapping into them, and working them through was picked up by two of our group members as:

> … clearly showing how the experiential knowing of doing it, lead to us telling stories and constructing the life line, so that would be the presentational form part. The propositional bit is

> how we are working through the particular incidents now to try
> to consider what happened from different points of view, so
> we can decide together what we know from it. (YoWiM,
> October 2001)

It was at moments like this that I really felt that we were not restricted by method, that it really was not a 'thing' in our group, rather that we were working our living knowledge alongside and inside the methodology and in so doing validating our work as 'knowledge' and inadvertently ourselves as knowers. Furthermore, as I was not the one doing 'methodological expertise' I was again reminded that the kind of space we had created was one in which expertise in methodology had been developed in all of us (albeit to different levels).

The above example from YoWiM seems illustrative again of Rorty's notion of redescription (1989) as described in Chapter Five. The development of a shared understanding and vocabulary around incidents in our group, that had previously been described in many different ways, meant not that some accounts were invalidated whilst others counted as truth. Re-describing the standing/kneeling exercise as one that *'challenged our awareness of how we each see our selves and others in P&G'* was useful because it invited us to stop remembering the exercise as either 'Brilliant' or 'Horrible' and to start acknowledging that we had been 'learning'.

Stories from sculpture: Ending presentationally

I discussed earlier in this Chapter that I offered to lead our group in sculpting with clay as a way of tapping into new stories. We did this for the final hour we spent together, at the end of our second day. It was the only time in our group that we meditated into an exercise (led by Lucy) and then worked in silence. When our sculpting time was up, we told the story of our sculptures to the group – this was the only occasion throughout our time together when we chose not to have our stories responded to or built upon by the group in any way. We just listened to each other and soaked up the meaning the stories had for each of us.

I want to end this Chapter presentationally – with photographs of the sculptures that emerged from our ending and the stories each of us told from these sculptures to the group. I am holding some tensions as I write this; should explain the sculpting process further? Should I link the stories to literature? Should I offer the pictures and the stories and let them speak for them selves, to mirror our ending 'soaking up' process described above? I am choosing the latter.

Jemma's ending

"I wanted to take a step back and have a think and all I was trying to do was create something that basically represented the team but was a physical structure that wouldn't be able to sit together unless it had all the parts there. Wouldn't be complete unless it had all the parts there, because that's one of the biggest things I felt about the whole thing we've done. So that's it, seven pieces which all make sense together." (YoWiM, October 2001)

Sarah's ending

"This is us. In the car on the way here I was inspired by Stonehenge, and this sculpture represents lots of things. We're all equal, we all sit around in a group, in a circle so it represents a physical circle, but the fact that we're all together, equally spanning around, we're all contributing the same towards a common goal, which is greater than us, and it's bigger than us.   This represents lots of things. And ultimately why we're doing this, to make ourselves happy and satisfied, what's important to us, so that's where the heart comes in." (YoWiM, October 2001)

Angie's ending

"Mine is a clock. It represents time which has been a key barrier to all of us all the way through. But we've also spent a lot of time. A year has passed, you know, it's been a big time commitment for everyone. We're really bad at keeping time. This is also to say that time has run out on our group. The clock has a big symbolic meaning for me today especially - our time together is nearly over." (YoWiM, October 2001)

Kate's ending

"OK, mine's a circle. It doesn't have any breaks in it, it's solid all the way round. When we finally became the group of seven, that was very solid too and that seven always felt very solid to me whether we were in a 5 or a 6 or a 7 or whatever. So what I'd like to do is, I've marked 7 spaces, and I'd like each of you to come up and put however many fingers or however many toes or however many noses into your space so that we're all there together, like we have been for the past year. So if you would like to do that now, I would appreciate it, come and choose a space and push in a toe..." (YoWiM, October 2001)

Lucy's ending

"My beautiful statue unveiled! It represents the things that we have been really good at doing with each other and for each other. It has big ears for listening to each other, big eyes for really seeing each other and valuing each other, and a big mouth for being very smiley and happy and enjoying each other, and for talking and sharing." (YoWiM, October 2001)

Clare's ending

"I made a star and I made it for several reasons. The star is for when you see starlight what you actually see is something that happened a long time ago. For stars it's millions of years and I'm hoping for us what has come out of the last twelve months is going to reflect in our lives and in the company in lots of different ways, over a long period of time. What we've done has built on who we are and how we understand what we do and that's going to shine through for the rest of each of our lives.

So it's kind of… what's going to be revealed in the future is very much a reflection of what has happened now, the way that when we look at stars we see what happened a long time ago. It's got six beams of light coming out of it. Each one is one of us and they're all pointing in different directions. Originally I was going make seven, but I made six and they stand up with a support, which is Kate. The beams of light represent the fact that we're all very different and our lives are probably going to take different directions from this point onwards - some of us in more ways than others. And Kate's really been a support for us through the whole thing and we've been able to stand up together." (YoWiM, October 2001)

Ann's ending

"I made a butterfly, it's not quite as fine and delicate as I wanted it to be, but that was the idea. The idea that I had was that as a team we've come a long way, we've come from a cocoon, almost, I suppose, to reinventing ourselves, not reinventing but developing and spreading our wings into something that was far more sophisticated than it was as we started. I think personally we have and we have as a team as well.

And the reason I quite liked the butterfly as well was if you think of it as an interesting physical form. It has a body which is about the only solid entity that it has, but it also has also kind of really fine and beautiful wings which are very delicate and almost give it all its power, but there's not a lot of physical substance in them. I thought that was quite good in terms of thinking about our group because we have our physical bodies - we are seven people sitting here, we do exist, we are individuals and in that we have strength. But in terms of the span that we make, a lot of the far-reaching things we have done are quite delicate and quite fine. There's a lot of meat in what we've done in terms of doing the things we've done as individuals, but a lot of that has been fragile and had to be done carefully, and I thought that was represented within the delicate structure of the butterfly's wings."
(YoWiM, October 2001)

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