Chapter 2

Chapter 2.

My approaches to inquiry

I position my research within action research. I will explain what this means and how I have worked with it. This chapter tells of my developed practice, as well as the practice I started from.

The first part of this chapter outlines my approaches to inquiry. I discuss action research as a broad range of ways of operating, my approach to action research, and contexts for my work.
I go on to look specifically at inquiry within facilitation, and then inquiry within my action research practice; including the frameworks I use and critical theory and feminist action research as influences on my action research practice.
In the second half of the chapter I focus on the ways I have worked with first, second and third person inquiry in research projects.

Throughout the chapter I refer to examples of research projects I have undertaken, the most significant of which are written up in the practice accounts chapter of this thesis.

I became engrossed in writing this section, unexpectedly as I had dreaded having to write a Methodology section! I realise that there is a lot of it, and that some sections take you over the same ground in slightly different ways, and I have chosen to leave it like that because of the coherence within the subsections; they are sections in themselves, the building blocks I have used to build my approach to inquiry.

The connectedness between my facilitation practice and my inquiry into it means that there are sections that are more about facilitation and move into how this is about inquiry.

Action research as a broad range of ways of operating

> Action research is research with people not on people (Reason, 1988, 1994).

Action research can be described as a learning process by which real, practical changes take place in what people do through a process of examining and reflecting on how they interact with the world and with others in it, and on the discourses in which they interpret and understand their world. It's a process in which participants come to understand their position located in its political, cultural, and social situation, and so can come to transform it.

Most writers tracing the history of action research start with the early work of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin – and his much quoted comments that 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory' and that 'you only come to understand something when you attempt to change it', and point to its philosophical roots in the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey who contended that democracy stops at the school house door! Action research makes learning a participative, communal and democratic process.

Key features of AR

In this quote from their *Introduction to Action Research* Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin stress the factors which make something *action research*, rather than another kind of social research. Their choice of emphasis is influenced by their position as academics working mainly with action research in industrial and community development in western industrialised countries, and by their own approach to action research which they call Pragmatic Action Research[13].

> AR is a *cogenerative* process through which professional researchers and interested members of a local organisation, community, or a specially created organisation *collaborate* to research, understand, and resolve *problems of mutual interest*. AR is a social process in which *professional knowledge, local knowledge, process skills, research skills, and democratic values* are the basis for *co-created knowledge* and *social change*.
>
> AR differs starkly from conventional social research because action researchers insist that *research processes, research outcomes, and the application of results to problem solving are inextricably linked*. (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:93, emphasis added).

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[13] The key principles of Greenwood and Levin's Pragmatic Action Research are:
- o The researcher as friendly outsider interacting with 'local' problem-owners
- o The co-generative research – the research process emerges out of joint experiences and from participants' mutual reflections on these experiences
- o The construction of arenas for dialogue (not forced into a single consensus) – creating spaces for mutual learning (social learning)
- o The use of multiple methods – not adherence to a specific methodology.

I value Greenwood and Levin's framing of action research because of its stresses on the cogenerative nature of the action research process. I see the action research 'group' as a rich source of social learning[14]; a place in which those with very different knowledges and skills can come together in a place of temporary equality to learn from one another for mutual benefit and to mutually agreed ends (which are often themselves emergent). This description of action research recognises that, in the 'real world', processes, outcomes and applications of learning are intertwined and that furthermore they are iterative.

Action research can be best described as a *process* guided by values and a way of seeing and being in the world, rather than a technique or methodology, or as Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury write:

> We eschew thinking about action research as a methodology, as it is a worldview which manifests as a set of practices which emerge in the interplay between action researchers, context and ideas. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: xxv).

In their preface to the Handbook of Action Research (2001) Reason and Bradbury use the metaphor of a family to describe action research approaches. Different approaches have been developed across the world with characteristics appropriate to their own location and time and grounded in different traditions, philosophical and psychological assumptions and pursuing different political objectives. These include Participatory Action Research (Horton and Freire, Hall, Fals Borda), Human Inquiry (Reason), Action Inquiry (Torbert), Action Learning (Revans), Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers) and Pragmatic Action Research (Greenwood and Levin). These approaches are closely linked to other more extended 'family' members – qualitative research approaches which have contributed to the development of action research, including feminist research (Maguire, Brydon Miller) and some approaches to anthropology(Behar) and ethnography (Bochner, Ellis).

Despite their differences in form Reason and Bradbury say that most of these action research approaches share a basic set of 5 key features (figure 1). Here I also include them in a slightly adapted form which uses

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[14] The social learning theory of Bandura emphasises the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences.
Bandura (1977) states:

> Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (1977:22).

Bandura, A. (1977). Social Learning Theory. New York: General Learning Press

the more easily comprehensible language which I find more helpful
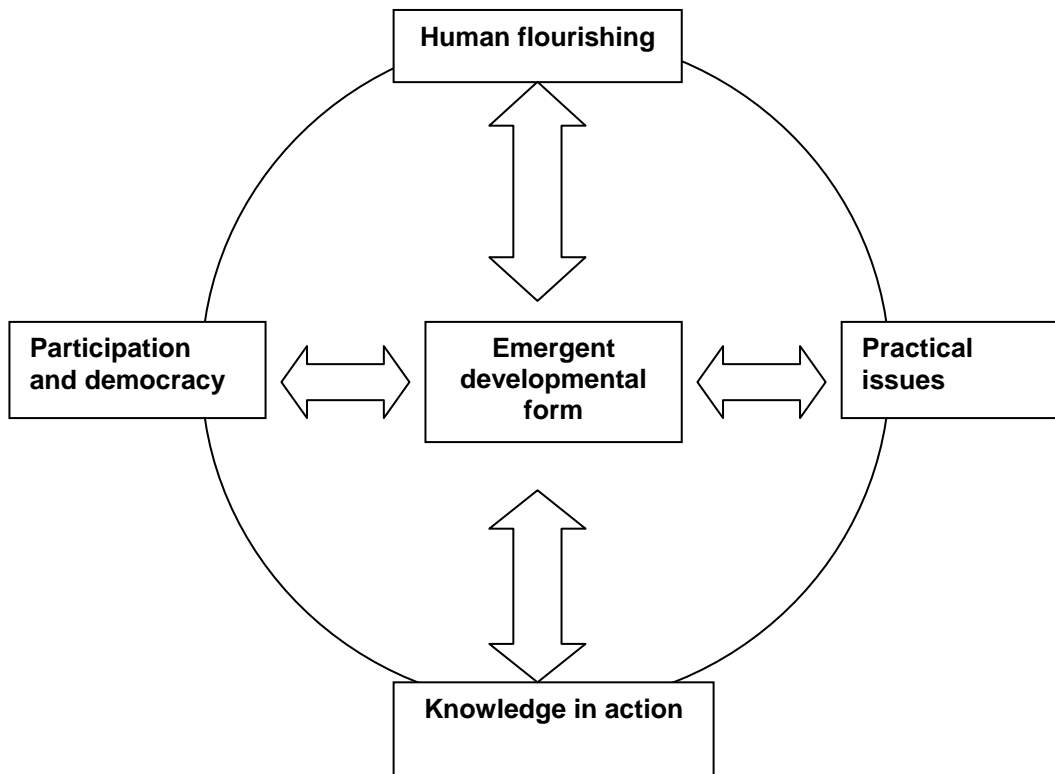when teaching action research in communities (figure 2)[15].

Figure 1. Characteristics of Action Research. Reason and Bradbury,
Handbook of Action Research.

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[15] This adapted version, developed with a group of social and economic regeneration
practitioners also places 'for the general good' (Reason's original 'human flourishing')
at the centre of the diagram to illustrate its primacy for them (and for me).   The minor
changes made to the wording used by Reason and Bradbury have been made to
make it more easily understood by non academics and practitioners new to action
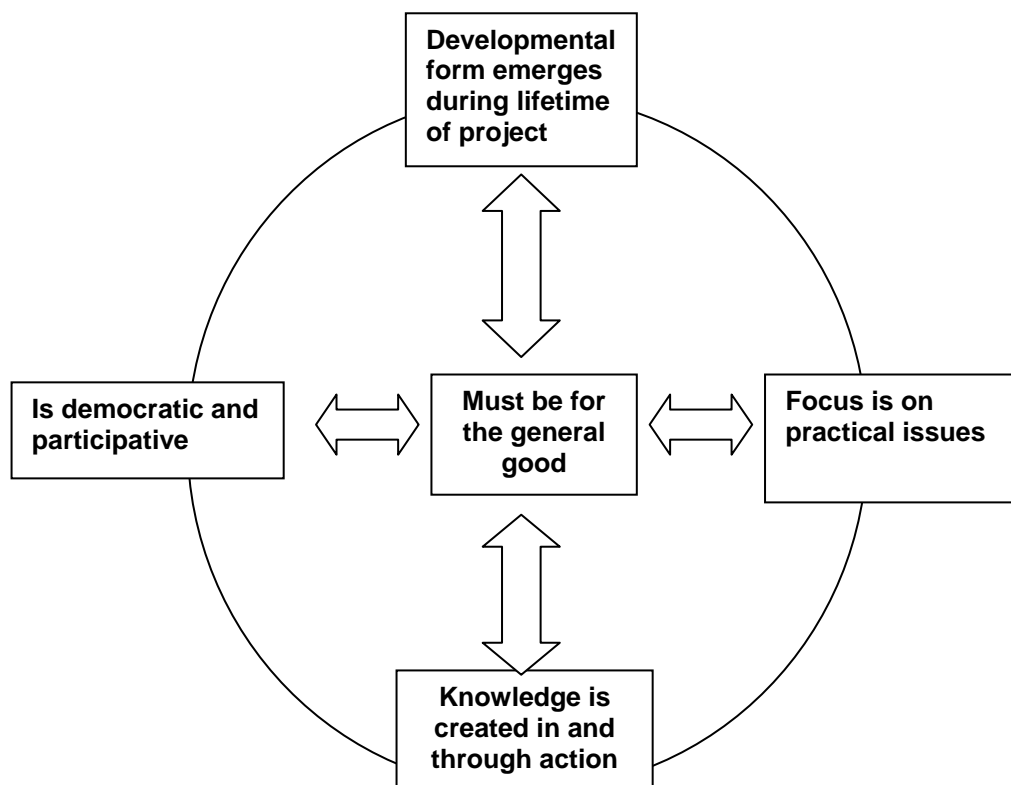research.

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Developmental  │
                    │  form emerges   │
                    │ during lifetime │
                    │   of project    │
                    └─────────────────┘
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│ Is democratic and│⇔ │ Must be for  │⇔ │   Focus is on    │
│   participative  │  │ the general  │  │ practical issues │
│                  │  │     good     │  │                  │
└──────────────────┘  └──────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
                            ⇕
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Knowledge is   │
                    │  created in and │
                    │ through action  │
                    └─────────────────┘
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Figure 2. Characteristics of Action Research, adapted from Reason and Bradbury, Handbook of Action Research.

Reason and Bradbury's five interdependent characteristics of action research (figure 1) are:

1. *It is democratic and participative* – the research group contains members of the community being researched, and even if the main labour of the research is undertaken by only some members of the group all come together as co-researchers to share data and make sense of it. It is socially inclusive and needs to involve all stakeholders (or as many as possible) in asking and answering questions and in taking action to improve things. Because different people with different ways of understanding the topic researched are involved in the research group the process of sense making is particularly important. When action research is undertaken by a solo researcher this characteristic of 'democratic and participative' is expressed in the researcher's intent to act democratically and participatively and enacted in the way they conduct their inquiry e.g. checking out their perceptions with other stakeholders and being transparent about the way they work with this data[16]

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[16] Judi Marshall describes the process and identifies the qualities of the solo researcher checking-out her perceptions with others within a first person inquiry in her article *Living Systemic Thinking.* Journal of Action Research Vol. 2(3): 305 -325. 2004. Sage. In which

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2. *It develops and changes over time as a project evolves* – it is 'live' and therefore responsive to the data discovered during the research inquiry, the form of the research process may therefore change as is deemed appropriate by the research group, and the conclusions are emergent – it does not simply test a hypothesis
3. *The focus is on practical issues* – it produces knowledge that is practical and useful in people's everyday lives and work
4. *Knowledge is created in and through action* – there are cycles of action and reflection that lead to meaning or sense making, which is then tested again through action, with more reflection etc. It is grounded in participants' actual experience
5. *The research must be for the general good* – it needs to benefit people, their communities and environments. Action research is not interested in abstract and non-useful information; the objective must be to improve the condition of the human and more than human world.

In addition it can be said that action research aims to:
o *Balance and combine taking action with reflection* on what we are doing
o *Improve our skills both in taking action and in reflecting*
o *Combine or blur the roles* – of researcher, research subject and activist
o *Include all the different ways in which we can 'know' something* – i.e. not just intellectual ideas but also lived experience, feeling material etc where appropriate. This can improve the quality of sense making; the analysis of data gathered by the group and reflected on within the group to identify meaning
o *Produce knowledge that is relevant and applicable to particular situations* – rather than 'universal truths', it is often not generalisable
o *Be pragmatic* – there are no fixed techniques that *have* to be used.

Greenwood and Levin (1998:7) state more simply that action research is made up of a balance of three elements;
o Research – generating new knowledge
o Participation – placing a strong value on democracy and democratising the process of knowledge generation
o Action – aiming to alter the initial situation of the research group.

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she describes how solo (or first person) inquiry is enriched through engagement with others.

Link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/s_porter.html

A little about cycles of action and reflection

Action research is often described as consisting of a spiral of self reflective cycles consisting of:

- o plan
- o act – observe process and consequences
- o reflect on process and consequences
- o re-plan
- o act – observe
- o reflect …

This description, while helpfully identifying the elements of the cycles tends to suggest that these happen consecutively, whereas in my experience these elements can happen simultaneously; action and reflection become integrated. It is essential however that both action and reflection happen.

As I noted during the Governance project co-operative inquiry:

All of the above activity includes reflection and action taken together and with others outside the meetings [of the research group], *action and reflection being integrated rather than differentiated.* However the process involved distinct cycles, with shared sense making in each cycle. This served to deepen the process and the understanding/thought and enabled the shift from dependency to independence.
As these [participants] are 'do-ers' we hung the process on the concrete rather than the theoretical or purely reflective.

(See Practice Accounts for detail).

Extending the five key characteristics of action research as identified by Reason and Bradbury, Kemmis and McTaggart identify seven key features of participatory action research (2000: 597-598). I include them here (in a summarised form) because I think they 'thicken up' the five characteristics described by Reason and Bradbury in ways which particularly pertain to some of the work I do, (particularly characteristics 1, 4, and 5). The fact that they are writing about one particular member of the family of action research (participatory action research or PAR) is less relevant here as I believe the core features are common to action research more generally, and there are strong similarities in the sorts of settings in which PAR practitioners and I practice action research i.e. community development with socially excluded groups.

As can be seen the two categories of five characteristics and seven key features largely overlap, with *emergent developmental form* missing from Kemmis and McTaggart's list, and *social process* and *critical process* missing from Reason and Bradbury's.

Seven key features of participatory action research (Kemmis and McTaggart):

1. PAR is a *social process* – it explores *the relationship between the realms of the individual and the social* and recognises that the processes of individuation and socialisation shape individuals and social relationships in all settings. It's a process which can support people (e.g. in education or community development settings) to individually and collectively explore how they are formed and re-formed as individuals and in relation to one another

2. PAR is *participatory* – it engages people in examining their *knowledge* (understandings, skills, and values) and the ways they interpret themselves and their actions in the world. Its a process in which the individuals in a group attempt to understand the ways their knowledge shapes their sense of identity and agency, and reflect critically on how that present knowledge constrains their action. It assumes that individuals can only do research 'on' themselves, individually or collectively, not 'on' others

3. PAR is *practical and collaborative* – it engages people in examining the *social practices* that link them with others in social interaction. It's a process in which people explore their practices of communication, production and social organisation and together attempt to improve their interactions by changing the acts that constitute them

4. PAR is *emancipatory* – it aims to help people release themselves from the constraints of unjust, irrational and unproductive or unsatisfying *social structures* that limit their self development and self fulfilment. It's a process in which people explore the ways their practices are shaped by wider social structures and consider whether they can intervene to release themselves from these constraints, or at least minimise their negative impact (injustice, inefficiency, alienation etc) on them

5. PAR is *critical* – it aims to help people release themselves from the constraints embedded in the *social media* through which they interact e.g. their languages (discourses), modes of work, and/or social relationships of power (in which they experience inclusion or exclusion, and affiliation or difference, are legitimated or not). It's a process in which people set out to contest and reconstitute unjust, unproductive or unsatisfying ways of interpreting and describing their world (discourses), ways of working, and ways of relating to others (power)

6. PAR is *recursive* (reflective, dialectical) – it helps people to investigate reality in order to change it (Fals Borda, 1979), and to change reality in order to investigate it through the spiral of cycles of critical (and self critical) action and reflection, as a social process designed to enable them to learn more about and to

theorise their practice, their knowledge of their practice, the social structures that shape and constrain their practice and the social media in which these practices are expressed. It's a process of learning with others through doing – and so changing the ways people interact in a shared social world

7. PAR *aims to form both theory and practice* – it does not regard either theory or practice as pre-eminent but aims to articulate and develop each in relation to the other through critical reasoning about both theory and practice and their consequences. PAR involves 'reaching out' from the specifics of particular situations, as understood by the people within them, to explore the potential of different perspectives, theories and discourses that might help to illuminate particular practices as a basis for developing critical insights and ideas about how things might be transformed. Equally 'reaching in' from the standpoints provided by these different perspectives, theories and discourses to improve practices in specific local situations or settings. In this way connecting the global and the local, the personal and the political. This links to what in other disciplines of action research is described as 'third person inquiry', where a local activity seeks to influence a wider system outside of itself.

Although the action research models I have been using could not be strictly categorised as PAR I am very comfortable with using these seven key features, along with Reason and Bradbury's five characteristics as criteria against which to judge whether my own work has quality and 'counts' as action research.

So what does it look like?

Describing action research as *a worldview* (Reason and Bradbury) or *a process* (Greenwood and Levin) is both helpful and unhelpful. Helpful in that it makes the point that action research is much more than simply a toolkit of techniques to be applied to any situation without concern for the values of participation and the drive for positive social change, and less helpful in that it can leave one asking the question 'can *anything* be action research then if I espouse these values?'
I found myself asking just this question early on in my learning journey as an action researcher and came to understand that basically the answer is 'yes, but…'. By which I mean yes, but the values need to be expressed in and through the research process (in action, lived through practice not just espoused in theory). Taking the five characteristics and the seven key features together as a guide to the purposes, aims, values, and processes of a piece of research gives a strong guide to what action research is there to do, who needs to be involved, in what ways and to what ends – as you will see I do in the Practice Accounts.

Greenwood and Levin explain:

> Action researchers accept no a priori limits on the kinds of social research techniques they use. Surveys, statistical analyses, interviews, focus groups, ethnographies, and life histories are all acceptable, if the reason for deploying them has been agreed on by the AR collaborators and if they are used in a way which does not oppress the participants...Formal quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods are all appropriate to differing situations (Greenwood and Levin,1998:6 -7).

It is also important to recognise that action research *actively* works with an awareness that both participants and researchers are situated culturally and historically, as Kemmis and McTaggart write action research locates practice

> [W]ithin frameworks of participants' knowledge, in relation to social structures, and in terms of social media. (2000:600).

I go into my action research practice in the next section.

My approach

I have been particularly interested in developing an action research practice that makes action research feel accessible both to the groups and communities I work with, and to the commissioners of that work who are often public service organisations such as community organisations, local government and the NHS who do not have generous funding and tend to be cautious about commissioning what may appear to be 'radical' (by which they mean threatening) or 'unscientific' or 'fluffy' research (by which they mean qualitative research and particularly that which recognises and includes perceptions and feelings as valid data). In order to do this I have developed ways of describing action research in 'common sense terms' to local people and professionals; I have worked to support my clients and other stakeholders in and through the difficult and demanding process of coming together to co-generate knowledge and learn socially, and have found myself increasingly practiced in mounting a defence of narrative (storytelling) as valid knowledge[17] (testing the validity of general laws through developing detailed stories of particular cases), accessing essential local knowledge grown from the lived experience of participants to add to existing 'expert' knowledge. It has also been illuminating to work with clients who are natural scientists to explore action research as a method which has a surprising amount in common with a more conventionally 'scientific' approach[18] through its constant interactions between thought and action.

In the *Practice Accounts* chapter of this thesis you will find a mix of types of action research which I have undertaken, which range from the relatively 'pure' and defined form of co-operative inquiry (the Governance project, the Diabetic services user group), to much more 'pragmatic' projects such as that undertaken with older people in Tewkesbury which involved an inquiry group, semi structured interviews and a stakeholder event (the Making Sense Meeting), and the Children's Commission project which used guided walks, video and photographic journals, a participative audit of play spaces, focus groups, and ended up with a Commission hearing involving stakeholders. In all of this work my guiding question as a practitioner has come to be 'how action research can I make this?' as I seek for openings and opportunities in

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[17] For as Greenwood and Levin observe: 'Over the past 15 years, a renewed appreciation of narrativity has developed through the recognition that, like all human action, social research is a set of socially constructed understandings built out of discourse structures. These discourse structures have narrative properties, and these narrative properties themselves must be analysed to understand how the structures of the discourses themselves create local meanings, become hegemonic, or seek to persuade'. (1998:124)

[18] For a discussion 'Can AR produce scientifically meaningful results?' see Greenwood and Levin, 1998:54.

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the work which comes to me to work with my passion and values through the process of action research.

Parallel with growing my action research practice with others I have been exploring and developing a practice of doing action research as self-study. I have done this in order to improve my practice as a facilitator and researcher through better understanding what affects and so shapes my sense-making and behaviour. I describe this in some detail in the section of this chapter *My First Person Inquiry.*

Earlier in this chapter I quoted Reason and Bradbury's description of action research as a 'world view'. Others describe the practice of action research similarly:

> In my point of view ... it is necessary to perceive in a very clear way the ideological back ground that determines the very methodology. It is impossible for me to think about neutral education, neutral methodology, neutral science or even neutral God (Freire, 1971:1).

> In my own approach to working with others around participatory research I have tried to avoid getting drawn into discussions about methods and techniques. It has been my experience that the best way to think about working in these ways is to approach participatory research as a political or philosophical phenomena. (Hall, 2001: 173[19]).

I find myself agreeing with Budd Hall that the process of 'doing' this sort of research is a 'political or philosophical phenomena', in fact I think it is both.
Hall goes on to quote his Canadian colleagues who wrote about participatory research as
> a way of life (Smith et al., 1997)... firmly locating the work in a values context, a context of continuity and a context of engagement (Hall, 2001:174).

I have been interested as my learning journey inquiry has gone on, to develop not just *practices* for me as the inquiring facilitator, nor simply action research *techniques* which I will use with my clients as a facilitator and researcher, nor just *methods* by which I can track my own learning journey and my development as a facilitator, but to *develop inquiring practices which have become a way of life*. By this I mean that they have 'got under my skin' as I have attempted to build an inquiring approach to everything I do in life I feel I have found a home in an approach (or family of approaches)that harnesses my commitment to social justice and social change.

As I read what I have written here (August 2004) I note that:

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[19] 'I wish this were a poem on the practices of participatory research' in Reason P and Bradbury H *Handbook of Action Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. 2001.

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This all sounds very comfortable and cosy, as if the family of action research was one of those model families, too good to be true. It's not: I still read with sadness and fury writing by male action researchers who appear to consider gender an issue that doesn't apply to them and their work; I question my own consciousness of diversity and whether I am as aware as I want to be at times; I struggle with the continued use of excluding language by academic action researchers who, at the same time espouse commitment to participation and inclusivity.

But, as with some other significant relationships in my experience, it's been worth the effort so far to seek to understand the other's perspective *and* to strongly advocate my own, in order to develop and sustain a meaningful comradeship on the journey we are making together.

Budd Hall goes on to describe participatory research as

> fundamentally a discourse about the role of knowledge and learning within the varieties of struggles in our communities for respect, fairness, a living wage, health for our families, clean air to breath and safe water to drink. It is about whose knowledge counts, creating information for social change, recognising indigenous and ancient knowledges and learning to be allies…

and he identifies that

> what has changed is that persons like ourselves[20] have increasingly recognised that the natural processes of knowledge creation being undertaken within social, environmental and political action settings can also be understood within what we call "research" (2001:174).

An important aspect of my own AR practice is as a researcher to avoid committing an act of 'colonisation' of a group, community or organisation I'm working with as I 'parachute in' from the outside with a set of 'magical' skills and externally imposed 'solutions' to the ills they are experiencing. For me research-as-social-practice needs to be embedded in the groups, communities and organisations with whom I work, and needs to recognise the long history 'ordinary people' have of analysing their situations and developing solutions. I approach working with groups and communities as a process which involves me as facilitator reframing issues and questions, encouraging and developing inherent abilities in people to plan, act, reflect and learn together, and to be able to tell the story of that shared sense-making (develop a discourse). In short it's a process of us all inquiring and learning together. I come to a project wanting to listen first and to learn, and I come offering a set of research and facilitation skills which I believe can help if shared with participants and applied in a practical manner – by which I mean taught and embodied by me, and I hope acquired and eventually 'owned' by the other participants. To reduce the risk of colonisation I choose to design with the participants; holding myself open to direction, challenge and teaching from the design group, I am

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[20] By which I think he means academics are accepting others have something to say about 'research'.

'acting with' (Wadsworth, 2001b[21]) participants. One of the important narratives of this learning journey is the story of me developing the humility and the confidence to facilitate in this way.

The work I have been undertaking through this learning journey has been to explore and develop a practice of mindful facilitation of action research (and other work). I have been interested to understand what are the *micro practices of noticing that can underpin my own practice as inquirer/facilitator*. I have also explored ways of *tracking my inquiry*; and particularly interesting for me has been the linking of the political, the imaginal, the autobiographical and the practical consciousnesses that happens through writing[22]. This chapter unpacks the approaches to inquiry I have explored, the next section starts with an explanation of the different dimensions I have been inquiring in.

My methodological journey

During the last ten years I have been inquiring in several different dimensions of my life and work. I have included them here because I am wary that trying to describe my inquiring on these multiple levels or dimensions as I write about *My Approaches to Inquiry* (or methodology) could be otherwise be confusing to my reader.

Using self study to deepen my practice:
I started off as a student (in 1996) learning to practice action research in order to improve my facilitation practice – Initially I was interested in what a facilitator 'did' when working with groups of unequal power, particularly how to work to ensure all voices were heard. I was at that time working to 'erase my self' from the group. Later I became more interested in presence[23] (Heron, 1989:132) and in using my *self* and my biography. This has led to me developing (first person) micro practices of noticing and reflecting while in action as a facilitator.

Action research projects for clients:

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[21] Wadsworth 'Becoming responsive – and some consequences for evaluation as dialogue across distance', *New Directions for Evaluation*, Vol.92, pp45 – 58. quoted in *Consumer Participation at Women's and Children's Health*. Cas O'Neill and Jennie Mullins. Health Issues Centre.
[22] See also section on autoethnography and self narrative (p143) and Appendix E for more on using autobiographical writing and storytelling in my work.
[23] Heron describes presence as active charisma 'a way of being, as and when appropriate, in and through hierarchical interventions. This is the outward spiritual power of the human person … distress-free authority'.

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I then (1998 onwards) became increasingly interested in using forms of action research with my clients – initially I looked for openings to run co-operative inquiry groups, later I became more pragmatic about the form action research could take and this has led to me finding ways to build action research approaches into my work, and working with the question 'how action researchy can I make this?'

Teaching action research:
More recently I have started to teach action research; initially to participants within projects, then to community development and regeneration practitioners, and more recently (2002 to date) to postgraduate students at the University of Bath (CARPP diploma programme and the MSc in Responsibility in Business Practice). This has been very challenging to the part of me that is uncomfortable with being perceived as an 'expert' and I have learnt yet again to work with groups to identify their own knowing and their good questions. This time the groups are students rather than co-researchers/research participants, but then of course are we not embarking together on an inquiry into their/our action research practice?
I have found that teaching has become an unexpected source of delight to me.

My learning journey:
Also significant here is the totality of my learning journey. I have moved through the angry, powerful but relatively limited operational field of my Tigers of Wrath moment; into a period typified by huge insecurities, courageous experimentation and flashes of a more secure knowing, my Unicorn moment; finally coming into a moment typified by a greater confidence and groundedness *and* a practiced watchfulness and sensitivity, my Pig and Deer moment.

Living Life as Inquiry:
Throughout this period (1996 – to the present) I experimented with developing noticing and tracking processes and an inquiring approach to living my life (Marshall). I have developed practices to support 'associative knowing' such as combining dream material, personal reflections in a therapeutic setting, and imaginal writing, in order to better understand a situation through accessing different ways of knowing within myself[24].

You will see evidence of inquiry in all of these dimensions throughout this thesis. I will now say more about the contexts in which I have worked.

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[24] See Appendices A, B, C for examples of imaginal writing.

Contexts for my work

During my learning journey I have worked in a range of *contexts* and *roles*, I outline them here and summarise them in a matrix for easy reference.

When I started as a student at CARPP I was employed by a health authority (GHA) as their participation and planning manager. A year later they underwent a major reorganisation and I took the opportunity to leave as my post became redundant in the new structure. This wasn't without its pains but gave me the opportunity to break out of being a 'tempered radical' (Meyerson and Scully, 1995) in a large, increasingly conservative organisation and to start to explore what work I wanted to do, and to work in the company I chose.

For most of the period covered here I earned my living working as a researcher and facilitator, sometimes also as a consultant, working as part of a small independent co-operative (Sustainable Futures). Sustainable Futures has focused on developing and delivering participative processes ranging from small scale regeneration projects, through running large scale participative events, to undertaking contracts for government agencies seeking to develop new transport solutions. More recently I have established a second organisation (Research that Works) in recognition of the changing nature and balance of my work, in this I work with three other women. We seek to work in inquiring and participative ways with and for clients, largely using action research and action learning approaches.

My research journey has included working in a wide range of contexts; these include work for local community and voluntary groups (both in a paid capacity and as gift-work[25]), local authorities, the NHS, and for government agencies. Some have been short one-off pieces of work, others are two to three year contracts, and yet others have become the basis of a continuing relationship.

The matrix in Chapter 4 gives a short description of the pieces of work, lists ways in which I was tracking my inquiry and the roles I took in the projects. For more detailed accounts of the projects, facilitation and relationship to my learning journey see Chapter 4 *Practice Accounts*. The matrix is not a complete list of the projects undertaken over this period

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[25] Gift work is a voluntary contribution of my professional services to organisations and groups. These are normally organisations very close to home e.g. Stroud Community Planning Conference (CPC) or organisations whose ethos and style are close to my heart e.g. Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network (GNPN). Sometimes the gift work involves working entirely without pay, at other times I may be paid for some of my time and contribute the rest without charge. This donation of time and services enables me to 'put back' into communities I care for. I do not consider there is any difference between my professional responsibilities to my clients who pay for my services and those for whom I work on a gift work basis, the quality should be the same, the commitment is if anything greater.

but includes projects which are especially significant in the context of my learning journey.

I worked in a range of *roles* during the period of this learning journey, often taking several interlinked roles on one project, all required facilitation skills:

Facilitator – in its most direct and usual usage

Working with clients to design processes and deliver workshops and series of events in which the aim is to maximise participation by all stakeholders.

In addition I work with the client organisations to support them in opening up to changes in organisational behaviour (inclusive and participative working, whole systems approaches etc), providing skills building/ confidence raising sessions for staff, reflective time with the boards etc. Clients include NHS Primary Care Trusts, Local Authorities, community and voluntary organisations, and local communities.

Facilitator/ consultant

This role is an extension of the above role; increasingly I am working with client organisations over an extended period to address questions using whole systems approaches. This involves capacity development on multiple levels in the organisation including skills development, facilitating action research and learning sets to support changing behaviours, and policy development.

Clients include National Resources Institute (University of Greenwich), Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network and the LGA.

Group facilitator

Designing and convening inquiry groups including co-operative inquiry groups e.g. The Governance project and facilitating a group of diabetic service users inquiring into the self management of chronic illness (NHS).

Partnership building

Working for three years with a multi agency partnership (Gloucester Locality Planning Team) supporting their work with community and other organisations. I also worked with them as a group on the issues and questions arising from their attempts to sustain multi sector (statutory and voluntary sector) partnerships.

Project development

I have built and facilitated some more temporary partnerships to develop projects and proposals or bids for funding. This work has included developing coalitions of community and statutory organisations to bid for Single Regeneration Budget funding, several National Lottery project bids including two bids for Healthy Living Centre funding, and a proposal for Sure Start funding for services for under four year olds.

All of these projects have been led by community organisations and so there have been particular challenges in facilitating a new type of relationship with the more usual leaders- the statutory agencies.

Researcher
I have developed and delivered a range of projects using participative research methodologies. These include Rapid Appraisals to research health related need in Neighbourhood Project areas (estates with high levels of deprivation and disadvantage), the Neighbourhood Children's Commission, Tewkesbury Older People's Needs research and research into the needs of hard to reach groups for Barton and Tredworth Sure Start.
Clients include Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network, three NHS Primary Care Trusts, and a Sure Start project.

Employee
As Planning and Participation manager of a health authority I was responsible for leading the internal OD necessary to enable the GHA to engage with communities (of geography or interest) in needs assessment and decision making regarding health service commissioning. I was also responsible for strategic capacity building in those communities.
Between December 2001 and December 2002 I worked for a year (part time) with Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network (GNPN) to set up their network of 8 Healthy Living Centres and to integrate them into the wider health systems in Gloucestershire.

Working in a range of contexts and in a variety of roles has helped me to enrich my understanding of the role of 'facilitator', and to explore working with action research in many settings.

Inquiry within facilitation

A common factor in the contexts I have worked in has been that I am usually in the role of facilitator, and it has been important to me to understand how to improve my facilitation practice. This section describes me learning to inquire within and into my facilitation.

I believe that in order to function well as a facilitator of participative processes, including action research, I need to develop a set of inquiry skills and practices, which include skills to support each stage of the cycle of action and reflection: plan, act –observe process and consequences, reflect on process and consequences, re-plan, act etc. This thesis could choose to explore more broadly how to facilitate participation and particularly participatory research, in which case I'd be spending time writing about contracting, planning, agreeing outcomes, acting together, questioning etc. But what has come to

interest me, and so form the focus of my own learning and inquiry, are the more subtle and less often discussed *skills and practices of noticing* (including having a scanning attention), and *tracking my inquiry.*

I've become particularly interested in noticing as a way of developing a personal and professional discipline to deepen awareness/consciousness, and tracking because of the potential to explore multiple ways of sense making through different tracking methods. The proper recognition of multiple ways of sensing and sense making have been continuing issues in my work, and life. Consequently this thesis will concentrate on the development of these skills and practices, which I describe in more detail later in this chapter. It is the recognition and development of these practices which I hope that this thesis might contribute to; making them more visible and raising them in the consciousness of other facilitators. When I sought for provocation and guidance about them for myself I couldn't find it, I hope that this writing will provoke and stimulate others.

John Heron(1996) puts it well when he describes a noticing practice as:
> How to inquire in myself all the time in order to co-operatively inquire with others.

For me this is an important element of both my facilitation practice, and my overarching first person inquiry into living life as inquiry.

As a facilitator I need a scanning attention
- o To register and make sense of what is happening in the room: [26] what is the group doing, what are the dynamics at work? (*Us*)
- o To understand how what I am doing is affecting the group/dynamics, am I making assumptions, what are my intentions, is what I'm doing meeting my purpose – what else could I be doing? (*Me*)
- o To be able to check how I'm feeling/responding/what it is raising/reactivating in me, is it my stuff alone, or is it a resonance, a mirroring of something happening in the group/system that is triggering something in me – if so what does it tell me for how I might proceed? (Separating *Me* from the systemic stuff (*Them*) in order to understand any resonances).

Oh, and somewhere I need to find the bit of me that keeps us all to task and watches the time!

In developing my personal noticing practices through self-study I am undertaking 'first person' action research, which Reason and Bradbury describe as:

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[26] The room here is predominantly the physical space that a group which I am working with is occupying, and also to a degree *what's in the room* which is created between participants, and them and me as co-researchers.

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> First person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act with awareness and to choose carefully and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. First person research practice brings inquiry into more and more of our moments of action – not as outside researchers but in the whole range of everyday activities (2001:xxv).

I discuss my first person inquiry practices in more detail later in this chapter.

As someone doing first person inquiry I need a scanning attention to ask of my facilitation practice

- o How can I stay inquiring in action?
- o How does my facilitation practice relate to my biography?
- o How this connection to my biography determines who and in what areas and issues I work (power, voice, whose narrative gets heard and valued etc)
- o How I then bring the 'best'[27] of me to the task.

My noticing practices, as they have developed, have sought to meet these needs to scan and bring my attention to both of these inquiry areas as facilitator and first person inquirer. In this I have built on a simpler structure of noticing the group dynamics as a facilitator.

My methods have developed over the period of this learning journey and the influences on my practice have waxed and waned

What I notice is that the people and places I looked to for guidance and wisdom about the practice of facilitation mirror my learning journey.

> I note my own journey between these sources here; this is not meant to be a factual representation of the texts made available to a student at CARPP, but a description of the path I steered and what influenced my choices. When I describe my erratic trajectory I do not intend any criticism of my tutors (who sought as ever to facilitate the personal learning in research through a heuristic approach, rather than pushing specific methodologies, approaches or authors) but note how I journeyed around the available influences; ricocheting at times like a pinball from the 'accepted masters' as I learnt to listen to myself *and* others.

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[27] By the 'best' of course I don't just mean the 'good' (caricature of good) bits but the very fullest self that I can offer to the task. This will be influenced not just by the client's needs and the task itself but by my own needs at that time.

> Having not found what I wanted initially I looked to feminist researchers doing participatory research, and here I found the appreciation that the personal *is* the political, a more comfortable joining up of the internal and external processes of facilitation of action research.

First of all I looked to John Heron, after all he was well respected by Peter Reason, and he had influenced those who originally taught me to facilitate. He had written *the* (definitive) Facilitators Handbook after all. But I didn't care for a lot of what I found (as I explain below) it was too intellectual, so I looked elsewhere.

This time I didn't look towards someone revered in the academy and with an intellectual style but to practitioners of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and PAR, the revered radical practitioners of participatory research. What I found was a greater political awareness and a stronger statement about personal values and commitment to political change, but in the writing of Robert Chambers and others I failed to find a focus on the personal, the use of our biography, maybe even a recognition of the link between the personal and the political?

I ask myself now why I came so late to women writers on research. After all as a feminist shouldn't I have started here? I think it says something about the literature and the stories that get told even in the more enlightened parts of the academy; its still largely men making androcentric theory and the victory narratives of Heron, Fals Borda, Gustavsen, Horton and Freire are more often cited than the projects of women researchers. And somehow it feels like all the best participatory research is happening in the developing world, not here at home in small, domestic scale projects. It's so much about who gets to make the theory and who gets quoted in the literature, as Pat Maguire notes: The mainstream of both the dominant and alternative paradigms is a 'male-stream' (Duelli Klein, 1983 in Maguire P, 1987).

At the same time I was having face to face conversations with others whose facilitation impressed me, one of these people was Joanna Macy and it was from working with her that I got the recognition of the transpersonal inside the political (Workshop, May 2000 Plas Taliaris, Wales). Much later I met Margaret Wheatley, from whom I learnt that less was more; that keeping the form simple could keep it accessible, and needn't mean the facilitation was naive or un-self-critical (Circle training workshop with Margaret Wheatley. February 2004. Richmond, UK).

And all the time I raked the indices of books for references to facilitation (largely unsuccessfully), and I embarrassed researchers presenting papers at conferences with questions about their micro practices of noticing when they facilitated research participants (and even more often sat in the audience biting my lip, sure that my question would be greeted with impatience or incomprehension).

Eventually having found some traces of the different component parts of the sort of practice I wanted to develop scattered across many of these writers and practitioners I felt more confident to spell out how *I* wanted to develop my own inquiring practice. I was now convinced it was about time to focus less on the (more masculine) aspects of thinking, theorising and writing up, and more on the acting, noticing and reflection aspects of facilitating participatory research. This section expands on some parts of this my journey to find other descriptions of facilitation practice.

In October 1998 I noted[28]:

How I do it: Expanding myself to fill the room as I enter it (links to John Heron's description of charismatic presence).
Looking around the room to 'enfold people with my attention' (links to Buddhist practice of compassion).

My developmental journey started from focussing on 'enfolding what's in the room' (see early practice accounts). Later my focus shifted to inquire how do I reflect on and 'process' that data, and inquire into myself, developing a spanning attention (see later practice accounts and description in this chapter).

Initially I was more interested in asking 'what is it that I'm doing?' and 'how do I get feedback about how I and the group are doing?' I was really keen to understand what 'good' facilitation was (or could be) as I felt that it was often mentioned in passing by writers such as Robert Chambers when writing about PRA practices (Chambers,1983, 1997) but that few people gave sufficient weight to the questions of what good and empowering facilitation really looked and felt like. The kernel of this my current inquiry was there tucked inside these questions, but not explicit.

I wrote:

I am finding in my reading that although facilitation may be acknowledged, it is not discussed, not explored – I have questions about the **nature of facilitation.**
    So what is a place to stand in my work?
    How can I, and others, facilitate places to stand that liberate participants from the fear of engaging?
    How will I know that I am working to support them and not from my own projections?
<div align="right">(<i>Writing for my Supervision Group.</i> April1998).</div>

And later that year:

> For this [development of my own awarenesses] I feel I am drawing on Bill Torbert's internal reflection cycles, trying to stay with myself, noticing, in the moment.
> I am committed to describing both this experience of facilitation and the cycling, because I believe it is open to all of us, and yet seldom or poorly described, not spoken of in ways that most people can recognise and feel are accessible, and so feel that they could use in their practice.
>
> [2004] I notice I was asking these questions at that time, asking them again and again, but not answering them. I come across my writing from that period and I find repeated framing and reframing of the questions but very few attempts to answer them myself. Instead lots of looking to others and to written sources for answers. I did not have the confidence to answer the questions out loud, in writing (although I was actually practising spanning attention). This was typical Unicorn moment behaviour; tempered, unconfident, tentative but also moving forward and getting the need to more fully describe and understand the qualities of the internal processes of facilitation (my passion) by the scruff of the neck.

Learning from John Heron: I said then (1998) that few people were writing about the nature of facilitation but of course John Heron had been doing so for some time (1977, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1998). He had also bridged the two fields of facilitation and participative inquiry and so became an obvious place to start looking for ideas as to how to develop my own noticing practice.

But it didn't work for me. No amount of ploughing through the Facilitators Handbook (and yes, that's an appropriately laborious description for the way I experienced it) and other writings could make Heron's carefully detailed practices feel accessible to me[29]. They gave me an overwhelming feeling of overload. So I'm including this acknowledgement here as I'm sure others will expect me to have used Heron's thinking more in my inquiry, and it had at times been helpful in developing my *thinking*, but not my *first person noticing practices*. To do that I'd have had to have a warmer response, to have wanted to let his ideas in-close to me, and I didn't. They required too much 'intellectual

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[29] A member of my CARPP tutorial group raised a helpful question on reading an early draft of this piece. She asks:
Is it because Heron is
   a) so intellectual
   b) a bloke
   c) an aboutness writer, not a withness writer
   d) a writer and not in the mire of doing/being grassroots change? (Chris Seeley. Personal communication. October 2004).
I realise a) to d) all have a part to play in making Heron's writing unpalatable to me as an activist, a woman, a withness writer, and someone in the mire of grassroots change myself.

exertion' whereas I wanted to cultivate something that felt 'rounder' for me.

In September 2002 I wrote about not using more of John Heron's ideas:

Writing this I feel very vulnerable to criticism of not working with Heron's ideas more, and as if I must give an account of myself. To clarify my own mind I opened up the *Facilitators Handbook* once again to see if I could be more intellectually clear about my more 'gut' reactions to its contents. I found a clue in Heron's introduction to the new rewrite (Dimensions and Modes. Page 11): he describes a revision as giving 'more clarity and power to the whole analysis of facilitator options'. And I suppose I feel about his writing on facilitation that it is so often a set of tools for enabling a facilitator to consider the options at any moment in a group, and what I'm looking for is something rather different. Which does not deny the usefulness of his frameworks (if you can learn to juggle them and still maintain an awareness of self) but I want to push a bit further in a slightly different direction.

[2004] By which I meant that Heron's approach was too intellectual, rather devoid of the recognition of other aspects of sensing and knowing. It felt like trying to appreciate a piece of music through a study of its relationship to mathematics – a very valid entry point for some, but not for me. He was too Aristotelian, boxing things into separate compartments, things which to me had felt joined up. It felt like cutting up a creature in order to understand it and then displaying the separated segments – it could not truly represent the creature it had once been for me.
I wanted to read someone who was writing about the process of facilitation as a more holistic experience. [30]

I have however come to appreciate Heron's categorising of three styles or modes of group facilitation; hierarchical, collaborative and autonomous.
Hierarchical – where the facilitator directs the learning process
Co-operative – where the facilitator shares power over the learning process and manages with the group
Autonomous – where the facilitator respects the total autonomy of the group; they find their own way, exercising their own judgement without intervention from the facilitator.

My relationship to these facilitation styles has changed over the period of my learning journey. When I was facilitating the Community Planning

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[30] And today (August 2004), editing this chapter, I smile as I read of my struggles with John Heron's style for, as if to reassure me it's still an irresolvable issue for me at this time, I have just lost my copy of the Facilitators Handbook! Or more accurately the Post Office has. I had asked my partner to post it to me as I wanted to look again at the text to remind myself why I found it SO difficult, I couldn't believe I was being so dense and I suppose felt I needed to give a better account of myself in setting Heron aside. So Glenn posted it first class on Saturday and it still hasn't arrived 10 days later. Of course it might come tomorrow but the point is already made. He's elusive as far as I'm concerned and I should accept it.

Conference[31] in 1995/7 I was seeking to find a way to almost efface my presence in the groups I was facilitating, believing that the less I did or intervened the stronger the group would become, the more aware of its own power and its ability to act together. I could not understand that my acting in hierarchical mode with a group could itself be liberating, I wanted the groups I worked with to be autonomous and independent of me and therefore I believed that they could and *should* do so immediately.

Over the next few years I learnt through experimenting with working in the three styles depending on the stage of the group's development and its purpose, and found that adding this choice of facilitator style enhanced the way I worked and the group's effectiveness. It was a major breakthrough for me to come to terms with the liberating potential of hierarchical facilitator style – but my struggle to do so was not surprising I suppose as a person who had lacked consistent holding in her personal life and had only experienced authority as unpredictable and oppressive.

Yet, although I aspired to facilitate autonomous groups I feared the lack of influence and control I would have in that situation. Personally I didn't know what to do with some types of freedom and I didn't really trust that others would do so either. Ironically I think it was learning to work with tools like Future Search[32] which had strong holding frameworks and explicit tasks but very 'light' facilitation in other ways (the facilitator does not intervene to resolve differences or to comfort distress but has a strong holding and noticing attention that enables participants to feel seen and heard but not to look to the facilitator to artificially resolve the irreconcilable) which enabled me to really understand what it was to offer a group a task and then 'get out of the way', respecting that the group *does* hold the answers and if it has the will and the time is right it will resolve its questions in the only way possible at that time.

In those days I was much more comfortable with Heron's collaborative style, which would allow me to disappear into the group, not requiring me to exert authority or to step out of the way. As someone with issues about inclusion this is hardly surprising either.

Now I wince when I look back on those early groups when members must so often have longed for a bit of direction and secure holding! If I consider a more recent piece of work, the Governance project, I can clearly see how I moved between these styles over the life of the group and also within individual meetings of the group depending on changing membership, the energy in the group and the task in hand. By the time we got to our final meeting I was operating at the start of the session in collaborative style building a picture with participants to guide our

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[31] See Practice Accounts.

[32] Future Search; a large group process used to help diverse groups of stakeholders find common ground, and develop plans based on it. Developed by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff.

reflection on the process we'd followed over the life of the group, and by the last part of that session the participants were acting autonomously as they planned their future moves for the period when the group would have ended with very little facilitation from Chris (my co-facilitator) and I other than a caring/holding attention.

Learning from Robert Chambers – looking for references to 'use of self' in other writing: In 1998 I was already writing that I had found few writers on participation who wrote in depth about the *facilitation* of participatory processes. I think this is still true; very few writers really explore facilitation and particularly the facilitation of participatory research as a *mindful practice* (Heron, Reason). There appears to be a lot of assuming that if the methods are correct and appropriate and the intent honourable then the facilitation itself will be ok. In this section I give an account of searching for a particular focus and level of detail in the writings of Robert Chambers to illustrate what good advice to facilitators already existed, and what was missing and therefore why I felt I needed to construct my own noticing practices.

In 1998 I looked to writers from the PAR schools of action research for an understanding of the importance of developing a self aware facilitation practice to address issues of power in the facilitator that is both able to notice that the facilitator is bringing 'baggage' into the group (in the form of positions, attitudes, assumptions, etc), and is able to access the facilitator's own life experience (identities and biography) when these are of relevance to the group and task. As the PAR school of action research had been so strongly influenced by critical theory I expected to see politically self critical and aware practice explained and explored here. I wanted to understand better how a facilitator of participative processes could embody that leadership role (of facilitator) *and* carry a vulnerable self awareness through developing a mindful practice.

I discovered that many PAR writers do not address the need to reflect on self-in-action in any great depth. Here I look at Robert Chambers' writing because it does acknowledge the issue of power and facilitation (in his case in development situations largely but not exclusively in the southern hemisphere), and because it stops at the point where I think there is a need to explore more. I can only contrast this omission with the level of detail he and his colleagues often give to the practical details of the activity of the 'animateur' e.g. use of locally available materials to enable people to visually construct arguments, and the competencies of the facilitator/animateur. I feel it's important to stress that it's not only Chambers who appears to omit discussing the micro practices of noticing in facilitation. Many other writers on action research do the same. I wonder whether the traditional patriarchal charismatic influence carried by many of the male leaders of PAR and other action research approaches, forms a barrier to them engaging in exposing self reflection

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which would make them vulnerable (but would unlock the resource of their personal selves, *including* their biographies). Or is it part of an effort not to be seen as a leader, but to 'hand over the stick' (in Chambers' words) to others who are research participants?

This interests me: how can one be so very committed to changing the balance of power as Chambers so obviously is, and neglect this opportunity to work with another aspect of the power in the room in the moment – which I believe requires the sort of mindful practice which I am advocating? I am interested in what it means to work with an *active awareness of self in the moment of facilitation.* I don't find it helpful to ignore the self and our life experience when working to better manage power in the facilitation process. And Chambers himself argues for rigour but doubts its efficacy;

> A rigour [can be gained] from reflective judgement. Personal self-critical scepticism and awareness can be powerful, but are open to the old traps of self-deception, or of convenient omission of awkward questions (Chambers, 1997:159).

This leads one to believe that he does not trust a mindful practice to be capable of overcoming self deception and omission. Chambers is very clear about the *behavioural and attitudinal practices* he expects from PRA facilitators:

> Basic to PRA is facilitating; handing over the stick, chalk or pen, enabling local people to be the analysts, mappers, diagrammers, observers, researchers, historians, planners and actors, presenters of their analysis, and then in turn facilitators. (1997:117).

And again in a chapter entitled 'What works and why' he writes:

> The PRA experience has led to insights and discoveries: ...that the *behaviours and attitudes* of outsiders are critical in facilitation... the principles additional in PRA are *primarily personal and behavioural*; handing over the stick, *self critical awareness, personal responsibility* and sharing. These contribute to quality through a rigour of trustworthiness based on judgement, and of relevance based on context... We are facilitators, learners and consultants. Our activities are to establish rapport, to convene and catalyse, to enquire, to help in the use of methods, and to encourage local people to choose and improvise methods for themselves. (1997:130-131. Emphasis added).

Yet Chambers does not unpack these terms, I would particularly like to understand how *self critical awareness* happens in the moment. Nor does he describe any micro practices that could sustain this different way of working, it's as if *wanting* to share power is sufficient to overcome any personal attitudes/positioning or baggage that the facilitator takes into the situation; whether positive or negative, or features created in the engagement e.g. tight timescales, local disagreements. As if *commitment* is enough, which I think sadly it is not. It seems that, in an attempt to make facilitation and the powerful role the facilitator takes

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open to all, PRA practitioners have concentrated on teaching tools and techniques and assuming:

> Both the participatory methods and familiar local materials have helped in enabling local people to express and analyse their knowledge and preferences, and to take command of the process. To enable these capabilities to be expressed, *the practical principle has been to assume that people can do something until proved otherwise,* and to encourage them by example'. (1997:133. Emphasis added).

I have no quarrel with the teaching of facilitation skills and sharing of the role of facilitator –its part of my own working practice to train and work with internal teams of facilitators, researchers and design groups whenever possible. However I think there are limits to the roles these groups can take on if this learning does not include first person inquiry skills, particularly self reflection. This is because the individuals in the group carry their personal life and cultural situatedness[33] into the role. If unaware of this, *and not actively working with it while facilitating*, an enormous resource is lost and a whole set of filters and biases are introduced that can reproduce the social practices, structures and media which are constraining them and which brought them to need the inquiry in the first place.

In later chapters Chambers goes on to list sets of *skills and awarenesses* that a PRA practitioner/facilitator is expected to acquire, whilst criticising the previous practices of 'un-self-critical rural development 'tourists' and fastidious social anthropologists' (Chambers, 1997:134). These facilitation skills include: relaxed rapport, respect, listening, being optimally unprepared, and embracing and learning from errors. These lists are inadequate at capturing for me what underlies what Greenwood and Levin (1998:208-209) call *crafty facilitation[34]*.

Yet Chambers is very realistic about the outsider, professional facilitator being caught up in the pre-existing hegemony and influencing the group. He notes:

> It is difficult for a facilitator to avoid influencing outcomes. The transfer of reality can take place unintended. There is no complete escape

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[33] Situated may need some explanation here: I understand all experience to be historically and culturally situated. This includes the political context in which we are situated (patriarchy, capitalism, etc) and the roles it places us in, as well as the situated knowledge located within particular communities at particular times.

[34] Greenwood and Levin write of crafty behaviour in a positive sense, one of a craft of research facilitation:

Crafty behaviour is the goal the researcher strives to achieve. The researcher is not omniscient and certainly not omnipotent, but the researcher has ways of gaining self-awareness and working with co-subjects to generate new mutual understandings and new understandings of the possibilities in particular interventions (1998:208 – 209).

I aim to develop a crafty facilitation practice, by which I mean a practice of critical self reflexivity in order to 'develop a kind of self reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intensions' (Lather P,1991:150).

from this trap, but solutions are sought in personal behaviour –
transparent honesty, respect, sitting down, encouraging, listening, not
interrupting (1997:155).

It seems that Chambers does not recognise the option of *exposing and
embracing* the facilitator's bias and enabling them to *work meaningfully
with it*[35].

More than outcomes are at risk of being influenced by the facilitator
who is unaware of her 'baggage' when working with issues of power in
the room and/or a wider system, the experience may serve to reinforce
existing divisions and oppressions. I suggest it takes a highly developed
awareness to fully appreciate what is happening in even a seemingly
simple activity together and that this can only be developed through a
rigorous noticing practice by the facilitator.

In his earlier book 'Rural Development – putting the last first' Chambers
does deal with the political aspects of the power of the development
worker. He writes of the outsider seeking to change things, and the risks
of them imposing their priorities:

> *Who* the outsider is may change but the relation is the same. A stronger
> person wants to change things for a person who is weaker. From this
> paternal trap there is no complete escape……There is however a
> partial remedy. Respect for the poor and what they want offsets
> paternalism…. Outsiders should not start with their own priorities but with
> those of the poor, although however much self-insight they have,
> outsiders will still project their own values and priorities. (1983:141).

Again his scepticism about the ability of insight to sufficiently affect
practice appears, as does his very genuine commitment:

> In what follows I too am trapped, an outsider asking what poor people
> want. All one can hope is that the effort of trying to find out, of asking
> again and again and doubting the outcomes, will check some of the
> worst effects of core-periphery paternalism, and that the more the
> priorities of the poor are known, the easier it will be to see what it is best
> to do (1983:141).

I am interested in offering an internal practice that mirrors this external
cycling Chambers describes when he talks of '*asking again, and again*'.
A practice which supports the facilitator noticing again and again in
order to listen well.

Chambers addresses the facilitator's role in working to give voice to the
voiceless in development situations, urging them to listen rather than
speak. I am interested in voicelessness and silence and I think it can be
more complex an issue than just encouraging facilitators to listen. Silence
is normally assumed in 'Rural Development' and 'Whose Reality Counts?'
to relate to the unchosen silence of disadvantaged participants.

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[35] As I describe when working with my 'noticing pocket', similar to David Bohm's internal
noticing cycling.

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However, as facilitator I believe one also needs to maintain an awareness for 'chosen silences'; where participants choose to maintain silence as a consciously chosen survival strategy (Marshall 1995; Maguire 1987; Lykes 1997). Working with this silence to sensitively understand, and to offer options about voice and silence requires a particular awareness and reflective practice.

The other aspect of silence which I think is worth noticing here is the silence of the facilitator. Chamber's ideal development-worker-as-facilitator is silent, or as nearly so as possible. But we need to be aware of the risks involved here. As Patricia Maguire points out:

> What about the silences of the powerful? Their 'chosen silences' may be mechanisms to maintain control (DeVault and Ingraham 1999). In her account of a participatory research project with a Canadian native community Chataway (1997:758) discussed silencing herself to avoid influencing the research. Yet she notes, "withholding information such as one's own opinion does not just allow space for the other to speak, it can also be an act of power that forces the other to carry the burden of speaking or acting if any relationship is to be maintained" (Maguire, 2001:64).

How would the facilitator, as described by Chambers, stay aware of these issues without a rigorous noticing practice?

Robert Chambers' work and writing has been encouraging to me and has helped me to find ways to apply action research in a range of projects and situations. The confidence I gained as a result has provided a springboard from which to attempt to explore and open up a debate about noticing practices for facilitators.

Learning from feminist researchers: I sought for a description of 'self reflective practice' for facilitators working in situations where power is a primary issue, and I found feminist scholarship and research offered an understanding of self reflexive practice for researchers/facilitators which was close to my own understanding.

Women participatory research practitioners such as Patricia Maguire, Yoland Wadsworth , Patti Lather and Mary Brydon-Miller pay attention to the questions of power in research facilitation. And it is feminist action research practitioners who urge us to recognise the powerful role played by historical and cultural situatedness, both of us as facilitators/ researchers and of research participants. They also value a self reflexive practice for researchers.

Patricia Maguire describes how a key feminist influence on action research has been restructuring the power dynamics of the research process itself and the role of reflexive practice:

> Turning the relationship between researchers and subjects inside out by promoting the approach of co-researchers in an effort to share or flatten power is at the heart of action research. Through reflexivity,

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> feminist grounded action researchers critique and change their own research practices, particularly regarding the nature and processes of empowerment (2001:65).

And Patti Lather challenges us

> to develop a kind of self reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions (1991:150).

I recognised in the writing of Yoland Wadsworth a description of facilitation which felt both accurate and meaningful for me. In 2001 the Handbook of Action Research was published and I read Yoland Wadsworth's chapter on facilitation. This started to describe facilitation in terms I could identify with, including a description of the difficulty of describing facilitation!

Her key capabilities span the whole process of facilitating Participative Action Research projects[36] from knowing self, knowing others; through real-izing inter-connectedness; identifying new growth and driving energies; resourcing the effort; shaping the inquiry; to accompanying the transformative moments.

These feel like frameworks or logics against which I could comfortably plot my facilitation of any of the projects outlined here as Practice Accounts. Better still for my search for a model of self reflective practice, her first key facilitation capacity *knowing our own selves* talks of 'capacity building a culture of respectful response in which people are questioned and understood and acted towards *in mindful relation'*(2001:425. Emphasis added) built upon a foundation of our 'inner project... [to] know our own selves including surfacing what is conscious and unconscious, discussable and undiscussable' and she uses the metaphors of the mirror and the magnifying glass as 'the key tools in this capability' (Wadsworth, 1997).

Wadsworth is describing a praxis in which my description of micro practices of noticing feel at home as part of a self reflective facilitation practice. However a description of the facilitator's internal cycling is absent from her account on this occasion. Her key area *Knowing self, knowing others* describes the need for the sorts of attention or noticing that my practice has developed, but she does not describe how to keep this attention 'live' in the moment.

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[36] In PAR the facilitator is 'nominal' in that her aim is for groups to self manage, to facilitate themselves as far as possible. PAR stresses the importance of the 'critical reference group' (those who experience the problem under study) pursuing their inquiries by and for themselves. The facilitator then 'becomes a facilitator of or an assistant to the critical reference group's own pursuit of *their* truth (or truths)'. Much writing about feminist research also stresses the desirability of the facilitation role being shared in the group. (Wadsworth. Y. (1998:11). What is participatory action research? Action Research International, Paper 2).

Wadsworth proceeds to deconstruct or tease out the facilitation skills needed; describing compass work, shaping and focusing, framing and magnifying, mirroring, mapping and knife work, and describes a project she has worked with – analysing the type of facilitator skills and actions involved, the progress of which feels very familiar to me. She describes some of the micro-processes of facilitating and shares her feelings about the complexity of the role at times saying 'I usually feel like I am "knitting socks on 24 needles".' (2001: 421). But it's when she writes of 'inaccessible mental filing cabinets of intuitive, unconscious tacit knowing' that I recognise that she too is struggling to make the process of facilitation transparent, to answer that difficult question '*yes, but what does it look like*?[37]'

> The irony is that the more any of us work to facilitate inquiry, the more our store of exemplars, working techniques, methods, decision-rules, built capabilities and practical experiences, collected in the course of thousands of hours of observing, listening, responding, talking, asking and thinking seems to have – and probably need to have – largely disappeared into our relatively inaccessible mental filing cabinets of intuitive, unconscious tacit knowing! (2001:421)

In this chapter and in the *Practice Accounts* I describe work I have done which demonstrates the capabilities she describes (although not using her terminology), however the particular focus of this thesis is my inquiry into the first of these key areas *Knowing self, knowing others*. I am particularly aware of the need to cultivate this capability in order to be able to operate effectively across <u>all</u> of her six key areas and I did not find a description of her 'inner outer attention' that was sufficiently detailed to enable me to compare our practices, even though we shared an intention to 'know our own selves'.

One difference between the work I do and the PAR facilitation described by Wadsworth is the degree to which the facilitation is shared by the inquiry group or held by an identified facilitator. Wadsworth (2001) writes of the importance of seeing facilitation as potentially a collective undertaking on the part of co-researchers in an inquiry group, shaped by the micro-actions of all participants.
I agree that this facilitation-as-collective-undertaking is an important aspect of inquiry and leadership in inquiry; how facilitation is held, how it can be disseminated, how we can understand and value all participants' contributions to the facilitation process. If the participatory research then 'takes off' the facilitator may need only to lightly hold the shape of the inquiry.

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[37] This was Peter Reason's question to me when he was my supervisor and I was in the (1998-1999) stage of talking a lot about inquiring into my practice while in-action in a group, but I was failing to be able to evidence this with descriptions of the actual practice. I have many tapes of supervision sessions on which Peter asks, with careful persistence (but increasing frustration?), 'yes, but what does it look like?'.

I wonder how realistic this idea of group-held facilitation is in some short-life inquiry groups, and whether it is always desirable – from my practice accounts one can see groups can commission facilitation (DUG), share facilitation (CPC), make the facilitator feel redundant at times (Governance), and have leadership issues which require facilitation (LGA). I think the PAR 'ideal' of the facilitator being simply nominal is in practice often not achievable, and not always desirable.

Wadsworth acknowledges our situatedness and the influences on our personal styles, as facilitators of research;

> The specificity of our current personal styles associated with our biographies, education, discipline or profession, and biological and ancestral inheritance. All this social software and embodied hardware combine to make a distinctive approach with characteristic preferences and features (2001:430).

But I am left still wanting to know more about how she stays aware of the 'social software' and 'embodied hardware' as it affects her facilitation, even though I recognise what she describes as facilitation very well.

I have touched on how feminism and feminist researchers have influenced **my facilitation practice** in this section; I will write more about the influence of feminist practitioners later in this chapter when I discuss **my action research practice.**

My action research practice

Before I go on to describe my **facilitation practice** in greater detail I want to pause to say a little more about my **practice of action research**; what frameworks I use for understanding it (first, second and third person inquiry, and an extended epistemology), and the major influences on my action research practice (the CARPP[38] school of action research particularly Human Inquiry, critical theory and feminist research).

Frameworks

First second and third person inquiry
Bill Torbert and Peter Reason[39] (Reason and Torbert, 2001; Torbert, 1998, Reason and Bradbury 2001) have offered a way of distinguishing between different scales of action research which I will use in this thesis to distinguish between my individual inquiring practice as a practitioner (first person inquiry), inquiring face to face with others into issues of mutual concern (second person inquiry), and action research which aims to have a wider effect involving others who have a stake but may not be met face to face (third person inquiry). These divisions are described in more detail in Box 1.

Box 1. First, second and third person inquiry

First person inquiry
First person inquiry is described by Reason and Bradbury in the preface to their Handbook of Action Research:

> First person action research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act with awareness and to choose carefully and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. First person research practice brings inquiry into more and more of our moments of action – not as outside researchers but in the whole range of everyday activities (2001:xxv).

An example is using AR to inquire into one's own professional practice by developing a discipline of noticing how I observe and judge others' behaviour, the inferences I make and testing out through cycles of this noticing and reflection whether my preconceptions are getting in the way of better communication with colleagues. Another example might be using a cycle of action and reflection to notice whether the way I 'frame' or present what it is I am trying to communicate in meetings is effective through noting what I intend to achieve, and the framing I use to communicate this, the effect it has and whether this serves my purposes. This data will then help me to experiment with changes in

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[38] Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, University of Bath. UK.
[39] Reason and Torbert are writing about two models of action research Human inquiry and Action Inquiry but offering a framework for thinking about action research more generally.

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framing in order to be most effective in my meetings through understanding where I am miscommunicating or being unclear.

Second person inquiry

Reason and Bradbury describe *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.

It involves a group of co-researchers researching together for a benefit to their community. In this case community can mean a community of interest or of geography. An example could be a group of flood affected residents coming together to inquire into what they have learnt from their experience and what they want from their situation.

Third person inquiry

Reason and Bradbury write:

> Third-person research/practice aims to extend these relatively small-scale projects so that … they are also defined as 'political events' (Toulmin and Gustavsen, 1996). Third person strategies aim to create a wider community of inquiry… Writing and other reporting of the process and outcomes of inquiries can also be an important form of third-person inquiry.

It describes a process involving a wider group than just the co-research group or seeking to influence a wider system. A 'whole system event' or stakeholder conference are examples of this where others may be involved more peripherally than the research group, but have a stake in the outcome, provide data and are involved in implementing change as a result of the research.

Approaches used by me include 'large group processes' - particularly Future Search - and exploring creating new/modified designs but retaining the core principles. Also developing 'Making Sense' meetings, usually as part of a Participative Rapid Appraisal – these are meetings which bring together the research participants, the group sponsoring the research (usually agencies working in the area) and other organisations who can make sense of the data from the research and can potentially make things happen. In this way those affected by the problem and those owning the problem come together with those who have the power to effect change.

The process used by Patricia Maguire to inquire into the impact of feminist research on action research (quoted later in this section) is an example of third person inquiry - she initially inquired (via email) with a community of action research practitioners (second person inquiry), then went on to publish the results of their shared inquiry in a chapter in the

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Handbook of Action Research inviting its readers to continue the inquiry with the original participants – This extends their second person inquiry into a third person inquiry which involves others who were not part of the original research group but who are affected by and have an interest in the findings (knowledge to improve action research practice through grounding it in feminist practice).

I will use this framework of first, second and third person inquiry when I describe my practice in detail later in this chapter.

Others have recognised this division between an individual inquiring into their own actions and situation (first person), a group coming together to inquire into a question of mutual concern (second person), and the effects an inquiry can have on a wider system (third person). For example in her book *Doing Participatory Research – a feminist approach* Patricia Maguire writes:

> By linking the creation of knowledge with social change, participatory research ultimately aims at three types of change, including the following:
> - o Development of the critical consciousness of both the researcher and participants;
> - o Improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process;
> - o Transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships (1987:29).

Different types of knowledge – an extended epistemology
Another important framework for understanding action research and its practice is that of the different types of knowing used during the action research cycling,
John Heron (1992, 1996) and Peter Reason (1988, 1994, 2001) have written extensively about these, which they refer to as an extended epistemology. I write more about the relationship between the ways of knowing and the stages of the action research cycle when I write about my second person practice of co-operative inquiry.

The four interdependent ways of knowing Reason and Heron identify are:
1. *Experiential knowing* – direct, face to face encounters with persons, place or things. Knowing through empathy, and resonance. A knowing which is hard to put into words
2. *Presentational knowing* – expresses experiential knowing through story telling, pictures, movement etc. a knowing which draws on aesthetic imagery
3. *Propositional knowing* – is concepts and ideas

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4. *Practical knowing* - enacts the other forms of knowing through taking action in the world.

In reviewing different approaches to action research Greenwood and Levin say about Human Inquiry's epistemological framework[40]:

> In our view this is one of the most useful parts of Reason's (1994) corpus. AR writing generally offers very few such characterizations to help practitioners portray and understand participatory processes, at least little since the social psychological literature of the 1940s and 1950s. The distinctions between experiential, presentational, practical and propositional knowledge are … very useful. The vague assertions in much of the literature about local knowledge or co-generated knowledge or reflective practice do not make sufficient distinctions for analytical purposes … in our experience, action researchers often have a very difficult time triangulating the process they are in. By having a sense of phases that can be defined according to the predominance of a particular kind of knowledge, the researcher is given a compass to steer by and a way of continuing to ask interesting questions about what has happened and what the next steps might be (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:204 – 209).

I have found this framework helpful as a facilitator of action research as I support participants to identify, value and express their experiential knowing, to understand how it fits with others' experience and theory, and to act upon the knowledge co-created in the inquiry group.

Who benefits, who needs to?

At the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) we speak of an inquiry needing to produce benefits for *me*, for *us* and for *them* (Marshall and Reason, 1987:112-113). Although it's possible to describe my inquiry into my noticing practices as primarily a first person inquiry, it is firmly nested inside my facilitation of action research projects, which themselves have at least a second person and often a third person focus and effect. This is because I have no interest in improving my own professional practice simply for the sake of it; for me it needs to be in service of second and third person inquiries, it needs to have a social effect. I am interested in making a contribution to the task of identifying the skills and competencies essential to new human inquiry (Lincoln and Reason, 1996) and I have an overt social justice agenda.

As Marx put it way back in 1845:

> The philosophers have i*nterpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it (Marx, 1845, 1942:473).

Or as Liz Stanley wrote more recently of feminist inquiry:

> Succinctly the point is to change the world, not only to study it (Stanley, 1990:15).

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[40] Human inquiry is a form of action research developed by Reason and Heron

Having identified some of the frameworks I use I will go on to outline influences on my action research practice.

Influences

As a student of CARPP it's unsurprising that my understanding of what constitutes action research is strongly influenced by the thinking and writing of my teachers Judi Marshall, Peter Reason and Jack Whitehead. Other influences on my practice have been the writing of Greenwood and Levin (1998, 2000, 2001) particularly their model of pragmatic action research; Budd Hall (1975, 1981, 1982, 2001) and Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2000), John Gaventa and Robert Chambers (1983, 1997) writing from a PAR perspective, and feminist researchers practising participatory action research including Patricia Maguire (1987, 2001) Patti Lather (1991) and Mary Brydon-Miller (2001).

Less direct (non-action research focused) influences have been the writings of bell hooks, Susan Griffin, Joanna Macy and Starhawk on feminism, deep ecology and power, Bowlby and Gosling on attachment and alienation, all of whom you will see mentioned here, however briefly. Absent from this thesis but influential on my thinking and understanding of the world has been the experiential and presentational of knowing of some artists including the (often abstract) art of Barbara Hepworth, Lynn Chadwick, Mark Rothko and Kenneth Armitage, Elizabeth Frink and Helen Chadwick, and the conceptual and land artists Thomas Joshua Cooper, Richard Long, Joseph Beuys and Andy Goldsworthy, and the work (installations and writing) of the poet Thomas A Clark. What this group of artists have added is an exploration of the relationship between people and place and landscape and the more than human world (Hepworth, Cooper, Long, Goldsworthy, Beuys, Clark), and the exploration and expression of our emotional reactions and questioning what belonging means in a time of deep insecurity and alienation (Helen and Lynn Chadwick, Rothko, Armitage, Frink). Underpinning all of this has been my Marxist informed view of the world, and critical theory.

Critical theory

The school of critical theory bridges for me between the Marxist theory familiar to me from my early political life, an interest in individual and social psychology and the thinking about action research which I met at CARPP. I understand critical theory as a term used to describe 'a range of approaches which raise critical questions about the conditions which sustain existing forms of social life that are experienced as problematic by particular groups of people' (1998:16).
I briefly discuss here the elements of critical theory which have been of interest to me in developing my action research practice.

I should say first of all *how* **I have learnt**, which has been to act and then to reflect on my projects supported by reading the literature and spending time with other facilitators whose practice I have learnt from (both dos and don'ts) [41]. This is very much my personal pattern to:

o   Instinctively 'know', plan and act upon the knowing
o   Observe and reflect
o   Read and reflect
o   Plan and act
o   Observe and reflect etc…

I thought initially that this made me a lousy student, but came later to understand that my strongest drivers are my instinct/intuition and a desire to act. Action research has taught me that this can be a sound foundation for learning *if* it's accompanied by observation and reflection, using the theory to sense-make in retrospect as well as in prospect.

During my time at CARPP I was also trying not to be *just* the 'course Marxist'. That was the position I'd held nearly twenty years before when I embarked on my social work training, and I feel it hampered my receptiveness and limited what others were prepared to say to me, and so affected our learning from each other.

Its clear that a critical or emancipatory approach to action research which has as it's aim improving outcomes, self understanding, and arriving at a critique of the social setting (recognising that particular people and particular settings are shaped and reshaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically) was likely to appeal to me. Aiming to connect the personal and political in collaborative research *and* action aimed at transforming situations to overcome felt dissatisfactions, alienation, ideological distortion, and the injustices of oppression and domination, seemed to me to be an appropriate goal. All this makes critical action research very attractive to researchers who are do-ers more focused on understanding and changing their situations than they might be on just practicing action research – which is where I was when I came to CARPP in 1996/7.

Next I briefly explore critical theory, and its influence on action research, I then go on to discuss how it informs the practitioner.

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[41] Including writers Marvin Weisbord, Sandra Janoff, Joanna Macy, and Margaret Wheatley. And practitioners John Colvin, Christina McDonagh, Neil Spencer, Martin Large, Alison Parfitt, Diana Ray, Richard Keating, Louise Earll, Sue Pritchard, David Wilkinson, and Chris Seeley. And clients and colleagues whose questions and practice have been so rich for my learning including Mark Gale (GNPN), Martin Simon (FairShares), Steve Clarke (University of Wales, Swansea), Diane Warburton (Shared Practice), Phillip Douglas, Jill Kearsley, and Helen Chalmers.

Critical theory grew from the tradition of Marxist epistemology (Kant, Hegel, Marx, Weber). It can trace its roots to Germany between the first and second world wars when scholars connected to the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) including Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, came together in what has come to be known as the Frankfurt school. As the Nazis took power many of them fled Germany for the US and settled in California.

> Critical social science is an attempt to understand in a rationally responsible manner the oppressive features of a society such that this understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves. (Fay,1987:4).
>
> The task of uncovering the cultural assumptions that dominate in a society . . . [is] the task of critical theory. (McLaughlin, 1996).

Critical theory made connections between the relatively new fields of psychology (then Freudian, since post Freudian) and economics (Marxist), seeking to understand how the individual/personal and the structural come together as ideological forms or expressions in which some people benefit at the expense of others. The critical theorists had a dialectical concern with the construction of experience. Joe L Kincheloe and Peter McLaren propose that the 'discourse of possibility' implicit within the constructed nature of social experience suggested to 1960s social scientists that the reconstruction of the social sciences could contribute to a more egalitarian and democratic social order. Where orthodox Marxism had offered only the rigid laws of historical determinism, the critical theorists' message was more hopeful. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) note that critical theorists, particularly Herbert Marcuse, were later to become the intellectual darlings of radical movements in the sixties as the potential of qualitative research influenced by critical theory to produce 'dangerous' knowledge, that is insights and information likely to upset the establishment and challenge existing hegemonies, was recognised.

Critical theorists propose that knowledge generation is not limited to the boundaries established by positivism and suggest that both interpretive and critical approaches to the practice of knowledge generation are also legitimate ways of approaching the research process. The following table (from Habermas) outlines the three forms of knowledge, their associated inquiry processes and the uses these knowledges can be put to.

Technical knowledge	Interpretive knowledge	Critical knowledge
Empirical-analytical inquiry is associated with the dominant paradigm in social science research. This type of inquiry is usually grounded in positivism	Hermeneutic, symbolic, or cultural inquiry is an alternative form of knowing, it **produces interpretive knowledge**: the understanding of the	Critical theory exposes the myth of value free social science and calls for the researcher's active involvement in social transformations. Critical

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(which assumes that the social world exists as a system of distinct and observable variables, which are independent of the knower). This type of inquiry **generates technical information**, in the form of laws and theories, which account for regularities in observable social behaviour (Fay, 1975:73). This technical knowledge **is used to** exert power and control over people and the environment.	meaning given to social interactions by those involved. Interpretive inquiry unmasks how individual and group interpretations of reality influence both social actions and the intentions which social actors have in doing what they do (Fay, 1975:73). The focus is on understanding how human interaction produces rules governing social life, rather than on discovering universal laws of human interaction. Interpretive inquiry **is used to** create the conditions for mutual understanding and consensus between members of different social orders, as well as producing practical knowledge.	inquiry **produces critical knowledge**. It is made up of a combination of an historical analysis of inequitable systems and self reflection. Critical inquiry is structured to uncover the systems of social relationships, and the contradictions which underlie social conflicts. Through self reflection, analysis of social systems and action, people can come to understand and to try to change supposed 'natural' constraints (Fay, 1975). Critical inquiry **is used to** help people to see themselves and their social situations in a new way in order to inform further action for self determined emancipation from oppressive social systems and relationships. In turn action informs reflection, and people see themselves and their social conditions more clearly. The dialectical relationship between inquiry and action, theory and practice is explicit.

Table 1. **Habermas's three forms of knowledge and inquiry processes and the uses to which they are put** (adapted from Habermas, 1971).

The thinking of critical theorists has had a significant effect on the development of qualitative research generally (particularly in the areas of the theory of knowledge production, and interpretation and validity – see Table 1) and more particularly on action research, most especially in its most liberatory forms e.g. PAR. The belief that injustice and subjugation shape the lived world (Bottomore, 1984; Gibson, 1986; Held, 1980; Jay, 1973) and the focus on the forms of domination caused by capitalism and industrialisation, gave common cause between critical theorists and practitioners of the more 'radical', socially aware forms of action research, particularly as both stressed the imperative of taking action to reduce oppression and inequality.

Critically informed inquiry generates a form of knowledge that results in and grows out of the liberation of those generating the knowledge; it is

simultaneously knowledge based in action and action based in knowledge. It is only through this dialectical process of action and reflection that the praxis of critical theory – or , to use Freire's term, conscientization – can be achieved[42] (Brydon-Miller, 1984:79) .

Comstock summarises the goal of critical social science, applying critical theory to social science and its research processes:

> A critical social science must directly contribute to the revitalization of a moral discourse and revolutionary action by engaging its subjects in a process of active self-understanding and collective self-formation. In this way, science becomes a method for self conscious action rather than an ideology for the technocratic domination of a passive populace. (Comstock, 1994:626)

Critically informed inquiry is overt about the political nature of any research activity, it requires 'the involvement of the researchers in the subjects' political activity' (Comstock, 1994:637), creating researchers with a more open and transparent commitment to a social justice agenda. In this way as researchers our personal commitment to social change becomes part of the inquiry.

> Our convictions can now become central and mutually acknowledged components of the research process, and the research process itself can be seen and evaluated in terms of its ability to generate broad community participation and on its political, social and economic impact. (Brydon-Miller, 1984: 80)

A form of action research known as critical action research (CAR) has embodied many of the ideas of the critical theorists in an action research practice. This is described by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2000) as being committed to bringing together a broad social analysis consisting of:

o The self reflective, collective self study of practice (praxis)
o The way language is used (discourse)
o Organisation and power in a local situation
o Action to improve things.

CAR brings together the social analysis of the critical social science tradition that reveals the disempowerment and injustice created in industrialised societies[43], with a strong commitment to participation. Typically CAR includes a mix of participants, including all those with an interest in the area of action and inquiry (e.g. CPC, Tewkesbury Older People and Children's Commission projects, see *Practice Accounts*). Networking is important in a CAR project in recognition of the belief that change and innovation requires broad based support.

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[42] This PhD process of knowledge generation is part of my own emancipation, my self liberation.
[43] More recently CAR has taken account of experiences of oppression other than just social class and has included disadvantage attributable to gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability.

For example: the Tewkesbury project started by drawing together the sponsoring group to map the organisations of and working for older people in the area. The research team then contacted these organisations to invite their participation in and support for the research. Similarly groups may seek support from others to help inform, initiate and sustain changes and improvements.

For example: the CPC working groups included council officers and expert professionals as well as local residents, (see *Practice Accounts*).

Kemmis and McTaggart identify two criticisms of CAR; one that it can be viewed as a 'dangerous' vehicle for importing 'radical' ideology into social settings. This view suggests that CAR risks making participants dependent on 'radical theorists', denying that self-understanding alone can constitute a source of critical self-reflection and emancipation – and in this way could act as yet another vehicle for the imperialism of academic (patriarchal) discourses over participants' own ways of describing and engaging their own experience. Their second criticism is that CAR can be criticised as a "romantic" aspiration; overemphasising people's willingness and capacity to participate in programmes of reform. I'm not aware of a study of CAR projects that would enable one to comment on the validity of these criticisms. I can however see that they might form the basis of a set of 'cautions' for CAR practitioners looking to evaluate their own practice and I have used them to question my own practice in projects i.e. do we all share the same reforming goals, am I pursuing this at the expense of participants' individual and collective goals?

Examples from my practice accounts of applying 'cautions'.
Re dependency on radical theorists:
DUG - Before the cooperative inquiry only one participant had been active in challenging the health system, however it was the group which shared experiences and developed self understanding[44]. As facilitator I added contextual information. Group members have since gone on to self organise to influence services.
Governance – timebank members already owned the values of reciprocity and mutuality. The cooperative inquiry enabled them to apply these to their own organisation.

Re people's willingness to participate in reform:
CPC – a wide range of desire existed in the group (see *Practice accounts*), which I worked with transparently.
Governance – the researcher's aims were aligned with those of the group, and the group's agenda followed as a priority, only then coming back to our sponsor's agenda. This was sustained by a constant process of checking.

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[44] As a practitioner I cannot enlighten group members, they are, or are not enlightened or empowered in their own terms, as Habermas asserts (1974:40).

LGA – the research team experienced enormous frustration due to limits of LGA commitment to some areas of change 'needed'. This commitment varied between workers on the ground and the senior management. Facilitator team process helped to surface this issue and work with it at the client's pace.

How critical theory informs the practitioner
A familiarity with these theories, which seek to explain the social construction of experience, knowledge production and identity formation, seems to me to form a basis for understanding both the positions of the participants in our inquiry groups and that of ourselves as inquirers (and as people) – that is that we are all historically and socially situated and the effects of this situatedness.

Gramsci[45] (1971) and Habermas (1974, 1979) both urge the practitioner to be self critical. Goodson (Goodson, 1997) noted that the meanings researchers garner from their work are insidiously shaped by a number of factors, including linguistic and discursive factors, which are typically hidden from awareness. And it was this dynamic that Gramsci had in mind when he argued that a critical philosophy should be viewed as a form of *self criticism*. He concluded that the starting point for any higher understanding of self involves consciousness of oneself as a product of power-driven socio-historical forces. And that a critical perspective involves the ability of it's adherents to criticise the ideological frames that they use to make sense of the world.

Gadamer (Gadamer, 1989), recognised that the researcher has these ideological frames or internalised 'affiliations' in the same way as the other research participants do and that these affect the questions we ask as well as how we interpret the responses. He makes the point that the challenge for the researcher/ facilitator is not to shed all of their affiliations or 'horizons' but to become aware of them and to understand their impacts, to become self aware and self critical. And Gadamer sees the hermeneutic act of interpretation as the 'fusion of horizons'. In this way hermeneutics is itself a form of action, a way of keeping the conversation going, (as is action research), and conversation is
> the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood (Rorty, 1979: 389).

As researcher/ facilitators we live our lives within structures of meaning which we have not necessarily chosen for ourselves. We need to unravel the ideological codings embedded in the cultural representations of our everyday experiences (the personal as political). Freire assumes that the

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[45] In his prison writings Gramsci is vitriolic about the hypocritical self-criticism current in fascist Italy at the time of his imprisonment. He also wrote that a critical perspective involves the ability of its adherents to criticise the ideological frames they use to make sense of the world (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000).

interpretive (hermeneutic) process is both an ontological (pertaining to being) and an epistemological (pertaining to knowing) act – that is a process which interprets the world so we become more fully human, and one that offers a method for investigating the conditions of our existence and the themes that shape it. Critical hermeneutics can be said to name the world as part of a larger effort to evaluate it and to make it better, in this way it can be seen to be a 'pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason' (Kincheloe and McLaren,2000:290).

For practitioners, critical thinking offers an analysis of the way our thinking is shaped, and issues a call for self reflexive practice. This praxis should alternate between 'being' the practitioner (researcher), and being a critical and self-critical observer of one's own practice – in this way being both subject and object.

Habermas (1972, 1974) offers insights into the relationship between the individual and the social realms of cognitive and cultural realities, between objective and subjective perspectives, between theory and practice and between explanation and understanding. He writes:

> In a process of enlightenment there can only be participants
> (Habermas, 1974:40)

In this critically informed practice participants can only be enlightened (or empowered) in and on their own terms, and the researcher *must* become a participant in the research.

Stephen Kemmis provides a very helpful description of his journey (since the early 1970s) through the territory of critical action research informed by perspectives from the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas (Kemmis, 2001:91-102). It has provided me with a succinct analysis of Habermas's thinking helpfully linked to action research.

Habermas produced a series of propositions which have contributed to helping me to make sense of self and society and what happens in a project. It seems to me these form legs or piers of understanding upon which an action research practice can stand:

- *The link between 'truth' and 'justice'* – the notion that truth can only emerge when all assertions are open to scrutiny, without fear or favour. Therefore research should seek to be democratic and participative, with mutual understanding and unforced consensus[46]

- *The four validity claims or criteria* – which are *is this utterance comprehensible? Is it true (accurate)? Is it right and morally appropriate? Is it sincerely (or truthfully) stated?* (1979)

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[46] Relates to my constant search for congruency between the research focus and behaviours in the research group, an issue in some projects e.g. CPC, LPT, LGA core team.

- *The theory of communicative action* – privileges a kind of reflection and discussion (*communicative action*) in which we interrupt what we are doing to explore both its dynamics and its value: *It is agreed it meets the four validity criteria*, and *it is action oriented towards mutual understanding.* Habermas identified two features: it *creates mutual understanding* and it facilitates *unforced consensus* about what to do, to which Kemmis (2001) adds it *creates communicative space* – bringing people together around the shared concerns and therefore a shared orientation

- *The substantive theory of system and lifeworld* – Habermas offers a two level social theory that explores the tensions and interconnections between system and lifeworld as two faces of the social world of modernity (1992:26). This is applicable to AR settings when participants (including the facilitator/researcher) have problems when the personal/social/cultural processes that sustain the setting as a lifeworld collide with the processes that characterise the setting as a system (with a system orientation to means-ends)

- *The public political sphere* and the argument for *autonomous public spheres* – Habermas describes a *public political sphere* which has sidelined mutual understanding in favour of a system self-regulated through the steering media of money and power, and which is paying the price in terms of withdrawal of motivation and legitimacy from those systems[47]. Kemmis (2001:97) notes that the 'economic and politico-legal systems have become insensitive to the imperatives of mutual understanding on which solidarity and the legitimacy of social orders depend'. Habermas argues for *autonomous public spheres* in which legitimacy and motivation are owned by the participants. Kemmis posits that grassroots organisations as self-organised groups conducting collaborative action research in system settings (community development, social welfare, education) are examples of autonomous public spheres operating at a local level, sensitising a system to previously ignored or unnoticed effects[48].

To sum up: Critical theory has helpfully built on my interest in individual and social psychology (which was what I suppose drew me to train originally as a social worker) and on my Marxist (and therefore largely economic) analysis of the macro dynamics of structures (class elitism, racism, sexism) and the discourses affecting the micro dynamics of everyday life for me and for the participants I work with as a facilitator of

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[47] Habermas explores these further in his theses of 'uncoupling' of system and lifeworld, and of 'colonisation' of the lifeworld.
[48] CPC is a good example of this in action, see *Practice accounts*.

action research projects. It has offered a more hopeful view than 'orthodox' Marxism of our ability to influence both the way we see the world, and understand and seek to change it without resorting to revolution. It is reassuring in its linking of awareness and reflection (a self critical praxis) *and* the call to take action, an argument for the optimism of the will over the pessimism of the intellect (Gramsci, 1971).

I am aware critical theory is criticised by some for being 'romantic' in its view of the commitment of participants to larger scale change, but my experience has been that the groups I have worked with have usually committed to having a wider (third person) effect in the world as well as their more parochial goals[49]. I believe this, and the criticism of CAR being at risk of reproducing an intellectual 'imperialism' (Kemmis and McTaggart), should make us even more self-critical and aware of our practice. They should not deter us from risking being hopeful about wider change.

Critical theory has given me theoretical foundations for my instinctive knowing that I should be continually aware of myself in action – and I believe my noticing practices point to a way for the facilitator of action research to be self critical and aware in action.

Feminism and action research

Earlier I looked at the influence of feminist writers on my **facilitation** practice, here I explore the value that feminism brings to **action research** generally, and particularly to **my practice** of it.

> Feminism is not merely a perspective (way of seeing) or an epistemology (way of knowing); it is also an ontology, or a way of being in the world (Liz Stanley, 1990:14).

> Without a grounding in feminisms, what would AR liberate us from and transform ourselves and our communities into? (Maguire, 2001:60).

Feminism had an influence on my life long before I 'found' action research. As a woman growing up in the 1960s and 70s the development of the Women's Movement was all around me in the urban areas of Brighton, Bristol, and London in which I was living and working. The democratic and participatory nature of women's consciousness raising groups, support groups for Women's Aid refuges and Women's Centres to which I belonged gave me a firm grounding in non hierarchical forms for learning, decision making, leading, and taking action. Pre coming to CARPP in 1996 I was aware of feminist influences in most aspects of my

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[49] Witness the number of times participants having had a bad experience in the health or social services will campaign for changes 'because I just don't want the same thing to happen to anyone else, so the system has to change'.

life but not particularly aware of a feminist school of research – but then I thought almost all research was the domain of academics, (as opposed to now when I believe it's for everyone)[50].

For me the influence of feminism does more than *just* putting gender into action research, although that in itself feels significant and long overdue. In 1987 Patricia Maguire commented that since the 1970s a worldwide network of education and development practitioners had been using participatory research and that the participatory research community had ongoing debates about the issues facing practitioners, yet it was not until 1981 that Budd Hall asked 'how can participatory research be human-centred, not man centred?' (Hall, 1981:17).

The value that feminism brings to action research has importance for me as a woman and a feminist, and a facilitator of action research; particularly the focus of feminist influenced research on the areas of everyday lived experience, voicelessness, and increasing participation. In this section I identify what in feminist influenced research has influenced my action research practice through looking at the similarities between feminist informed research and action research, and how action research is given added depth by feminist influence.

In writing about action research here, as elsewhere in this thesis, I refer to those versions of action research which have liberatory intent (corresponding to Reason and Bradbury's 'human flourishing', and Kemmis and McTaggart's 'emancipatory' action research), and specifically exclude those versions which call themselves action research but do not have a commitment to social justice. Morwenna Griffiths[51] describes these as 'instrumental versions, which focus on technical improvement with very little reflection drawn from outside sources'. And I note her criticism of 'versions [of action research] calling themselves critical which somehow often manage to look carefully at power without noticing the feminist perspective on power' (Griffiths, 1999). Patricia Maguire was probably not the first to do so when she wrote eloquently about these omissions in 1987 in *Doing Participatory Research – a feminist approach,* and feminist researchers seem to have been pointing to it ever since.

Maguire's chapter in the recent Handbook of Action Research has drawn together the responses from a considerable number of action research practitioners who were asked how feminism informed their work (2001:59-69), and I have drawn on this chapter (as well as other sources) in reflecting on my relationships with action research and feminism and

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[50] I remember in my interview for a place at CARPP Judi Marshall and Jack Whitehead asked me what were my favourite/most influential books. I was very uncertain about the reception I might get but I do remember answering truthfully that it was Susan Griffin's *Women and Nature.*
[51] Email communication: 1999, quoted in Maguire, 2000.

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the territory in which these important approaches come together to create a way of practicing and a way of living for me as a woman, an activist and a facilitator of action research.

I share the journey Ann Martin describes when she writes:

> For me, the connection between feminism and action research begins with the concept of voice as I found it in the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule (1986) and the essays of Audrey Lorde … Many of us (women) have lived the transition from silence to voice and experienced the power gained in that transition … it's only a small step from the experience of finding one's own voice to realizing that this finding of voice, this learning that one does know, applies to everyone. (Martin, email, 17th March 1999, quoted in Maguire, 2001:63).

This section on feminist influences on my action research looks at:
- o Shared core values and issues, feminism and action research
- o How action research learns from feminism; a feminist action research.

Shared core values and issues

In their book *An Introduction to Action Research* Greenwood and Levin express a concern that feminism and action research might be viewed as competing frameworks, and explore the criticism of PAR as androcentric (Maguire, 1987). In stressing the common ground between feminist and action research they stress that they both share 'underlying ethical and political commitments to democracy and social justice' (Greenwood and Levin, 1998), and point out that 'action research is not a theory but an approach to praxis that uses any and all tools that the co-researchers find helpful', and argue for 'more and diverse approaches to meet the endless challenges of inequality and oppression' (1998:181).

There is a south in the north…[52]

There is no universal, unified feminist perspective – that would itself be incongruent with valuing diversity and local knowledge – hence the use of the term *feminisms* (Kemps and Squire, 1997). There are instead a richness of theoretical foundations and varied methodologies (Maguire, 2001). Having said that, core to all of these feminisms is the belief that women all over the world face some kind of oppression or exploitation (even in the relatively affluent north). And feminism takes as read a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains that oppression, *and* a commitment to work individually and collectively in

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[52] In this context of (liberatory) action research the term 'south' has come to mean a state of oppression and exploitation in any geographical location. It challenges our belief that 'all is well at home' in the north and that the 'real' work of liberation is to be done in the rest of the world, commonly referred to as the south or third world by development organisations and government.

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everyday life to end all forms of oppression, whether based on gender, race, class or culture (Maguire, 1987, 2001; Stanley and Wise, 1983).

There are key components of a feminist approach to research which action research shares[53] these are:
- o Critique of positivism
- o Analysis of political economy
- o Analysis of power relations
- o Concern with silencing and voice
- o Focus on transformative praxis
- o Belief that theory and practice, and action and scholarship (Reinhartz, 1992), should not be separated.

Yoland Wadsworth and Kay Hargreaves[54] spelt it out simply and firmly when they wrote:

> Wherever women experience the world – and record their experiences in systematic ways to exchange and together develop theory and improved practice – women can work in ways which approximate a model of feminist research (Wadsworth & Hargreaves, 1991:4).

How action research learns from feminism; a feminist action research

When Maguire(2001:59-69) asked action research practitioners *how, if at all, feminisms had influenced action research as a field*, and *how if at all, had feminisms influenced their work* their replies fell into themes of; gender, multiple identities, interlocking oppressions, voice, and everyday experience. I use these themes here to briefly discuss the importance of a feminist grounding for action research, and make links to my practice.

Gender
Recognising that gender is culturally and historically situated there is a need for gender-responsible research, and this needs to be systematic, otherwise women's perspective is ignored (van den Hombergh, 1993).

> The gender system embeds itself in power structures and institutional and interpersonal relations that translate difference into hierarchy and power asymmetries, positioning man as normal and woman as ab/normal; man as universal and woman as the other. (Maguire, 2001:61) .

A feminist informed action research considers how gender arrangements are constructed, sustained and experienced, changed or ignored (Barrett, 2001; Flax, 1997; Morawski, 1997; Treleaven, 2001; in Maguire,

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[53] I have written earlier in this chapter about the core values of and issues for action research and its family of approaches.
[54] Wadsworth and Hargreaves include a helpful set of criteria for feminist research in their paper *What is Feminist Research?* (1991: 4-5)

2001). The move in feminist scholarship from 'Women's Studies' to 'Gender Studies' has clarified the need for researchers to view themselves and all research participants whether male or female, as gendered persons with a gendered experience, rejecting the notion that only women have gendered lives[55]. Action research can then in its practice 'unsettle' the assumptions and the dichotomies (or binaries) of gendered identities.

Responding to Maguire's question Davydd Greenwood notes that his female students are quicker at learning action research than their male peers and his comments contain a good description of the feminist influenced action researcher. He comments:

> I don't attribute this [learning more quickly] to biology. AR requires the willingness to forego the authority of professionalism and the domination of situations through objectivity and validity tests … I think the experience of being a woman in our society – unfortunately – is good preparation for AR. Learning how to manage without domineering, linking rather than coercing, respecting diversity and otherness rather than imposing sameness are lessons women often learn as a result of being coerced themselves. For a man to become interested in these matters often requires a different trajectory… (Greenwood, email, 22nd February 1999, in Maguire, 2001)[56].

An action research grounded in feminism must consider how the gendered identities and experiences of women and men influence both its research practice and the behaviours and attitudes of its practitioners, requiring a self reflexive practice.

This acceptance of gendered identities has been relevant in my action research practice for me as a woman researcher, including in the ways I practice *with* colleagues – i.e. my expectations that we will have mutually supportive, caring relationships. It has enabled me to better understand the gendered identities of research participants, for example in the Tewkesbury Older People's group where both age and gender stereotyping were factors in the lives of the (male and female) participants, and where as a research team we were aware of age and gender issues when it came to allocating roles and managing assumptions of both our clients (the Health Improvement Partnership) and participants, as the majority of our paid research team were women in their early twenties (see practice account).

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[55] While this may seem obvious to the reader (as it does to this writer) practice in many cases is only slowly following the change of thinking symbolised in the change of name from Women's Studies to Gender Studies.

[56] When he uses 'unfortunately' I understand Greenwood to be expressing a concern that women have had to learn such skills and behaviours because we live in a culture which discriminates against them. One might also consider it unfortunate that men don't more readily learn these behaviours.

I have recently been aware of a particular set of gender and other culturally and historically situated identities when working with members of the Traveller community in a research project designed to look at their health related needs. This included a need to meet with the men and women on separate occasions due to the Traveller culture (too recent to be included in my *Practice Accounts*).

The influences of cultural and social expectations of men and women were also apparent in my work with single parent fathers as part of the Sure Start project with hard to reach groups (see practice accounts matrix), when I needed to maintain an awareness of the gendered identity of participants in both the design of the research and our practice as researchers (e.g. difficulties in reaching single fathers due to very little free time, need to stay aware of single fathers' isolation from their peers, their fantasies that 'women knew how to parent instinctively', their feelings they could not engage with others for advice/sharing experiences for example with mothers at nursery).

Multiple identities
Feminist analysis has identified that gender, class, race, sexuality, and disability are all analytical categories which have 'complex interdependent and simultaneous effects on human behaviour' (Collins, 1991; Dill and Baca Zinn, 1997, in Maguire 2001). As Maguire points out 'The resultant interlocking system of oppression is not additive … but complexly interdependent' These multiple locations and interlocking oppressions 'manifest themselves in the varied ways people name the world and their experience of it' (2001:62).

The categorisation of people by their race, class, gender,(dis)abilities etc means that they will have very different opportunities, choices, inequalities, lifestyles and experiences, and that these will shape the way they view the world (their perspective) and what they identify as significant issues. It requires an awareness and attentiveness from the action researcher to learn how to listen to the people we work with; being aware of who defines the issues (and who are we not hearing from). Staying conscious of the power we carry as facilitators of action research; being aware of how we can so easily reinforce the oppression being experienced, how we can become identified with the systems of domination (hooks, 2000). As Brinton Lykes wrote of her own PAR in Guatemala:

> I have worked with indigenous women who deny that there is sexism amongst indigenous groups … I think for me the tension, contradiction, bind has often been around who defines issues and how I negotiate my power and powerlessness in collaborative work that is constrained by racism, [and] economic violence…
> (e-mail, 18th March 1999).

As a feminist grounded action research practitioner I'm taking into my practice both the theoretical understanding of discrimination and privilege, and the personal, lived experience of it. Both hone my sensing for who is heard, what issues arise easily and what needs a careful drawing out. In groups I have worked with such as the DUG and the Tewkesbury Older People's groups it would have been easy to miss the experience of working class women who had particular issues with being heard by medics, had I not paused carefully and questioned again after others in the group assured me this was not an issue. Additionally in both groups the design of a more 'formal' group time preceded or succeeded by less formal space for conversation enabled different voices and issues to be heard.

My personal experience reminds me of 'who gets noticed' and who is overlooked: As a disabled woman I notice I am likely to be identified as a 'client' by staff in public service organisations before I'm seen as a professional. This happens most obviously in the reception areas of public service organisations. Before I open my mouth I'm a 'client', once I have spoken and the receptionist has heard a middle class accent and I have stated my business I get more eye contact and smiles. I also notice I am more likely than clients to get reassurances if the person I am meeting is delayed. At its most embarrassing I've even been offered tea in front of waiting clients presumably likely to be just as thirsty as I.

Voice and silence
The metaphor of 'voice' is common to feminist and action research. It has multiple feminist uses which include 'talking back' (hooks, 1989), 'a different voice' (Gilligan, 1982), and contesting the voice of authority (Morawski, 1997). For action research foregrounding voice has meant *affecting power relations*:

> To listen to people is to empower them… before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors. (Shulamit Reinharz, 1988: 15, quoted in Way, 1997: 706).

And practitioner researcher Susan Noffke cautions action researchers:

> Regardless of how we see our positions, we do not 'give voice' to those in less powerful positions. Rather, we must see ourselves as part of the process of breaking apart the barriers for speakers and listeners, writers and readers, which are perpetuated through and act to support our privileged positions. (Noffke,1998:10 - 11).

Hence the need for a mindful facilitation practice that keeps an alive awareness of our position, and keeps that awareness under scrutiny while in action in all of the stages of the research; including the planning, contracting, convening, facilitating the group, interpreting, recording, reporting etc.

Action research can learn from the consciousness-raising groups of liberation/ feminist activism of the 1960s and 70s which created a space in which women could speak of and explore their shared and diverse everyday experiences (including those previously considered unspeakable or politically insignificant) and reflect, sense-make and theorise together. Action research should also learn from the not so positive aspects of the consciousness-raising group experience; that of the potential for domination by the white, middle-class if there is an insufficiently complex and in depth analysis of the system (hooks, 2000:27).

Feminism has spoken out about the importance of *relationships and relational practices* (Fletcher, 2001). It is itself built upon the supportive and challenging relationships formed between women, and holds that people break silences, learn, grow and change while in-relationship to others (Miller, 1986). From these 'relationships' and their spaces for 'ordinary talk' (Barrett, 2001: 297) as well as more structured discussion, life history work, information seeking etc. action research participants come to understand their experience is not an isolated one (learning about power relations) whilst appreciating the variety of experiences of others (learning about diversity), and can sense make and theorise together about what is happening to them (have an understanding of the cultural and historical effects), and gain strength to make changes in their individual and collective worlds.

In the case of the Diabetic User Group, this included changes in their individual relationships with treatment providers and carers, and their own and others' relationship with the health system itself through discussions with and presentations to the Local Diabetes Services Action Group and National Service Framework implementation group, and the design of the diabetes audit process and questionnaire (see practice account).

Maguire points out the linkage of gaining voice to the recognition of knowledge as a social construction in the context of human relations is central to feminist and action research. And that feminist grounded action research works to uncover and disrupt the silencing mechanisms, subtle and overt, in knowledge creation and organisational change efforts (Maguire, 2001:63). Recognising that silence may be a deliberately chosen survival strategy (Marshall, 1995; Maguire, 1987; Lykes, 1997) feminist grounded action research affords participants the power and space to decide for or against action, for or against breaking their silence (Maguire, 2001:63).

As a person embarked on the process of gaining my own voice, voice has been an important issue in my life, and both feminism and Marxism (and later critical theory with its combination of psychology and political economics) have offered spaces and support to speak out and be heard, and frames with which to analyse and understand my life

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experience[57]. As an action research practitioner I find that voice is one of the important issues for me in the groups I work with; ensuring I am conscious of my own power, creating the conditions for the otherwise silenced to be heard, and more latterly respecting my own voice as co-participant as opposed to 'neutral' facilitator (see discussion of my early approach to facilitation in *CPC Practice Account*).

Everyday experience
> When we think of what it is that politicises people it is not so much books or ideas but experience (Peslkis, in Weiler, 1991:457).

In the 1960s and 70s many women (including me) turned to their feelings and everyday experience as a source of legitimising and politicising knowledge in consciousness-raising groups and similar fora. Action research and feminist research can both seek to put the voices of the marginalised and muted at the centre of knowledge creation processes through this approach of starting with every day, lived experiences. (Barnsley & Ellis, 1992; Callaway, 1981; Freire, 1970; Lykes, 1997; Tandon, 1981). In action research, as in the Women's Movement, telling the stories of everyday experiences reveals the differences and diversity in the group (learning about each others identity and locations) and opens up the potential for collaboration 'based on the articulation of difference rather than a pretence of sameness' (Weiler, 1991: 468-9). In my own practice facilitating Future Search conferences has taught me that this recognition of diversity is an essential starting point in the search for common ground.

Through starting with stories of everyday experiences of participants it becomes possible to understand the social relations 'in which we participate and to which we contribute, that have come to take on an existence and power over us' (Smith, 1992: 95). In this way the experience of participating in action research can be liberating for participants.

To enable this understanding, feminist grounded action research must have a sufficiently complex analysis (hooks, 2000:27), which can expose the structural and social pressures which are otherwise often hidden. In this way the strategies and programmes developed from action research projects will be based on real-life experience rather than theories or assumptions, and an analysis of issues rooted in how they are actually experienced by the people that they effect (Barnsley and Ellis,1992). In my research examples included here in *Practice Accounts* the Locality Planning Team, Tewkesbury Older People, Children's Commission, and Diabetic User Group are examples of telling stories of everyday experience in order to theorise and better understand one's situation. This led to raised consciousness and increased capacity in

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[57] As has my therapy space, which I describe later in Tracking My Inquiry.

participants to engage with the system to continue to lobby for and influence changes, as well as better proposals for services and informed action.

Power

Both action research and feminist influenced researchers believe aspects of the status quo need to be overturned in favour of more liberating conditions. Feminist researchers advocate democratic social change as necessary to correct the evils of exploitation and oppression 'not just polite conversations about being better people' (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:182).

Both seek to change the power relations, structures, and mechanisms of the social world in which they operate (Maguire, 2001) and of the research process itself. Both share the concept of *co- researchers;* the researcher as participant, and seek to make the process of research congruent with its liberatory intent through the mindful cultivation of a self reflexive practice, with a particular awareness of how the research facilitator's own practice can contribute to dominance or support empowerment (Lather, 1991; Maguire, 2001; Bowes, 1996).

The production of knowledge and whose knowledge counts are issues for feminist and action researchers alike. Feminist researchers particularly have sought to find ways in which the process of knowledge creation can be made explicit in the research process, ensuring the self is present in the text; that feelings, responses, choices and multiple identities are disclosed, clearly locating themselves in the research process. John Rowan calls it 'the refusal to remain anonymous' (Rowan, e-mail 17th March 1999, in Maguire 2001). This struggle to find appropriate methods of representation and interpretation and disclosing of self applies to the researcher and to participants alike -- opening up the conditions of knowledge creation to scrutiny.

I started this learning journey thinking I needed to make my facilitator self invisible, then I travelled through a period of 'now you see me, now you don't'. More recently I have been particularly interested to experiment with ways of journaling and with imaginal writing to find ways in which multiple aspects of my self can be included in the work I do; in the talking-with and in the texts.

To sum up: I have found the core values and ideologies of feminist influenced action research deeply reassuring. Much as other liberatory forms of action research have sometimes provided me with inspiration they have also often disappointed, as the (so often male) hero figures

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show no apparent awareness of issues of gender for themselves, their practice or the people they work with.

For me feminist research takes many of the key understandings from critical theory and adds this fundamental recognition of gender, laying a proper emphasis on the issue of voice and silencing, and working with and through everyday lived experience.

Added to this I have been inspired by the way feminist researchers have made themselves vulnerable by making themselves co-researchers; appearing in the stories and texts as 'real' feeling practitioners with doubts, anxieties, frailties along with their co-researchers. What a refreshing change from the victory narratives we so often hear, which feel closed to both readers and co-researchers in their comparative coldness and certainty.

I agree with Patricia Maguire when she concludes:

> Jointly feminist and action research can be powerful allies in the effort to harness research as one resource in the struggle to dismantle the interlocking systems of oppressions and dominations in our lives (Maguire, 2001:66).

And again ask along with her; without a grounding in feminisms, what would action research liberate us from and transform ourselves and our communities into?

My first person inquiry

The outward work
Will never be puny
If the inner work
Is great.
And the outward work
Can never be great or even good
If the inward one is puny and of little worth.

Meister Eckhart

In the earlier part of this chapter I outlined my approaches to inquiry and my action research practice. In this section I discuss first, second and third person inquiries I have been engaged in over the course of this learning journey; including influences on my inquiry practice and the ways I have worked with first, second, and third person inquiry. I then go on to give details of the ways in which I have tracked my inquiries.

The first thing to say about my first person inquiry is that there'd be no point in doing it if it wasn't for some second or third person effect. By which I mean that I'm not interested in noticing myself other than in the interest of improving my ability to be effective in enabling participation. In this way it's a first person inquiry in service of second and third person inquiries, or in Meister Eckhart's words it's inner work in service of outward work in the hope the outward work will be good, and maybe sometimes even great.

The main focus for this thesis, and my learning journey inquiry here at Bath is a first person inquiry into use of self in my facilitation practice the issues that are most resonant for me and I'm drawn to work with, and the contexts I am drawn to work in.

- o   How my facilitation practice relates to my biography
- o   How aspects of my biography determines who and in what areas I work (power, voice, whose narrative gets heard and valued etc)
- o   How I can stay inquiring in action.

Reason and Bradbury write that 'the primary "rule" in action research is to be aware of the choices one is making and their consequences' (2001: xxvii)[58]. In order to be aware of this process of making choices the action researcher needs to be able to 'observe oneself while observing others' (Bateson, 1984) or, put another way the action researcher needs to develop a first person practice in order to be aware of such choices, their consequences and what has brought them to make them.

> These resonances between the personal and the professional are the
> source of both insight and error. You avoid mistakes and distortions not

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[58] Referring to Lyotard's (1979:81) proposition that the work of art is to look for rules and principles.

so much by trying to build a wall between the observer and the observed as by observing the observer—observing yourself—as well, and bringing the personal issues into consciousness.

M C Bateson. 1984. *With a daughter's eye.*

I wish to stress how important it's been for me to be able to 'mine' the resonances between the personal and the professional (and political) through this first person inquiry practice. Undertaking this mining seeking to avoid the errors and mistakes Bateson refers to, avoiding reproducing in my work that which is degenerative (including negative aspects of cultural and historical situating), and also asking all the time whether what has been experienced as painful or degenerative in the past can offer something generative in the present situation.

<u>For example</u> as class has been significant in my life it raises issues of legitimacy and voice, and I am drawn to work with projects which seek to address social exclusion and developing capacity for increased participation by those whose voices have been muted by the dominant dialogue. It feels crucial for me to be able to connect the 'articulated, contextualised personal with the often hidden or invisible structural and social institutions that define and shape our lives' (Maguire, 2001). As such it raises questions of:

Participation – and creating spaces for inclusion, including processes and forums that allow (enable) engaged dialogue through skilled facilitation. This picks up key issues for me of legitimacy, and working with muted voices
Aspects of self in action – including my use of self: political, psychological and transpersonal
How to do this work with craft – what training fits me for this calling (my learning journey as the work of my PhD) as one who works on the edge, an intermediary at the boundary? How I use myself in my practice mindfully, choicefully?

Or as Patti Lather challenges us 'to develop a kind of self reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions' (Lather 1991:150).

Reason (1988) describes such practices as having the potential to 'free our attention from the constrictions and distortions of past distress, or from political oppression; …or involve exercises that expand our attention into multiple domains of experience'. Next I consider influences on my practice, particularly the noticing practices of Torbert, Bohm and Marshall .

Observing the observer – influences on my first person inquiry practice

For me inquiry is a mixture or melding of the intellectual, the physical and the intuitive – with a spiritual aspect to it too. Perhaps that's why it's quite so difficult to explain, and why some writers have sought to make sense of inquiry practices through named and numbered frameworks or logics (Heron, Torbert). Its also something that does not come without practice; continual, dogged (at times) joyful (at others) practice, which includes noticing how hard or easy it is at any time to practice it – and asking myself gentle questions about that; e.g. 'does it (the ease or difficulty) have significance at any one time?'

Reason describes an aspect of the practice of inquiry as *developing critical subjectivity* (Reason, 1988), so named because it seeks to go beyond the split between subjective and objective knowledge, shifting from an objective consciousness to a quality of awareness he calls critical subjectivity.

> Critical subjectivity is a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary subjective experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and swept along by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process (Reason, 1988:12).

Judi Marshall writes of 'disciplines of inquiry':

> These are open frames rather than rigid behaviour patterns. I seek to pursue them with soft rigour, determined and persistent, but not obsessive (2001:433).

And Bill Torbert writes:

> In order for each of us to discover our own capacity for an attention supple enough to catch, at any moment, glimpses of its own fickleness, we must each *exercise* our attention (2001).

It is also clear to me that this is more than simply an intellectual exercise, as Timothy Pyrch and Maria Teresa Castillo express it:

> To experience that new knowledge is not just a matter of intellect, or the ability to understand metaphors. To hear those quiet sounds...we need to listen with our hearts, to be aware of the 'experiencing', and not just the experiences that happen to us (2001:380).

Bill Torbert and noticing

Bill Torbert has developed a body of noticing and communicating practices, Action Inquiry, that includes

- o   being mindful of purpose and action (The four territories: visioning - the attentional/spiritual territory; strategising - the mental/emotional territory; performing - the sensual/embodied territory; and assessing - the outside world territory), and

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- o identifying the four parts of speech (frame, advocate, illustrate, inquire), and
- o *cultivating a special intention in the emerging present.*

> Action inquiry is a research practice inspired by the primitive sense that all our actions … are in fact also inquiries … and all our inquiries are in fact also actions… Action inquiry studies the internalising and externalising universe in the present, both as it resonates with and departs from the past, and as it resonates with, and potentiates the future (Torbert, 2001).

Bill Torbert's noticing and communicating practices – action inquiry

Bill Torbert has developed a model of inquiry - action inquiry - which include noticing and communication practices. Torbert identifies the four aims of action inquiry as:

1. increasing our own and other's awareness of a shared mission
2. increasing mutuality and internal commitment
3. increasing communication about lack of alignment of individual, group and institution/corporation objectives and actions, and lack of validity of assumptions
4. increasing action towards alignment between personal aims and actions and organisational mission and operations (1995).

Developing these skills/practices requires us to be strongly motivated to becoming aware of ourselves in action in the present. Torbert and Fisher emphasise the sustained commitment needed:
   'We have to feel in our bones that only actions based on truth are good for us, for others, and for our organisations. Developing that feeling is a lifetime journey in its own right' (1995: 39).

Action inquiry strategies to increase/widen awareness include:
- o Noticing differently by taking a '30 minute holiday' from work tasks
- o Listening differently in meetings, using a process of unfocusing ones eyes/softening the gaze in order to listen more intently to the rhythm of speech and exchange – how things are said rather than just the content
- o Two column recording – to capture process and content
- o Journaling
- o Observing for the four parts of speech in others, and practicing using them ourselves
- o Taking group focused initiatives – loosening one's focus on one's own goals alone
- o Using walking/running as a regular opportunity to listen for (and act on) impulses in oneself. (Torbert:2000a)

All of which can contribute to developing 'a continual, silent, impartial observing of your own performance amidst others … it's self overcoming and self transforming – and this is both its cost and its benefit' (2000a:38).

The four territories

Torbert advocates a logic of four 'territories' to enable action inquirers to develop and maintain clarity, and writes that the very essence of developmental action inquiry is to seek to heighten our own awareness, understanding and skilfulness in each of these four territories:

> First Territory - Intentionality
> Our purposes, aims, intuitions, attention & vision – to understand more deeply our intentions and to continually refine them (ask: what are my intentions or goals?)
>
> Second Territory - Planning
> Our tactics, strategies, schemes, ploys & game-plans – to develop plans and strategies that better reflect our aspirations and our changing circumstances (ask: what strategies have I been pursuing?)
>
> Third Territory - Action
> Our behaviour, skills, activities, deeds & performance
> to notice the skilfulness and unskilfulness of our actions so we develop ever more skilful behaviour (ask: what actions have I taken?)
>
> Fourth Territory - Outcomes
> Our results, events, occurrences, consequences, of our actions (or inaction), environmental effects & assessments – to become more aware about the impact of our actions, *to notice how these four areas of experience interact with each other* (ask: what results, if any, have arisen?).

Over time and with practice we come to see ourselves more holistically through observing and working with the interplay between these territories as we enact them. This is not just a reflective after-the-event process but 'becomes a silent listening in the very moments of planning and action' (Torbert, 2000).

The four parts of speech[59]
Torbert claims that 'speaking is the primary and most influential medium of action in the human universe… [and] talk is the essence of action' (1995: 38). This logic exists to support practicing observing the action effects of speaking as we engage together in conversation, on the assumption that asking our questions (our inquiry) is much less likely to be effective if it is not preceded by framing, advocacy and illustration. This practice enables one to attend to the *dynamic process* of conversation, rather than to the *passive content* of the conversation.
> Framing
> Explicitly stating your purpose, the problem and the assumptions you think are shared or not shared
> Advocating
> Explicitly asserting a feeling, opinion, perception or proposal for action

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[59] These categories are based on prior theory and research found in Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1974) *Theory in practice: increasing professional effectiveness*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; C. Argyris (1981) *Reasoning, learning and action*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; D. A. Scon (1983) *The reflective practitioner*, New York: Basic Books; W.R. Torbert (1987) *Managing the corporate dream* , Homewood, IL; Dow Jones-Irwin; W.R Torbert, *The Power of Balance*, Newbury Park, CA, Sage.

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> Illustrating
> Telling a story or giving an example to put 'the meat on the bones' of the advocacy. Helps the listener to orient themselves and motivates
>
> Inquiring
> Asking questions in order to learn from the other.
>
> It is important to be explicit about each of the four types of speech and to interweave them sequentially.
>
> It strikes me that, although this logic concludes with 'inquiring – asking questions in order to learn from the other' the rest of the logic is not very participative, by which I mean it feels like an effective method for communicating 'out' but I question how much it develops the potential for the listener to contribute to a dialogue. Judi Marshall adds signalling/ signposting 'themes and issues' to Torbert's four parts of speech and in doing so gives the listener a greater ability to engage with the content of the advocacy.
>
> *Cultivating a special intention in the emerging present*
> I write about this and how it relates to my own practice below.
>
> *Relatively apolitical but not amoral*
> Torbert's rationale for his action inquiry logics is relatively apolitical, by which I mean he does not appear concerned to raise the practitioner's awareness of their own cultural and historical situatedness and that of the others with whom they come into contact through the practices he advocates. But it is not a practice without values, witness the statement quoted above that 'only actions based on truth are good for us, for others, and for our organisations'. However his writing often presents the practice in what many readers may view as an amoral context – used as a tool for achieving the goals of individuals or organisations without the rider of a need for the goal to be for wider benefit, we assume that either the motivation of the practitioner is deemed irrelevant or is simply assumed to be positive. But in the chapter entitled 'Seeking the Good Life' (1995, 2000) Torbert addresses our concerns and puts the benefits of his practices into the context of the need to address sustainability and the obscene inequalities existing in the world, as Torbert puts it 'doing good work with good friends addressing good questions' (Torbert, 2000: 172).

The aspect of the work of Bill Torbert that has been particularly useful for me (as first person inquirer) has been; *cultivating a special intention in the emerging present* – a first person research practice of noticing which intentionally brings one's attention to one's breathing and then to the surrounding environment (e.g. colours, smells, sounds), then to the sensations in the body (e.g. the feel of the ground under one's feet), to one's feelings (what's going on inside), only then to thinking. What attracts me to Bill's approach is not just it's simple framework but also his delightful humanity when he writes and speaks about it! He is quick to acknowledge his (and our) failings to stay inquiring, to remember to do so. He asks:

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> How may we inquire in the midst of the real-time actions of our daily lives?   ... We immediately discover a fundamental difficulty. *We rarely remember to do so*. Moreover, we don't really know what to do when we do remember. We rarely experience ourselves as present in a wondering, inquiring, 'mindful' way to our own action ... As much as we may like the idea of action inquiry we rarely actively wish to engage subjectively in *first person research/practice* in the present. At least that's what I've found (Torbert, 2001:250).

In this way he comes to resemble for me a good and persistent meditation teacher. I've no doubt that this is one of the strongest reasons that I have been drawn to use his thinking as a starting point for my own practice (and it's stopped me from being too repelled, reacting too much against his developmental framework[60] – which still feels too much like a potentially oppressive hierarchy to me). My own practice combines elements of Torbert's noticing practices and also those of Bohm, which I describe next.

David Bohm and attending fully

David Bohm describes methods for what Mary Catherine Bateson calls 'observing the observer' and exposing our assumptions based on respecting the connections between feelings and bodily reactions, self perception of thought (proprioception)- or thought aware of itself in action.
He writes:

> In the process of thought there should be the awareness of that *movement*, of the *intention* to think, and of the *result* which that thinking produces. By being more attentive, we can be aware of how thought produces a result outside ourselves. And then maybe we could also be attentive to the results it produces within ourselves. Perhaps we could even be immediately aware of how it affects perception (1996:79).

Bohm explores an awareness that can be cultivated to cut through the confusion produced 'by the weight of collective opinion, ill-founded representations, and the illusion of the observer and the observed'. He suggests that it is possible to 'suspend' assumptions, and acting on them or censoring them; experiencing the effects of the thoughts (anger, irritation, fear) but in a way which makes them visible to observation by the self, rather than being identified with the feelings. In other words,

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[60] Drawing on earlier work, particularly the work of Loevinger, Bill Torbert has developed a Developmental Framework which seeks to characterise the stages of development of managers through describing 'frames' including Opportunist, Diplomat, Technician, Achiever, Strategist and Magician. This includes a description of the governing frames (or characteristics – e.g. for the Diplomat expectations rule interests) of each stage and their focus of awareness (e.g. for Diplomat it would be socially expected behaviour). This framework appears in *Personal and Organisational Transformations.* Fisher D and Torbert W.(1995) and can be seen to be itself evolving in Torbert's later publications.

suspending an assumption means neither repressing it, nor following it through, *but attending fully to it.*

This is similar to Buddhist practices of noticing and letting go, and also in my experience to the active practice of being engaged in therapy, by which I mean both the shared in-the-session experience with one's therapist and also the practice one is developing oneself when out of the therapy session of attending fully to oneself in order to be choiceful about how/whether to act on feelings and thoughts, rather than be 'identified with them' (to use Bohm's term). It is for this reason I believe that a commitment to one or other of these similar disciplines is an important grounding for any but the most mechanical facilitator.

I found Bohm's ideas inspiring, it seemed to me that he was advocating developing a noticing space, a time/place (actually both and neither of these) in which one could receive and notice data (feelings, sensations, thoughts) and inquire into what is arising in oneself without acting on it or censoring it. I realise that Bohm is describing a process of noticing that relates to thoughts and feelings in a Dialogue situation but I could not see why this was not transferable to a noticing practice for wider inquiry. After all it offers me a set of disciplines: *notice, don't censor, track.*

I have come to think of this practice as creating a noticing space, pouch or pocket in front of me (rather marsupial-like) in which I can inquire through noticing and tracking, which then enables me to question where what is arising in me belongs, and how it relates to me – is this my stuff, your stuff, systemic stuff? Does it have meaning for me, us or them and therefore how I should act when facilitating. I prefer to use the term 'noticing' to Bateson's term 'observing' as observing feels more passive, and although my 'noticing' can be calm and quiet it's never passive. I say more about my noticing practices later in this chapter.

This practice (cultivating a noticing pocket in which to have a special attention on the emerging present), has crystallised for me particularly in the period 2001-2 as part of my PhD journey – not least the sense that it is legitimate for me to take-in other people's ideas about inquiry, assess them critically, add what I want from them to my own ideas and understanding, and produce a (pragmatic) practice which is very much my own but honours its influences. I consider this to be an outcome of my Pig and Deer moment, and it links to *constructed or connected knowing* in the terms of Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986). That is a position which allows both outside knowledge to influence my thinking, *and* which values my own subjective knowing, using my sense of connectedness and critical judgement to assess for myself what I wish to take in and give out.

> In 2002 I wrote the first draft of this methodology section and wrote:

I note that it is only in the process of writing this paper and the resulting dialogue with my supervisor, that I can step assertively and in a relaxed way into claiming and naming my unique practice.

Judi Marshall and 'noticing the self noticing'

So using what I take from Bill Torbert's thinking I aspire to *keep myself present* (both directed and open) and with a *strong intentional awareness*, performing arcs of inner and outer inquiry (Marshall) and processing what I detect in this noticing space (Bohm). Not so different I think from the practice Judi Marshall describes when she writes:

> A key notion for me is that of engaging in inner and outer arcs of attention and of moving between these… seeking to notice myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out and so on. I pay attention for assumptions I use, repetitions, patterns, themes, dilemmas, key phrases that are charged with energy or that seem to hold multiple meanings to be puzzled about, and more. *I work with a multi dimensional frame of knowing; acknowledging and connecting between intellectual, emotional, practical, intuitive, sensory, imaginal and more knowings.* (2001:433 Emphasis added).

Judi Marshall writes about the process of *noticing the self noticing*, something I believe I need to almost ritualise so as to avoid the forgetting that Torbert refers to, or at least to minimise the forgetting:

> Tracking is partly judging the quality of my inquiry practice in the moment. I know the signs of engaged inquiry: I feel physically alert and multi-sensing, I breath fully, I think/feel, I am agile as I move within and between inner and outer arcs of attention, I 'find'/experience ways of speaking which both question openly and pursue. And when I have been thus engaged for a while, I may rest back and notice that I am thoroughly tired, almost immobilised …. And so inquiry involves oscillations of whole-person movement, bringing as much attention as possible into the states and dynamics engaged (2001:436-437).

She also identifies the rhythm between action and reflection as adding itself a dynamic:

> I juggle and balance and move emphasis between inner and outer arcs of attention, seeking an alive interplay, a generative, appropriate combination and dynamic… The rhythm and discipline of moving back and forth between action and reflection … seems to generate its own momentum, and so to enhance different forms of attention and of behavioural expectation (2001:434).

These practices of noticing, of holding my inquiry about my self, the group, the content etc, are multi dimensional and changing. I often find that the inquiry I 'agreed' with myself at the beginning of a session changes form as a meeting progresses and unexpected material and connections emerge. I have learnt to hold my intent 'lightly', not to grasp

too tightly to my original sense of what's important, to allow the focus to be emergent. Again Marshall describes her practice:

> Inquiry involves intent, a sense of purpose. This may be held tacitly. There may be multiple intents, in accord or discord. Often intents unfold, shift, clarify or become more complex. Working with this aspect of inquiry is vital to self reflective practice (2001:435).

Attending to where things are situated: Wilber's framework

In my practice I have at times (1998 –1999 mainly, the Unicorn moment) found it helpful to use Ken Wilber's 4 Quadrants of the Kosmos framework as a simple map of inner/outer, individual/community checking of purposes or 'who does this stuff belong to' type questions. This was directly applicable in my facilitation practice. Examples of me using the framework in practice are included (implicitly) in the *Practice Accounts*. See also my questions to myself using my noticing pocket, mentioned earlier in this chapter.

> In 1999 I wrote:
>> I am using Wilber's 4 quadrants of the Kosmos to check and focus my awareness of the internal/external, the individual/collective domains, the context in which I'm developing a common world space. It informs my reflective practice and the design of my facilitation. It also mirrors and explains my commitment to working increasingly with the transpersonal in my work, and claiming a place for this in the political contexts in which I operate.

It would be true to say that my interest in this framework is restricted to using its 'headlines' as a useful mantra – asking in the moment *where does this (material that is coming up) belong, to an individual or the collective, to the interior or exterior'*. And for asking myself *am I attending to all these aspects of what's going on here, and if not why is that?*

Or as Wilber puts it, in his flamboyant way:

> We want to touch the truth in all these quadrants. And we begin to do so by noticing that each speaks to us with a different voice. If we listen carefully, we can hear each of these voices whispering gently their truths, and finally joining in a harmonious chorus that quietly calls us home (1996:104).

Wilber has a (typically) complex and highly developed theory about multiple connections which can be interpreted through his framework – as its name *Four quadrants of the kosmos* would suggest. It is primarily the individual/ collective, interior/exterior dimensions that interest me at this time, although the framework acts as a useful reminder to check for cultural and historical interpretations and situatedness.

Interior/Individual intentional 'I' self/mind subjective	*Exterior/Individual* behavioural 'it' individual behaviour/ brain objective
'we' *Interior/Collective* Cultural Inter-subjective	'it' *Exterior/Collective* Social (systems, structures) Inter-objective

Figure 3. Wilber's four quadrants of the kosmos (1996:71).

It's worth noting that Wilber's diagram of his framework shows hard lines between the quadrants, I think its more realistic to ask where something feels to have its first home, rather than to expect things to belong firmly in one place or the other. In fact often the most interesting aspect is the way that material/issues arising in a group belongs in more than one domain, and the relationship it has between domains, including the resonances and mirroring from one place in the system to another described in the *Practice Accounts*.

I have written here about influences on the micro practices of my inquiring. I go on to write about how that practice evolved.

How my first person inquiry practice evolved

In this section I write about how I am inquiring, both as a facilitator and as a person pursuing a first person inquiry into my professional practice (of facilitation). In it I write about how it feels to unpack my noticing practices – how difficult this is, and I consider the charge of self indulgence and counter it with my belief that these first person practices enable me to be more effective as a facilitator in service of projects which work to have positive social effect. At the end of this section I identify some qualities for my inquiry practices.

I then go on to briefly describe how I use loops or arcs of attention and methods of tracking data and how these practices have evolved over the period of my learning journey and continue to evolve.

I recap why I need these practices as facilitator and inquirer as an introduction to more detailed sections on a particular method of inquiring in action (creating a noticing pocket), and tracking methods (including writing as reflection and finding a writing form).

I think one of the reasons I always find it difficult to unpack my practices of inquiry for someone else to understand is that to lay them out, as I have done here, seems to be making such a huge claim to being continually aware and reflective – so let me say here and now that these are the practices I aspire to, the practices I practice to perfect (hah!). Every day I fall short of my ideal, and one of the learnings from this journey is to be more kind to myself as I fall short of perfection, and to treat the process of practicing to be more inquiring as an inquiry in itself. Over the years I have come to understand better what helps and hinders me in this quest, what I can do to affect that and what I think I may just need to accept. By saying this however I don't mean to be or sound complaisant, but 'What if this is as good as it gets?' (to quote Jack Nicholson[61]), I do hope not.

I have had the privilege of working with and observing some sublime and very different facilitators over the last ten years[62] and they provide a continuing inspiration for me to continue to practice at my practice. One of the loops of inquiry I have pursued in this period of the learning journey has been to ask these role models to describe to me their own micro inquiry practices which support their facilitation practice and in struggling to write this chapter I take heart from the fact that none of them have found it easy to communicate the fine grain detail.

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[61] *As good as it gets.* 1997. Directed by James L Brooks; screenplay by Mark Andrus and James L Brooks.

[62] These include Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, Joanna Macy, and Meg Wheatley.

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Examples: A conversation with Joanna Macy in June 2000: she talking of the facilitator as guide[63]; the need to have done significant amount of work on our own (despair) before working with others; the 'bifocal attention' a facilitator needs as she engages herself in what's going on in any exercise, staying alert to herself as well as staying alert to the group. Macy's assertion that because the neural net/web exists as facilitators we do not need to create the connectedness, only take away the blocks. Recognising the radical insecurity in ourselves as facilitators (the feeling we need to 'know') and instead speak from within. And most significant of all for me her assertion that as facilitators 'we have been training for this work all our lives' (personal communication, June 2000). Macy offered me the image of sitting back (as facilitator) in the lap of the Tibetan goddess Tara. In Ireland shortly afterwards I wrote:

> The pre-born Tara, at the moment before her birth; shape shifting, land forming goddess – who can hold it all together with her awareness and presence – relieving me of my (unequal) struggle. So I can practice sinking back into her lap. Just being (Journal: August 2000).

The goddess Tara

Later in 2004 talking with Margaret Wheatley about facilitating working in circle: she spoke of the need to be aware of a drift towards being judgemental and to listen connectedly accepting the arising of self, and

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[63] Macy talks more about the role of the facilitator in her book Coming Back to Life. Joanna Macy, Molly Young Brown. Coming Back to Life. 1998. New Society Publishers.

stressed that 'noticing the self is essential to the power to change one's own behaviours', describing her practice as being 'similar to meditation' (personal communication, February 2004).

And this is as close as I could get to detailed descriptions – I began to feel that pressing for more detail became very personal and intrusive. I still wonder whether most facilitators are unaware of their noticing practice and so when pressed are at a loss to give a description.

I have come to believe that we all need to create our own form of reflective practice, just as we can all meditate in an infinite variety of different ways – however both the meditation and the inquiry practices need to include some common core values and qualities, in the case of inquiry practices it seems to me these should include an awareness of self as well as an awareness of the other.

What is all this noticing for?

> I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions...By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:737).

A criticism I am aware I risk provoking is that of being overly self interested, self obsessed or neurotic as I commit time and energy to reflective writing, inquiring conversations and psychotherapy[64]. I too have wondered what came first and what has been my primary motivation: the desire to better understand my practice and its potential to have positive effect in the world, to improve my practice as a facilitator and to make a contribution to the first person inquiry practices of other facilitators; *or* my desire to better understand myself.

I can only offer some observations:

Firstly that social justice has always been a strong driver in my life, often at considerable personal cost and from a very young age (I was demonstrating against the Springboks tour of the UK and against the war in Vietnam at the tender age of 14). I have been an activist for as long as I can remember – somehow caring about social (and latterly environmental) justice has got into my bones and has been nurtured by the influences of feminism and Marxism. There have been huge advantages to being born in the 50s as I was of an age to participate in consciousness raising groups as well as the campaigns for a woman's right to choose, reclaim the night, anti apartheid and gay rights – this is despite the sense in the Thatcher years, and since, that many of the freedoms we campaigned for and won have been taken away again or tempered.

Secondly without an acute and well articulated understanding of 'where I come from' I deny myself (and others) access to my own lived

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[64] See *Tracking My Inquiry* for more details of these practices.

experience of being born a woman in a working class family in the UK in the 1950s, of the struggles for inclusion and legitimation, of the passions that drove my activism and campaigning, and of the cultural, social and political context in which I and my family were situated. These experiences give me a genuine understanding of and empathy with others without voice.

Thirdly that it is the discipline of these first person inquiry practices which enables me to keep my values as explicit and enacted in my work as I can make them[65]. Otherwise my anger and grief (at injustice) would undermine my effectiveness and deny an arena for my compassion. I need the discipline to enable me to feel outraged, and to 'out' my rage at injustice through taking action. Maybe it doesn't matter which came first as long as the first person inquiry is *in service of* the second and third person inquiries which have the potential for positive social effect.

As Joanna Macy, writer and Buddhist scholar says:
> That dead argument: 'Is it more important to work on yourself or Is it more important to be out there on the barricades?' Those are such stupid arguments, because actually we have to do it all. And as we do it together, it gains momentum and becomes more self-sustaining.

In a recent conversation with Mike Pedler (Revans Institute) about first person inquiries he expressed his concern that they can become purely self indulgent personal memoiring (personal communication 2003). This has concerned me too, particularly in the early years of this learning journey; wanting to include my self and yet needing to be assured it was more than writing autobiography[66]. Reassurance has come for me through reading and listening to the work of others (bel hooks 2000; Ella Bell 2001[67]; Morwenna Griffiths; Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis 2000, 2002 ; Arthur Frank 1997, 2002 ; Andrew Sparkes 2002 and others) whose judicious and courageous use of self has illuminated their second and third person inquiries and added hugely to the knowledge created. It has also come from learning for myself how much better I work if I 'join up' my Self and the work: My insights are of a greater quality, I put myself genuinely into the role of co-inquirer, of learner together with my clients, and in this way the learning for all of us appears to be greater.

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[65] For as long as I can remember I have wanted to be able to integrate my self and my practice in ways that enable me to use responsibly my life experience and my experience of the world, the way in which I know as well as what I know. I still remember going for my first tutorial as a student social worker in 1979; I went with the expectation that we would be talking about the implications of our life experience for our social work practice – both in a political and a personal psychological sense. I was rapidly disappointed. Despite being rated as the best social work training in the country at the time and having Family Therapy and group work as strengths, Bristol University firmly separated the (valued) transferred formal knowledge of the academy from the lived experience of its students.

[66] See section on autoethnography and self narrative *and Appendix E.* for more on drawing on self in writing for wider social effect.

[67] HAR

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See also '*My writing and better understanding the world*' for an exploration of autoethnographic writing and Appendix E *Telling stories, telling lies* for the argument for placing the self in the text and the vulnerable text.

So it feels as if there are qualities identified in what I've written here for my inquiry practices: Persistence, lack of complaisance, willingness to engage as a learner oneself, awareness of self, courage, judicious judgement, a commitment to positive social effect, as well as the discipline of sustaining the micro practices of inquiry.
I could go on, but I'd just like to acknowledge that there are other qualities (Lincoln, 1995; Lather 1993; Reason and Bradbury, 2001) that one could test a first person inquiry against, but these are mine. Patti Lather writes of 'shifting validity from a discourse about quality as normative to a discourse of relational practice', and
Reason and Bradbury (2001: 11-12, 447-455) identify five validity and quality questions, linked to the five characteristics of action research which they identify in the Handbook of Action Research (fig 1.). These are questions of: significance, relational practice, plural ways of knowing, outcomes of practice, and emerging and enduring consequence.

I find that I need to use a combination of methods to support my inquiry. Some are more immediate and discreet and consist of internal loops or arcs of attention (Marshall, 2001) which are described here as part of 'creating a noticing pocket' or space in which I can foster an alertness/awareness of what is arising in me as I facilitate and can notice and gently interrogate[68] whatever is arising in order to understand where it comes from and what it can tell me about my facilitation at that moment and in that particular situation (an internal loop of attention), and in which I can ask questions of myself about what's arising in the group/situation. The extension of this (external or outer loops of attention) is to inquire of and with others about what I and they notice or to pursue a cycle of action to test my developing sense-making[69]. The CARPP/Human inquiry model of action research emphasises the importance of having some type of self reflexive practice or first person inquiry at the core of any inquiry.

As Greenwood and Levin observed when writing about the Human inquiry model of AR developed by Peter Reason and colleagues at the University of Bath:
> This desired kind of consciousness is appealing because it involves self awareness and self-reflectiveness, living in a fluid world of complex and

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[68] Part of the learning over the last ten years has been to keep the interrogation gentle; not to grasp whatever is arising by the throat and slam it against the wall in my eagerness to understand what's going on and so feel more in control.
[69] Judi Marshall writes eloquently about her own attentional disciplines, including inner and outer arcs of attention, in her chapter 'Self-reflective Inquiry Practices' in the Handbook of Action Research.

dynamic patterns and forms along with the use of the imagination, the emotions, and the intellect together as tools. Human inquiry leads the inquirer not just to conduct research differently but to live in the world as a different kind of person... By stressing that human inquiry is a discipline and a practice, and that the researcher has the characteristics of a learner, Reason (1994) stresses that AR involves all participants in a process of self-discovery through others (1998:208-209).

Other methods which I use are more external and are using the inquiry tracking methods described later in this chapter. These include two column note keeping (keeping contemporary records in which I can record my feelings and sensations in a situation along side the action-type notes I keep in meetings), this enables me to have a simultaneous record to use at the time or revisit later. Still others happen after the event and so are more distanced (in time) as reflective practices and include 'writing as reflection' and working with dream material, as well as reflections with other team members and my CARPP tutorial group.

I list here the range of methods I have used during the period covered by this learning journey (I explain these in more detail in this chapter when I describe Tracking my Inquiry):

- Notebooks – two column note keeping
- Writing and experiments in writing form
- Writing as reflection and inquiry ; making a different future through restorying my past and writing my desired futures
- Therapy sessions and notes
- Dream material, social dreaming[70] and dream journals
- Journal
- Case studies
- Writing for and discussions with my CARPP tutorial group (recorded and transcribed)
- Discussions with my PhD supervisor(s)[71]
- Sharing and reflecting on writing about projects with co-facilitators and colleagues
- Inquiring conversations – specifically designed to elicit feedback on my practice as facilitator[72]
- Creating the noticing 'pocket' or space in front of me, which enables me being aware of and questioning my reaction to what I see and hear.

At the start of my learning journey I used a smaller number of methods; I tended to keep opportunities which were not specifically set up to look at my professional practice, such as my therapy sessions, separate from

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[70] I use the social dreaming matrix process sometimes when working with groups, particularly if we are in a residential setting.
[71] I have had two different supervisors over the period of my studies at CARPP.
[72] See Chapter 5 for detail.

my work reflections, and rather resented it when work 'intruded' into what I then considered to be purely a personal space. Similarly when my writing started to include different forms such as poetry or stories I failed to recognise (in the sense of legitimating) the multiple layers of meaning immediately, and was initially reluctant to share them with my tutorial group or supervisor, let alone my work colleagues. And it was only much later again that I was prepared to share writing in more experimental forms with clients as a way of making sense of the work we were doing together (for an example see references to 'Working with my passions through the Joining Up project' in LGA Practice account).

It is now quite usual for me to practice several of these methods concurrently when working on any project; I cannot imagine working without sustaining a 'noticing pocket' [73] in which to reflect in the moment, and I regularly (twice a week) take time with my therapist to reflect on dream and other material which often has connections to my work or wider issues for my practice, in addition I record what feel to be significant dreams in my journal. I use writing to explore problems or issues arising through projects and so inquire about them, myself and with others.

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[73] Explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Some more detail about some of these inquiry practices and how I use them

My first person inquiry is in service of my practice as a facilitator, particularly as a facilitator of action inquiry. I need a scanning attention to ask of my facilitation practice:
- o How can I stay inquiring in action?
- o How does my facilitation practice relate to my biography?
- o How this connection to my biography determines who and in what areas and issues I work with (power, voice, whose narrative gets heard and valued etc)
- o How do I then bring the 'best' of me to the task?

So what does it look like when I'm inquiring?
I've made claims for my practices, told some history of how they've developed and the way the thinking of others has influenced me. In this section I'd like to say more about my in-the-moment noticing practice (a *moving around* dynamic; creating a noticing pocket, loops/arcs of attention).

My practice has a 'moving around' dynamic to it

My practice involves cultivating a capacity to move around, part of my form is an unwillingness to be in one place only[74]. By which I mean:
- o Being nimble with my micro practices of noticing
- o Shifting between the two possibilities (of the here and now and the possible future) as the work requires a practice of looking at intersections all the time; working here and now with what's allowed by people's energy, mind sets and the immediate context, *and* holding an awareness of the possible other, offering the opportunity to engage with creating alternative futures – political work that challenges the cultural and historical situatedness
- o Cultivating multiple ways of knowing and associative knowing, ensuring that I'm accessing all the information I can in order to do the work; keeping aware of symbolic, imaginal stuff that can arise in the protected reflective space of my noticing pocket, as well as the more 'political' material regarding historical and cultural frames.

This associative knowing results in something akin to what Clifford Geertz called a 'thick description'[75] (1973), meaning I build up layers of

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[74] I find Judi Marshall's term 'moving around' rather helpful – offered in response to my description of what I do (personal communication, 2001). I suppose because in my mind's eye I have this image of me as a rodent with its nose and whiskers alive and constantly moving to smell, taste and sense the vibration of what's going on around it.
[75] 'Thick description' is a term coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz to describe the layered, rich and contextual description of an event or social scene.

information – in this case taken from different sources such as symbols and archetypes, images or sensations, provoked by place or landscape, political linkages, felt sensations (in the body) etc. By working with these in combination, either in the moment or through writing, drawing etc I develop a richer, 'thicker' sense of what I 'know'.

Another way of thinking of associative knowing is as knowing being concatenated (Kaplan, 1964) or linked together (rather than hierarchically connected), creating a pattern in order to theory-build and understand, creating a dense web of knowledge drawn from different sources of knowing, composed by linking several relatively independent parts (rather than by logically deducing an explanation). A concatenated theory with its many independent sources provides a multi sided, complex picture of the subject matter.

Creating and sustaining a noticing pocket

My noticing pocket practice is really hard to explain, it would almost be easier to draw you a picture, but then that could not capture the disciplines involved in developing and maintaining these awarenesses (I think of it as a marsupial-like pouch). This is my attempt to explain:

i. How I create the conditions for the noticing – I do this by pushing out a space around me in my imagination, holding the pocket created in this way in front of and around me. I liken this to a practice I learnt when I was studying chi gong and tai chi which involved gathering one's energy or *chi* and tracking it as one moved it across and over one's body. In the same way I can visualise and feel the space I create around me. I can push out to create enough space to enable me to attend to what is arising in me and in the group.

ii. How I sustain the noticing – I do this by keeping a physical reminder, the equivalent of a knot in my hankie; I try to ensure I keep my feet flat on the floor, or my hands on my knees. If this is not practical I look to create a reminder through an awareness of something in the room or surroundings to keep me focused softly on the noticing[76]. I liken this last aspect of keeping a soft focus to an exercise I learnt when first meditating, to help me to keep letting go of thoughts as if they were leaves floating down a stream in my mind's eye. When Bill Torbert (2001) describes similar noticing practices he speaks of developing and sustaining multiple awarenesses including one's contact with the earth or furniture etc, what is going on around one in the room, and what is arising in one's mind, as well as the 'learning how to learn[77]' awareness that comes as an occasional bonus (Torbert, CARPP seminar July 2004).

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[76] A bit like the princess and the pea I think: I know who and what I am (a princess) because of a connection to the physical world (the pea). The noticing of this (the discomfort) keeps me alert and, as in the fairy tale stops me from falling asleep!
[77] Triple loop learning (Flood and Romm).

iii. What I am noticing – I am looking/listening/sensing for what's arising in me (how am I feeling physically and emotionally, constantly asking what are my reactions, where do they come from, are they relevant here and now?); noticing and trying to understand/get a sense of what's going on in the room (physically, verbally); also what's going on in the room more subtly (taking the emotional and energetic temperature).

iv. How I check the noticing – by questioning myself and my assumptions, checking with my co-facilitator in the moment or as soon as possible afterwards, looking for corroboration from people in the room (does someone else look scared/excited/hot etc?) Or checking explicitly: 'I'm noticing this, it could be *us* or it could be *me*, is anyone else feeling/noticing anything?'

v. How I support myself – I mentioned that I had asked others who facilitate about their internal practices as part of my inquiry. When I asked Joanna Macy she described her sense of connection to the goddess which supports her when facilitating. I have drawn on Joanna's image and for the last two years have adopted the practice of visualising sitting back in the lap of the goddess Tara as I work. I find this a supportive image of being cared for and focused on my self care.

This section has attempted to explain why I developed and sustain a noticing practice as a first person inquiry to underpin my facilitation practice. I have described these practices and how I use them here and more evidence of this practice–in–action can be found in the *Practice Accounts* chapter. The next section focuses on my use of second person action research.

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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).

I have described second person inquiry earlier when writing about the different forms of action research , here I remind us of its form, write briefly of the way my second person research practices have evolved and then go on to describe co-operative inquiry in a little more detail.

It has been said that speaking-and-listening-with-others is the quintessential second-person research/practice (Reason). In some ways second person action research is the most straightforward to understand; it is people coming together to inquire into questions of mutual interest[78]. Unlike first person inquiry it's not a solitary discipline, nor is it a system-wide inquiry as third person action research can be.

As I have written earlier, this thesis is not intending to focus on any one second person inquiry method or project. However the work I do often involves working on second person inquiries, frequently these are nested inside a wider third person inquiry.

For example the consultant team plus the sponsoring client in the LGA Joining Up project[79] formed a group which met regularly throughout the three years of the project and this group could be identified as a community of inquiry undertaking a second person inquiry into our practice in the context of this project. The wider Joining Up project itself was a third person inquiry, as it involved a cross section of a whole organisation in inquiring into how to embed an awareness of social policy issues and processes into an organisation with a primary focus on physical science and an operating mode of regulation.

Having said that second person inquiry is not a solitary pursuit I need to also say that participants in second person inquiry need to practice first person inquiry too, to learn to be self reflective in order to inquire together better as a group. So in the example above (LGA) each member of the team was practicing individual critical self reflection in different ways and bringing their findings to the team meeting for further collective reflection. And as you will see from the practice account the

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[78] Group members will be pursuing a set of parallel first person inquiries and whilst the inquiry question may not be the same for all members there is a shared concern in the topic and a mutual interest in each other.

[79] See *Practice Accounts* for a description of the LGA project.

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willingness and ability to self reflect can differ greatly between individuals and according to their situations. As Reason and Bradbury suggest

> the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies: first-person research practice is best conducted in the company of friends and colleagues who can provide support and challenge; such company may indeed evolve into a second-person collaborative inquiry process… attempts at third-person research which are not based in rigorous first-person inquiry into one's purposes and practices are open to distortion through unregulated practice (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: xxvi).

My use of second person action research

Second person inquiries involve communities of inquiry (or learning communities) that can take many forms. Groups can come together around a common question, sharing the responsibility of facilitation e.g. peer learning groups. In the work which I do it's more usual for there to be an initiating researcher who is tasked or commissioned to bring an inquiry group together.

In the Practice Accounts there are examples of co-operative inquiry groups (Governance, DUG, LPT) and action learning sets (LGA consultant team, LGA Project Development Group and the LPT), as well as examples of a wide range of social research techniques managed by action research collaborators (Tewkesbury Older People, CPC working groups, Children's Commission, LPT).

Nowadays my approach to supporting participants to 'do' action research is very pragmatic; I aim to see how 'action researchy' I can enable a project to become. What I mean by that is *I work with them* to see:
   o how participative/democratic we can design it to be,
   o how much of a contribution it can make to community benefit,
   o how much we can allow the form to emerge as we work together,
   o whether we can we keep a strong focus on the practical issues at the heart of their question,
   o how much we can link taking action with gaining the knowledge that we need, undertaking cycles of action and inquiry in order to learn together.

This inquiring approach to project design and commissioning results in the clients learning along with me what design of project might best meet their research needs, rather than me proposing action research to them. We have started by inquiring together, building a foundation of trust which we will need as the project proceeds. And if the answer is 'not very action researchy at all actually' then we have the basis for a frank conversation about whether I am the right person to be working with them because we have started already to talk about our espoused

values and to test what they mean when we try to apply them in the context of the research project.

My basic aim for a project is that we can form at least one second person community of inquiry. That may be the steering group for a piece of work, or it may be a specific piece of action research such as the Diabetic Services User Group (DUG) where the methodology of the co-operative inquiry group was best suited to achieve the aims of the project's commissioners. In many of the most satisfying projects there are inquiries going on at multiple levels simultaneously
For example the Children's Commission where there was a commissioning/steering group who were inquiring together (first and second person), a series of focus groups which were themselves small short life inquiries (second person), the play audit and guided walks which were inquiries (second person), as were the children's use of cameras to record their day in order to reflect on what they'd actually been doing (so much more accessible a record than their usual answer to the question 'what do you do?' which was 'hang about with my mates'). Eventually all the elements of the project came together in a third person inquiry event – the Commission hearing, and a CD report was distributed to interested parties nationally.

Influences on my second person inquiry practice

When I first started to learn about action research and use its ideas with my clients ten years ago I was much more of a purist. I took the methods explained in other people's case studies and writing (Reason, 1988, 1994, 2001; Heron, 1971, 1996; Torbert, 1995, 1998, 2001) and tried to apply them as strict models of how it should be done. I didn't have the confidence or even the understanding to trust or to comprehend that action research was a set of principles that were flexible, malleable[80]. I didn't think I was doing much action research because I couldn't recognise any specific methods or models in what I was doing. I had created a figment of a perfect action research project and couldn't see how I'd ever get to facilitate one!

Its hard to put my finger on a particular moment when the penny dropped, was it listening to visitors to CARPP workshops like John Gaventa talking about his work in the Appalachians (1997)? Maybe it

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[80] I've just watched two water skiers speeding past on the high tide. One of them appeared to be making far more moves, taking more action in response to the changes in speed and direction of the towing motorboat, in comparison the other looked a little inactive, I wondered stiff? Watching a little longer as the boat performed its circuit of the bay I started to see that the seemingly more agile skier was actually constantly acting and then recovering from his actions (steering and over-steering), while the seemingly immobile skier was flexing his body in more subtle ways, with pauses between his actions, much more responsive to the river currents and the tide. His seeming inactivity was actually a relaxed and so softer body. Alert but not stiff (2004).

was Hilary Bradbury's story of her work with the Natural Step (1998), particularly the bit when she spoke of taking the results to the sponsoring group and getting them to cut up the papers with scissors and paste them in the patterns that emerged in order to make sense together of the findings. Maybe it was meeting Yvonna Lincoln and hearing her stories of forming a sense of the turns or moments which have helped us to measure out the ground for qualitative research (1998), maybe it was being at the biannual Hawkwood Emerging Approaches to Inquiry conferences and hearing other researchers' stories as they worked at putting inquiry at the heart of their practice.

Maybe, or maybe it was something that happened much more slowly inside me as I started to let go of clutching other's models so tightly, and started to relax a bit more into telling the stories of my own practice and through doing so learned to understand my practice differently. For this I need to thank members of my own second person inquiry group; my CARPP colleagues - students and tutors. Supported by this learning community I began to understand just how much of my work had been close to action research even before I understood what the term meant. My instinct for participation, my naturally inquiring approach, my enjoyment of the lightly planned and even the chaotic, my passion for social justice, my activism, my innate way of learning through doing and *then* reflecting, my desire to keep talking about process as well as outcome, my dislike of hierarchical controls and my preference for working collaboratively, my preference for keeping things open and transparent. All these made action research a 'natural' way of working for me, and so however imperfectly, I'd been exploring and experimenting with forms of action research for some time before coming to Bath. In addition to which, as Greenwood points out in his response to Maguire's question about the effect of feminism on action research, my life experience as a woman also equipped me to find action research a familiar way of operating (Greenwood, email, 2001).

Over the last two years I've been interested in and experimenting with meeting in the circle-style advocated by Margaret Wheatley (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1996; Wheatley, 2002) and popularised in North America through coffee house conversations. These simple meeting forms are a joy after the profusion of over-complex methods and theorising that has been going on about forms for increasing participation.

I can't identify many individual influences on my second person inquiry practices because there are now so many. I've listened to so many people's stories of their work and learnt something from most of them. I have always been a bit of a magpie carrying off the bits that seem to me to glitter, a bricoleur[81], stylistically sticking and stitching together the

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[81] Lincoln and Denzin (2000) describe the researcher as becoming a bricoleur; learning how to borrow from many different disciplines. They give several possible definitions of the term: a jack of all trades, someone who works with her hands, and myth maker.

bits that make my heart sing. And always with an eye to making the 'form' of action research more accessible.

Working with co-operative inquiry

This desire to make action research more accessible eventually gave me the courage to abandon my figment of a 'perfect' co-operative inquiry group, and come to see it as a malleable form. I believe, along with Heron and Reason, that 'ordinary people are quite capable of developing their own ideas and can work together in a co-operative inquiry group to see if these ideas make sense of their world and work in practice' (Heron and Reason, 2001:179).

The model of co-operative inquiry was first presented by John Heron in 1971, and was then extended and developed over the years primarily by Heron and Reason (Reason, 1988; Heron, 1992; Reason, 1994; Reason and Heron, 1995, Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001). Heron argued that 'orthodox' research methods were inadequate for a 'science of persons', because they undermined the self determination of their 'subjects' which itself characterises them as persons. Rowan made a very similar point (Rowan, 1981) when he argued that 'pure' research alienated (in Marxist terms) subjects from the product of research, from the work of research, from other people, and from themselves. He proposed that one can only do research with persons in the fullest sense if what they do and what they experience as part of the research is to some degree *significantly directed by them*. They have to be *in active relationship* with each other, with the behaviour being researched self generated by researchers in a context of co-operation.

So what does it look like?
Reason writes 'the essence of co-operative inquiry is an aware and self critical movement between experience and reflection which goes through several cycles as ideas, practice, and experience are systematically honed and refined' (Reason,1988), and he argues that the minimum required for an inquiry to be co-operative inquiry is
> o   the nature of the involvement of all participants should be openly negotiated
> o   all should contribute to the creative thinking that is part of the research
> o   relationships should aim to be authentically collaborative.

And Reason writes more about what this authentic collaboration might feel like:
> In co-operative inquiry we work with our co-researchers, establishing relationships of authentic collaboration and dialogue; ideally we care

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Descriptions of the nature of the process include emergent, pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive, and describe the bricoleur using the aesthetic and material tools of her craft; deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials are at hand.

for each other, and approach each other with mutual love and concern. While not ignoring the necessity for direction and the role of expertise, we eschew unnecessary hierarchy and compulsive control (Reason, 1988:11).

Co-operative inquiry can be said to have 4 stages:
1. Decide what is to be researched (the question), discuss ideas and theories about the question, plan action how to record etc. This stage involves propositional knowing (drawing on concepts and ideas)
2. Co-researchers take the action into their lives; note the outcomes, record discoveries. This stage involves practical knowing (through action)
3. Co researchers become fully immersed in their practice, suspending as far as possible previous theorising and opening themselves to novel experiences. This stage involves experiential knowing (direct face to face encounter)
4. Co-researchers come back together to reflect on their experiences and to attempt to make sense of it. This stage involves primarily propositional knowing but involves use of presentational knowing (expresses the propositional through storytelling, drawing on aesthetic imagery) in order to communicate the experience.

These stages are then repeated as the group goes through successive cycles.

My use of co-operative inquiry

In this section I look at specific aspects of co-operative inquiry and give examples of how I have used the methodology, often stretching the form of the method because of the specific needs of the situation or group. I believe this has led to my evolving a very pragmatic approach to co-operative inquiry as a method, an approach which I would encourage others to take as opposed to feeling dominated by any figment of the 'perfect form'. Further details of the examples can be found in *Practice accounts*.

Is it just for professionals inquiring into their practice?
The early descriptions of co-operative inquiry read rather as if they could only be used by a group of professionals inquiring into their (shared) area of practice – I don't believe it was ever the intention to inhibit the use of co-operative inquiry in this way and co-operative inquiry has provided a good basic framework for a range of types of groups and purposes in my work.
For example: The Diabetic Services User Group (DUG) is an example where the participants' common experience was one of having diabetes and accessing NHS services. The purpose of the group was not

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to enable them to become 'better' patients but to share and explore coping mechanisms and to influence service development. In fact they became much more demanding patients in some ways as they explored what they wanted in the way of support and enabling from services, and individually and as a group explored advocating their wants.

Cycles of action and reflection
Reading the 'text book description' it would be easy to assume that action always needs to come before reflection, and that the two activities are undertaken in strict succession. In my experience it's not that clear cut.
Sometimes the group does it's reflecting when it comes together and its acting when people go back into the world, but in the case of the Governance project for instance the reflections often happened outside the inquiry group meetings and participants reported back on them when the group met, additionally the action sometimes happened in the group; people practiced doing things differently there and then and were later able to reflect on it. We also noticed that action and reflection often became rather difficult to distinguish from each other as they got integrated, but could be teased apart later in the reporting-back (stage 4). Also that the group moved from individual reflection to organising reflection (R Vince, M Reynolds) as reflection became a dispersed activity.

Group membership
Most co-operative inquiry group facilitators will go to great lengths to negotiate a contract with co-researchers to try to get as consistent a membership as possible, this is the ideal. However in my experience it's very difficult to get a consistent group over an extended period; however committed individuals are the world has a habit of intervening.
For example: In the DUG group membership fell-off after we had accomplished the first set of tasks we'd contracted to do together, which necessitated taking time to check out carefully again with the remaining participants whether they wanted to open up membership again and their expectations for the next stage.
For example: In the Governance project group membership was constantly changing, which we all knew and accepted from the start. This meant that the group's contract had to be checked out at every meeting and progress fed back to each new participant to enable them to feel fully part of the group. We found ways to do this with large visual maps of our process and our inquiry which were used in an informal but focused way to engage each new wave of participants (in this way negotiating purpose, task and approach).

Meeting format
Some colleagues advocate the desirability of day-long inquiry group meetings at regular intervals. In my experience co-operative inquiry can

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still be a productive approach when meetings are shorter and less regular.

<u>For example:</u> The DUG group started with regular (two monthly) meetings of two hours, then took a pause and restated but never quite got back into its bi-monthly groove. However the group felt it most appropriate to meet at intervals at which progress could be measured and this worked for them. It was also an issue for the DUG group that some of the between-meetings activity got shunted into a longer timeframe because it was dependent on the LDSAG (see practice account) for decisions about implementation and access to information. This then determined how often the group met as it was participant's choice to keep to a pattern which made sense in terms of making progress on specific tasks, as they felt their lives were quite full enough without unnecessary meetings.

<u>For example:</u> For the Governance group the task needed to be undertaken within a tight timeframe due to funder's priorities, and the numbers of days of facilitator time were limited. In order to make contact with as many participants as possible we held several short meetings on each day on which we were working with them, often timetabling an extra meeting across the lunch hour to catch people who were working.

Changing focus of inquiry during life of the group
It is expected that any co-operative inquiry group will need to review its original questions as it goes through its cycles of activity. In my experience a group can also reach a stage where it decides to change its focus quite radically.

<u>For example:</u> This happened with the DUG group who decided to move away from their sponsor's intended aims to focus on the group's own agendas.

This seemed to me to be quite congruent with the basic principles of a co-operative inquiry group but reflecting on it now makes me wonder just how often this happens when groups are commissioned by organisations who will not necessarily be members of the group themselves. It presents a challenge to the group facilitator to keep an eye to the exercise of power over the group by others and the exercise of power by the group in order to define it's own agendas. Keeping to the autonomous group model can get it's facilitator into hot water with their paymasters.

Teaching the methodology – keeping it informal
I've never managed to work with a group where we have learnt the underlying theory in a formal manner. I have however enjoyed exploring ways to teach/learn inquiry skills together in less than formal ways. This has often meant following a practice of noticing when 'it' (the things we are attempting to learn such as critical subjectivity and first person

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inquiry) are happening (or very obviously not happening), and pausing the action in the group to take time out to 'notice' together.

I find using diagrams and pictures drawn in the moment with the group is a good way to capture our learning and give form to what might otherwise feel abstract. I used to give handouts but have now abandoned this approach and only point people towards more formal learning tools when they directly express an interest in them.

Keeping the map – telling stories of where we've been together
One way of knowing where you're going, and reviewing where you've come from, can be a written group contract or similar document.

I have found that members have little interest in such things.

For example: When we came to evaluate the DUG group no-one remembered that they'd been given a copy of the terms of reference and the later amendments that they had made to them as a group. However they did remember what we were there for!

Today I prefer to use diagrams and pictures as a basis for telling the history of the group together. The mind map and spiral diagrams we used for the Governance group are an example (see *Practice Accounts*).

Telling stories together has proved a useful way to tell a group's learning history, and on occasions to enable the group to engage with each other with more of the love and concern spoken of in Reason's description of co-researchers' ideal relationships.

For example: The LGA consultant team spent two days away together in an attempt to move the group (and the project) on, and telling personal history stories formed the basis for some better relationships, even if this change was temporary for some group members.

Writing together has also been a useful tool with some co-operative inquiry groups in my experience, particularly when the members were unable to take the action into their lives and immerse themselves in the practice (stages 2 and 3) due to interpersonal dynamics around leadership (for an example see *Practice Accounts*, LGA).

Having written about my second person inquiry practices I now go on to describe working with third person inquiry.

Third person inquiry

> Third-person research/practice aims to extend these relatively small-scale projects so that … they are also defined as 'political events' (Toulmin and Gustavsen, 1996). Third person strategies aim to create a wider community of inquiry… Writing and other reporting of the process and outcomes of inquiries can also be an important form of third-person inquiry (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: xxvi).

In this section I will go into some more detail about my own third person inquiry practices, naming influences on my practice and identifying some key learning points. I practice third person inquiry in the following forms:

- o Large group processes (Project examples CPC, NRI, LGA, Carers Impact, Vision 21 Accommodating Gloucestershire)
- o Making Sense Meetings and similar events (Tewkesbury Older People, Sure Start, Children's Commission, GNPN health needs assessments) which bring together the research participants, the group sponsoring the research (usually agencies working in the area) and other organisations who can make sense of the data from the research and can potentially things happen. In this way those affected by the problem and those owning the problem come together with those who have the power to effect change
- o Writing and speaking about projects (Children's Commission, DUG, Governance project).

It should be remembered that all of these projects have first and second person inquiries 'nested' inside them, for they are as Bill Torbert puts it 'mutually necessary' to good third person inquiry (Torbert, 2001).

Large group processes

Large group processes or whole system events are designed to engage members across a whole system in thinking and reflecting, and so moving to planning action and acting together (Bunker and Alban, 1997).

For some people these have come to be seen as *the* form of third person inquiry, often high profile, dramatic events with prestige attached to their facilitation – and very nice too if you can get it together! However not all third person inquiry happens in large group events, and not all large group events are action research by any means. Large group events have become increasingly popular as the ideas of stakeholder involvement have spread in business and the public services, but are often used as ways for organisations to spread already developed corporate messages and achieve buy-in from staff and other stakeholders (suppliers, distributors, consumers). To qualify as action research these events need to be about co-creating knowledge and

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energy generation (for action), not just the transmission of already formulated knowledge across a system or organisation.

Large group processes *can* be designed to be forms of action research and Ann Martin (Martin, 2001:204) has identified ten conditions that need to be in place to make a large group process action research, rather than simply a stakeholder event (see Table 2.) She insists, and I agree that 'to qualify as action research, learning and the generation of new knowledge should be conscious, if not explicit' (Martin, 2001:200). Martin's conditions can be applied both to the design and to the facilitation of a large group process.

If the large group event is to be a learning process that triggers collective action then the event needs to be designed to ensure that the knowledge which is held in the group is explored, along with the theories and assumptions participants are working with in their lives. Together these are used to generate insights, new knowledge and the power to make change and take action.

Conceptualization	1. Clarify purpose – researcher as critical educator 2. Define the problem or question – researcher and participants together 3. Understand whose voices will be heard – and for whose action
Framing the event	1. Establish learning as explicit objective 2. Clarify responsibility for action – participants and observer 3. Decide who comes (the participants in the research)
Design of the event	1. Establish ground rules for dialogue 2. Design for multiple perspectives 3. Prepare for power imbalance
Continuation of reflection and action (follow up)	1. Continue reflection on learning 2. Teach technique and appropriate social science strategies 3. Ensure system support 4. Shift responsibility for research to participants

Table 2 Conditions for large group designs as action research (source: Martin, 2001:204)

Large group processes can take many forms and some e.g. Future Search (Weisbord, 1992; Weisbord and Janoff, 1995) and Search Conferences (Emery , 1993) are more democratic than others; e.g. Real Time Strategic Change (Jacobs, 1994). An excellent comparison of the

best known designs and their applications is included in *The Change Handbook* (Holman and Devane).

My experience of facilitating such designs is limited to using Future Search in its unmodified form (Vision 21Accomodating Gloucestershire conference), shortened versions of Future Search (Carers Impact), Open Space events, and tailor made designs developed with clients which draw on elements from and retain the core principles of Future Search, Search or Real Time Strategic Change, and Open Space designs (LGA, CPC, NRI). In theory they all meet Martin's ten conditions, while in practice some struggled particularly around the conditions pertaining to 'continuation of reflection and action' after the event has ended.

Large group processes are just that; they involve large groups in a process, often more than 80 people and sometimes two hundred plus. And because of this they can be very time consuming (they often last three days), expensive (venue, meals, accommodation, staff time), and threatening to power holders who lose their status for the lifetime of the event, for

> *Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator, and change has its enemies* (Robert F Kennedy).

However many participants enjoy the events, as Rosabeth Moss Kanter points out *Change is disturbing when its done to us, exhilarating when it is done by us.*

In my experience it is almost always an organisation that is comparatively rich in time, money *and* courage, *or* very desperate, who will actually proceed with a large group process. This limits its usefulness with many groups and sectors. The exception discussed in the Practice Accounts is the Community Planning Conference (CPC) when most people's time, including the facilitators' was given as gift work, and accommodation, food etc was provided free or at cost by local people involved in this project as part of their community. This shows that it is possible to use these powerful and moving tools in community settings if there is sufficient commitment and courage, and when the problem or question is sufficiently pressing.

Other forms of third person inquiry

Several of the projects shown here in *Practice Accounts* are the result of being pragmatic, by which I mean both holding to the principle characteristics of action research – to the 'informed ideas and formal practices' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) – *and* feeling free to respond to the needs of each client and project as they present to me.

Action research has given me a ground to stand upon and from which to develop a creative and responsive practice in a way which enables me and my client to learn together about not just *what* they want to be enabled to do (starting question, desired outcomes) but also about just

how to do it (co-creating the process with them). Therefore the third person practices described here are pragmatic and in many ways particular to each project. Added to which, as I've said before, I'm a magpie and carry my glittering finds (insights, learnings) from project to project, holding them up to the client's question to see if they offer some guidance or inspiration as to design and delivery. I intend that the *Practice Accounts* will give sufficient detail for the interested reader to be able to appreciate the breadth and variety of designs, and understand how they are action research.

Making Sense Meetings
The third person practice most frequently referred to in the *Practice Accounts* is the use of Making Sense Meetings (MSM). These are meetings that bring together research participants, the sponsors of the research and representatives of any other organisation identified as having a stake through the research. The purpose is to provide a 'public hearing' for the data gathered in the course of the earlier stages of the inquiry and to enable all present to 'make sense' of the data together (there will have been a preliminary analysis but this is considered to be provisional until the MSM has happened), and to agree priorities and plan and commit to taking action.

In some ways it reminds me of a public inquiry, in other ways someone standing up and taking the pledge – all MSM participants (local people and professionals together, the powerless and the powerful, uppers, middles and lowers) hear the stories from the research together, including the actual words of and stories told by co-researchers/participants wherever possible. They also witness each other listening and reacting to the data, and this can be very moving and can enable people to experience their common ground (and common humanity) as well as expose and work with their differences. They then take time in small groups to consider what they have heard and develop plans to respond to it.

The MSM's basic design is a tool used in participatory Rapid Appraisal (Annett, H. & Rifkin, S.1990), which I have adapted with colleagues and use in both the Rapid Appraisals I undertake and other action research projects. Managed and designed carefully, preferably with the sponsoring or design group for the research project, these events meet the five characteristics of action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) and the validity and quality criteria for action research, namely they are for positive social effect, they are participatory and democratic, they involve knowledge created through action, they focus on practical issues, and form is emergent.

MSMs bring together those with resources and those who have needs for those resources. They hear the evidence of need and the desired

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solutions to problems. This can cause all involved to feel stressed and anxious about whether these demands can be met. But as the song says

> You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, well you might just find you get what you need (Jagger, Richards).

Because of this MSMs need to be designed and managed carefully. 'Managed carefully' is an important caveat – there needs to be a considerable amount of preparation for a MSM:

- o Ensuring the data really contains the voices of the research participants
- o Identifying who should be invited, through getting 'inside' the data, understanding who is affected by the issues, who can help and who can obstruct the processes of change and action. Then finding ways to reach out and persuade these people and organisations to attend
- o Preparing power holders, often local public servants of some seniority, for the meeting. Supporting them to face any sense they might have of personally failing their clients, of being pressured to stretch budgets beyond reason, of personal or professional criticism from others. Supporting them to embrace the session as a learning experience (about sharing power and developing partnerships, as well as the original research question) and somewhere where solutions can be co-created, rather than approaching the meeting feeling that they must have all the answers ready to hand[82].

This is a tricky and potentially explosive meeting, which often surfaces personal, political and professional frictions which have been hitherto suppressed (see practice account of Tewkesbury Older People research). Only on one occasion have I known a MSM get seriously 'out of hand', and even then what was expressed was a genuine difference of perspective and a clear refusal on the part of a group of power holders (local councillors) to share the power to define what was a problem (local residents complained of discarded sharps[83] in the playground, the councillors denied that the area had a drug problem). In this way the existing system with all its living contradictions was laid bare in the meeting, and our task as facilitators was to enable participants to then develop strategies to work with this reality.

Writing and reporting

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[82] Offering this support to powerholders has been largely a Pig and Deer moment role – requiring as it does an empathy and compassion for those holding power which I would have found harder to practice in earlier moments.
[83] Meaning syringes and needles used for injecting drugs.

Over the years I have experimented with ways to report the results of inquiries to a wider group of people, with the intent that they could then take the material and undertake their own second or third person inquiry. Examples of more creative methods have been the CPC reports which were humorous and very visual as well as crammed with facts and the story of the process. Also the Children's Commission which used footage of the Commission hearing plus pictures from the guided walks and the play audit to communicate the wealth of information gathered from and with participants on a CD version of the project report.

Key learning points seem to me to be about using presentational knowing to express the experiential, with just enough propositional knowing as framing to enable 'outsiders' to get the underlying concepts and ideas. This experience has led me to develop these do's and don'ts for myself:

- o **Don't just tell it if you can also show it** – use photos, video, cartoons, drawings first – just use words to back them up
- o **Do let people speak for themselves**; use participants' words and pictures, resist the temptation to formalise the data – if you must you can provide a 'translation' for your readers but your participants' words are likely to have the most impact (I don't forget the words of one mother in a riverside village who, when asked about maternity services said: 'I'd rather have my baby on the kitchen table than in the GR hospital'…).

To sum up

Having a wider political effect in the work I undertake is very important to me, therefore most of my work has a third person component to it. Here I have described my use of the more 'heroic' form of large group processes, and also the Making Sense Meeting as a third person action research tool which I can use in many more projects and settings.

Tracking my inquiries

Having outlined my use of first, second, and third person action research I now move on to describe how I track my inquiries – particularly my ongoing first person inquiry into my own facilitation practice.

I have used a range of methods over the period covered by this learning journey to track and record the data arising from the noticing practices that form part of my first person inquiry into myself in action as facilitator. These noticing practices are therefore lodged primarily in my first person inquiry but span my first, second and third person inquiry practices, as described in the previous sections.

Here I explain each method of tracking briefly, and in the case of *Writing and experiments in writing form* and *Writing as reflection* take the opportunity to write at greater length about my use of the methods and influences on my practice.

Tracking methods described:-

- Notebooks – two column note keeping
- Journal
- Case studies/practice accounts
- Therapy sessions and notes
- Dreams and dream journals
- Writing for and discussions with my CARPP group, these discussions are taped and then transcribed
- Writing and experiments in writing form, including autoethnography
- Writing as reflection – ref Narrative means to therapeutic ends, making a different future through restorying my past and writing my desired futures
- Getting feedback from others, a later development which I explain in Inquiring about my practice chapter.

Notebooks

I keep a separate notebook for most projects. In the notebooks I keep records of a range of data which include; emotions raised, physical in the body noticing, and reflections on thought connections etc that occur to me while in meetings, running 'events' or otherwise working directly with clients. I often use diagrams or pictures rather than words, particularly to map what feel to be 'energetic' connections; e.g. of ideas arising in a meeting, between stages of the project, or parts of the

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client organisation(s). These are kept alongside my task related notes and more straightforward 'process stuff' as two column note keeping. In addition I will sometimes add to these notes after a working session, for instance later the same day or in the hotel that evening.

Working with clients who are very different from each other means that I need to tailor my note keeping to the setting. At times I manage to do contemporaneous two column note keeping (keeping a record of my noticing; my thoughts, feelings and reactions, alongside my task related note keeping), although often this is not possible because so much is going on at the time. At other times I need to 'revisit' the session when transcribing tapes (if I've been able to record a session which I do with some longer term projects where relationships are well established and recording is less likely to feel inhibiting) and flipcharts if used. I then build my reflections on these reminders and build a rich or thick description (Geertz) in my mind by evoking details of the room, the weather, the views from the window etc. I think of this practice as *reawakening a memory of myself in the session* (and memories of the session more generally through my connectedness with other participants which I find I can re-experience through this process), I think of this record being *written in my body*, a sort of physical memory.

Journal

I keep a personal journal in which I try to write regularly (and don't always succeed). This focuses on emotional material and reflections on what's happening in my life more generally, although work does at times appear explicitly. Its nature is unpredictable, chaotic and rich.

Case studies/practice accounts

The nature of my work determines that I often need to record it in the form of reports or case studies for client organisations. I have recently extended this practice to respond to the needs of students and learning set participants for examples of action research undertaken in community and social economy settings and have produced examples of action research case studies. I use these in teaching sessions I do with MSc and CARPP graduate students, and with groups of community development workers and community activists when doing 'barefoot research skills' teaching sessions with them.

Each piece of commissioned research is written up in a report for the client e.g. The DUG co-operative inquiry group, the Children's Commission research etc. These could be considered tracking for second and third person inquiries but lack many of the qualities expected by CARPP (i.e. first person inquiry data). However I have parallel records of these projects kept in my personal files.

Therapy sessions and related writing

Part of my reflective practice has been through continued individual therapy, over a period of 14 years. I have chosen to continue this engagement as a *formal space for reflection*. It's a time and place which is there for me to notice what is around for me, and be inquiring about it. In the first couple of years of my time at Bath I attempted to keep my personal therapy separate from my CARPP based inquiry – it wouldn't stay separate!

Students of CARPP are often heard to describe a process of coming to realise that their life *is* their inquiry, or at least inseparable from it. My experience has been that my personal life issues are echoed in my work, and vice versa, and they are both strong elements of my inquiry[84].

<u>For example</u> if I am working in my therapy on issues of legitimacy in my own life I have noticed this often coincides with legitimacy issues being the focus for a work project. Of course at least partially this is because of a heightened awareness or sensitivity on my part to such issues, which might otherwise remain hidden or denied.

This thesis asks how to recognise this connectivity without compromising what legitimately belongs to any one of the component parts. The use of insights in my inquiry gained through my therapy is therefore congruent with this – it could be said to keep me in my place; in service to the group, fully utilising myself but not working 'my stuff' out in and on the group.

> [P]eople in our sort of society carry around a good deal of unresolved distress – grief, fear, anger – from past experience, especially from the very beginnings of life and from childhood; and that there is a tendency for this to be projected out unawarely into all sorts of present situations, distorting perception of a situation and/or behaviours within it (Heron, 1982:8).

John Heron describes here the degenerative potential of unresolved distress which can be reactivated and projected onto a situation, so distorting our perceptions. I believe that if work is done by a person to understand, and where possible to resolve, this distress then the past experience can be used generatively to understand and empathise when appropriate. Self reflexivity gained through the process of therapy can potentially give a facilitator a useful sensitivity to (and in) situations where issues such as attachment, inclusion, legitimacy, voice and silencing, use of power, and fear are manifest on a cultural/political level.

The issues addressed in my therapy appear frequently in my writing, and both my therapy and my journals provide a record of my dreams. I keep some notes from these sessions and make these available as part of body of material that tracks my inquiry.

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[84] See Appendices B,C and D for examples.

Therapy has also formed an important part of exploring storying and restorying my experience, and through the real presence of my therapist I am *experientially, practically experiencing a change* – that of being in-connection and not abandoned, that of being heard and answered[85].

Dreams and dream journals

I keep a record of dreams as part of my journaling, and take many of my dreams to my therapy sessions. I consider dream material relevant to my first person inquiry, and also to individual projects (second and third person inquiries) on occasions.

Dreaming may be argued to be a process of enabling us to select the stories that we wish to tell about ourselves as part of the process of continually constructing and reconstructing our identities. Anthony Giddens, writing about identity, points out that a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour or the reactions of others but in

> The capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.

Giddens quotes Charles Taylor:

> In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going (Taylor, 1989. quoted in Giddens, 1991:54)

and suggests that there is an unconscious aspect to this 'work' which may be organised in a basic way through dreams

> [D]reaming may very well represent an unconscious selection and discarding of memories, which proceeds at the end of every day.

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[85] I was struck by the similarity of approach told as a story in Tim Adam's article on Billy Connolly and Pamela Stephenson's biography of him (*Billy*) in *The Observer*. Connolly was interviewed by Adams and in the interview described his experience during a floatation tank session:

> He had a sense there was someone else floating there next to him.
> It took him some time to realise, he says, wild eyed, that the someone was just a voice in his head. And then that it was a voice he'd heard often before. The voice was responding to the plans he was making, the daydreams he was drifting into and saying " *No, you'll never do that. No, you're not good enough, not clever enough, you'll never go there."*
> It was a voice he says, which sounded just like the aunt who brought him up by beating him up, the teachers who always called him thick. Perhaps even of the mother who abandoned him at three and the father who sexually abused him for five years from when he was ten. He jokes about it now but he believes, too, that voice will never really leave him; he sees his life as a series of different strategies for learning to live with it. Not least of these was the tried-and-tested one he employed in the tank itself: "*Away with you!"* he yelled, "*Fuck off!"*.........
> Therapy…. has been for him:
> "*Like someone telling you there's no such thing as ghosts, and you can go to sleep"*, he says. "*And you realise you must never make decisions in your life based on that negative voice in your head. And also that so many people do just that. You must always instead* **go with your primary thought, your hopeful thought**. *And that's what I try to do"*.........   [My emphasis].

As my writing has become more imaginal and allegorical (in the Unicorn and later in the Pig and Deer moments) then my dreams have appeared more frequently in it and have been used by me to *understand and story my life*. Most recently I have been going back to the record of particular dreams when things have reminded me of them, when there's been a resonance with a current issue or question and have written-into them to sense make on the current question[86].

One of the aspects I have explored when the occasion has permitted has been that of the social dreaming matrix. This is the idea that a group of people dream for the group – that is they tell their dreams to the group to be given meaning by and for the group, rather than the individual. This continues to interest me but has not become an important part of my inquiry.

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[86] See Appendices C and D for examples of working with dream material.

Writing, including:

- o Writing for my CARPP group – the discipline of writing for a particular audience of critical friends
- o Writing and experiments in form – including noticing what censors us
- o Writing as reflection – narrative means to influence the future
- o My use of autoethnography.

Writing for and discussions with my CARPP group and supervisor

Over the period of this inquiry I have written regularly for discussion with my CARPP group. It is CARPP practice to have peer tutorial groups, sessions are taped and I transcribe mine. These sessions are challenging; members critique each other's work, making one review assumptions and practices[87]and providing a space in which the student can be supported to explore issues further in dialogue with the group.

This has often enabled me to push an inquiry harder and the tapes of these sessions have provided me with a record of my thinking and talking about my work that is materially different from contemplating and writing about it without feedback and discussion. These groups include a tutor. During the period 1996–98 I had a separate supervisor and tutorial group tutor. Since 2000 my supervisor has also been a member of the tutorial group. Both of these arrangements have had significance for my inquiry, particularly as the issue of legitimacy is so key to my first person inquiry.

In her book *If You Want to Write – Releasing your creative spirit* (1991) Brenda Ueland writes that:

> The only good teachers for you are those friends who love you …whose attitude is 'tell me more. Tell me all you can. I want to understand more about everything you feel and know and all the changes inside and out of you. Let more come out'.

This might well describe a CARPP tutorial group working at it's best if its also combined with the role that Bill Torbert (1976) describes as 'friends willing to act as enemies[88]', which gives a more accurate sense of the mixture of support, encouragement and loving but persistent challenge aimed for in a CARPP tutorial group.

Writing and experiments in writing form

Because *writing as inquiry* has been so important, *and* an area in which I have developed my practices *and* it links strongly to the key themes in the research, I will explore it in some detail here.

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[87] See LGA Practice Account for examples of assistance with designing a collaborative writing process and of a strong challenge to face my unconscious desire to leave the project, this influenced the way I returned to work with the project.
[88] Torbert writes: 'Personal development is bound to be one sided or incomplete without a circle of friends willing to act as enemies'. Torbert, *Creating a community of inquiry*. 1976:169.

As mentioned above I have written regularly during most of the period covered by this inquiry. Initially just exploring writing at all was quite liberating, and being encouraged to explore different forms and approaches to writing such as Freefall practices[89] and the guidance offered by Natalie Goldberg in *Writing Down the Bones* have changed significantly the 'amount of me' included in my writing.

This has largely been achieved through regular, uncensored writing practices. As Natalie Goldberg urges:

> This is the practice school of writing … you practice whether you want to or not. … You learn to trust your deep self more and not give in to your voice that wants to avoid writing (1986:11).

She goes on to describe the qualities of material caught by this regular and uncensoring approach:

> First thoughts have tremendous energy … First thoughts are unencumbered by ego[90], by that mechanism in us that tries to be in control, tries to prove the world is permanent and solid, enduring and logical. The world is not permanent, is ever changing and full of human suffering. So if you express something egoless, it is also full of energy because its expressing things the way they are. You are … riding for moments the waves of human consciousness and using your personal details to express the ride (1986:9).

And she describes the pain of doing this:

> You must be a great warrior when you contact first thoughts and write from them…Don't stop at the tears; go through to the truth. This is the discipline.

She quotes Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche:

> We must continue to open in the face of tremendous opposition. No one is encouraging us to open and still we must peel away the layers of the heart(1986:12).

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[89] Freefall writing aims to help the writer to cut through to first thoughts, uncensored, uncritised by internal critical voices. It's based on the belief that these first thoughts contain important truths about us, and there is value in coming to know them.
It is essentially more like talking than the usual styles of writing – talking on paper. Natalie Goldberg, in Writing down the bones, recommends regular writing as a discipline with the following rules:

1. Keep the hand moving – don't pause to read what you've written
2. Don't cross out – that's editing
3. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar – or even staying within the lines on the page
4. Don't think, don't get logical
5. Go for the jugular – if something comes up that's scary or naked dive right in. It probably has lots of energy.

[90] Whether Goldberg's claim that 'first thoughts are unencumbered by ego' is true in *all* cases may be open to dispute. For me I am aware that it is a nimble way to avoid my censor, which is slower on its feet than my first thoughts. I am aware that first thoughts, like dreams, give me glimpses of my whole self, before my learnt protection cuts in to obscure aspects of self from the world and from my wary, conscious self.
 In this way my observation over the years of the similarity between these two sources of data has addressed the quality process issue here. The correspondence between the two (qualitatively) offers a test of validity.

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Certainly the process of writing down *and* through the feelings has been a painful one for me, although ultimately satisfying as I have 'peeled away the layers of my heart' through writing. Within CARPP there have been those who encourage that opening up and who urge 'go fearward' in the writing.

What censors us?

The hugely encouraging Brenda Ueland writes:

> Everybody is talented, original and has something important to say..... (but) most people must break through a shell of timidity and strain. Everybody is talented because everybody who is human has something to express ... everybody is original, if he (sic) speaks from himself. But it must be from his *true* self and not from the self he thinks he *should* be.... This creative power and imagination is in everyone and so is the need to express it, i.e. to share it with others. But what happens to it?
> It is very tender and sensitive, and it is usually drummed out of people early in life by criticism... (1991:3-5)

Ueland refers to criticism as a muter of voices, and blames a culture which values destructive criticism as a goad to learning. I think this is a well-intentioned but somewhat simplistic analysis of mutedness. I suggest that there are many reasons for individuals to lose voice including this problematising, negatively critical approach that Ueland identifies that seems endemic in western culture. *And* there are also institutionalised reasons for whole groups or classes of people to become voiceless, some of whom are not even aware that they are silenced. Individuals coming from predominantly oral (working class or some minority ethnic) cultures, where conversation is the place to form and share ideas, can feel seriously disadvantaged trying to (gauchely) construct written arguments, and inhibited trying to write out in black and white what can be lightly spoken and given coded nuance by tone of voice or a look. It can feel like using another's unfamiliar tools to perform a delicate task, potentially laying the writer open to wounding criticism or misunderstanding.

I commented (2002):
I know this as someone from a working class family with a working class, oral culture where access to books was via the library, and paper for writing normally had to be torn out of a book such as an address book, or was the back of an envelope.
My mother took great pains to take us children to the public library every Saturday morning, and a set of Children's Encyclopaedia were carefully saved for and purchased. Its not that (other people's) writing was not valued, but it did not surround us, and the idea of one writing oneself was confined to written school exercises and school notebooks.
In my family nobody knew anybody who had written a book or even an article, in the same way as no one in the family had a doctor, teacher or artist as a personal friend.

I sometimes reflect on this when I sit down to dinner with a consultant friend, share a beer with artists and teachers and published writers we have known for years, kiss my

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MP and call him David. It's another world, and although I have crossed the divide I am acutely conscious that others have not. [91]

I know for myself that when I re-read my earlier writing (Tigers and Unicorn moments, pre-2000) I notice that *it must be read out loud in order to be understood.* The elaborate twists and turns of thought spoken aloud have not translated well to paper. Yet it has been important to write the thought, to speak it to myself, to share it with others who will hear my spoken explanation (e.g. in my CARPP tutorial group). This process has held my hand in order to get me here writing this today. It has been the process of finding voice, but in a written form, to extend my speaking-out to writing-out.

bell hooks describes the aural development of ideas and knowledge in her grandparents working class black family in *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000)

> Baba did not read or write. Telling a story, listening to a story being told is where knowledge was for her. Conversation is not a place of meaningless chitchat. It is the place where everything must be learned – the site of all epistemology. Over home, everyone is always talking, explaining, illustrating and telling stories with care and excitement.

The creation of knowledge through conversation amongst peers (i.e. without 'expert' input) has been significant in several projects on which I've worked, examples included here are Tewkesbury Older People, Children's Commission (see *Practice Accounts*), and developing a resource of aural 'Health Journeys' with residents of Neighbourhood Project areas (linking into the NHS moves to recognise different knowledges and expertise through the Expert Patient Programme). The latter owes much of its development to the antecedent of Aural History Projects developed by the Workers Educational Association and others such as the Trade Unions and University Settlements, largely in working class areas.

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[91] I read this passage, which I wrote in 2002, now in 2004 and I'm very aware that it could be read in many ways. Originally I was reflecting on both the change over a generation for some working class families in the UK, and also the class migrations undertaken by often isolated individuals from working class families. Of course you as reader will construct how you understand what I say here, and should be free to do so in the spirit of developing dialogue through the medium of this thesis, however I do not wish you to read into the final sentence of this passage ('Its another world, and although I have crossed the divide I am acutely conscious that others have not') any sense of a belief on my part that others *should* cross such divides or should aspire to, only that they *should be able to choose* to do so, and that such migrations should be enabled by aware facilitation or made less necessary by the reduction of inequalities of opportunity. Those others should be valued for where they are, the place they *are* in, not judged from across the divide. I would also note and share the remark of bell hooks about the personal cost of making a similar migration; 'I have been inwardly homeless ever since' (hooks. 1994).

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Judi Marshall writes in a paper outlining 'principles for writing':

> (It is my belief that) people can write if they are allowed their individual style and perspective, and that they can better meet academic (or other) standards by first looking within to discover their own "truth" to be told, rather than looking externally to see what is required of them…. but that there are many possible forms of doing so. I do not see language only as a restricted social code, although it is also that. We use language with great richness and diversity of form, tone, vocabulary, nuance – we express much meaning that is not consciously appreciated. Allowing our own language to speak to us is part of working creatively with writing.

And makes the distinction between expressive writing and the academic style of writing:

> Much writing is *writing from*, is giving voice, is expressive, rather than *writing about*. Traditional academic writing is based on *writing about*. As we appreciate that people experience from perspectives and create their truths, and we appreciate the knowing held in experience and practice, *writing from* seems often to be a more appropriate form. It will require different views of validity.

The majority of my writing is *writing from*, an example appears on the next page.

In 2002 I was preparing for my Masters to PhD transfer, I wrote:

In my learning journey I notice it has taken a significant shift, (and much time and exploration of my writing as a vehicle for presenting my knowing in an assured way), to get me to the point which I am at as I draft this Methodology section in August 2002. And even as I write my inquiry is still "can I turn the question 'is this good enough?' into 'how can I shape what I want to say so that you can hear it?' " My original unsurenesses do not go away, but in 2002, (in my Pig and Deer phase) I am finding a way to listen to them and still find voice[92].

For me as a child of ambitious parents (my mother taught me to read at four), and as a working class child 'making good' at the grammar school always looking over my shoulder to see what was expected of me was a way of life; it was a way to survive in alien territory by adopting the camouflage of fitting-in. Although a (head) strong individual streak always ultimately undermined my attempts at this chameleon-like behaviour, and subsequent contact with authority posed me with what felt like a huge and anxiety provoking choice: fit in, or protest and be excluded (as I was eventually from home and school). My Tigers moment

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[92] Post Hawkwood conference 2002 note: To turn the need for legitimation into an inquiry about socially constructed meaning – writing and reading as a dialogue, this thesis as a performance (Mary Gergen's term) that can be repeatedly revised as we make shared meaning together, reader and writer, practitioner and academic. (See *My writing and better understanding the world* section of this thesis which explores developing this dialogue).

reflects a great deal of the 'protest' option, whereas over time I wanted more and more to feel as if I belonged in the academy and so experienced the anxiety of trying to meet the standards of the academy. It was only later (Unicorn moment) I found my voice and accepted that it *was* legitimate all along.

One of the key themes running through this thesis is legitimacy, and the aspect of legitimising ways of knowing, other than just propositional knowing (see also section on Muted Voices and Finding a Form). Writing has been one way in which I have explored the legitimacy of my knowing in the academy, and have explored through this inquiry the way that I work with groups and in situations where particular types of knowing are discounted and marginalised.

Extract from writing October 1997. This extract shows me identifying questions of legitimacy and writing form:

Writing about writing, respecting what I know, speaking out in my voice.
This is going to be a very curving, turning piece of writing.
I am reminded of Lewis Carroll's The Tale of the Mouse in one of the Alice books, snaking across the page, looking like the tale of a mouse.
So too my writing feels as if it needs to take shape, turn and sometimes come back on itself.
And of course taking shape is what it is all about.
A representation of the struggle to present my knowing in the face of so many experts, and the mores of the academy.

I am asking whether this is at the core of my inquiry, and my attachment to it. And at the same time asking whether it means that I cannot "perform" in this place, can the academy be the place to explore felt knowing? And yet if there is any space in such institutions CARPP feels to be it.
(October 1997, writing for tutorial group).

Writing as reflection

Having discussed my writing practices; what censors us when we write and practices to support *writing from* I want to go on to explore my practice of *writing as reflection* (similar to Laurel Richardson's writing as inquiry).
Let me explain: I have found writing helpful in that if I write my thoughts, particularly if I can capture thoughts and feelings that have emotional charge, I can use the process of
   o   Discharge through the process of *writing it out*[93]
   o   *Writing into* those feelings
   o   Writing how it might /should have been (to meet whatever needs in me are being reactivated by the situation I am writing about)

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[93] Eruptive rather than steady stream writing which I find can often mirror a system and has an exciting feel, revolutions don't come quietly – but freedoms *do* erode quietly.

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In my first person inquiry I have used writing as a method of surfacing my knowing and finding a voice. I like the analogy of *pentimento*[94], uncovering something previously known but submerged. It speaks well to my experience of having lived for many years tempering my knowing by covering it with a layer of speaking in someone else's language. The years of struggling to be me-for-someone-else, the lack of native fluency in the language I have assumed as a camouflage – taking on the camouflage of middleclass-ness in order to access the culture and education I sought.

When I am working with others (second and third person inquiries) I am attracted to the jazz image, the need to listen well to others, whatever sound they make, in order to find a place for one's self in the shared creation of music (text).

> In texts based on the metaphors of montage, quilt making, and jazz improvisation, many different things are going on at the same time – different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision. Like performance texts, works that use montage simultaneously create and enact moral meaning. *They move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and the cultural. These are dialogical texts.* They presume an active audience… they do more than turn the other into the object of the social science gaze. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000. My emphasis).

Richardson describes writing as a method of inquiry; a way of finding out about yourself and your topic, a way of knowing – a method of discovery and analysis.

> Writing from our Selves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers … because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged … it provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science (2000:924).

Richardson uses five criteria for such writing; using the lenses of both science and art. She asks does this piece demonstrate:

1. A substantive contribution to our understanding of social life?
2. Aesthetic merit, inviting interpretive responses?
3. Reflexivity?
4. Impact on the reader, affecting them emotionally and/or intellectually?
5. An expression of reality – does it seem true?

She argues that writing stories situates

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[94] Pentimento- in which something which has been painted out of a picture (an image the painter has repented or denied) becomes invisible again, creating something new.

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the author's stories in other parts of the author's life. They offer critical reflexivity about the writing-self in different contexts as a valuable creative analytic practice (2000:931)

She writes of

the *writing process* and the *writing product* as deeply intertwined; both are privileged … readers … want and deserve to know how the researcher claims to know. How does the author position the Self as knower and teller? (2000:929 -930).

And notes that writing as inquiry produces evocative representations in which

evocative writing touches us where we live, in our bodies. Through it we can experience the self reflexive and transformational process of self-creation (2000:931).

I write more about my take on the interconnection of writing process and product and writing that evokes response in *My writing and better understanding the world* (below) and *Appendix E.*

One particular aspect of writing as reflection that has interested me has been writing as a way to imagine and so bring into being possible futures. It seems to me that this links with the idea of working with desired futures through visioning processes (Future Search, Visioning exercises, etc) such as I do in my work as a facilitator (see Box 2 below). This is a focus on developing the 'generative capacity' (Gergen, 1982) of myself/the situation[95]. My approach has also been strongly influenced by the thinking of Michael White and David Epston and their book '*Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*'.

White and Epston both work as family therapists and it is in this context they have developed their thinking about *the power of problematising*, and ways to use writing to separate the problem from the person. They invite us to ask ourselves 'how can we enable the writing of personal and collective stories that liberate and heal when the dominant stories are so problem saturated?' (1990: xi). In their practice they work with clients to use writing to describe positive outcomes, 'storying and restorying' the lives and experiences of the people who present to them with problems[96].

White and Epston write:

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[95] Kenneth Gergen describes 'generative capacity' as "the capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social action". Gergen K (1982:136) *Towards Transformation in Social Knowledge*. New York: Springer-Verlag. Of course Gergen is not writing about the individual but I suggest the term and the analogy are as applicable to this work on an individual basis as they are to wider human systems.
[96] Links to Foucault – Knowledge as Power. (1990)

> The identification of unique outcomes can be facilitated by the externalization of the dominant 'problem saturated' description or story of a person's life and relationships… (this) can be initiated by encouraging the externalization of the problem and then by the mapping of the problem's influence in the person's life and relationships (White and Epston, 1990:16).

White and Epston's analysis starts from an identification of the oppressive effects of the manner in which problems are typically described, and the constitutive and subjugating effects of descriptive knowledge itself. By which they mean the person is described in oppressive terms and so subjugated; they are seen and come to see themselves as being what and how they are described, and start to act into that description. This knowing is largely defined by the cultural practices in which we are embedded e.g. labelling, defining, evaluating etc. and we are further subject to social controls through language.

To illustrate: Basically if I think of you and describe you as having a problem, *you* become *identified* with the problem. I have collapsed a problematic description onto you, so disempowering you, and incidentally empowering the problem. In this way their analysis has some similarities with the power of the problematising question to be fateful in bringing about more of the problem by empowering it, as identified by Appreciative Inquiry thinkers. This is why AI looks for appreciative questions.

Through the process of externalisation – that is people restorying their lives this time with the choice of positive outcomes, people gain a reflexive perspective on their lives, and that opens up options as they challenge otherwise imposed and accepted 'truths' about themselves. They can then come to question and refuse what Foucault describes as their *thingification* by others[97] – that is the cultural practice of the objectifying of persons and their bodies, an encouragement to think of persons as objects for the purposes of subjugation in order to extend social control.

For my personal writing practice the key contributions from White and Epston's work have been the power of noticing the subjugating 'truths' by externalising (noticing, speaking) them and the reinforcement it gives to the notion of *the power of 'performance' of alternative and desired futures as a way of breaking out of subjugating 'truths' and narratives*, whether imposed externally or through myself absorbing them and imposing them on myself.

Note which I had written to myself, which I found in my copy of White and Epston's book '*Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends'* (25.5.01):

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[97] Foucault (1965, 1973, 1979) quoted in White and Epston *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*.

> I speak about it and so emerge.
> I act without insight and am submerged.
> I make space for what I know and am more fully present.
> I occupy the space previously taken up by problems, fear.

Something in this note reminds me of a powerful quote from bell hooks' book Yearning:

> Thinking again about space and location, I heard the statement 'our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting'; a politicisation of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, from *that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present* (1990:147,emphasis added).

Writing has provided a medium for me to explore my knowing and to story and restory my life. I increasingly use writing as a means to reflect on projects and encourage my clients to use writing as a form of individual and collaborative sense making (see LGA practice account for an account of collaborative writing experiment).

Box 2

My approach borrows from the thinking underpinning Appreciative Inquiry (AI), particularly the fateful nature of the *unconditional positive question*, its ability to spark transformations (Gergen's *generative capacity*) and support implementation.

AI assumes that past present and future are rich sources of inspiration, learning and interpretation, and that the topics we choose to study, the questions we choose to ask are *fateful* in that they determine what we 'find' or 'discover'[98]. They spark off transformative dialogue and action. Ludema et al write:

'Our experiences suggest that human systems grow and construct their future realities in the direction of what they most persistently, actively and collectively ask questions about (2001:191). Choosing what to focus on actually determines outcomes, it is a fateful act. In this sense, there is a self-reinforcing cycle that develops as positive vocabularies multiply and people are drawn into relationships where they are invited to discover, see and affirm the good and the possible in each other... and the capacity of the whole system is multiplied'. (Ludema et al 2001:197).

Frank Barrett has described AI as 'an invitation to see the world anew' (CARPP seminar). Through my writing I am discharging my immediate experience to form a fertile and very immediate body of 'knowing' (the way I understand the world now, in experiential and presentational

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[98] This belief gives rise to the use of the unconditional positive question in Appreciative Inquiry. This concept assumes that whatever positive topic we want to study, we can study it unconditionally and, in doing so significantly influence the destiny of our organisations and of our social theory. This thinking drives the design of AI's 4D cycle: Discovery, dream, design and destiny.

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forms). The process of writing, reading the writing aloud to myself, *reflecting on the writing with positive and inquiring questions* contributes to making a desired future.

I am conscious as I write this of my continued use of the term positive. I want to clarify that I do not mean by this to exclude the proper place of the 'non-positive' or 'dark' emotions (notice how hard it is to use words about this – to use 'negative' seems so, well, negative!). I firmly acknowledge the place of suffering and sorrow (what Matthew Fox calls the Via Negativa) and the role and use of anger. And I understand that anger and sorrow are not made illegitimate by this AI approach but can be harnessed as a driver, being a passion transformable into desire – and it's desire that drives the dream, design and destiny aspects of the AI process.

Also contributing to my thinking has been my experience of working with Visioning processes – whether tucked inside larger third person inquiry tools such as Future Search[99] or in the form we evolved within Vision 21 (Gloucestershire's version of Local Agenda 21) in its hay day. What I noticed early on was the energy that participants brought to constructing visions of possible futures, despite many having been initially sceptical of it being a bit of a 'new age' tool. I also noticed a strong common thread in the futures that they described, and the way working on futures together *amplified this preparedness to speak out for and to risk working for what their hearts desired*[100]. Both David Hicks and Elise Boulding have observed and written about similar phenomena in their work with students to those we observed working with local communities, professional groups and business people.

Having written about writing for my CARPP group, experiments in form and writing as reflection I now go on to include a section on my use of autoethnographic writing in my inquiry practice and in this thesis under the heading of *My writing and better understanding the world.*
This next section started off as a much larger chunk of writing, including a critique and defence of autoethnography and sections on creating dialogue with readers, and how much to say – a defence of vulnerability. These sections I now include as *Appendix E*, which I would like you to read but have included as an appendix because it is not

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[99] Future Search is a design for a large group process, in the same 'family' of large group events as Search Conferences and Real Time Strategic Change. For more detail see section on Third Person Inquiry.
[100] Perhaps the most exciting common elements for me are those of an egalitarian community with shared leadership, sustainable social practices and a "green" lifestyle—including access to wilderness, integration of work and home life, lifelong learning, and a strong sense of caring community and a sense of connectedness. It was as if the process enabled access to a shared dream, memory or vision of what an ideal future might be.

critical to this thesis – but reading it would tell you more about what I feel about this sort of writing.

My writing and better understanding the world — my use of autoethnography

> A fact is like a sack which won't stand up when it's empty. In order that it may stand up, one has to put into it the reason and sentiment which have caused it to exist (Pirandello, 1921/1952: 230).

In this section I add some detail to the description of my writing practices by expanding on my thinking about the use of my Self in narratives; specifically in this thesis through the inclusion of autobiographical stories, and explaining how I see the potential for the thesis to become *writing as performance* (Gergen M). I explain why I value the story form as a way to communicate in ways that are more than the purely intellectual, and that I see this as a way to draw out wider social and cultural aspects from the personal experience described in the narrative. I outline my interest in doing this in order that I can use story telling to shift the balance of power between writer and reader, researcher and participant and to make my writing more accessible. I include references to my use of autobiographical story work with research participants, as well as my own autoethnographic writing.

Why autoethnography is relevant to me and my work is as an expression of:
- The reflexive role of self and research
- Depicting the fuller picture of the research with me clearly in it
- The personal and the political combined
- What it says about writing; putting one's voice in writing in order to depict more fully, and because that way of writing helps to provoke/evoke for the reader and is therefore more holistic in its ways
- The potential for having a conversation in absentia with the reader.

In my inquiry practices, and specifically my writing I am attempting to better understand my self and others and achieve what Carolyn Ellis describes when she writes of seeking to understand a way of life through exploring her own life:

> I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:737).

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Writing has come to be an important way of inquiring for me, both into myself (what I know consciously and subconsciously), and into the lives and issues of others. For as Laurel Richardson says:

> Writing itself is a method of inquiry; therefore my notepads are filled not just with what I observed but also with what I know. (Richardson, 2000:923)

In writing in this way I am using my life experience to generalise to a larger group or culture. Reversing the practice of more traditional research which develops a generalisation across a number of cases and seeks to apply them to one case, autoethnography takes the particular experience of one 'case', the author, and seeks to generalise from it by engaging the reader in an empathic process which is both emotional and intellectual (Geertz, 1973).

I am interested in silencing, the ways in which some members of society can lose their voices, and I am very aware that whose story gets told determines how a situation is understood. Like Arthur Bochner I too

> wanted to understand the conventions that constrain which stories we can tell and how we can tell them, and to show how people can and do resist the forms of social control that marginalize or silence counter narratives, stories that deviate from or transgress the canonical ones (Bochner and Ellis, 2000:744).

I think autoethnographic writing offers a great opportunity to develop counter narratives or transgressive texts, to resist silencing, to really change things *and* to keep it personal as well as political, to make space for feelings and the everyday as well as analysis and theorising.

Definitions and explanations

Autoethnography is a term used for a wide range of writing by social science researchers which recognises and includes the self in the text. Ellis and Bochner provide a comprehensive definition and description of autoethnography in their chapter in the second edition of the Handbook of Qualitative research from which this is an excerpt:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural … Usually written in first-person voice, Autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, … personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing and social science prose. In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739).

As the name suggests autoethnography has developed from the fields of anthropology and of ethnography, where the term autoethnography has sometimes been used to refer to a category of counter narratives

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that are 'politicised texts that resist ethnographic representation by outsiders' (Reed-Danahay, 1997:139). Here I am using the term to mean the act of self narrative; *a work of self reflexivity through text*, autobiography with an eye to wider issues of interest and value to others arising through my personal experience, a method that places the self within a social context.

> While autoethnographers write about themselves, their goal is to touch 'a world beyond the self of the writer' (Bochner and Ellis, 1996: 24).

A post modern form

> Co-participation within the ethnographic encounter equals the shift from observing others to observing the self, from participant observation to co-participation. (Tedlock,1991:69).

Autoethnographic and similar post modern approaches to narrative and text have developed as researchers have moved from 'participant observation', recognising themselves as participants rather than observers (Tedlock). In this way it can be seen as the logical consequence of acknowledging and embracing the fact that we cannot be impartial observers (as the positivist approach suggested), but that the researcher *is* participant, and therefore our perspectives, positionalities and epistemologies should be made explicit in our texts alongside the other data gathered in the research.

So my notes taken about a project will form only one selective story, written from my particular perspective.
For example: Hilary would I'm sure tell a different story from mine about the LPT partnership power struggles from her perspective as a woman chief officer of a voluntary organisation. I could attempt to write a 'neutral' account, or I could choose to include in my account multiple voices from multiple perspectives to try to provide a 360 degree picture of events for the reader, or I could choose to tell it as I experienced it while being as explicit as I can be about my own perspective, how I am culturally and historically situated. I have chosen to do the latter (see LPT practice account).

> From a post-modern perspective, all authors, all narrators, are situated; the challenge is to come to terms with the positions in which authors locate themselves (Tierney, 2000:543).

The development of autoethnographies (and my use of them) is informed by critical theory and its rejection of a single 'truth' or interpretation of an event or action. The autoethnographic form allows for the creation of alternative interpretations, and for the reader to add their own interpretation to that of the author(s). It takes into account both the situatedness of individuals and the fluid nature of identity.

Furthermore proponents of autoethnography suggest that including our feelings and exploring our knowing are valuable additions to the data.

Why this form is of interest to me

For me this writing form is attractive because I know that I am drawn to work with projects which have resonance for me. This can start off as intellectual resonance but often develops into something more holistic; by which I mean raising 'life issues' and questions for me. In this way my research contributes to my ongoing inquiry into myself (who I am, what that means for me and others) *and* my self has something to contribute to my research.

For example: When I was asked to take on the diabetic services co-operative inquiry group (DUG) I was conscious that I did not have the condition diabetes, and wondered how that would affect my contribution to that inquiry group. Then, as the group went on, I became more conscious of the experience of long term chronic illness which the group and I shared. When this shared experience was made explicit by me it significantly changed the dynamic in the group and I believe led to more openness – particularly about feelings of despair and disillusionment experienced by participants. We could speak together from our shared experience, and didn't need to continue the 'expected' behaviour of the sick colluding with the 'well' professionals (or others) either as helpless victims or tragic heroes, or in the pretence that things would not get worse and that there were no feelings of grief or loss experienced by participants who had found themselves involuntarily deprived of the healthy future life which they had expected to lead. We were, and recognised each other as, members of the same 'community of ascription' (Gosling, 1996; Jacobs, 1995) or 'accidental community of memory' (Malkki, 1997) for the social constructs pertaining to disability and illness are, as are other social constructs, contextually and historically situated (Foucault, 1973). As McDermott and Varenne point out 'disability is not an individual condition but a cultural construct determined by the individual and group relations in which people function and develop meaning' (1995:344).
The DUG project was therefore instrumental in my being moved to write about my own experience of illness, how this relates to my commitment and interest in my work, and also what it meant to work in my professional role with a group while making myself vulnerable by sharing information about myself, and how this affects my self image.
Had we chosen to write about the DUG project in anything other than the formal report requested by our funders I would have chosen to explore autoethnographic forms with the group, e.g. life (hi)stories, which would have fitted well with the anecdotal/storytelling format of many of our sessions together, and could have included 'me, the researcher' in the text as well as 'them, the participants', so being a more authentic and learningful text than a simple, formal report.

In choosing to explore a research approach and particularly writing in this way I am questioning the conventionally accepted but unhelpful splits between self/society, insider/outsider and objective/subjective. Autoethnographers enact the basic assumption of interpretive, qualitative social science that one cannot separate the knower from the known. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Here, however, 'the known is the knower's experience' (Elaine Bass Jenks, 2002).

Autoethnography is a place where social scientists can examine 'the contradictions they experience'

> … connecting the personal to the cultural until the distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred …
> You come to understand yourself in deeper ways, and with understanding yourself comes understanding others. Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 738 – 739).

For example: When I write of my sense of displacement from my class and community, of having multiple identities because of the either/or choices I faced in pursuing my education, I become part of another community, this time that of writers/academics experiencing the same dislocation and dual/multiple identity (for example hooks, 1993; Reed-Danahay,1997).

There is also an additional dimension to autoethnography that excites me, which is the potential to build a dialogue with my readers. This style of writing is both a *confession* (*for me* – therapeutic) and a *testimony* (involves me standing as a model – saying this has relevance beyond me its purpose is to be *of use to others*). Ellis and Bochner caution about the vulnerability of self disclosure, and the experience of not having control over the way your readers interpret – the way they make sense of your story. What excites *me* about autoethnography is this very lack of control; I'm interested in whether its possible to engage the reader through these stories (writing as performance – Mary Gergen) and to move into a place where the reading and writing can become a dialogue so that you, the reader of my thesis, and I can make meaning together. If we accept the proposition that meaning is socially constructed then this thesis can be viewed as a *performance* that can be repeatedly revised as we make shared meaning together, reader and writer, academic and practitioner. (In this way at this moment you my reader contribute to my inquiry as I turn the personal need I have for legitimation into an inquiry about socially constructed meaning!) I say more about this (below) when thinking about researcher/reader relationships.

How I use autoethnographic writing

You will find autobiographical stories scattered amongst the text of this thesis; sometimes these are stories of my learning journey and sometimes stories of my personal life based on my inquiry. They are placed here to explore meanings, stimulate reactions, and evoke feelings, all of which contribute to our being in-relationship as I write and you read, I perform for you and you react to the performance with your (equally valid) responses. In this way we can have a dialogue as you read, feel, think and react. I deliberately try to evoke a sense of my feelings in you as you read, in this way you can come to know me as a knower as well as a theoriser. I evoke the experiential rather than starting with the propositional.

I currently use an autoethnographic approach for three types of writing:

Autoethnographic stories of life/work	Writing about writing	Collecting life (hi)stories within projects
These form a method of self-study, a first person inquiry and personal exploration and sense making.	These are over-written texts, offering a reflective tool for inquiry into my learning journey.	Incipient; I use these (hi)stories verbally but these have not yet developed into co-produced texts.
Examples are: o Crow (*Appendix A*) o Filling the silence (*Appendix F*) o Writing re my experience of a physiotherapy assessment (*Appendix A* page 2)	Various inc MPhil to PhD transfer papers. Examples of writing with overwritten comments are used throughout this thesis to demonstrate changing perspectives across learning journey moments.	LGA writing about *Working with my passions in the context of the joining up project.*

So far I have written about autoethnography as if it were only a first person inquiry method which seeks to engage its readers in a 'serial' second person inquiry with the author with the aim of a third person effect as the wider cultural learning is identified from the particular learning described. However second and third person inquiry texts can

be co-constructed with participants or written by the researcher alone, facing the researcher with issues of how to present or reveal the material gathered.

For example:
Had the DUG group and I written together about participants' experience of long term chronic illness we could have done so in autoethnographic forms including a descriptive text written by me framing quotes from their life-story-telling, short stories written by participants (with or without me), poems, a play etc. We could have included in this writing both their experience of the services for people with diabetes and the group's experience of the NHS system's ability and inability to hear and value this lived experience.
I could also have included my story (written for myself and my tutorial group) of trying to recruit to the group; how I experienced that (my frustration), what it brought up in me (re my own relationship with health professionals and authority), how that relates to the wider cultural and historical context (patient self advocacy and professional power, the self image of 'damaged' people).

Power issues that I as researcher/author would have needed to consider include:
- Was there a 'we' in the material presented or a 'them'?
- What did we choose to reveal to each other only and what did we agree to reveal to 'the world'?
- Did the forms the writing took feel appropriate to everyone in the group?
- How did we decide that/deal with discomfort?
- Did the report get read and by whom?
- What happened as a result?
- How does that affect the way we view the experience of the group?

This thesis is written at a point when I have experimented with the form of self reflexive text and am gaining confidence to go on to develop more polyvocal/collaborative texts with participants . I have not yet found the opportunity to develop co-created autoethnographic texts with an inquiry group I'm working with for second and third person action research. The closest I have come to it is some of the CPC reports and written records which start to address the issues of co-constructed texts (including the researcher voice); and using different forms to communicate different types of material e.g. the CD of the Children's Commission presentation and data; and the LGA writing *Working with my passions in the joining up project* as an example of writing alongside co-inquirers.

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Congruent ways of communicating

I have said that some of the key themes arising in this thesis are those of power, class and voice. I am interested in ways of inquiring and communicating that are congruent with my concern for these issues, and which can have positive social effect. And I am interested in ways which can open up the process of researching to those previously excluded because of the association of 'research' with being an academic and intellectually elite activity, as opposed to research as inquiry open to all to engage in. As Ellis and Bochner put it so succinctly:

> The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience (Shelton 1995), and *to write from an ethic of care and concern* (Denzin, 1997; Noddings, 1984; Richardson, 1997) (2000:742, emphasis added).

I am researching and telling my own stories at least partly in order that others might come to 'own' their own stories through reading and resonating with mine. Stories are the way in which people constitute themselves socially and culturally, in this way they create their own life stories. In the telling of stories, in the listening to and reading of stories there is an opportunity to share with one another the experiences of our own lives and those of others. This process forms a version of the 'communicative space' which Kemmis describes as necessary for action research (Kemmis, 2001), and as Elliot Eisner commented stories can advance and enhance empathic forms of understanding:

> Narrative, when well crafted, is a spur to the imagination, and through our imaginative participation in the worlds that we create we have a platform for seeing what might be called our 'actual worlds' more clearly (Eisner, 1997:264).

Such texts can evoke emotional responses in the reader, advance the reader's empathic understanding of the issues written about and enable the reader to reflect on their 'life worlds' from a different perspective.

In my autoethnographic writing I aim to include as much of myself as I can, exploring the resonance for me of projects and issues, and in this way inviting the reader to experience the world as I do and to interact with the 'me' that is present in the text. I'm looking to communicate my experience, not in a simply factual way but to communicate the meaning for me of the experience, and to provoke in you my reader feelings about your own life by evoking my own.

For example: when I write about my experience of being visited by crows and so coming to confront my own witchiness I want you to be asking yourself questions about *your own* subconscious, *your* witchiness, *your* personal power, *your* connection to the transpersonal[101].

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[101] See *Crow Appendix A.*

When I write about my experience of illness and disability I want you to be able to feel your own fear and frustration as you read about mine, your own sense of empowerment as you read about me confronting and rejecting the role of victim.

Although an autoethnographic narrative is usually a written text it does not need to confine itself to propositional ways of knowing but can access experiential and practical knowing. It is important to me that ways of knowing other than the purely intellectual are valued here in this thesis and in this process of me writing as performance for as Ellis and Bochner wrote:

> Reflexive ethnographers ideally use all their senses, their bodies, movement, feeling and their whole being – they use the 'self' to learn about the other. (2000:741.

In addition to coming to know me through this performance I invite you to join with me in drawing out from my personal narrative the social and cultural aspects of the personal experience and so be able to generalise from it, because these are also relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure and culture and dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language. I invite you to engage at multiple levels both emotionally and intellectually, to become for the period in which you engage part of the living process of the inquiry through experiencing in a feeling sense having been invited into my world and I hope stimulated to reflect on and understand better your own life – in this way I hope to make a contribution to my readers' own sense making.

For as Richardson writes the authors of self narratives:

> [P]rivilege stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations. They ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually.[102]

Accessible story telling

> The anecdote is the recital of an incident that illuminates an entire destiny.
>
> > Martin Buber.

I am interested in finding ways to make this and my continuing work more accessible, particularly to those I work with as co-inquirers. Story telling is a medium which can cross the barriers of the academy and

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[102] Richardson (1994) quoted in Ellis and Bochner (2000).

class. By story telling I mean the telling of stories of our everyday, lived experience[103].

I have learnt through my own practice how informative and liberating story telling can be in a group (Freire), and still value my own personal experiences of consciousness raising groups. I hope that by illustrating my writing with stories I can go some way to countering the inaccessibility of the academy, and particularly of post modern texts (Rose, 2002) which ironically require the acquisition of even more theoretical discourses than classical and modernist texts as to be *post* modern one needs to start with a grounding in modernism and preferably in premodernism and classicism too, before acquiring an understanding of postmodernism!

It has become noticeable (Tedlock, 1991, Bochner and Ellis 1999[104]) that the academy is becoming more diverse, and that this has coincided with the focus moving from old paradigm social science to an increasing focus on participatory approaches to researching and writing.

> The current shift from 'participant observation' to observing participation, and a parallel emphasis on the process of writing, has coincided with an increase in those who were previously the ones without voice becoming the ethnographers; the tellers of the stories. More women, working class, minority ethnic and third and fourth world scholars are now represented in the academy (Tedlock, 1991)

As a scholar of working class origin I want to learn to tell stories that can travel across the divides of the haves and have-nots, the uppers and the lowers (Chambers) carrying a real sense of diversity and differences in experience. I accept that I cannot *give voice to* those who are silenced in less powerful positions (despite my sharing origins and experiences with them) but I can see myself as 'part of the process of breaking apart the barriers for speakers and listeners, writers and readers, which are perpetuated through and act to support our privileged positions' (Noffke, 1998:10-11). Through autoethnography I can speak from my own experience and invite you to come close and listen and help me to make sense, as I hope I can help you to make sense too.

To sum up

In this section I have added some detail to the description of my writing practices included in my methodology chapter by expanding on one particular form – autoethnography, and on my thinking about the use of

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[103] I recently brought three women together who didn't know each other previously and who I was interested in working with, and who I hoped would want to explore ways of working with each other. On the first occasion on which all four of us were present one woman suddenly launched into a story about her relationship with the man she lived with, and that was it – for an hour each of us told stories about our everyday lives and through them explored our similarities, our diversity, and established our relationship.

[104] Quoted in Ellis and Bochner (2000).

my self in narratives, specifically in this thesis through the inclusion of autobiographical stories. I have discussed the potential for writing and reading to become performance, also how I value the story form as a way to communicate in ways that are more than only intellectual, and that I see this as a way to draw out social and cultural aspects from the personal experience described in the story.

I've outlined my interest in doing this in order that I can use story telling to shift the balance of power between writer and reader, researcher and participant, and to make my writing more accessible.

Who else is doing this or writing about something similar?

In this chapter I have included references to and discussion of writing by others about facilitation (Chambers, Heron, Macy, Weisbord and Janoff, Wheatley, Wadsworth), telling the story of my search for a 'guide' to facilitation.

This search started off with me seeking for a comprehensive description of facilitation against which I could judge myself, and steps which I could follow to self improvement. What I found was some writing which I found it hard to relate to (Heron), and some which I could relate to but which didn't plumb sufficiently the areas in which I was particularly interested (Chambers, Wadsworth), and other writing which focused on other aspects of practice; power (Chambers), a feminist perspective (Maguire, Wadsworth), bringing different stakeholders together to search for common ground (Weisbord and Janoff), integrating the political and the transpersonal (Macy, Starhawk), and yet more writing (Wheatley and the PeerSprit circling materials, Shaw, Conversation café materials) that was working from a place of feeling connection, that countered the to me alarming trend (led by those (e.g. Joplin, Madron[105]) who seemed to focus on design and a range of 'sophisticated' tools) to complicate the process of *coming together to learn* in ways which were making the whole business of facilitation and meeting design feel increasingly 'expert' and inaccessible, whilst espousing the words of Paulo Freire and the pursuit of inclusive participatory processes.

Had I kept on searching I may eventually have found what I was looking for but instead I became more magpie-like and started to 'raid' writing that related to facilitating inquiry but came from a focus on self-reflexive practice (Marshall, Torbert, Bohm). And at the same time I started talking with others who facilitated and learnt things from those conversations (Macy, Weisbord and Janoff, Wheatley) and had email conversations with the Future Search network and the UK Community Participation Network, whilst at the same time coming to recognise that not everyone wanted to be able to deconstruct their practice and develop a near-continuous awareness. If I was going to find a form I was going to need to create it myself – but there was a wealth of related material out there to help. For this I'm grateful – both that I gave up looking for the 'holy grail' formula, and that others have given so generously of their ideas and experience.

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[105] I quote John Joplin and Ray Madron simply as examples, both are well intended and committed campaigners for democracy but with a tendency to complexify. Joplin and Madron (2003) *Gaian Democracies*. Schumacher briefing No 9. Greenspirit Books.

Here in this chapter I have described a practice; a set of noticing and tracking disciplines that I have developed and seek to practice and would recommend for facilitators of any AR as a first person practice for themselves.

Drawing it all together

> As facilitators we have been training for this work all our lives. (Macy, May 2000. Personal communication).

This chapter has told my journey through methodology; outlining action research and what has influenced me, looking at inquiry in the context of facilitation and what's influenced my practice. I've outlined my first person noticing practices and contextualised these by describing briefly my second and third person inquiries, and I've described how I track my inquiries, and how I use ways to 'thicken' and deepen the data through writing and working with dreams and imaginal material.

I have attempted to ask and answer the question *why notice?* And have outlined the ways in which I am 'observing the observer' (Bateson) through 'ritualising' my noticing, particularly my self-noticing practices in order to stay aware of three aspects: the *political, historical cultural stuff* of my life and those I work with, how they situate us and the existential struggles of living in the world as it is and as we experience it; the *personal, psychodynamic stuff* that relates to my biography, to be aware so that I don't do my number on others degeneratively but can have access to my self when this is generative for the task/group; and the *transpersonal, imaginal stuff* through which archetypal patterns of the collective unconscious may be discernable, wanting to access these to examine them and ask what they can offer to my understanding and the task as appropriate.

Throughout this chapter I've been open about the personal history, attitudes and the values from which I practice; challenging the status quo (Chambers, Hall), integrating gender (Maguire, Lather), seeking out different ways of knowing, different voices, caring passionately about voice and silencing. For along with Marx I can see no point in studying the world if we are not also to change it.

To put my daily work into the wider context I 'notice' in the hope that my facilitation practice may ultimately make a contribution to a more just and a more interconnected world. Joanna Macy, beloved teacher of deep ecology, Buddhism and living systems theory, writes of our 'radical interconnectedness' (Macy, 1998) and of the need to work with the gifts

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of the Shambala warrior; insight and compassion[106]. Both Macy (1998) and Starhawk (1982) stress the need to integrate the political and the transpersonal, emphasising the need to reconnect our alienated human selves to the earth who made us. For we live in a 'culture of estrangement' (Starhawk, 1982:48), as Susan Griffin wrote:

> We who are born into this civilisation have inherited a habit of mind. We are divided against ourselves. We no longer regard ourselves as part of this earth. We regard our fellow human beings as enemies. And, very young, we learn to disown parts of our own being (Griffin, 1984:175).

In and through my work I am arguing and working for a reintegration with(in) ourselves, with each other and with the more than human world.

Having explored at length my approaches to inquiry I now go on to consider power; its relation to the context in which I work and the work I do, including the effect of the exercise of power on me and those I work with.

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[106] For an explanation of the Shambala warrior see *Chapter 3 Power key issues – Our systemic inter-existance and power.*