

## Chapter 4

### Practice Accounts – introduction

Having considered the exercise of power in the contexts in which I live and work I want to offer examples from my practice over the period of my PhD inquiry.

I have selected a few examples of my practice to write up in some detail here, a larger overview is also available in the matrix *Work Projects*<sup>175</sup>. It has been a struggle to get a coherent form for this part of the thesis, like trying to get the residents of a zoo to all look the same; some are hairy and some are scaly and that is the authentic nature of each of them. So they are here with their differences, their diversity<sup>176</sup>.

Between them I believe the practice accounts cover the key issues with which I'm working, and many of the challenges for me as facilitator and the learning which has contributed to the facilitator I am today (see list overleaf). They also represent work undertaken during each of the three 'moments' of my learning journey. I have selected the accounts to tell in more detail how the key themes have arisen and been worked with by me over this learning journey, and how the conceptual development of the thesis relates to them.

Wheeler and Chinn define praxis as 'values made visible through deliberate action' (1991: 2). These accounts show me trying to enact my values through and in my practice; the way that I work, who I work with and how I am in my work, and how I inquire.

#### What can I show you?

Can I really show you me-in-action in these practice accounts? I will try to do so and suggest that you also refer to *Inquiring conversations about my practice*, where you see me engaging with others giving me feedback.

Here you can see me in-action using my 'noticing pocket' most clearly in the Children's Commission account when the children describe

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<sup>175</sup> I have included the matrix to show the range of inquiries I have conducted over the learning journey period. There are too many to cover in here so I have selected accounts from them. I have been inquiring in all of the projects listed in the matrix, including reflecting on them in my CARPP tutorial group.

<sup>176</sup> I use some of the practice accounts as teaching materials, so they repeat references mentioned elsewhere in the thesis.

playing ball on the roof, and in the LGA account when I 'snap' at the participant in a workshop. You will notice that these are both examples of me questioning my practice. These examples stick in my mind most, the times when things go less smoothly, the times when things go well fade quickly. It's the gritty times that stick in the mind.

### What this process has shown me

It is typical of this learning journey that the very process of writing up my practice accounts sent me into a panic of not-knowing<sup>177</sup>. As I later related to my supervisor:

I got quite agitated a couple of weeks ago; I can always create a fantasy of not having done something or misunderstanding so not knowing something. At that point it was like the 'getting feedback' fantasy<sup>178</sup> and I'd decided that everybody must keep 'proper' practice accounts as they go along. Therefore I'd failed to do that since 1996/7 and I couldn't ever make up for it now.



Bags of evidence

It was the process of going through the notebooks digging them all out, labelling them, reading bits and being surprised, reading bits and being appalled, that was incredibly good. It did take days and

<sup>177</sup> There's also a piece of dream/therapy writing called '*Getting*' which specifically refers to this process of losing faith and regaining it.

<sup>178</sup> For a long time I feared I would be unable to get feedback on my practice, and because I had not formally asked for feedback at the time of many of the projects that I'd be unable to include others' perspectives in this thesis. This fear ignored the fact that I have sought feedback in the process of working throughout the period of this learning journey, it was a fantasy that was made up of a belief that there was a 'proper' way of seeking feedback and that I had failed to understand and implement it and therefore my inquiry was invalid.

they make up three whole bags! I've also thrown away 6 crates of work papers in that process because I had confidence in my books, I knew there was something in there that I could touch and I could remember what I'd done (Transcript July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004).

From starting at CARPP in 1996 there's been the fantasy around in my mind that I wasn't doing anything to track my practice. Delving back into the piles of work books and journals, and the records of tutorials and papers written has been a real journey of realisation, not just of quite how much tracking I was doing but also of just how strong this fantasy of not-knowing and not-doing really is, how hard wired it is in me. It has shown me yet again how easy it would be for me to dismiss my lived practice and experience because of the fantasy I hold that its not 'proper' evidence or 'legitimate' practice that I'm speaking from. And this is such a familiar issue for so many of the groups with whom I work; of feeling they are not sufficiently expert to be heard, that they don't have a legitimate form for their knowing and its communication (for example through story telling as opposed to expertly produced written reports).

The process of revisiting the material which I have created has been both challenging and invigorating. Now I can speak from it and through it because I can hear it speaking to me. Here is a glimpse of my practice with some of its joys and pains, it is my intention to show a condensed and knitted together picture of the journey. As Judi said at the time of our session '*you have brought yourself together and to now in the process that you've done*'.

### **What you will find here**

In these practice accounts I have concentrated on tracking me as facilitator in three different, sometimes concurrent roles; as a 'standing up at the front' facilitator (e.g. CPC), as a more 'covert' facilitator (e.g. facilitating learning about partnership as well as the partnership itself in the LPT), and finally as researcher/facilitator (e.g. Children's Commission, Governance project).

The accounts are organised under headings giving:

- how the written account was developed – showing the quality process
- a brief description of the project
- the ways in which I was inquiring
- why they are of interest in this thesis
- the issues raised
- developing my capacity and presence as a facilitator and
- the relationship to my learning journey.

In the accounts I explore developing strands of territories<sup>179</sup> including:

- what are the qualities of a good meeting or partnership
- power and powerlessness
- muted voices
- recognising different kinds of knowing
- the creation of empowered space
- sense making in real time
- facilitating openness to happen e.g. supporting participants to be able to choose not get pushed into defensiveness or old behaviours
- my noticing and use of self as facilitator.

Some of the strands have been figural across the whole learning journey e.g. power and voices, others have arisen and because I've worked with them have receded again or have become embedded e.g. issues about my own identity particularly in relation to my illness and disability. I think the way such issues become figural or recede emphasises the importance of an ongoing first person inquiry for the facilitator/researcher. They need recognising and attending to or they will keep cropping up again and again and I could miss something really germane to the work and my own development as inquirer.

### **How the accounts relate to my learning journey**

The accounts also tell the meta story of my learning journey showing my movement towards working with greater integrity and authenticity, from the early counter-dependent (in relation to authority) Tigers moment, through my very conditional and more dependent Unicorn moment, into my Pig and Deer moment.

They show the movement from striving for 'perfection', to being more confident and therefore able to be choiceful and pragmatic.

They show the movement from aspiring to be someone else who has a 'perfect practice', to valuing myself for what I am and what I bring, and using what I am to respond to clients' needs through designing and planning with them, responding in the moment; and learning to support them.

They show the movement from facilitation as an extension of advocacy and campaigning (with a guilty subtext of I 'should' be neutral – when I knew I was not), to a more pragmatic approach rooted in understanding and compassion for my client (while noticing what gets reactivated in me but with less attachment), which means more support/coaching at the same time as keeping a sharp eye on the social justice aspects and the wider context, using my values more and my headstrongness less.

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<sup>179</sup> The Matrix *Work Projects* shows which of these themes are covered in each practice account.

In shaping these accounts I've needed to be choiceful in what I include, both because of the sheer volume of available material and because of issues of confidentiality. Some accounts have had to stand for numerous similar projects due to lack of space to tell the stories and to avoid repetition; other stories are partial accounts to avoid being identifiable when the situation has been one of some sensitivity.

These practice accounts are designed to be an open exploration of where I was at the time, viewed from 'now' but accessing my records of projects to give a flavour of 'then'. They are not meant to be heroic accounts or victory narratives. I try to be candid about when it was not easy to hold groups or my intentions for them, and when I act from frames of mind which are not my current preferred best.

### **Other things you should know**

The directly quoted material in the accounts is drawn largely from three sources:

- o contemporary writing
- o reflective conversations with my CARPP group and co-facilitators
- o a series of *Inquiring Conversations* with people who know my work well.

I have usually given the real names of co-facilitators/research team members but have changed the names of research participants. The exception to this has been the LGA project where I have referred to consultant team dynamics; in this instance all names have been changed.

## Community Planning for Stroud (CPC or "Up 2 Us")

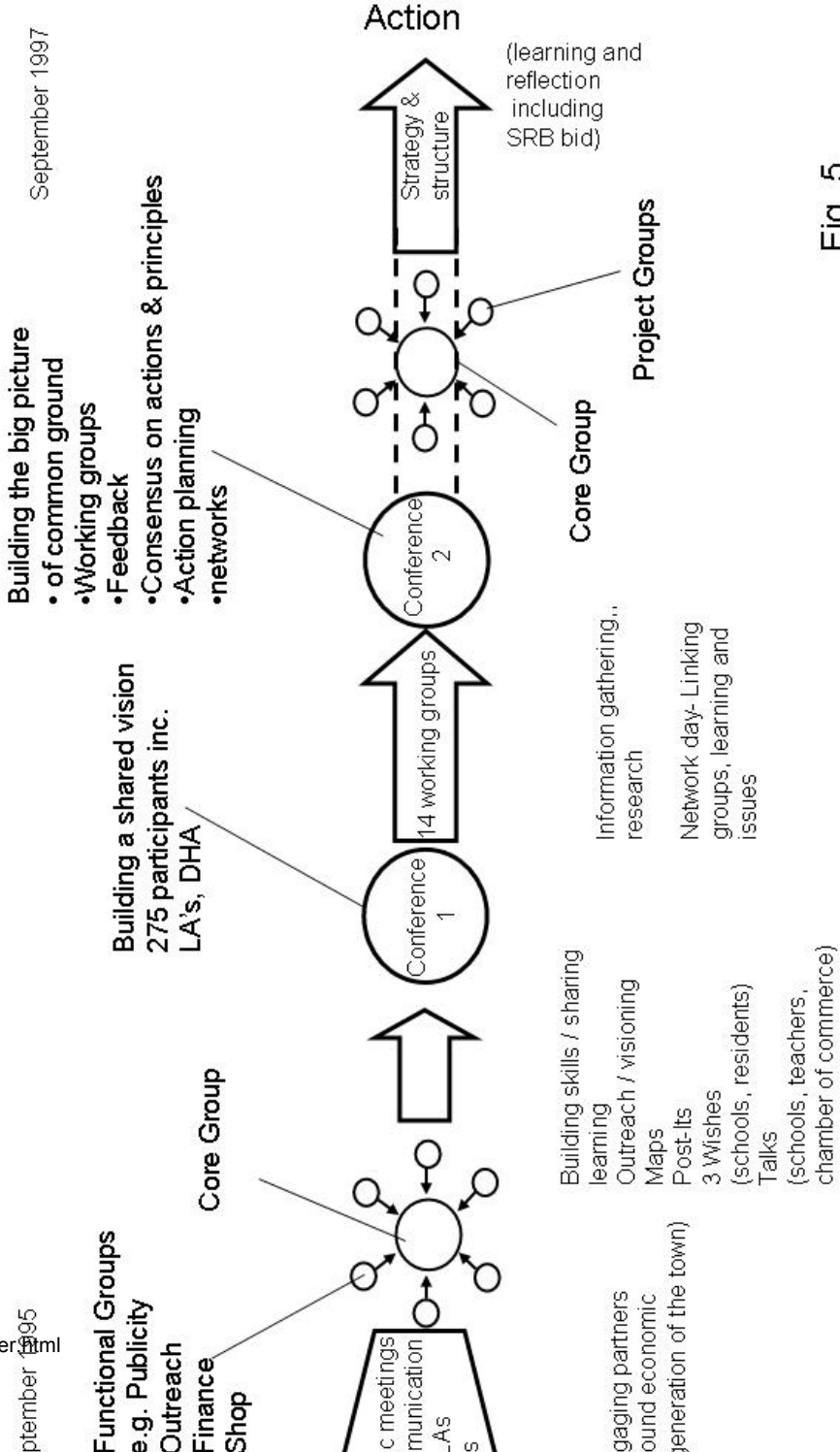


Fig. 5

## Practice account 1 – CPC

1995 – 1997

### **How this account has developed:**

Digesting it through writing about it (AMED and Learning Company conference papers), speaking about it (conferences, teaching sessions), and entering into question and answer sessions with students about it.

Plan for account made and discussed with supervisor March 04.

First draft completed 30.6.04.

Discussed with supervisor 2.7.04.

Revised 7.7.04.

Shared second draft with ML (co-facilitator, CPC).

Revised 7.9.04.

Me: and I think in that way CPC's probably the most useful practice account. Because it's a nice understandable flow, an identifiable piece of work – unlike the GHA stuff which was about advocating something from within an organisation, although its relevant in that I can now look back from the LGA stuff and see the similarities between trying to move issues in both settings and what I've learnt about when to stop pushing, it would be really hard for someone to get hold of that stuff and it could sound quite whingy, frustrated and stuck (which it was but also a lot of other things as well). Whereas if I look at CPC which I was doing in my spare time in parallel (surprise, surprise) there's a piece of work where I've got the diagram, there's the storytelling, then some photographs and some video evidence, and there's the questions about that that I came here with. [Tutorial March/04]

### ***Brief description:***

CPC stands for the community planning conference held in Stroud, my home town at the time, and was the name by which the wider process became known also. I worked as a member of the core organising team and facilitated both community conferences and other meetings.

See diagram of the CPC process for a sense of the design and the timescale (Fig 5), and this extract (below) from a paper written to accompany a workshop which a CPC colleague and I presented to the Association for Management Education and Development (AMED) conference<sup>180</sup> which had as a focus that year '*Vision, values and the virtual organisation*'.

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<sup>180</sup> Held at the Civil Service College, Surrey. Uk.

## **The CPC process (extract from a paper presented at AMED conference, August 1996)**

“Vision was seen as particularly essential to the CPC process of revitalisation of the town but there was a dilemma in designing the overall process about whether to focus on vision or the current reality first. It was decided to identify issues through a visioning process concentrating on “how we want it to be” not what is missing and this was done through using post-it notes which was a really flexible and effective way of capturing people's wishes or dreams for Stroud, both in pre-conference meetings and public consultation and in the first conference.

The overall process was designed to involve the whole system and has similarities to Open Space Technology and to Future Search, which was also considered. The difference was primarily the wish to not focus on a limited number of stakeholders but to make the process open to anyone<sup>181</sup>.

The first weekend conference was designed to create a community vision for the town, drawing on the public consultation that had already taken place on post it notes. The visioning process started with guided visualisation, developing into drawing, sharing in pairs and in table groups and then translating into words on post it notes. These, with the post it notes collected previously from the public, were then clustered on a large wall into topic areas. Then groups formed around these issues and developed exciting creative visions presented through plays, visual models and song. Action plans for research into how to achieve the visions were then developed.

Although the CPC was conceived and evolved over several months through public meetings, it was this exciting and creative visioning process which had a sense of warm community which gave birth overnight to the organisation at the first conference. Before that conference people were interested but sceptical and divided in their usual camps: as a result of the first weekend, 275 people were part of CPC and had literally rubbed shoulders in a crowded hall - a range of ordinary citizens and those who traditionally have the power to decide about planning and other issues.

The initial conference process strove to keep all the facets of the vision for Stroud open and allow people to follow their passion for particular topics in choosing the working groups. This was also recognition that groups would only flourish where there was energy and therefore leadership to pursue a particular passion.

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<sup>181</sup> We reversed apathy and non-participation in decision making in the town by, in Schattschneider's terms, declaring *what the game was about*, as well as *who gets to play* the game (everyone who we could engage in the process), and on as equal a footing as process design could engineer.



There followed an intense period of research and information gathering by the groups in a very short 3 month timescale. A network day was held halfway through this time for groups to share information and avoid duplication. This also strengthened the sense of community and helped focus the visions.

The second weekend conference drew together the work of the working groups through presentations and focused on building “the Big Picture” using a whole group mapping process to achieve consensus on actions and guiding principles. New people also joined the process and were included through recapping the initial visioning and the interactive group process. One of the difficulties of the second conference was that in introducing new people and achieving consensus in a large group, issues such as housing, arts, or economic regeneration, were still being addressed on a overview level, at which there was consensus and not at the detailed implementation level, where there was inevitably disagreement that people wanted to resolve. These issues were left to be resolved in the project groups which formed from the working groups.

Vision was particularly central to this virtual organisation as its initial task was to empower people to develop and communicate their vision of the town to each other and the planning authorities. As it moves towards action that vision is a guideline” .

### ***How I was inquiring:***

- Work book notes and reflections in my journal
- Discussions with my CARPP3 tutorial group (from 3/96)
- Dreams, therapy session reflections
- Reflections with co-facilitator Martin Large and CPC core group members
- Video and still photographs of the conferences
- Feedback from conference participants – both formal via feedback sheets and informally on the street
- Reflections with Vision 21 Facilitators Learning Network colleagues
- Reflections with Sustainable Futures colleagues
- Reflective interview with Chief Executive Officer of the Stroud District Council, at my request
- AMED and Learning Company Conference sessions (and papers)
- Reflections on the project, and particularly my practice, with co-facilitator Martin Large.

Writing the paper for the AMED conference workshop was challenging as I was co-presenting with another of the first CPC conference facilitators, with whom I did not see eye to eye completely. The resulting paper and workshop was therefore an example of me being pragmatic, and consequently feeling unsatisfied and compromised.

Looking at the paper again for this practice account I can see the evidence of this pragmatism and can re-live the feelings I had about not using a 'pure' FS design for the conferences – irritation at not being able to sway the decision and fear of facilitating a design in which I did not have absolute confidence.

The experience of working with Martin Large to plan and deliver our session to the Learning Company Conference was very different as, although we each brought different contributions, our values and perspectives were closer and I felt at the time that I was learning from the collaboration.

### ***Why it's of interest here:***

**This is a very early account of me as facilitator** (in learning journey terms an example of my Tigers of wrath moment); I had only facilitated until then within the context of Vision 21 projects (Gloucestershire's Local Agenda21) and my work in health and social services, but had recently trained with Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff to facilitate Future Search (FS) processes.

Some of the work on this project predates my membership of CARPP but I already had a very keen interest in the nature of facilitation – both the power issues and a curiosity about how others used their 'Selves' in their facilitation and what went on as internal processing.

**All the issues relating to power are here in an early form;** whose voice gets heard, who sets the agenda, inclusion, working from the margins, congruency of content and process as well as questions for me as a facilitator – particularly as I was viewed as a community leader by traditional power holders such as the local authorities.

Martin Large commented:

Taking Barry Oshrey's Power and Systems work – where, crudely, he looks at top power, middle power and bottom power – you were in the bottom power mode (helping the marginalised find a voice etc), rather than as a facilitator choosing when to assert top power (clear vision, benefits, overall strategy, simple and profound solutions, values), or middle power (connective, relating etc). You of course are good at top, middle and bottom power as a facilitator, but tend to see things from the underdog's point of view and this blocked your ability to relate to and influence tops and middles as a leader, broker, and facilitator (personal email 19.8.04<sup>182</sup>).

I think Martin's observations were pretty accurate at that time.

**This project, undertaken as gift work in my own community, acted as a counterpoint to the work I was struggling to continue to do from within the health authority (GHA)** I was then working as planning and participation manager. I had joined the health authority with real

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<sup>182</sup> Martin's comments were in response to an invitation from me to feedback on my practice.

hopes of being able to affect the ways the organisation engaged with the publics it served. After changes at the top of the organisation, and the end of the honeymoon period it became increasingly obvious that for many of the executive it was important to marginalise the work I was doing and to keep any changes superficial. In 1995 I was still fighting to try to retain influence inside the authority and to champion changes in the way it did its business; to engage more of the community in health planning and decision making on individual and community levels<sup>183</sup>. I was feeling disappointed, frustrated and immensely unskilled at work. CPC became a place where I could feel skilled again, could work with my values and in community. However it shared some of the same issues and questions for me as my work with the health authority; e.g. how to work both pragmatically and with values, the need to understand and work with others' motivations, questions about the nature and forms of leadership.

To use Gramsci's terms the project was a triumph of the optimism of the will over the pessimism of the intellect, and in this way unusual for me, or at least for my later moment self. Today I would be much more circumspect about what such a project could achieve. I think I needed somewhere to be optimistic because of my frustration at work and this enabled me to be in-step with the wave of community optimism which gave birth to CPC, not as a campaign against anything but as a movement towards something better.

### ***Issues raised:***

**Expert power** – The alternative name for the CPC was Up2Us, which made a statement about being community led. It was our belief that the wisdom and experience gained by 'ordinary people' i.e. local residents about their needs and desires and what was possible and practical (lived experience) was worth more at this stage than expert opinion from outside the community (Freire, Chambers).

The core group of CPC (which met throughout the process to co-ordinate activity and learning from the project) shared my discomfort with importing 'expert' knowledge rather than finding ways to listen to the lived experience of the community. Whether the experts were consultant/facilitators hired to run the CPC process, professional experts from the local authorities or a 'saviour' town centre manager rather than citizen led and informed town centre management.

Up2Us also made a statement about who should have the power to implement changes and about a move from passive dependency on statutory agencies and large business.

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<sup>183</sup> Acting as a tempered radical.

**Gathering upstream and downstream companions** – the CPC project provided many of both: many councillors, senior local authority managers and others in position of influence were involved in CPC, particularly the conferences and working groups; and it felt like every activist in town (and for miles around) was involved in one way or another.

My role in the CPC project was as a member of the co-ordinating core group, a member of the design group which designed the conferences and the wider process, and as one of a team of three facilitators who delivered each of the conferences. Some of these participants and facilitators were known to me before the CPC, and others not.

However looking back now I can see how very unskilled I was in developing and sustaining relationships with those with power e.g. the Directors of Housing and Planning from the District Council. I allowed my distaste for the system which privileged their knowledge over that of local people to get in the way of being politically strategic in my relationships; and because this felt so difficult I tended to avoid the one to one or small group meetings with local authority directors etc and left them to others who were keen to do them – too keen I thought and rather despised them for it<sup>184</sup>.

Strong memories of this period were recently evoked for me by a dream and subsequent work I did on its content and connections, I wrote<sup>185</sup>:

I think about work. I remember the ache of inauthenticity, frustration and shame working for GHA and being unable to influence sufficiently.  
Ashamed of myself, speechlessly angry – (and) I can't give-in to anger I can't be sure of controlling.  
Hating the game playing, the pragmatism, the settling for small rewards.  
Loathing the culture of obsequiousness.

I was having a very hard time hanging on in the job I was doing for the health authority, the stress and frustration affected me enormously and had an impact on my activity within CPC.

The outcome for CPC was that this interface with the power holders in the system was conducted by core group members who had little or no experience of campaigning, advocacy or partnership negotiation. The resulting partnerships were often weak, and the meta goal of local authority support for an ongoing community development project and capacity building was neglected.

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<sup>184</sup> See Martin Large's reflection on working with middles and uppers.

<sup>185</sup> Writing as reflection; '*Sussex pond pudding (tempered radicals connection)*' 3.6.03.

I was struggling to influence while staying on the margins (hooks), where I also felt muted and angry.<sup>186</sup> This made for a difficult ground from which to facilitate, particularly as I had a question about whether I 'should' be facilitating from a position of neutrality. I had not yet managed to make the margins fully my own, there were too many resonances from my personal history getting mixed in (without a proper awareness on my part) and too naive an analysis of power<sup>187</sup>. Whatever my feelings I must have done a reasonable job of concealing them as I was asked by the two local authorities to do several pieces of facilitation work in the years following.

**Changing needs for leadership** – this project helped me to have a felt understanding of the different types of leadership required by groups through their stages of development (Randall, Southgate and Tomlinson), and to experience how these are valued differently by the group (CPC), with heroic leadership being seen as most significant. My own leadership role was complicated; I wanted to work within a core team but repeatedly found myself 'at the front' of meetings and events, particularly when things got sticky. Facilitator, broker and community leader/activist roles need some distinguishing in this sort of project.

**The value and complexity of local knowledge** – Greenwood and Levin (2000:141) write about the value and complexity of local knowledge as it is mobilised through participatory processes in *An Introduction to Action Research* describing a community based research project in La Mancha, Spain in which Levin was personally involved. Certainly my experience of the CPC process convinced me that Greenwood and Levin were correct when they wrote about communities who were 'mobilised and capable of developing plans that would rival or better official, expert, outside plans'. Many of the CPC ideas and initiatives have gone on to be developed as concrete and successful projects. Greenwood and Levin noted that in La Mancha 'what was in short supply were facilitation and research skills, but these can be learned much more easily than outsiders can learn the details of local knowledge'. This was very similar to our experience in CPC, except that in Stroud there was no shortage of facilitators either, Stroud being a very 'alternative' place compared by many to Totnes and

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<sup>186</sup> See also the reference to silence as a consciously chosen survival strategy in Chapter 2. *My approaches to inquiry*.

<sup>187</sup> See also Power chapter regarding power as embedded in the system. As Deetz commented 'the force of these arrangements is primarily in producing order, forgetfulness and dependency' (Deetz, S. A. (1992). See also *Appendix C*, referring to me 'learning to be nice while still being nasty' – finding ways of empathising and influencing and the ways they affect my self image as an authentic person.

Glastonbury<sup>188</sup>. As a result Stroud has a considerable concentration of management consultants and 'change agents' as residents, and had many active participants in Local Agenda21, including a core of us who were interested in the participation and democracy aspects of sustainability.

### ***Developing my capacities and presence as a facilitator:***

**Congruency of content/aims and process/design** – there was a positive/appreciative focus for the inquiry (although I didn't know what Appreciative Inquiry was at that time) however we did know we had an interesting thing; a community initiative that was not focused around a crisis but was based on a desire to make things better through valuing what there was and building on it. It was not a project that wanted an authority to 'rescue' it but wanted to become a platform for community self help<sup>189</sup>.

**Inclusive design** – a range of activities were developed and badged CPC or Up2Us in order that those who would not normally get involved in 'discussion-based' processes such as public meetings would engage. These included:

- street theatre in the shopping areas of the town
- school gate meetings to catch parents dropping their children off at school
- Core group members offering to speak at meetings of pre-existing groups e.g. WI, Parish councils, and interest groups
- working with local primary schools to include the CPC process as part of school projects e.g. designing posters and logos, learning about the history of the town, exploring the concept of citizenship
- distributing the town maps leaflet via the local paper – which encouraged people to write or draw on the map the facilities they would like to see in the town
- running a Three Wishes for Stroud campaign
- opening an Up2Us drop-in shop in main shopping area.

Using **visual methods** to communicate including:

- the Furry Godfathers (as opposed to Fairy Godmothers) street theatre

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<sup>188</sup> It is said that west Wales is full of hippies that never made it as far as Ireland in the '60s and '70s, if this is so it could also be said that Stroud is full of hippies who never even made it across the river Severn to Wales.

<sup>189</sup> This makes the Stroud District Council decision not to fund or support any of the community development activities of CPC at the end of its first phase particularly tragic as, after the second conference, there was no investment in community capacity building by the local authorities who could have funded it within their remit.

- asking people in the first conference to start by drawing their visions before they put them into words
- compiling a huge wall of Three Wishes post-its to illustrate areas of common concern and commitment
- photographic displays, maps and 3D models of the town



3D model of the town

- the use of humorous posters and newsletters
- the placing of notice boards around the town for all to use (which also reduced fly posting in other areas by providing a legitimate space in which to communicate)
- the utilisation of the windows of empty shops for displays.



Hearing from the Planning groups

**Building trust in me as facilitator** – not ‘trust me I’m an expert’ but ‘I can help us to identify what we know, what is in the room’. Of course in 1995 I would not have put it this way, and I struggled with stepping into facilitation in the sense of taking temporary and task leadership within the meetings and conferences. This was partly because I was struggling with a (misplaced) notion that I should be a ‘neutral’ facilitator, both in the act of facilitation and in my involvement with

the CPC core group. And of course I didn't feel neutral about Stroud, this is my place which I had covered with my emotional graffiti in some of the most formative years of my life<sup>190</sup>.

**Seeking to be a 'neutral' facilitator** – I had somehow got it into my head that I needed to be neutral as a facilitator. This now feels like a self denying nonsense but then it was quite absurd to attempt neutrality when working in my own community, even if I thought it was ever an achievable or desirable goal, which I don't. I wanted to be both facilitator and protagonist and felt that was like having my cake and eating it; impossible.

My question regarding 'neutrality' at this time was based on a sense that I needed to enable the voices of the groups I worked with to be heard, not my own. If I look at it from the perspective of Maslow's idea of developing a 'resistance to enculturation' in order that we can step outside or see through the accepted frameworks of cultural roles and values (Maslow:1970: 171-4; Lather, 1991; White and Epston, 1990), I can see a virtue in this, however at the time of the CPC project I was closer to trying to eliminate any sense of 'me' in my facilitation, rather than asking how can I better understand 'me'. It was both impossible and pointless.

**Handling my hostile and adversarial feelings** – I now believe that part of the motivation for my struggle to be 'neutral' as a facilitator was a reaction to having hostile and adversarial feelings towards some of those with whom I needed to work. At this time I had not developed my practice of 'noticing'.

**Discovering my charismatic presence (Heron) as facilitator** – the CPC process stretched my limits as a facilitator, caused me to take risks, and develop a degree of confidence through a combination of being dropped in the deep end and other people's confidence in my abilities. At the time there were occasions when things in the conferences got very difficult, particularly the second conference, and the design team had to quickly meet to make changes to the design. It was then that I found I was being looked to, to deliver the new and difficult bits. And then I was aware of feeling both scared and inadequate and very excited by the challenge<sup>191</sup>. It was also a significant aspect of the Tigers moment that I might have wanted someone else to do these scary bits but I also did not trust the rest of the team to do so to my satisfaction.

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<sup>190</sup> I was born and grew up in Stroud, leaving when I was 17 and returning twenty years later.

<sup>191</sup> See Chapter 5. on seeking feedback for others' noticing of this excitement.





**Facilitating the Community Planning Conference, a large group process**

Feedback on this aspect of my facilitation identified another, more comfortable, if no less scary example:

Charismatic presence – your brilliant moment as the Saturday post lunchtime summariser and presenter, initially for TV camera benefit, but a great intervention that really took the conference to the next step of visioning and presenting, as well as getting all our minds off the camera. Sue with her brakes off! (Martin Large. personal email. 19.8.04).

**Struggling with my own rigidity and desire to be controlling** – this is an interesting contrast with my espoused desire for lack of form and disseminated leadership. CPC brought me up hard against these paradoxical contradictions which I was living (Whitehead).

One example of this was the design of the conferences. The design group contained 4 facilitator/consultants each with their own preferred design, as well as other CPC members; I can still remember how painful it was to have to accept a shared design rather than a straight FS design.

A particular pressure was the strong advocacy by one consultant for the Charrette model – an expert-led design which would have been incongruous with our values. This led to a two conference model being agreed as a compromise.

**Designing and acting with explicit values** – CPC developed explicit values for its process and these guided the design of the outreach, documentation, conferences, decision making etc. Having explicit values was great but did not mean there weren't issues of the values being espoused but not in use.

Understanding people's motivations for becoming involved helped me to better make sense of these contradictions. However the values formed a glue which held a disparate group of people together.

**Risk of levels of commitment becoming degenerative** – towards the end the CPC project was taking up a great deal of my time and energy. I had to moderate my desire to be involved in so many aspects of the project and pull back to a tighter focus. On reflection I don't think I handled this well; at the time my overwhelming urge was to stay engaged while feeling exploited, an interesting contrast to my feelings a few years later when again involved in my community with the Hill Paul Regeneration Group when my feelings of being overstretched (and disenchanted with the conflicts caused by the behaviour of a small group holding a lot of power) caused me to take stock and more clearly and explicitly to disengage from meetings while still offering specific skills when needed (a Unicorn moment approach).

Sharing an early draft of this practice account with Martin Large he pointed out a key source of stress for us both was the role conflict between being members of this community and our role as facilitators:

I think yours and my health may well have suffered, because we cared, and got far more involved than in a straight forward facilitation job (personal email 19.8.04).

**Understanding others' motivations** – this was an important aspect of learning for me in the CPC project. As I wrote at the time in a paper for that year's AMED conference:

“An important element in working within CPC has been understanding participants' motivations. In order to harness people's energies it is important to understand their desires, particularly in an organisation where all input is given on a voluntary basis. It has therefore been important to work with self interest; sometimes it is possible to explicitly map this self interest, as in the visioning and planning processes used to build-up what has become known as the “Big Picture” of desired outcomes and priorities. At other times these desires or self interests are always going to be less overt. These desires can be categorised as;  
*Declared or official desires* - e.g. as a responsible councillor, shop keeper or active citizen.

*One's actual desires* - e.g. to increase the footfall in the area of ones own shop or to increase the income from business.

*Hidden or private desires* - e.g. to enjoy more social contact through CPC meetings or to increase ones own sense of being able to exert influence.

*Unconscious desires* often hidden from the individual themselves - to be part of a group, be included, or to lead or be led by a 'good parent' figure.

Understanding and working with a wide range of motivations or desires is an essential element of achieving a *shared understanding*<sup>192</sup>”.

**Learning the importance of nurturing** – training to run FS conferences had taught me the importance of good meeting ‘hygiene’; that is spaces with good levels of natural light, having good and abundant food at lunchtimes, music and poetry at break times and other nurturing things.

And I note with horror that we took on a complex facilitation task and didn’t build in supervision or explicit learning time!

**Designing to suit the system** – the CPC was attempting to shift a complex system, as Martin Large wrote:

The system of the town was far more complex than in normal FS’s ... and we as facilitators with largely organisational backgrounds – even in public sector – were challenged by the complexity, as well as the fundamental stuckness of the statutory system (Martin Large. personal email. 19.8.04).

Another example of the optimism of the will on our part. Much more analysis of the different interests, groups, the business, statutory and community sectors would have helped us with both the design and follow up. But, as Martin commented ‘this was very early days for community planning and it did at times feel like a goldfish bowl’.

### ***Relationship to my learning journey:***

CPC was a project of my Tigers of Wrath moment. In this setting I was a creature of strong passions, largely driven by anger. The fear and anxiety I felt more strongly in my day job setting (GHA) is unspoken but also present here, as is my ambiguity about my personal power and authority and stepping into it.

During the period of this project I am starting to be aware of symptoms of my MS. From very early on I think I recognised it for what it was, but waited for others to put a name to it. This too seems redolent of my Tigers moment, not trusting my own knowing but holding it close to me along with the fear.

This project was buzzing for me when I first joined CARPP3 to study for my diploma. At that time I felt that it was not regarded by my tutors as a significant piece of inquiry, whereas I always felt that *it was* action research and later came to know it as a third person inquiry. Part of

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<sup>192</sup> This categorisation of desires was drawn from Randall, Southgate and Tomlinson. (1980) *Co-operative and community group dynamics*. Barefoot Books.

the nature of my Tigers period was wanting to feel accepted by the academy, and the experience of not feeling accepted and being misunderstood and feeling anxious, as if I was repeatedly failing to understand something important.

It has continued to be significant in that I have used the CPC project as an example when talking with and teaching students about third person inquiry, and somehow it now feels 'accepted' and appreciated.

I have used this practice account for one more cycle of inquiry – this time checking my perceptions with my tutors.

In response to the first draft of this account Judi Marshall wrote:

I do remember your accounts being complex, broad ranging, a bit diffuse and not easy to ground – and perhaps therefore my responses were more general than was helpful (personal communication 2.7.04).

And in a subsequent discussion:

Me: As I think I said in the CPC account it feels quite symbolic that when I came I thought the CPC was an interesting piece of AR and I felt like nobody else recognised it and I've no idea whether that's true or not because for me at the time the important thing was about being misunderstood, that was where I was at.

Judi: I noticed that and I was thinking about meetings here and feeling 'oh, so in a way you felt I was contributing to the devaluing of that project' and what did I feel at the time? Did I see it like that? My sense of remembering you was that you would come in and tell this incredibly complex story with your arms moving across all these things you were paying attention to and that we (tutorial group) would pull on something we could say 'oh' about, pick up something, but actually it was quite amorphous to get into so it wasn't necessarily a lack of interest but it was also like it wasn't easy to put one's foot anywhere because it was all so connected up. And you were the one who had the mental map that you were working to, and so we would tug on things like facilitating from neutrality those kind of things, and yet in some ways its interesting you didn't feel met, and on the other hand my sense was of just a space in which you self-directingly talked about these things.. I thought 'well that's a shame' but there it was also.

Me: I think I came with it (the CPC project) as being "outside" somehow'. (Supervision 2.7.04).

Legitimation of me and others is a constant theme that runs through my life and is well represented in this project, my practice, my thesis and my relationship with the academy.

My dear colleague Martin hits the nail on the head again when he writes:

Is it legitimation or is it giving yourself permission, or is it just being your quietly confident yet alert self as a facilitator focused on the task, the process, the people and the question? And having the courage to go from being the underdog (is this the right word?) to shining your

unique light. And don't let the 'Academy' get to you as yet another context for being an underdog, rather than being yourself – because whilst the whole CPC process was complex, with many levels and strands, with a huge amount of learning – and therefore hard to get across in group settings briefly – it was great action research!  
(Personal communication 2.7.04)

## Practice account 2 – Locality Planning Team

1997 – 2000

### **How this account has developed:**

Writing for tutorial group

LPT collaborative inquiry paper, with overwriting

Digesting it through writing and discussions on partnership working

First draft (for transfer) May 1998

Plan for account made and discussed with supervisor March 2004.

Second draft June 2004.

Discussed with supervisor July 2004.

Revised July 2004.

Reviewed and revised May 2005.

### ***Brief description:***

The Locality Planning team (LPT) was a multi agency group of organisations originally formed to address Joint Planning for community care issues, but by 1997 its role extended to a wider regeneration and community safety agenda – what would be called 'liveability' now.

Over the period 1997 – 2000 the group usually had between 10 and 15 members including representatives from Social Services, the NHS (health authority and local providers), the youth service, the education authority, the city council, voluntary, and community sector organisations. A place at the table was coveted by other organisations (Lukes' second dimension of power, 2005; Schattschneider 1960).

During the period covered by this inquiry I spent three years working (on a very part time basis) as the facilitator of this multi agency planning team. In this context I ranged between first, and second person inquiry, with occasional third person inquiries e.g. Anti Poverty Alliance conference. This included an attempt to initiate a co-operative inquiry (CI) group which included LPT members. Work undertaken included working with voluntary and community sector organisations and statutory agencies developing partnerships for regeneration and health improvement projects.

My reflections on the project largely centre on what it takes to facilitate partnership working; the challenges that partnership poses to participants and that the process poses for me as facilitator.

### ***How I was inquiring:***

- Taped group discussions with LPT members (attempted CI group inquiring into the facilitation of partnership)
- Questionnaire based evaluation – LPT members and partner organisations
- CARPP3 tutorial group, and discussions with supervisors
- Case study for CARPP transfer paper (failed). At that time I took a very different approach and presentation to this practice account; the case study itself was multi layered and very difficult to access, which reflected my feelings about the project and the nature of the relationships in the LPT itself. Through the process of writing the case study I was exploring the work and how I felt about it, and I was dumping the material and my feelings about the work. The LPT work was an important transition point for me (see *Relationship to my Learning Journey* below)
- Workbooks – contemporary records of meetings. Notes written on arriving at meetings or in preparation for meetings, ah-hahs noted during meetings, brief notes after meetings, more reflective notes made shortly after. Reflections on my facilitation, my sense of it, my accounts
- Journal
- Exploration in reflective therapy sessions
- Dream material
- Meetings with Judy Large, conflict resolution specialist. These sessions were designed to enable me to develop skills to work better with the conflicts arising in the partnership.

### ***Why it's of interest here:***

**An early example of me working outside of and between organisations** – I had moved from being a 'tempered radical' within the health authority to working between organisations – a different sort of marginal working position (which brought up personal stuff about wanting to be cared for).

**Facilitation of group over extended period** – With varying levels of 'permission' for overt facilitation role from partnership members.

**Me wrestling with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person inquiry running concurrently** – I found it very slippery at the time, even down to the distinction between them. It's hard now to see why it was so slippery because I was doing them nested inside each other.

**Me trying and failing to facilitate an inquiry group** – I wrote in 2002 of the CI group I tried to set up: 'Now I look at it and think that's how not to do it!'<sup>193</sup>

In retrospect I think it was explicit as an inquiry with the rest of the CI group but they were not doing inquiry *with* me, they were playing me up, it was like trying to herd cats as the agendas from the wider group politics got played out in the group and I felt powerless to manage the agenda *or* to just go with it and see what happened.

Later when initiating such groups I learnt to contract more clearly about desired agendas for all parties and the inquiring nature of the group. This enabled me to use the contract to question 'disruptive' behaviours and, more importantly I think to be more inquiring about what would come up and how it might relate to the original aims for the group. As it was, with the LPT CI group I started off being transparent about what I wanted from the group (data for my PhD) but was so apologetic about asking for the group's time that I gave away my facilitator power and opened up the way for others' (not very inquiring) agendas to get played out *and* for me to feel helpless. Now I feel curious as to what might have happened in the group had I been able to be more inquiring and had I understood at that time the systemic mirroring that was occurring, and been able to act into it rather than resist it.

My analysis and understanding of what was happening has developed over time, even in 2002 I wrote that I thought the group were unclear that we were doing inquiry *together*:

And was I? Who did I think the information was for? I'd like to go back and check my framing and other records of the start of this because if I'm honest with myself I want to question whether I just thought they were helping me, or if I believed the inquiry was for all of us. I'd like to think the latter, and I remember being irritated at the time by Hilary's repeated presentation of the inquiry as them helping me to do something that got me a benefit (my degree) but had nothing in it for them. (Workbook).

In April 1998 I was reflecting and planning after the first meeting of the CI group and wrote:

I feel as if I'm asking "What is the added value of facilitation to the partnership building process?" But I need to check-out the sorts of questions I did formulate for the first session, and the practice of only sharing these verbally. Also think again about those that I have drawn out from the notes of the first meeting for the second session.

In planning this I am acknowledging my own discomfort that others may not share my own interest in my inquiry, and the questions it poses. That it feels like self indulgence – to others and to me?

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<sup>193</sup> I also noted that the confusion I was experiencing was similar to that I had over the CI group I ran for V21 at about the same time: 'also I was profoundly confused as to what was happening as first person inquiry and second person inquiry, and what was happening in a wider sense. I actually think I got stuck; I could think 1<sup>st</sup> and wider [3<sup>rd</sup> person inquiry] but not distinguish how it fitted with the second person inquiry I was setting up' (writing for my tutorial group, 27.8.2002).



Your [PR<sup>194</sup>] advice last time we met was to start-off framing it by saying what *I* think I'm doing, the questions that *I'm* interested in asking. Asking "am I asking the right questions as far as you are concerned?" I notice that the circumstances didn't allow me to do this as clearly as I would have wanted and I now feel I want some space and some help to unpick it, to see how far I was blown off course and why. Was it facilitative to go with what was around for others, e.g. did they need to get some things off their chests, or did I just fail to prepare myself and others enough? ... Was I just not assertive enough? I think the content of the issues raised reinforce the understanding of the power issues alive in the system at the moment. Framing it in order to take my interest into account as well as making space for other's issues feels like a challenge.

Later in October 1998 I wrote summarising the experience of facilitating the CI group:

*So I breathed out again*, linking to my practice facilitating partnerships.

Let me give you a taste of the issues raised:

- I have found it hard to obtain the co-operation (attending meetings) of several of the inquiry group
- It has proved hard to keep focused on the agreed task – inquiring into the areas of partnership behaviours and facilitation. Participants have wanted to reshape the focus of meetings, not through negotiation but by drawing discussion in other directions, not sharing responsibility for either retaining the agreed focus or renegotiating a new one  
*[Something here worth pursuing about Bjorn Gustavsen's ideas about responsibility and practice, calling a halt to the continuing story telling that just moves the goal].*
- I have found it a forum in which I feel very vulnerable and undefended, not feeling very able to defend myself, and feeling undefended by some others. Frankly I have felt defensive.

I can now see some links between my approach in presenting and negotiating the task and the lack of shared ownership/responsibility for keeping to task or renegotiating with the group. Predictably the core partnership issues for the LPT surfaced in the group, and I had planned and framed it in such a way as to be unable to facilitate the process myself, whilst also feeling unable to participate fully in the inquiry!

I am now [1998] feeling I must go back and write this up more fully, even if it only becomes a model of how *not* to do it. But I am beginning to think there may also be more here that I have not allowed myself to dwell on because it is too painful – Must the child of warring parents always be driven to be the peacemaker?

What on earth am I doing working as a facilitator if I don't hold an awareness of the fear of me the child, sitting on the stairs at night, listening to the rows between my parents, unable to intervene because it must, somehow, be my fault.

How can I develop an internal discipline to keep this child present and empowered to put responsibility where it belongs, *and* to take action?<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Peter Reason, my supervisor at this time.

<sup>195</sup> I drew this writing together as part of my transfer papers in 2002 and wrote: 'NOW – I'm reading these questions, the identification of these issues and feeling so pleased. They have become more fully the focus of my first person inquiry and this

### ***Issues raised:***

**Partnership** – its nature, how to develop and sustain partnerships, including what is leadership in this context. In April 1998 I wrote of a particular initiative of the LPT. I was struggling to understand how to facilitate co-operation while respecting the separate identities (and needs) of members – themselves from organisations with very different types and levels of power:

This identifies the issues of separatism, of separate development for the different partners, and the question of how to facilitate and draw the appropriate elements together. I am convinced that this could be done through collaboration, and that it cannot be achieved through taking oppositional stances, although acknowledging that such stances and the feelings they evoke tell us a great deal about the system under scrutiny. Is it inevitable that the “stances” evoked by the power imbalance will make collaboration impossible without something to focus the intent for change or transformation – a crisis, a transformative process or a “mobilising event” (Kieffer 1984). (Workbook).

I added that 'transformation is (also) structural, not just behavioural' and related the situation to the need to develop "spaces of control" (Giddens 1984), having myself facilitated an (LPT) interaction which aimed to allow all parties to question their "realities" and transform their understanding (Fals Borda 1988; Freire 1972).

In these spaces of control the power differentials can be altered because people have developed confidence, changed attitudes and behaviours<sup>196</sup>. Rowlands (1992 quoted in Nelson and Wright) argues that this process has three levels:

First – the personal level, involves developing confidence and abilities e.g. communication, including undoing the effects of internalised oppression

Second – the ability to negotiate and influence close relationships (this is the aspect most people seem to recognise as partnership)

Third – involves working collectively to have a greater impact than each could have alone. As Nelson and Wright point out this is where "power-to" (Hartsock, 1984) overlaps with the "power-over" model of power (Lukes).

**Values espoused and in use** – issues for team members, the partnership, and for me. Working with the 'pragmatic reality' e.g. re participation there were central government drivers and local aspirations, but both local and national power holders were limited in

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provides me with evidence of the questions I was asking at this time [1998] as the LPT partnership work was entering its final phase'. (Transfer papers August 2002).

<sup>196</sup> See also LGA practice account.

the extent to which they wished to really share power when push came to shove<sup>197</sup>. Nelson and Wright point out

Before attempting to shift power in a system it is important that the basis of existing and future institutional arrangements are well understood ... Grownow questions the unexamined assumption of many policy makers that shifting power is both desirable and unproblematical (1997:13).

Having answered the question 'how far do you want to go?' (in participation and power sharing), I was concerned that the LPT partnership should take a strategic and transparent approach. What I observed was individual members acting in ways that bought them (individual) short term good will from those benefiting (from opportunities) but also compromised the larger agenda of the LPT as a structure/group learning to operate differently and taking that learning back into their organisations for wider effect. On the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998 I wrote:

I feel that there are often dangers inherent in well-meaning but isolated attempts to be more inclusive – such as gathering ideas on spending plans in an ad-hoc way from some groups. If this is done in isolation from a wider participation strategy it can compound the problems that arise from imperfect sharing of information, lack of a shared agenda, ignorance of the wider picture and partial access by groups to those with influence.

In addition it could be seen as embodying the destructive potential of moves towards partnership that are still contained within an understanding that they are based on *accessing resources alone*, so that the desire to access funding... drives decision making, rather than a longer term partnership strategy based on a variety of shared goals – such as can be negotiated through establishing a partnership framework, using the building of this framework as an example of *making spaces of control through which to redress imbalances of power*.

**Power dynamics and 'mirroring'** – the tensions and dynamics in the wider political context (e.g. statutory versus voluntary power struggles, the power hungry aspirations of one voluntary sector development organisation) were translated into difficult relationships within the LPT team membership, bringing the system into the group. In the same way there was an inability to get people to collaborate in the inquiry group which reflected the inability for them to act together in the wider team or at the city level in which they all delivered services. I refer to this as 'mirroring'.

My experience at the time was of feeling I was failing to facilitate better collaboration and partnership; I was personally taking on what was actually a systemic incapacity to do something. I now accept that the LPT as a structure and the members as players in the wider

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<sup>197</sup> See also Chapter 3. *Power* for a discussion of the historical background and political context

system had their limits and no amount of facilitation on my part could make them what they were not. However I also question whether an LPT learning set or CI group *could* have taken a more learningful approach – but only if it had had its own learning high on the agenda, and at that time it wasn't<sup>198</sup> .

**Political framing** — the government approach, and local government structures including partnerships such as the LPT (and now LSPs) reflect a tradition of defining poverty and powerlessness by neighbourhoods, this demonstrates a refusal to address institutionalised and structural power disparities. As a result campaigning /organising tends to happen at a neighbourhood level rather than that of a community of shared experience.

**Tempered radical** – working for the health authority (and for my previous employers as a social worker,) I had been a tempered radical (Meyerson, Scully). Although in the past my position as tempered radical had often felt complex it had not felt as confusing as my position now working for the LPT: now I was employed by a mixture of statutory and community/voluntary organisations with all their different and conflicting agendas *and* by the partnership that these organisations formed when they came together as the LPT. The degree of radicalness of individual organisations often changed depending on who they were in relationship with, and LPT members appeared very much more radical in relation to the LPT agenda than they were back in their own organisations.

Being 'radical' in some ways was one of the agendas that the LPT aspired to, for example discussions they had re power sharing with communities. However this was approached in a rather naive manner and I found myself in the uncharacteristic position of advocating a slower pace, and more strategic thinking. My agenda was to maximise the potential for power sharing, but to do so in a way which was sustainable by all 'sides' and would not be suddenly abandoned because it had become too scary. For example, using transformational power, I supported partnerships with community organisations to develop projects which they would then lead (rather than just deliver) e.g. the SRB5<sup>199</sup> bid which became only the second SRB programme in the country to be led by a community organisation, rather than the local authority.

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<sup>198</sup> In marked contrast to the intentions for the similarly constituted Local Strategic Partnerships that succeeded the LPT two years later, many of whom have included a learning/capacity building agenda for the group itself encouraged by a different approach from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and support from government funded initiatives like Knowledge at IDeA.

<sup>199</sup> The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) provided funds targeted at areas of economic deprivation. Areas had to bid against each other for time limited funding, aimed at achieving specific central government targets e.g. creating jobs.

What I did notice about myself at that time was that I sought out the more radical organisations in the partnership to work with and from which to gain support and nurture. It was at this time my close relationship with the Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network (GNPN) developed, and I invested time and energy with others in developing the Anti Poverty Alliance. At the same time I became increasingly aware of behaviours in these types of groups and organisations which ranged from comradely to dysfunctional. Along with the warmth of shared visions came bitter disappointment at some of the interpersonal behaviours and the lust for personal power which was the same as in statutory organisations<sup>200</sup>.

### ***Developing my capacities and presence as facilitator:***

**Partnership facilitation** – despite the failures to facilitate some potential partnerships I was instrumental in developing an Anti Poverty Alliance of statutory, voluntary and community organisations, as well as a Health Improvement Partnership, a successful Healthy Living Centre bid to the Lottery and a major SRB5 partnership bid, and a Learning City partnership including a bid for Education Action Zone status (all successful). It was the more fundamental partnerships that proved more difficult than these strategic/pragmatic partnerships often focused on obtaining funding.

**Conflict management** – I learnt the basic skills and tools for conflict resolution and in so doing discovered that I'd been applying many of the analysing tools already as part of my facilitation practice. These were also helpful in enabling me to feel less personally responsible for *making* collaborations happen through viewing things more systemically.

**Crises of confidence** – the 'bad behaviours' of some LPT partners, particularly the interpersonal bad behaviour and the disrespectful behaviours of those working for power holding organisations towards

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<sup>200</sup> I was more than once reminded of an incident when I was 17 or 18 and at college doing 'A' levels. A fellow student who was also a Marxist and I were playing Diplomacy with others as part of a Liberal Studies session. The core of this game is to form and switch alliances between the states the players represent, and I can still remember the personal hurt I experienced as my comrade switched alliance to side with others against me. In my simple way of seeing the world at that time our bond as comrades should have bound us together in any and every situation. Together against the rest of the world, literally, in the context of the Diplomacy game. In the same way in the context of the LPT work I still in my heart grieved at the cruel interpersonal behaviours and power hungriness of workers who I would otherwise have thought of as my allies and fellow travellers. This time I could see it coming and had (some of) the tools to analyse it but it still disappointed me.

community based and legitimised organisations hurt me<sup>201</sup> and caused me to feel very unsure of myself. Because I lacked good professional supervision I took this personally at the time, since then I have been able to compare notes with others working to facilitate partnerships and have been able to depersonalise it. I was starting to develop a noticing practice, which enabled me to be aware of myself and to take more data to my supervisor (PR).

**The power of the facilitator** – the facilitator as potential tool of the establishment (those with power over). Including how do/did I feel about being seen as the one in charge?

As the 'face' of the LPT partnership I sometimes drew the hostility of those who were excluded from the LPT or felt themselves to be 'lesser' partners. In a room full of voluntary organisations I risked becoming viewed as a statutory organisation representative and occasionally vice versa.

I didn't have power-over others directly but I did, by virtue of my position as LPT facilitator, have some power over the agendas of meetings (Lukes 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension) and over the proposals made for allocating a small LPT budget (£50,000 p.a.) to other organisations for projects, so in this way working for those who did have power-over others (the LPT members) gave me some power to set agendas. I was positioned in a privileged identity within the social order.

In addition it was well known that in the rest of my working time I was working for some national policy and strategy making organisations, which again gave me power-over by association and the power to influence agendas.

**For them, for us, for me<sup>202</sup>**

I wanted to find ways to interpret my LPT experience (e.g. through Heron's frameworks), and so to both enhance my own understanding and offer models to colleagues in similar roles<sup>203</sup>. By the end of this project I felt more confident that I was doing this.

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<sup>201</sup> Remembering how it felt to get caught up in that; how it felt personally, the Tigers me, noticing an initial failure on my part to have a loop of reflection before the snap-back. Recovering myself, how it felt to dwell with my suppressed tiger. (Nowadays it's a Deer fear and fleetness of foot, and a Pig moving forward into the space).

<sup>202</sup> The CARPP test for action research – that it should be able to produce/demonstrate benefits for *me* the inquirer (first person), for *us* the involved group (second person), and for *them* the wider system (third person) (Reason and Marshall).

<sup>203</sup> In June 1999 I wrote:

'John Heron<sup>203</sup> writes about a range of experiential groups, within which he includes "social action training groups", but I have some difficulty in recognising the sort of social action partnerships with whom I work in the types of groups he explores in the book. It is part of my intent in writing to link the frameworks and the learning from the better-explored territories of the types of experiential groups Heron writes of (traditional therapy groups, sensitivity training and encounter groups, personal growth groups,

In addition I was exploring whether my working experience in the LPT could be valued in the academy. It was only later that I could 'hear' this experience as valued, being asked to take conference sessions and teach helped!

At the same time I wanted to produce writing which could be understood and used by colleagues in the Anti Poverty Alliance and GNPN – an audience intolerant of both intellectualisation and what could be perceived as 'new age' approaches to meaning making. I wanted to write a thesis that would pass the 'Bill Booth test'. I have found that I often need to draft an introduction to some terms and ideas – but this applies equally to academic colleagues trying to understand working in this sector.

**Moving between participant and facilitator roles** – unusually for me I am not in an overt facilitator role. This project sees me using a lighter style of facilitation, working in/with diffusely held groups – and sometimes the question is the group held by anybody?

At the time I wrote of my experience in a meeting:

Finding myself looking around to those with position power who are chairing meetings to see whether they are holding the group (my own sense is of not being held, feeling the threat of immanent collapse of the alliance or of being smothered, rolled over by alliances negotiated outside of this meeting but forcibly imposed on participants many of whom are not noticing what's happening because they are attending to the concrete outcomes they desire, rather than attending to process). In Randall and Southgate's terms aspects of the production and organisational leadership are being taken care of, but not the emotional leadership.

Attending to this and encouraging/supporting/negotiating with partners to fill some of the gaps/attempting to fill them myself...

Finding it hard to be explicit.

After the meeting I reflected:

Harrison suggests we need explicit statements of intention e.g. 'this is what I'm working towards', 'my purpose here is to...', testing clarities in systemic situations<sup>204</sup>. This would allow use of purpose/strategies/behaviours/feedback to test the way forward. Keeping it more overt. The internal version of this (inner arc) helps me to choose where I want to be, the consequences, reflecting on how it feels, offering analysis etc.

Life feels much more straightforward as a simple facilitator!

By which I meant a 'standing at the front by the flip chart' type of meeting facilitator. At the time I asked myself:

Do I hold an ideal model of what should happen, or do I let it become tailored, let go of the ideal sometimes, with or without testing it in the group

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interpersonal skills and management training groups), to the context in which I practice; social action partnerships, including a range of partners holding very different sorts of power and expertise, not all of which is traditionally acknowledged and respected (CARPP writing, June 1999)'.

<sup>204</sup> Similar to Torbert's 4 territories and 4 parts of speech – see Chapter 2. *My approaches to inquiry*.

and possibly accept that its just not going to happen here. [There] can be too much attachment to perfection, or too much loss. Testing out what I'm seeing/feeling with the group can lead me to realising that I'm misunderstanding what is actually happening, or that its not that important to them to help it to happen, or that they're just not going to make the move I want them to at this point.

and wrote:

It's not my role to 'educate' the group – but [I could take on the role of] sharing self disclosure of 'this is how I feel'. 'I'm pondering this myself, how do other people feel about it?' and so reducing the influence of my own attachment [to outcome]. With groups like the FLN<sup>205</sup> I notice myself just saying 'this is what I'm noticing' and not offering an analysis. Whereas with other groups in which I feel less secure i.e. the LPT I feel it is a real risk to simply reflect back what I'm noticing or feeling without any analysis. And [I notice] it's more joyful to offer without an analysis because the group can then inquire together [workbook 1998].

It was hard not to always have the position/authority to facilitate learning in the LPT.

**Lack of recognition of need to attend to process** – I reflected

Much of my work is done in task focused meetings where process is the least of people's worries. It may be a legitimate part of my role to attend to process but there's no way I'm going to get it to be part of the business of the meeting. Often the groups I work with are very task focused and very impatient of process issues, until they can be translated into useful tools [CARPP writing 1998].

**Facilitating bid writing partnerships** – in May 1999 I reflected with my tutorial group on facilitating these partnerships:

They are short term and focused but are also a stage of longer term project partnerships (to actually deliver the work which they bid for). The initial stages of the work needs to honour the thinking/development which initiating partners have brought (e.g. GNPN), but also it models relationships for the future. Not least an action learning approach in partnership.

I was able to support a more inquiring approach in some of the multi sector project teams.

**Facilitating reflection** – it proved very difficult to facilitate reflection in the LPT team without an explicit learning agenda, which I was not able to get accepted as important to 'learning to do business together'. I wrote papers for the team on issues such as how far did they want to go in linking with communities; how much power did they want to share, what might that mean in practice? This stimulated debate and it was then possible to facilitate some shared reflection on the issues. I noted that (carefully facilitated) they shared both their thinking and what they meant by the words they used, also their feelings; fears, shame, hopes and excitement.

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<sup>205</sup> The facilitators' learning group within our local Agenda 21 initiative.



In this way it was occasionally possible for the team to work with their hearts as well as their heads, not just speaking the words expected of them but coming to a shared understanding of what their individual and collective intents were in order to develop a strategy as a team.

When facilitating the session on linking with communities at the LPT awayday I noted my surprise at the risks some team members were prepared to take in sharing their fears and their sense of shame when they examined the power that they had and how prepared they were to share it:

I felt shocked when D started the second round of thoughts on the discussion paper by saying how ashamed he felt when he looked at Arnstein's ladder and thought about where on the ladder he'd been operating to date (placation and tokenism seemed to be the key shaming words for him). He opened himself up, made himself very vulnerable. I notice myself feeling excited, making an effort to ensure I was keeping (soft) eye contact with him, while checking the others' reaction to his statement. And I was grateful (relieved?) when P [his boss] spoke about the difficulty of operating in a senior capacity and how sometimes your values were compromised.

Once P had spoken I relaxed a little, as did others in the group; it was now ok to admit not getting it right *and* the fact that no-one in that room really was going to give over massive amounts of power in the foreseeable future. I kept watching Hilary, would she align herself with the other senior managers [she was CEO of a voluntary organisation]? No, she acted as if it wasn't an issue for her organisation. I pressed a bit but she wasn't going to budge, this was about the statutory organisations learning as far as she and A were concerned it seemed. I backed off, I didn't want to provoke too far and lose the permission to share feelings, not before lunch anyway (Workbook 1998).

This awayday was the 'peak' of the team reflecting together in this way. Shortly afterwards a significant number of key players changed and it became more difficult to overtly learn together.

**Spaces of control** – my experience with the LPT made me more aware of the question 'how do I facilitate/create space/resources/processes for learning in community/organisation. I have continued to think about spaces of control and social conduct. As Anthony Giddens writes:

Most forms of social theory have failed to take seriously enough not only the temporality of social conduct but also its spatial attributes. ...Neither time nor space have been incorporated into the centre of social theory; rather, they are ordinarily treated more as "environments" in which social conduct is enacted...rather than as integral to its occurrence. (Giddens,1979: 201-10).

Rather than treating space as a mere context or stage for social behaviour, Giddens argues, as does Goffman, that social systems must be viewed as "systems of interaction" in which settings and temporal patterning are integral to the *process of social structuration* in which

"players jockey for control of settings". I was interested in 'making and holding open spaces of control for partners to explore power (sharing), to alter the power differentials in their relationships' (Tutorial March 1998). And in April 1998 I was asking myself how to

work into the space from different perspectives, while maintaining an awareness of multiple perspectives, and how can I work in ways that are empowering from a position of enormous power and privilege?'  
(Supervision April 1998)

and citing Nelson and Wright:

If bureaucrats and researchers are embedded in the apparatus, and do not look reflexively at how it is working, how can they empower others? Using the "power-over" and "power-to" models, Rowlands asks a similar question. How can empowerment be initiated by those who have "power-over" others when, as she asserts, "any notion of empowerment being given by one group to another hides an attempt to keep control" (1992:52)? She argues that this potentially bottom up concept can be used to perpetuate and disguise continued top-down attitudes and approaches (1995:11).

and going on to ask:

Is the LPT or any other powerful organisation any different from the development agencies quoted in Nelson and Wright? Unless we take a community development approach to working with "weaker", less powerful groups how can we address the imbalance? Isn't it built into the culture and behaviour of these powerful organisations to suppress that which is threatening? So that, whether consciously or not they will exclude the outside voices, finding ways of making them feel dispossessed, without a place or role, without influence. And correctly so as the fora for final decision making are seldom those in which such community organisations are invited to participate, and if they do they are not there as equals (witness the discomfort of the voluntary sector representatives in the LPT). See also the issues raised in the first meeting of the collaborative evaluation (CI) group for my post.

### ***Relationship to my learning journey:***

#### **Definite Tigers period project.**

I was working out of anger and outrage while trying to be persuasive. Smiling while snarling inside, and consequently tearing myself apart.

In 2002 I wrote:

The big question is to track how I have grown in my understanding from a gut based rage and discomfort and adversarial positioning, through pain about adversarial positioning (partnerships and LPT come in here) to understanding a more systemic approach ...

For me it's been a journey from a simple, anger-based view of class and oppression, nurtured through Marxism and nurtured by Marxism. To a more complex understanding of multiple oppressions AND a realisation that espoused values/values in use have a role to play here. Its not as clear cut as I had wanted to believe' (Personal reflection on this period, 2002).

Having the space and frameworks for reflection led me to be able to move out of 'opposition' and to explore working from a basis of caring

for team members (see observations on vulnerability at the awayday above).

In October 1997 I wrote about trying to use my Self in my facilitation. Reflecting on my role and facilitating reflection in the LPT, and the potential of the CI group:

In the terms of Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) my questions relate to learning to use myself (the Self) as an instrument of understanding, finding points of connection between what I am trying to understand and my own experience, a way of weaving my passions and intellectual life into some recognisable whole.

I can see how some of the large group interventions I am using seek to create that space in which a diverse range of stakeholders can come together to sense-make, having the experience of being in temporary community to enable them to build the trust necessary to inquire together. If this is my desired aim then I am faced with the question; how do I, as facilitator, use my power in the range of situations in which I work, to enable this particular framework to be accessed by participants? I can see that when I am working as "consultant" there is the space to reflect on the process of the group, and so frame the situation and behaviours to offer options and choices – e.g. to work as a group to become a learning community rather than remain a success-driven group of individual interests.

I am less clear at present how I might introduce this sort of reflective space into the aspect of my work as LPT partnership facilitator, for a group who do not see me as "consultant" but as enabler. Perhaps this is an important element of the CI Group that I am currently setting up as a collaborative inquiry into my post, and has implications for the questions I raise in that inquiry group.

I am also thinking that this is not just the "what" of enabling another way of framing the current reality and so the options for being, but is also a "how", that offers me the chance to explore *modelling* behaviours in the group; those of "attentive love".

They (the WWK authors) go on to describe this position, that of constructed knowledge, as providing a capacity to "attend to another person and to feel related to that person in spite of what may be enormous differences" – or "attentive love".

I reflected (2002, writing for my tutorial group):

To me this sounds to be an essential element of facilitation of partnerships between diverse groups/individuals. And, at the same time, a way of knowing/behaviour that such a facilitator might seek to enable facilitated participants to develop in order to sense- make together through an appreciation of complexity. Developing the trust to work with complexity rather than to fear chaos.

There are also specific messages for facilitator style – connecting through endeavouring to enter into each participant's perspective, trusting each participant's experience, although as a person or a critic I might not agree with it. Where trust as a facilitator means more than just tolerating a variety of viewpoints, acting as an impartial referee, assuring equal air time to all.

However it is clear from contemporary (1997 -2000) writing, reflection and discussions that this was very hard to apply to working with the LPT

at this stage in my development as a facilitator. On reflection I was being very optimistic about what I could enable or facilitate.

In 2002, writing about the systemic mirroring, I identify my (driven Tigers stage) sense of being 'in service' and my unsophisticated facilitation:

'[It is] *Partnership building work* showing the way the system appears in each level of relationship – mirroring. A good example of my learning journey as I was unable to distinguish the systemic nature of what was happening at the time. Also an example of where my life experience led to me having a sensitivity which caused me to take on responsibility for "making it happen" and my experience of what it meant to share power for an inquiry, my discomfort with a multitude of agendas (which I could not control). I have a sense of guilt for doing it badly. Important to honestly show the gaucheness of my facilitation and what and how I learned. The LPT partnership inquiry as an example of doing it badly, but also how it defined a major theme which I'd not necessarily predicted: the systemic mirroring.

Sense making through writing and discussion with my supervisor and CARPP tutorial group had enabled me to identify these issues during the project and to experiment with other ways of facilitating e.g. changing my approach in the CI group.

**Getting my own needs met** – the combination of working unsupported between organisations and a personal sense of failure (which came from being unable to *make* the LPT be more collaborative) led to me having particular needs for support and supervision<sup>206</sup> which were not well met.

I was unable to tackle or even express this in a direct way with my manager but it emerges in the context of CARPP through my writing<sup>207</sup>. This is an extract from a piece of reflective writing (see Appendix F) in which I glimpse the rawness of my feelings at that time, and the double bind I was caught in of believing myself unlovable (not least because I was so angry) *and* wanting to be cared for. I knew that on one level I was simply experiencing poor supervision while working in a demanding context, and I was also very aware of the early feelings that were being re-activated. One of the ways I started to manage these feelings was by writing about them; joining up all the connections between the personal, the political and the professional/practice situation, writing out the connections I'd made, the insights and questions I had:

I can't remember wanting to be taken care of in this way before.

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<sup>206</sup> From my line manager.

<sup>207</sup> I suspect that one of the reasons this agenda appears in writing specifically undertaken to be shared with my then supervisor (Peter Reason) is that in this indirect way I am also asking him for similar sorts of support. I'm also struck as I write this in July 2004 with the image of a baby porcupine crying to be picked up and cuddled. It seems the anger and the need for comforting are bound together in this Tigers moment.

I notice I want my line manager to mother me. To think about me, to put my needs first, 'put me first not them'.  
Don't let me have to ask, it means nothing to receive having asked for it, not at this moment.  
I shall be so angry with you if you don't care for me, take care of me.  
And if you do I'll be jealous, I shall adore and despise you.  
You will fail me.  
I shall find myself outside, more isolated than before, having dared to hope (CARPP writing September 1998<sup>208</sup>).

Earlier in April 1998 I wrote in my workbook:

I notice that one of the things that is happening is that I am aware of feeling unmanaged in a non-supportive way – I suppose it could be compared with feeling un-parented/unseen – and that at yesterday's LPT meeting I fed this into the team by pointing out the uncertainty about funding and my hours, and asking them to take responsibility for prioritising areas of work, and for assistance on one project. This is not just an attempt to meet my personal and financial needs, but also to hold them into a sense of responsibility for the work, which otherwise runs the risk of becoming *my* work and not *their* work. So that *I* become the partner and not the team and what they represent.

I framed this through particular projects I am working on, rather than by asking them to support me personally. It achieved the team taking some responsibility for the work, and some acknowledgement of my needs, although not particularly by my manager (Work book April 1998).

I notice looking at this now (2004) that I asked for support in a way and on an issue (my hours) that actually made me even more vulnerable to feeling abused or rejected. And that I could not ask for support personally but talked in terms of 'the work', not just to them but to myself in this work book note. This is behaviour, typical of my Tigers moment, is based on a sub conscious but fundamental lack of belief that I am worth supporting, and demonstrates where my energy (anger and pain) gets channelled into my work; 'the work' as the heroic cause, the principled rightness of 'the work' feeling indisputable to me at the time.

I have been reminded of these feelings in the process of writing this practice account. A feeling of irritation and depression had crept over me as I reread old notes and my writings and compiled the pieces I wanted to include here. It wasn't until I dreamt of a very particular desert dwelling plant and took the dream to my therapy session to reflect on it and the feelings that I identified the cause. I include my journal notes written immediately after my session with SM.

**Dream, reflection in therapy session, personal reflection 14.7.04**  
*Memories of the work written in my body, re-evoked by the writing, further processed then through reflection.*

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<sup>208</sup> For full text see Appendix F.

It's awakened all sorts of feelings for me, stuff that feels unresolved.

I started yesterday afternoon to write. Writing this [practice] account makes me feel physically uncomfortable, to the point of being in pain. It makes me feel depressed and grumpy.

Last night I dreamt of a huge green spiky plant. Full of substance and well defended, afraid of and protected from being bitten into.

Memories of Hilary; me feeling manipulated, used and then abused. Her behaviour making me feel despairing. Feeling furious rage and then frustration because I was powerless. Shameful feelings; the frustration and the failure to be able to change things. Wanting to be taken care of – working for so long in-between organisations, nobody's baby.

Me feeling consumed by these feelings then and now. Eaten up by them.

Remembering hearing someone tell of a desert in South America where it hasn't rained for thousands of years. The only water comes from the wind at night blowing clouds from the sea (the desert is next to the coast). There is an animal (is it a camelid? I can't remember) which has so adapted that it can survive by licking the water from between the spines of the cacti on which the water condenses overnight.

It has felt that I have had to be so well defended. To survive with just a small stream of nourishment. To adapt to extremes to get what I need. To live alone in a desert at times.

I want to rewrite my account to add the good things from that project: the partnerships developed, the money won from funding streams, the time working with GNPN and others. There was joy and I don't want the sourness of unresolved rage to take that away from my account.

The dream and the subsequent reflection with a concerned other (SM) enabled me to recognise and be candid about my feelings of frustration and rage at being unable to influence, at feeling a failure, feeling under nourished and as if I need to protect myself. It also helped me to clearly identify how these feelings were reactivating old hurts and patterns of behaviour, and to reflect on how my reactions to them have changed from paralysed and pained victim to assertive (if saddened) facilitator who can now see the potential in the situation but also respect the stuckness and move on.

Overall the LPT work identified some important elements of my Tigers moment approach to facilitation, and highlighted the importance of reflective processes to both learn and survive a sometimes frustrating experience.

## Practice account 3 – Diabetic services user group (DUG)

1998 – 2002

### *How this account was developed:*

Draft practice account for transfer 1998

Case study for teaching 2000

Drawing on final DUG report to commissioners and conference paper 2002

Second draft June 2004

Discussed with supervisor July 2004

Revised August 2004

Further revision May 2005.

### ***Brief description:***

This group was a three year co-operative inquiry into the self management of diabetes commissioned by the NHS, which I designed and facilitated. The group has been effective in influencing service review and development, and the implementation of the National Service Framework for Diabetes services in Gloucestershire.

Included in the box below are the project's Terms of Reference, originally developed with clients and then amended by the co-operative inquiry (CI) group.

### **DUG Terms of reference**

#### **Purpose<sup>209</sup>:**

- To enable long term users of services to feedback their experience of services to serve as a resource for Trusts, GPs, Primary Care Groups and the Health Authority in setting quality standards.
- To make practical proposals for service change and development, (*changes need not necessarily involve extra finances/resources*).
- To enable the users involved in the pilot to explore the nature of self management of their diabetes.

#### **Aims;**

To create a group of service users with a long term, self managed condition – diabetes mellitus.

To provide independent facilitation of the group, meeting for approximately eight sessions.

To use the group to build confidence and communication skills within the group, to enable effective feedback on experience of using services and possible future developments.

To develop a template for the development of other, similar groups.

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<sup>209</sup> From Terms of Reference for DUG project.

**Methodology.**

It was agreed to run one action research group, of approximately 8-10 members. This will involve 8 meetings over a period of approximately 10 months.

The pilot will draw on co-operative inquiry (CI) methods to work with the group over a period of 10 months to develop information and test practice useful to the participating individuals and the wider system of health care services. A debate will be constructed between the group and Local Diabetic Services Advisory Group (LDSAG) via the formation of a reference group.

The venue for the group meetings will aim to feel both safe and informal and, where possible, meetings will not be held on health service premises.

**Target Group for the Pilot .**

Membership of the group will aim to reflect the following;

- Patients attending one of the hospital based clinics in the county, *and* those receiving their care via the primary care team only
- Insulin dependant *and* non insulin dependant diabetics
- Patients who are newly diagnosed (less than 3 years), *and* those with longer term experience
- A range of ages, between 18 and 65
- Patients from both rural *and* urban areas of the county.

It is intended that a majority of those attending will be using services in the west of the county.

**Recruitment.**

Practice nurses and Diabetic Clinic nurses will be asked to identify potential participants for the group. In addition a flyer/poster will be distributed to clinics and GP practices asking for volunteers to join the group.

**Accountability/Reporting arrangements.**

The pilot is being funded by Severn NHS Trust (SNHST), and has the support of the Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust. A mid-term and final report will be produced for both Trusts.

A Reference Group has been established. This group will provide guidance to the facilitator and the pilot project throughout its life. The group will meet quarterly to receive the anonymised material gathered from group sessions. The Reference Group has been established as a sub group of the existing LDSAG. A service user member of the Reference Group will provide a six monthly progress report to the LDSAG . [Terms of Reference, 1998].

I chose the CI methodology for reasons I summarised at the time in writing the proposal to SNHST as the funders of the project:

Co-operative inquiry is “research *with* people, rather than research *on* people” (Reason, 1994:1) It feels important to me that the methodology supports the empowerment of those participating in the inquiry. It is my experience that people may experience being de-skilled by health professionals, even as regards their own experience of illness. It is therefore important to me that the methodology grows confidence in its participants, and I propose that the co-researcher approach reinforces this.



It is my belief that the disempowerment (social exclusion) experienced by many in society is a significant factor in their ability to be self determining. This however only reinforces my belief that this methodology is appropriate when I assess its ability to support what the writers refer to as self development.

The members of the group have the expertise from their lived experience that the research needs to access. Co-operative inquiry therefore seems to me to be well suited as it is a participative research methodology where the primary source of knowledge is the self directing person within a community of inquiry (Reason, 1994:42)

One of the fields in which this methodology has developed in the UK is that of *experiential learning*. The methodology is therefore congruent with learning about the self management of illness, and this format enhances this congruence through that learning/reflection taking place in company of/community with others with the same or similar experience. A humanistic research methodology also appears appropriate to inquire into the current abilities, and potential, of a range of services to support the *whole* patient and their needs. (Research proposal 1998).

In the Diabetic Services User Group (DUG) individuals were encouraged through contact with others with a similar life experience of diabetes to become increasingly self actualised persons through the strengthening of self esteem and sense of self efficacy. Bandura (1986:390) has defined perceived self efficacy as 'people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses'<sup>210</sup>.

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<sup>210</sup> Much of the recent research and thought on efficacy is based upon the social cognitive theory of Bandura. Bandura considers self-reflection the most uniquely human capability, for through this form of self-referent thought people evaluate and alter their own thinking and behavior. These self-evaluations include perceptions of self-efficacy, that is, "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1986, p. 389). In his theory, Bandura (1986) pronounced, "Among the different aspects of self-knowledge, perhaps none is more influential in people's everyday lives than conceptions of their personal efficacy" (Bandura, 1986, p. 390). Even though individuals may possess certain skills, there is a distinct difference between possessing such skills and being able to perform them. Self-beliefs of efficacy mediate the relationship between knowledge and action. Therefore, to perform specific actions effectively requires knowledge, skills, and efficacy beliefs. People who view themselves as efficacious set challenges for themselves and are more likely to persist in their efforts until they succeed. People who recognize themselves as inefficacious are more likely to evade difficult tasks and even abandon them in the face of obstacles (Plourde Lee A. 'The influence of student teaching on preservice elementary teachers' science self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs'. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*. Dec. 2002).

### *How I was inquiring:*

- The first meeting of the CI group set success criteria for the group which were to:  
Improve services (campaigns, advocacy)  
Find out more about the condition and support to better self manage  
Raise awareness of the condition and improve practice  
These gave us criteria for ongoing reflection and evaluation as a group
- Discussions with Judith Gill (SNHST) - regular, and John Richardson (GRH NHST) and David Dungworth (SNHST)- occasional
- Discussions with project reference group
- Discussions with LDSAG
- Work books
- Journal writing
- Regular reflective sessions with therapist, including work with dreams
- CARPP3 tutorial group and discussions with my MPhil supervisor Peter Reason
- CARPP6 tutorial group and discussions with PhD supervisor Judi Marshall
- Writing up of project for final report, shared with participants
- Participant evaluation of group, (including personal and group learning, energies, abilities and support).

### *Why it's of interest here:*

**Issue of chronic illness** – it shows me working with what were my own questions at that time: ‘how can I work with the group when I’ve not got diabetes?’ and ‘can I talk to them about my condition, when it means we have a shared experience. What would happen if I did?’ – I held these questions or variants on them, over the three year lifetime of the group. The changes in the questions and answers mapped my ‘progress’ from Tiger to Unicorn moment as I start to include myself more strongly in my facilitation.

The DUG project was instrumental in my being moved to write about my own experience of illness, and how this relates to my commitment and interest in my work, 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.

**Working into an old field of operation for me (NHS) in a different role,** that of facilitator rather than manager. I came across the same barriers and power holders and I was operating with less position

power but more understanding of the power dynamics and of their effect on me in personal terms (see Recruitment example below).

### ***Issues raised:***

**Motivations and multiple purposes** – Long term service users are uniquely placed to comment on the quality of service provision and it was this feedback which was a resource to service providers and commissioners in setting service standards and good practice guidelines.

Health service drivers included:

Diabetic services – In October 1997 the NHS executive published Health service Guidelines on Key Features of a Good Diabetes Service [HSG (97) 45]. In this guidance Local Structured Programmes of Care were described, and it was made clear that such programmes should be developed “in consultation with all relevant interested parties ..... and to reflect accurately the particular local circumstances.

Interested parties typically include: people with diabetes, those who care for them, and representatives of patients, including the CHC and British Diabetic Association”. This was a clear signal both that diabetes was likely to be the subject of a National Service Framework (although the term was not familiar at that time) and that an Effective Health Care Bulletin on diabetes and clinical guidelines would follow shortly.

Patient involvement – It also signalled that the Government and the Department of Health expected that service users would play an active part in reviewing, auditing and developing services, as in the ‘Patients influencing purchasers’ project (1997)<sup>211</sup>.

The Department of Health had also just started to work with the Long Term Medical Conditions group to develop the Lill project, recognising that chronically ill people have resources to offer each other and the overall benefits of lay self-management.

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### **211 Patients Influencing Purchasers (1997)**

Since the 1980s, Government white papers and NHS directives have been advocating closer working relationships between the NHS (purchasers in particular) and patients. However, by the mid-1990s, little guidance had been available on how to achieve this objective. The ‘Patients Influencing Purchasers’ research project aimed to find practical methods for developing effective partnerships between people with long-term conditions and health authorities. Six health authorities worked with fifteen LMCA member organisations to discover first hand what patients’ experiences of the quality of services were, and their views on how these could be improved. The *Patients Influencing Purchasers* report (published in 1997) includes specific recommendations for the NHS Executive; health authorities and NHS trusts; and voluntary organisations working within the health sector.

The group piloted the specific methodology (CI) and the wider process of establishing a dialogue between a group of users of NHS services and those with the power to affect planning, delivery and practice.

**Personal drivers** – I was particularly interested in understanding how the CI group could support participants in sharing their experiences of the disease and the way that they were disabled by both the medical model of illness and disability used in the NHS, and by the attitudes of the wider society. It was this consciousness raising aspect of the group (Freire, 1970; Chambers 1983, 1997) that attracted me.

I was however feeling unconfident about how the group came to be initiated and how my own motivations might be perceived because I also knew I wanted to use the DUG group as a case study. In May 1999 I wrote:

I have had some anxiety about the group on two fronts:

1. That the idea of the pilot was initiated by one of the service providers, not from an existing group of service users or self help or campaigning group.
2. That I suggested this particular methodology, knowing that it would provide me with this case study. However I would like to be clear that I honestly believe that this is the appropriate methodology for this group.

The first point is concerning to me in a purist sense, and is based on the belief that a top down initiated group has the potential to reinforce feelings of disempowerment and helplessness<sup>212</sup>. However, sensitively framed, it does not have to be an issue for the group or its members. There is a long and venerable history of such groups empowering their members. (Schwerin on self esteem and self actualisation, and Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988: 745) who studied community service organisations, clubs and self help groups and found that 'greater participation in community activities and organisations is associated with psychological empowerment'. Also Mullender and Ward).

The second point is about a concern that I am carrying that informs my framing and intent for the group. I feel that this will be resolved if I can create a space with the group in which we can agree a common purpose, or an accommodation of our different purposes. It hinges on whether we can inquire together as co-researchers. This requires building a shared belief and trust in the group that can acknowledge our different roles, and also our interdependency and common purpose. In fact this important stage of setting up roles in the group can resolve both of these concerns.

When I first wrote about the group last November/December I wrote that my being paid to facilitate the group somehow compromised its ability to be a co-operative inquiry. I don't know where I acquired this purist and inaccurate view. I now feel more confident that it is about negotiation.

Framing the purposes of the group, particularly in that initial meeting -right

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<sup>212</sup> That mirror my feelings later in the project when I could have no influence over the closed group of Diabetes nurses who could prevent or facilitate access to their patients.

down to leaving people with the option of only having one meeting [if they wish].<sup>213</sup>

I can now see how purist an approach I had to offering these groups, but at the time these questions felt as if they could trip me up at every turn. 'Doing it right' felt like a real issue to me. I was seeking for a legitimacy for my role and what I was offering, once the group was under way these anxieties subsided as participants identified what they wanted from the project for it to be of benefit for them.

**Power and the system** – power dynamics affected many aspects of the project, here I give one example which illustrates the way that those already holding power within a system can erect barriers to change (Lukes, 2005). This example also illustrates my 'processing' in the situation as I attempt to recruit to the group and reflect on the barriers, plan my tactics, and inquire into why I feel as I do. It also illustrates how I was using more of a *noticing* practice and writing to reflect on my practice.

The original intention regarding recruitment to the group was that the hospital-based Diabetes Nurses would pass invitations to the group to their patients, and would also encourage the practice nurses working in primary care to issue invitations to patients and put up posters. After working to develop a suitable invitation Judith and I waited for weeks with no responses at all. We then 'dropped into' a few GP practices and could not find any of our posters displayed. We then contacted diabetics we knew and discovered that none of them had been told about the group.

We got around this barrier by linking with the relatively new and very enthusiastic retinopathy service which visited GP practices across the county; they agreed to distribute our invitation cards to their patients. In addition I visited the one support group in the county (Stonehouse) and discussed our project and our recruitment difficulties with them and received advice on how to reach other diabetics.

In August 1999 I wrote:

**Calling back**

Having gone through the period of despairing that we would ever get the group together, and then having cracked a recruitment strategy that overcame the barriers I mailed the 10 respondents to the invitation cards, plus the three volunteers, plus Richard from the Stonehouse group.

I notice a multi layered set of feelings in myself:

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<sup>213</sup> It is a familiar pattern for me of finding it difficult to ask for the things I want. This can lead to lack of clarity and unassertive attempts on my part to manipulate things so that I get what I want, but others don't notice because they've had their needs met too. The Wilber framework [Four territories] has been useful here in making me mindful of my "stuff".

I was hesitant to presume that they would want to come to more than one meeting of the group, so part of the agenda for the first meeting will be discussing whether they want to meet again, and for what purposes. If people raised it on the telephone I encouraged them to see it as an option, their raising it confronted me with my lack of faith that they would want to participate. (What is it in me that has been shaken? I am asking myself whether it's my own stuff, or belongs outside). In order to understand this better I have discussed it with my colleague Judith. She too experienced a strong sense of being discouraged and blocked.

My sense is that this feeling belongs partly in my own lack of faith in my practice (why should they want to work in a group facilitated by me?), and partly in my dislike of working on my own (a minor influence this but I notice one that troubles me, a sense of wanting to be accompanied)<sup>214</sup>.

But the main and crushing feeling has been one of a passive resistance to change from "the system" -- in this case in the persons of the specialist diabetic nurses and the practice nurse community

I realise that both Judith and I would be sensitive to this having worked for the Health Authority during its period of both inflexibility and denial of its own traumatised condition. However it also could have been expected to have equipped us with skills and a familiarity with the tactics.

What I also notice is that when I wrote of setting up this group nearly a year ago (Transfer paper. First draft) I wrote assuming some resistance to any changes proposed by the group. It made me unconfident in framing how self directed the group could be.<sup>215</sup>

### **Barriers to Recruitment**

... I am aware of the two very different receptions I received from the two specialist nurses. Muriel was encouraging and helpful<sup>216</sup>. June worked for the consultant that chaired the LDSAG, and I met her with him at their clinic. Her manner was not overtly hostile, but it was abrasive. I noticed this in the ways I reacted to her more than in the direct content of our exchanges. I noticed myself being slightly pedantic about some details regarding one of our target groups (minority ethnic communities). Her language was potentially offensive in that she made broad and sweeping generalisations that included some stereotyping. I had not intended to

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<sup>214</sup> And I am reminded in writing this that the first person that rang me back to say they could come also asked if she could bring her daughter with her. I initially was nonplussed thinking she meant a child. But she wanted to bring her adult daughter, in recognition that they had been through the experience of the diabetes together, not that the daughter had it too but that she had shared the experience. This made me realise the importance of seeing the experience of the disease as one that is shared by a whole circle of people. It prepared me to look for this as a potential shared issue in the group -- it brought the theory about issues for those with chronic illness into the lived experience of this participant.

*Of course it also reminds me of my own position. The feeling that both Glenn and I share the disease somehow, or more accurately share the condition of having this in our lives. What it makes conditional in our lives.*

<sup>215</sup> And I need to be clear that this is an issue for me, that of influence, a sense of powerlessness that both drives my commitment to justice through influence and so my work in this field, and a latent sense of hopelessness that is very much rooted in a childhood experience of powerlessness, and so comes with the potential of overwhelming despair as its original issue was survival.

<sup>216</sup> But it turned out still passive when it came to recruitment.

challenge this in the interview but then found myself correcting her about the appropriate language to use with one minority ethnic community. I was appalled with myself at the time, it immediately felt like a real challenge to her authority, and yet when I recalled the words they were inoffensive and in fact potentially helpful. On reflection I wonder whether this lack of sensitivity on my part exposed her need to have her expertise respected absolutely....

My tactic was to seek her help both within the LDSAG meeting to clarify information, and later to advise on establishing better contacts with the Practice Nurses...

Because this is a pilot the issue of effective recruitment is worth understanding. In addition it may tell us something important about another part of this system: that of the staff, their pressures and priorities, that will contribute to understanding how to implement any changes identified by the DUG as desirable. In this way it is important information for the LDSAG.

I also noticed and identified when the project became re-invested with energy for me:

A significant number (6 out of 14) of potential participants rang back with 24 hours of receiving my letter giving the date of our initial meeting. In addition I am noticing the words they used, and the efforts people are making to attend. I came back to a message on my answer phone " I would love to come to the group"; other conversations have included phrases like "I'd really like to come". Potential participants with no cars have asked for lifts, others have offered lifts to others who are complete strangers. People who said they would only attend a meeting if it were held in one town have been prepared to travel.

This feels very exciting, and has helped me to see the whole venture in a different light.

*What I'm noticing as I write this is that I find it hard to stay with the excitement, which isn't that I don't feel it, but I'm not able to stay with it. In writing I keep going back to the difficulties and can't stay with the joys. I could speculate on the reasons for this, I am more of a glass half-empty person, I'd rather be protected by having lower expectations of success. But I'm not sure it's that simple in this case. (Workbook).*

**Story telling and experiential knowing** – within the CI group the participants told stories about their lives as it was affected by their diabetes, they shared their experiences and found the areas of common ground. They also were able to learn from each other about what they might expect from the illness and the services. They were able to explore and rehearse situations as diverse as exchanges with over protective family members and negotiating with a health professional to have a service delivered in a different manner. Participants gathered a much bigger picture of what it was to live with diabetes which served them well when some members of the group went on to sit on planning groups such as that implementing the NSF for diabetes services in the county, they were able to feel more secure in these representative positions because they had gained something of an overview (see also Children's Commission practice account re. exploring ways to turn experiential and practical knowing into propositional form for wider dissemination).

Or as I wrote about the project in 2000 when using it as a case study with students:

### **Outcomes**

The system (the NHS) has learnt something about how to listen to differently informed opinion (lived experience rather than expert knowledge from a biological/medical view of illness), including its discomfort with having its practice questioned (as evidenced in the passive resistance of some individuals and the LDSAG itself in its failure to grasp opportunities for actions proposed by the DUG report whilst awaiting the NSF).

We believe that the group has demonstrated the value of experience – linking lived experience and expert knowledge, particularly in its later stage when heads of service have met with the group to exchange views and stories of 'how things work', or are supposed/designed to work, and how they are experienced by those they are designed to serve.

The group has demonstrated the value of storytelling as a method for transfer of information and the building of confidence/assertiveness. The value of this being its accessibility for patients as a conversational form, rather than their being required to find more formal ways to engage with each other or the system.

### **Ways of knowing**

Experiential knowing was shared between members of the group as presentational knowing through story telling about their experience of their condition and services (their absence or presence). This was then formed into propositional knowing through developing a report to LDSAG.

The group members reported developing an extension to their practical knowing – increased skills for self management of their condition.

**Consciousness raising** – another purpose that the group served was to raise the consciousness of participants about the issues which related to the provision of services. These ranged from the differences between the social and the medical models of disability, the professional politics within the NHS, national funding decisions, the way attitudes of staff affected service delivery, and who receives a service and who goes without.

In other practice accounts I make the point that for me the transition from advocacy to dialogue is part of my learning journey, and that part of my role has been supporting my clients to develop a wider vocabulary of modes of operation that enables them to choose between advocacy, campaigning, dialogue and partnership. In the case of the DUG group participants becoming better advocates was always part of the agenda. It is there in the Terms of Reference developed with the funders of the project who hoped that such a group could affect service delivery, and it is clearly there in the success criteria the DUG participants set for themselves.

A process of conscientization (Freire) was part of the experience of group membership, and a range of service providers were invited to



speak with the group about their services (e.g. the head of the chiropody service at the time that a reduction in service was proposed). The group became increasingly confident to question and challenge the assumptions underlying some service planning. This culminated in a report presented to the LDSAG at a joint meeting and DUG participants being invited to be members of various working groups reviewing, planning and implementing services. Group members also reported being more assertive about services they personally used.

### ***Developing my capacities and presence as facilitator:***

**The first 'proper' co-operative inquiry group that I ran** – I am seen here starting-off with rigid ideas about the CI process and my facilitation. During the life of the group I learn to relax into accepting emergent form and agendas.

**Balancing self disclosure and listening respectfully and well** – One of the reasons for my hesitation to self disclose in the group was the stage I was at in my own relationship with my illness. I was anxious that my feelings would impair my ability to listen and pay proper attention to the group participants. In the event careful sharing was empowering for me and well received by group members, who were then able to include me in some of the taken for granted assumptions about attitudes and experiences.

In June 1999 I wrote in my journal of the experience of sharing with the DUG group:

I realise that my grief and distress is [felt as] a humiliation to me. I feel humiliated and somehow am less in admitting/exposing my grief. This is not just an issue with my family, it is so in every other circumstance. There is a link here to 'coming out' in company where I feel accepted and respected, and where I have been able to make an (acknowledged) contribution. It counters the disempowering feeling of my loss<sup>217</sup>. (Journal June 1999).

I would not have these same questions now but they were figural at the time and if I hadn't dealt/dwelt with them they would be likely to still be cropping up now. As it is they could show themselves again for a reason that's germane to the context at the time<sup>218</sup>.

**Working with client champions, but 'against' the power in the system** – the CI group supported its members to advocate their own and the

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<sup>217</sup> Raises issues of spoilt identity (Goffman), also membership of community of shared experience, community of ascription.

<sup>218</sup> I continued to write about 'coming out' about my condition in the context of my work, including a piece (11.6.99) relating to my work with GNPN, written on the occasion of being asked to attend their House of Commons presentation and nearly refusing because I knew walking would be difficult. As it was I 'came out' and took my wheelchair with them on the coach to London and duly entered the Houses of Parliament on wheels and amongst friends.

wider group's needs. Many members gained a more confident voice through speaking in the group.

**Supporting the group to advocate** – see consciousness raising above. My role as facilitator of the DUG pilot included supporting those who were championing these approaches from within NHS organisations. This involved coaching on my part to support them making the case for pieces of work and approaches to user empowerment.

***Relationship to my learning journey:***

**A project on the Tigers/Unicorn cusp** – made transition during the life of the group – this project illustrates me growing from 'gut based rage' and discomfort and adversarial positioning, through awareness of and pain about this adversarial pose to understanding and taking a more systemic approach e.g. working to understand the selling points and comfort zones for professional services/groups. As I wrote in 1999:

I think when I started I thought it was all about getting a seat at the table for the de-legitimised and muted voices. Now I'm aware that one needs to work with the whole system, especially around issues for clients (NHS managers and consultants) of learning how to listen.

**Coming to terms with working around health and old colleagues and elephant traps** – through the DUG project I remade relationships with some NHS organisations and old colleagues from my new position as independent facilitator/researcher.

## Practice account 4 – Large Government Agency

2000 – 2004

### *How this account has developed:*

My own writing and reflecting at the time and since.

Discussed with supervisor August 2003, June 2004.

Inquiring conversation with Sally December 2003 (after false start November 2003, when I'd let the time negotiated for this conversation get filled up with other things), taped, transcribed, shared with Sally, analysed and written-up (9.03.04, revised 26.4.04), which was shared with Sally for comments<sup>219</sup>.

Other conversations with client and fellow consultants, including sharing of some writing for comments/feedback.

Early draft of Practice Account shared with members of tutorial group 2004.

Early draft slips my mind and I start to gather material to write but feel I don't know how to disguise the client organisation so can't get started!

Discussed with supervisor February 2005.

Find early draft while starting to write again April 2005. Build new draft on early writing, surprised at clarity of earlier insights.

Later draft shared with supervisor June 2005.

### **KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS USED:**

**LGA** = Client organisation.

**JU** = 'Joining Up' the project we are working on.

**Jack** = client contact person/sponsor for the work in the LGA, their Social Policy manager.

**Ivor, Sally, Duncan and Daphne** = other members of the consultant team. I appear as **Me**

**Patricia** = an original member of the consultant team who was fired by the client.

**Malvern** = venue for our November 2001 retreat to reflect on the first year of the work.

### ***Brief description***

This account refers to work undertaken for a large government agency (LGA) which is a science-based organisation (engineering) currently struggling with issues of how to bring together its own expert knowledges with other, public knowledges. As part of this transition the LGA sought help from a consortium of consultants<sup>220</sup>, of which I was

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<sup>219</sup> See *Inquiring Conversations about my Practice*.

<sup>220</sup> Its worth noting that the consortium of consultants was brought together by the client, who had decided who his 'dream team' would consist of and required these individuals to form a consortium to work together on the project. Others, such as myself, were then added to the team as some original members left (e.g. Patricia) or

part, to develop and embed a social policy<sup>221</sup> for this scientific organisation, and so enable it to integrate sustainable development into the organisation and its activity.

As I wrote in 2005 when reflecting with another researcher working on a project for the LGA:

**The fatal flaw is that key senior champions could not see that research processes, research outcomes and the application of results are inextricably linked.**

For reasons of confidentiality I will not identify the government agency involved but will refer to the client organisation as the 'LGA'.

This account describes me working with the LGA on an area, regional and national level to embed an awareness of social policy issues and develop skills for social processes e.g. stakeholder consultation, involvement of communities in planning.

This work has contributed to my first person inquiry (including how I work with issues of power, leadership, inclusion), and second person inquiry within the consultant team (including designing and piloting a collaborative writing process)<sup>222</sup>. Processes I have facilitated have included stakeholder involvement in policy development, and whole system events (third person inquiry). The project includes introducing action research as a (social process) tool into the LGA, and working with internal design teams and a project board.

### **The work took the form of:**

Phase 1 (mid 2000 – March 2002) consisted of a number of workshops held in LGA regions to look at the links between sustainability, social issues and the work of the agency – getting the social onto the sustainability agenda for the organisation, where previously only an interest in the scientific was legitimated.

The design was a whole systems approach with a cross section of staff by geographical area of operation and hierarchy in the room.

The design was developed with an internal design team and modelled approaches that were congruent with the 'social issues'<sup>223</sup>.

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gaps were identified. Important stages of forming the consultant team were neglected, and the client Jack held an unusual role as both representative of the LGA commissioning the work and a member of the project team alongside the consortium of consultants.

<sup>221</sup> This became categorised as consisting of social issues, social awarenesses and social processes.

<sup>222</sup> As part of the project I also worked with groups of LGA staff and other stakeholders in larger, third person inquiries. I do not document these third person inquiries in this practice account.

<sup>223</sup> Processes congruent with social issues in this situation being a whole system approach (linking up and down the hierarchy); a stakeholder approach to projects and workshops; maximising participation in the design.

There was also a comprehensive literature search and a Directory of LGA social initiatives; this was a review of research projects touching on social issues, processes or perceptions within the agency. This was started in phase1 and concluded in phase2.

Phase 2 (April 2002 – mid 2004) The project went on to work with regional groups on identified action research projects (pathfinder projects) to further support staff in their action learning regarding working with the JU Project agenda.

A series of reports were written at the conclusion of the project to identify the learning, and propose next steps to the LGA. Ivor and Sally were not involved in phase 2.

In addition I undertook three related pieces of work for the same LGA; one facilitating a pilot process for national policy development for the LGA (as policy advisors to government) - this is referred to as PWG. The second was a commission to work with LGA corporate services section on a project designed to raise staff awarenesses, develop skills and confidence and an inquiring approach to engaging communities. The third was the design and facilitation of a stakeholder event bringing together NGOs and government departments from the two fields of social/economic equity and the physical sciences to develop a statement and action plan for Environmental Equity - that is the equal access to environmental 'goods'<sup>224</sup> for excluded communities.

### ***How I was inquiring:***

- Consultant team discussions
- Discussions with Sally (fellow member of consultant team)
- Discussions with client (Jack)
- Workbook writings: a contemporary record of factual and reflective information (two column style)
- Journal – reflective and imaginal writing
- Writing as reflection - writing specifically undertaken to help me to explore and make sense of what was going on in the project
- Collaborative writing with consultant team members
- Writing for consultant and client team – e.g. learning reports both formal and less formal e.g. report entitled *What I learnt from working with my passions in the context of the project*
- Tutorial group sessions with CARPP tutorial group
- Supervision sessions with my PhD supervisor
- Dream work and reflective therapy sessions.

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<sup>224</sup> As opposed to environmental 'bads' such as higher levels of air and water pollution, fewer green spaces, higher noise levels, closer proximity to landfill sites etc.

## *Why it's of interest here*

**An extended project over two learning journey 'moments'** (Unicorn, and Pig and Deer moments).

Phase1 finds me still operating largely from my Unicorn moment much of the time, whereas in phase2 there are many more examples of me working from my Pig and Deer moment.

For more detail see *Relationship to my Learning Journey*, below.

## **Collaborative writing project**

Early in 2002 I designed and worked with a collaborative writing process to support the project team in the process of bringing together the learning from the first phase of the project, and as a team building exercise<sup>225</sup>. (The proposal for this is included as an endnote<sup>1</sup>).

Reflecting on the process afterwards (2003) I wrote:

Why did I end up making the [collaborative writing] proposal? Well I suppose because I hold a position in this team of strongly advocating valuing our learning as a consultant team; the belief that this is likely to contain significant mirroring of the client system and so be of use for 'me, us and them'; and because I find myself very concerned with the issues around congruence – of values and practice, of design and content (form and function), so that I was advocating a collaborative approach to the construction of knowledge within the consultant team.

Basically I was keen that we equalised the voices, and that more than one type of knowing/perspective was present in the Learning report. Having written the paper *What I learnt from working with my passions...* for the same group I felt able to step into a role which was familiar to me from other contexts (advocate for maximising participation), and to do so from a (new) considered and 'digested' position (achieved through thinking about and writing that paper and reflecting (myself and with others in my tutorial group) on its contents and the messages from the two other similar reports circulated by Sally and Daphne). This was a different experience qualitatively for me from the more familiar 'swift action in response to anger' of the Tigers of wrath moment, or the silence of 'stifled voice due to anger and insecurity' of the Unicorn moment. In this way this case study shows

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<sup>225</sup> I was inspired by the process described in *Women's Ways of Knowing*:

So, too, during our work together, the four of us developed among ourselves an intimacy and collaboration which we have come to prize. We believe that the collaborative, egalitarian spirit so often shared by women should be more carefully nurtured in the work lives of all men and women. We hope to find it in all of our future work.

In collaborating to write this book we searched for a single voice – a way of submerging our individual perspectives for the sake of the collective 'we'. Not that we denied our individual convictions or squelched our objections to one another's point of view – we argued, tried to persuade, even cried at times when we reached an impasse of understanding – but we learned to listen to each other, to build on each other's insights, and eventually to arrive at a way of communicating as a collective what we believe.

From the preface to *Women's Ways of Knowing* – Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule. 1986.

the transition from Tigers of wrath to Unicorn to Pig and Deer moments, and strongly surfaces key issues for my inquiry.

I made the proposal at a team meeting, and followed it up with a paper proposing a method. I had previously discussed approaches to writing collaboratively with my CARPP6 group, who helped me to reflect on my intentions, the risks and benefits, and possible forms of process. I facilitated the collaborative writing day which resulted from the proposal. I have tapes and notes from this event and post-event reflections. I have also written an account of the day.

I then edited our shared material from the day, and managed the writing of a first draft of the report (Journal 2003).

Benefits included learning to listen to each other and a better understanding of and respect for the perspectives of each team member. There had been power struggles within the team, writing collaboratively did not solve them but it may have helped members to be more compassionate and understanding in their dealings with each other at times.

**Me learning to be 'a consultant'** – managing the discomfort of the role and my own sense of not-knowing (denying I knew anything) and knowing but not being quite sure it was accepted by the team or client at times.

Continuing to work with my internal discomfort with the role; at the start of this project my fantasy is I have to '*know* about things', later sees me working towards a position of wanting us as a group to inquire, rather than have to 'know', being a champion for us learning together as a team and together with our participants from the LGA (co-intentional education, Freire).

**Me writing to make sense of the project** – producing a wide range of writing in order to do so, I think particularly because there was something about the nature of the work/project which led to all of the consultant team at times finding it hard to 'hang onto' their knowing, to feel we could keep a good picture of what the project was about. I took some of this sense making writing to the consultant team, including what felt like some quite risky writing which linked my personal to the wider political as relevant to the project, the LGA, its issues, and the team dynamics.

This was the first occasion on which I did this, sharing this sense-making and my understanding so publicly. I would not have had the confidence to do so earlier in my learning journey or without the support of CARPP (tutorial group and supervisor) and the learning I had developed about using my personal self in my work, and using the imaginal to access different sorts of knowing in order to 'make sense'<sup>226</sup>.

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<sup>226</sup> This led me to take this project to my tutorial group on repeated occasions for reflection and to be supported and challenged by them, much more so than with any other piece of client work.

In November 2001 I wrote a paper to be shared with the project team called *What I have learnt about working with my passions in the context of the project*, in it I included an observation about learning in the organisation. In it I work openly with my own prejudices about the potential for learning in such a hierarchical organisation, I also included (as a footnote in the original, here marked\*) a more imaginal piece of writing, which shows me sense-making, to thicken and illustrate my meaning:

**What learning have I seen take place in this project, and where do I think its not taken place/root?**

This was my starting question. I feel as if I can contribute to answering the first part of the question, but as to where learning has not taken place – I think this takes longer to judge, the easy answer would be ‘at the top’, but that would just expose my prejudice and dislike of hierarchy, rather than being based on understanding the struggles of senior managers in the LGA.

However it does remind me of a recent incident when I had some time with a senior LGA manager: As we sat in yet another hotel conference suite we got to discussing pressures on staff, as his computer took nearly 20 minutes to download his email (its volume being so great). Looking past him I could see the beautifully wrought windows of the Elizabethan manor house that had become this hotel, and through these large oak trees, whose leaves had turned a wonderful toasty brown and were now falling to the ground.

He described the constant pressure on staff for whom he was concerned, of which email had most recently become a part. Things had got so bad, he said, that they were considering taking away email from some staff who could not handle the demands it put on them, for their own protection. I asked how he felt this differed from any other aspect of time management, were there not ways in which staff could be supported in being more choiceful about the demands made upon them, what was so different about email? No, he said, email is different. There is something seductive about its immediacy and the personalisation of the contact with the recipient. *These staff could not manage their own responses when someone told them how much their contribution was needed!* (The same staff describe themselves to us as ‘passionate professionals’, committed to protecting the environment).

\*I looked past him as I thought about what he had said, and noticed the groundsman walking down the avenues of oak trees vacuuming up the steadily falling leaves.

How much do we understand of each other’s drivers? And when we don’t how futile activity can appear.

However I also note that I ‘took the plunge’ less supported than I might have been; namely I sent my writing to my consultant colleagues before sharing that particular writing with my CARPP colleagues – this led one person to ask ‘do you want to resign from this project?’, implying that my writing almost dared the team to see this as a letter of resignation or as me taking a step too far.



I do remember when I sent the writing to the other team members clearly feeling that I wanted to be true to myself, and my knowing and ways of knowing, and there was a sense of recklessness in exposing myself to them in this way – a dare to see *me* and respond to me. But my writing was both provocative and caring; I understood the (LGA) injunction ‘not to speak’ and had decided not to obey it<sup>227</sup>. In doing so I was being choiceful, based on a system diagnosis. I had an intuitive notion that what I was doing in writing provocatively was more than being merely bolshi; it was a post conventional choiceful use of Tiger (Torbert).

**Working as part of a team which underachieved on what it espoused to be important i.e. collaboration and learning together** – we were good at reflecting as pairs and trios but failing to process and reflect as a whole group e.g. the leadership battles which were seldom discussed openly in the whole team, and the ‘Patricia incident’ (when a member of the team was very publicly excluded from a meeting and then from the project by Jack) was still resonating 2 years later but never directly reflected upon as a whole team, or between the team and Jack.

I felt we were unable to talk about *our own emotional processes*, and so for me it became very hard to value the very responses and feelings I have learnt to trust to guide my actions (when carefully examined through the process of my ‘noticing’ what arises and where it belongs) in group reflections.

**Working for a client who had insufficient power in the organisation’s system to get buy-in** – the Social Policy manager (Jack) was relatively new to the LGA when he commissioned the JU project. He did not yet have a well developed sense of internal networks or politics, nor were his influencing skills sufficient to the considerable task of some aspects of the cultural change which developing and integrating a social policy for a science based organisation posed for some staff, particularly some very senior managers and some operational staff. His position power (power-over, power to make things happen) in the organisation was weak.

This resulted in a failure to ‘manage’ the Project Board (a critical group if the findings of the project were to be fully integrated into the LGA), and resulted in Jack experiencing rushes of anxiety and demonstrating controlling behaviour (at times driven by bullying from his own manager).

Because the action research methods used by the consultant team were stakeholder/whole system events and action learning, this failure

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<sup>227</sup> It mirrors issues of passionate knowing in the LGA and breaching the felt injunction not to really share it.

of influence was only damaging to some aspects of the project. Those who experienced being part of the research learnt experientially and were less affected by Board level discomfort with a focus on social processes and supporting learning across the organisation and between the organisation and other groups such as incident affected communities<sup>228</sup>.

**Working on the project challenged, broke and made relationships between members of the consultant team** - during phase1 of the project there were complicated leadership struggles within the consultant team, and between the client and some members of the consultant team. This led at its most extreme to bullying and scapegoating. Despite several attempts to deal with this and its effects on the project and the group through discussions and design (e.g. the collaborative writing process) the resolution only came when a significant member of the team withdrew at the end of phase1. In phase1 the team consistently split into two groups; the 'process consultants' and the desk based researchers and policy writers.

**Mirroring of the system** – by which I mean that the sorts of issues and challenges faced by front line staff were 'mirrored' (replicated, but on another scale) across the client system in the issues faced by the client organisation on a political level, also by the management teams of the client organisation, and by the consultant and client team. Examples of this are the espoused value (and therefore the desire) to work differently with stakeholders as part of integrating the social aspects of sustainability in a LGA which had had hitherto a purely scientific understanding of sustainability. This was a political and managerial aspiration for the organisation as an agency. For staff on the ground there was an aspiration to work with the public and public knowledge, and for the consultants supporting the organisation's learning the individual client and consultant team's aspirations were to work with an inclusive and participative action research approach. However this did not prevent a Project Board member from dismissing the advice in the final report of the consultant team, (describing the social policy including approaches to stakeholder working) as '*wholesome but not yet acceptable to the LGA's Board and senior management*'.

Another aspect of this is the difficulties right across the client system in working with what Foucault would call subjugated (esoteric and local popular) knowledges, which was mirrored in the client and consultant team by an impatience at times with the diversity of knowing and approaches included within the team.

I noted (Feb. 2002) the consultant team mirroring a failure to integrate learning when the process we followed for developing the bid for

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<sup>228</sup> Such as those involved in or living close to the site of engineering accidents.

phase2 picked up all the 'faults' we'd just identified from phase1 and enacted them yet again!

### ***Issues raised:***

**Action Research as a capacity building tool** – We specifically undertook capacity building which went beyond mere competences to awarenesses and mindfulness, and acknowledged different ways of knowing (LGA staff learning to learn from and with communities and other stakeholders, Chambers' *uppers* learning from *lowers*). We supported shared learning through creating learning spaces and processes; developing dialogue within the organisation and between the LGA and stakeholders (through workshops), supporting learning about organisation blocks and culture, encouraging story telling to enable different knowledges to be heard and recognised, raising the awarenesses necessary to work with issues of diversity, inclusion and participation.

**How unlearning can be embedded in organisations and how as consultants our voices can be silenced** – Can you use Action Research (AR) in an organisation which is resistant to dealing with the institutionalised barriers to learning together? Our experience is that as an inquiring approach AR works in isolated pockets in such circumstances but cannot have an effect on the wider organisation without people taking leadership to enable it. I described to Sally part of a recent consultant team meeting where we identified some core messages for our report writing:

Me: We spent a morning talking about how we perceived the LGA and what we thought the messages were that we've learnt over the past nearly three years.

We started off talking about the methods that we'd used, and then of course once you've started to talk about AR and AL you're asking is this organisation at the right point to be using these methodologies? At which point we were finding ourselves concluding that no, it wasn't yet a good point to be using these methodologies because there are some parts of the organisation that can and other aspects of the organisation that militate against it.

The recent refusal of very senior managers to publish, let alone to commit to acting on, our recommendations (Project Board), brings up yet another aspect of voicelessness and powerlessness, that of the consultant whose advice is spurned because it's unacceptable, if 'wholesome'<sup>229</sup>. At the same time I reviewed the project (April 2004) with middle managers who had been members of the Project Development Group (the internal design team) and they were

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<sup>229</sup> It seems that 'wholesome' is just another way of saying 'motherhood and apple pie' – another disparaging phrase I have often heard used to argue against the morally correct but tactically unacceptable action.

immensely positive as to how the action research aspects of the project particularly had enabled them to make changes on a personal professional and wider professional levels e.g. one member quoted having the confidence to take on a university visiting professorship and to develop learning materials for engineers who he now teaches sustainability at higher education level.

**Leadership within the organisation and consultant team** – I remember well hearing the LGA CEO's comments to staff about the unacceptability of dissent, described by them as 'corporate disobedience'. This attitude contributed to a culture of anxiety within the agency.

Abusive and anxious behaviours going on within the LGA were replicated at times between client (Jack) and consultant team. E.g. anxiety led to the client wanting to be the leader of the team at times when he was less able to influence in his own organisation or gather a 'real' team about him.

If we had applied what we knew about learning in groups and organisations then leadership would have been diffused and situational in the project team. As it was there was a continuing struggle for position in phase1 as Ivor, who had organisational responsibility for the project, struggled to assert himself, alongside Jack's attempts to control the project and the team, both directly and through Duncan (his preferred candidate for leader).

As this struggle continued between the men in the project the three women attempted to manage the conflict and peace-make, but without being able to frankly name the behaviours. Behaviour in the project appeared gendered in many ways (see *Appendix H* for more detail).

**Power and powerlessness were played out** within the LGA, between staff and the public, within the consultant team – e.g. we heard ostensibly powerful managers also feeling powerless to get things done, and identified a role for the project to reconnect the powerful with the less powerful at the 'edge' of the organisation. Surviving in organisations became an issue for the consultant team members as well as for LGA staff.

**Congruence of process and content, behaviours and values** – Integrating process and practice and theory and policy (joining them up) was an issue in the consultant team, in the processes used in the project, and in wider system of LGA. Inclusive social processes lay at the core of the JU project and yet decision making in the project team was not always inclusive and processes for reviewing learning and writing were often rooted in an 'expert' paradigm. Members of the team wrote well and fluently about participation, and yet collaborative and participative approaches to inquiry and policy

development were uncomfortable for us most of the time due to anxieties about performance and influence, and non inclusive behaviours abounded e.g. short response times for contributions to major documents, participation time sacrificed, agreements breached, resulting in no shared sense of ownership.

**Espoused values versus values in use** – the project worked to stimulate social processes such as networking, partnership etc, but members of the project team were still dependent on old ways of influencing e.g. Ivor's elite networks, Duncan and Jack's public school affinities with each other and with others in the LGA.

**Working with passion** – We heard LGA staff describe themselves as 'passionate professionals', referring to their caring for and commitment to using engineering to protect the planet. The project team were similarly passionate about sustainability and social policy. For some the focus was on holding the aspects that constitute sustainability together, for others the priority was enabling participation, for another person it was enabling learning. And there were tensions between individual and collective needs; e.g. Individuals wanting to 'shine' in this project and putting this above a shared view of priorities for the project.

**Significance of place** – There was connection and disconnection for LGA staff in different roles because some (disconnected regulators) related to sites and sources of potential risk, and others (educators) to communities and specific areas in need of protection – largely ignoring the fact that these sites are within communities and places. This sort of disconnection was mirrored in the way the agency organised (and reorganised) its structure and staff roles<sup>230</sup>. We worked with this paradox by designing events which brought staff from both types of roles into close connection with local communities affected by incidents, and creating spaces in which (hi)stories could be told and responded to. In this way we went some way towards reconciling the paradox between the values of solidarity and identity.

**Struggling to grasp it, blocks to learning** – Members of the consultant team experienced feelings of not knowing, and of knowing and losing it. Difficulties expressed included; making sense of bits of the task but not of the whole (Duncan), feeling stupid and gauche (Sally), feeling one knew nothing of value (myself). The situation was not helped by only some team members admitting to these feelings at the time. Consequentially there was insufficient shared sense making at times in

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<sup>230</sup> Staff were also frustrated, divided and exhausted by reorganisation (Mann's second aspect of organisational outflanking).

the team, and the group tended to fracture into the process consultants and the policy writers.

Roger Harrison (1997) writes of the blocks to learning in organisations, some of which I feel relate to the underlying causes of some of this 'not-knowing' for us as members of the team, and for some in the LGA. In this way we as a team continued to mirror the organisation we were working with. Harrison writes of the blocks:

- The inhibition of learning by the presence of fear, anxiety, and other strong negative emotions in the organization.
- The inability to acknowledge the shadow: aspects of the organization's doing and being that are contrary to the ways organization leaders and members would like to think about themselves.
- The unmet needs for healing in organizations that are undergoing major changes, such as downsizing.
- The bias for short term problem solving, action and competitiveness that are embedded in the character of most leaders and managers, and in the cultures of their organizations.

**Working with the habits of an organisation** – The 'habit' or culture of the LGA is to hold power and authority (Lukes' 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> dimensions). This leads many members of the agency to feel uncomfortable and very nervous about community engagement.

This project invited participants to experience processes which themselves value and encourage diversity (stakeholder events, design teams, pathfinder action research projects), and taught experientially the skills and awarenesses staff need to develop if they are to work with stakeholders, including communities, and to value multiple ways of knowing and knowledges (e.g. scientific/engineering knowledge and public knowledge).

The discomfort of disturbing this 'habit' was mirrored across the system; from government's relationship with the public, through senior LGA managers' relationships with their own staff, the relationship between this project and the LGA staff accountable for it (Board members, Jack), and within the consultant team itself.

Lack of corporate recognition of the work (both work to embrace social processes and the JU project itself) created anxiety for some staff and consultants.

This lack of a significant champion for the project at the most senior level in the LGA contributed to a sense of there being a threat to the project's survival, which by the end of phase1 felt like a challenge to the project to withdraw or go forward.

The consultant team named the questions they were working with as:

*How to make loss of control bearable, and how to stay receptive and reflexive.*

It felt, as Sally pointed out, as if as consultants we were experiencing the distress of organisational life, but without the community.

### ***Developing my capacities and presence as facilitator:***

#### **Gaining confidence to use my skills outside my areas of knowledge**

Shows me working with self doubt and anxiety, and identifying my own knowing; For example I had a real crisis of confidence when asked to facilitate the national PWG as I had little or no 'content' knowledge, however instead of counting myself out (which I would have done at one time, and nearly did this time, telling the client I was very busy and would have to check my diary) I spent time asking colleagues who knew my work to give me honest feedback on whether I was sufficiently skilled in their eyes to undertake the work.

I also knew that this was piloting a process for a stakeholder approach to policy development. Somehow the focus on piloting a process gave me more confidence, and my passion for participation made me want to be part of shaping national policy development, making things happen.

#### **Me learning to be 'a consultant'** (in a much more experienced team) –

Shows me working with others whose work I respect, wanting to learn by working alongside them – rather than by pushing against them and their expertise all the time which I might have done in my Tigers moment.

**Learning to support my client** – Integrating working with multiple perspectives: 'Recognising the validity of the perspectives of clients, and being able to work respectfully with them' (self to colleague, reflecting on LGA project, 2003). There were times in this project when working in learningful ways with very self assured, positivist engineers was very difficult. I felt I found a resource in myself to better understand the place clients within the LGA were coming from in order to get alongside them. I discovered a compassion in myself in relation to them which I believe would have been obscured/inaccessible to me at an earlier moment.

**Working with internal design teams** – Discovering the importance of having a design team drawn from the organisation or group of stakeholders one is working with: to act as a sounding box; a miniature of the diversity and dissent in the room to enable understanding/engagement<sup>231</sup>. What I noticed was that the design team was initially as difficult and energy consuming to facilitate as any

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<sup>231</sup> Including the diversity of power.

large group process, then I got closer and discovered our learning bond (shared agenda) and the facilitation task became easier, less stressful because I could give up being 'the process expert' and share the holding of the group a bit, feeling less solely responsible for it being 'a success' in others' terms. Our shared learning bond supported us all in acting and reflecting.

**Realising there's more to it than I thought** – 'I'm not responsible for running perfect events' (my journal Feb. 2002). The realisation that being a good facilitator involved much more than running events proficiently, and that it required me to take more risks in learning with others, and to abandon any desire to make the process look 'perfect'. Instead it feels like it's about ways of working differently together, ways of learning differently together. I think I did know this before this project but working with the LGA over this four year period certainly brought this message home to me.

**Facilitating within the team** – Due to the issues around power, leadership and influence within the consultant team and between the team and the client (Jack) meetings needed a considerable amount of facilitation to be functional. This included roles and relationships, and conflict management<sup>232</sup>.

I note that I developed a strategy of proposing specific tasks and offering processes e.g. the phase2 proposal writing meeting was framed strongly by Sally and I, and I designed the collaborative writing meeting.

**Working with conflict in the team** (and between aspirations in LGA staff/senior managers) gave plenty of opportunity for me to practice using my noticing practices to identify what was being reactivated from my own biography, what was happening which belonged to the group and when the group was mirroring the wider system.

I notice that I was **confronting** (at times) and not confronting (at other times) constructions of power in the group – hierarchy, zero-sum, and when these were in conflict with the collaborative aim and espoused values of the project.

I found myself in a familiar role **advocating collaboration and inclusive approaches**, possibly too strongly for the context we were working in i.e. the stresses on and within the consultant team made it very difficult to engage in collaborative writing (see also comment above on working with habits of the organisation).

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<sup>232</sup> See Chapter 5 *Inquiring about my Practice*.



**Holding a clarifying role in the team** – I was modelling a purpose and focus, ‘a capacity to make sense of, to articulate some sense’ as Sally fed back to me (2003).

In order to do this I was practicing to have clarity regarding my intentions and being open and transparent about that (not manipulative). Yet I noted in 2003, when reflecting on the project with another team member, that ‘I could say honestly there was no time during this project when I felt calm or at rest or secure’.

**Co-facilitating** – Practicing checking/reflecting in the moment, plus planning and reviewing – was very successful with Sally<sup>233</sup>, more troublesome with Duncan as he resisted reflecting much upon himself and our activities as facilitators and was much more keen to reflect on the participants’ or the client’s behaviour.

Shared reflection with co-facilitators enabled us to ride out when things went wrong/differently and deal with our anxiety re Jack’s huge emotional investment in the success of the project. It was important that the reflections were not just about what others had done, what had gone on etc but also about how we did things, and how that was experienced – my ‘presence’ question proved useful (see Chapter 5. *Inquiring about my Practice*).

**Recognising and using my feeling responses** – acknowledged and understood through my noticing practices: e.g. in 2002 I wrote of having ‘a sense of appeasing a demanding and volatile parent’ regarding the shadow of the Patricia episode (Notebook record, 15.2.02). My *noticing pocket practice* was by this time well developed and feeding me data.

**Collaborative writing** – My role was to manage different relationships to the task in the group. Jack very stressed and demanding, Ivor very withdrawn and sullen, Duncan ‘throwing a flippy’, Sally unenthused. Me feeling like shouting but keeping cool. Sally (2003) remembers me as making ‘a calm, precise and focused intervention’<sup>234</sup>. I was more able to be nimble/flexible and starting to develop a hardiness I’d not had earlier.

**Facing up to my shadow** – At one of the regional stakeholder events I facilitated as part of phase1 I had an unexpected meeting with my ‘dragon queen’ (Roberto Assagioli; sub personalities). Challenged about time keeping I snapped back at a participant. Even in 2004 when I wrote about this incident in *Inquiring about my Practice* I felt shame at my impatience, yet I also asked ‘must I always be perfect?’ Now (2005) I am quite clear that the challenge was unhelpful and

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<sup>233</sup> See Chapter 5 *Inquiring about my Practice*.

<sup>234</sup> See *Inquiring about my Practice*.

being caught off guard by it was part of being human. Aspiring to be 'sweetness and light', when there is actually 'too much piss and vinegar' in me for that, would be inauthentic<sup>235</sup>. I work from anger as well as love, and my angry sub personalities are part of me<sup>236</sup>.

**Anticipating and acting out my intentions** – In this project I am seen to be anticipating and acting out my intentions as I work with the client, the organisation and the consultant team. This was described by one of my colleagues as a high order facilitation activity;

Everyone starts off wanting to be helpful, add value, and support the client. But how well we actually do that is more complex (2003).

I feel that over the life of the project I developed a much better flow between intentions and action than I had previously.

### ***Relationship to my learning journey***

**This was a project which extended over two learning journey**

**'moments'** (my Unicorn, and Pig and Deer moments) – This account shows me operating from both 'moments'; more Unicorn in my tempered and cautious start (2000 – 2002). For example in writing '*What I've learnt about working with my passions in the JU project*' I shared my insecurities, but also it shows me contributing to and challenging the team as I find my voice, so moving into Pig and Deer. Whereas in phase2 (2002-2004) there are many more examples of me working from my Pig and Deer moment; by the end of the project I was more accepting of the constraints in the situation/context/system, *and* more solid in my own knowing. For example when the commissioners of a piece of related work started to depart from the under pinning principles and objectives previously agreed for it,

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<sup>235</sup> At a recent workshop (Hawkwood, Glos. May 2005) I was delighted to hear Joanna Macy described herself as having 'too much piss and vinegar' in her to be able to find a simple, short form of the Practice of Compassion sufficient. It really connected for me as teaching that we can be human, authentic, *and* still practice to love well.

<sup>236</sup> In 2003 I commented: 'I think the more basic difficulty for me is because of a construct from my childhood of me being labelled as 'difficult'. So if I disagreed with my mother then I was being difficult, if you have a heated discussion for my mother that's an argument and frightening. She was very nervous in that way and very unable to manage any sort of challenge, and therefore a child that doesn't accept 'because I told you so' and all that goes with that is seen as having a 'difficult child' persona. And I suppose that makes it very difficult for me to ever feel secure in that dragon queen type behaviour, I always feel like I'm at that moment over the precipice hanging out there thinking 'oh fuck there's nothing under my feet how do I get myself back in there and pretend I never did it'. And all that attendant stuff about being inappropriate and isolated. For me one of the biggest challenges is to use that (anger) appropriately and constructively (!) and to survive using it. Use of anger is a legitimate strategy as a social worker and I used to find that quite difficult as well. It's the same thing, acting into a particular sort of authority at that point, but you do need to feel fairly secure in that and once I'm beyond the initial 'whoosh' I'm not secure in it.

Daphne and I were able to clearly restate our own opinions of the way forward and the risks involved in making changes, and ultimately to withdraw from the contract when the client continued to want something different. We could accept that these workers could not transcend the immediate context in which they were working.

At the time (3.10. 03) I wrote of the issues and decisions involved:

Currently as a consultant team we are considering withdrawing from a contract because of interference by our client (not the commissioning client, they changed).

It's not the direct interference of this anxious, officious client that has snapped our patience (although that's been very trying). No, it's the change in direction of the project from creatively enabling staff to think and act out of the box to issuing directions for a new style approach. *It's the misunderstanding of the way we are working that interprets humility and collaborative inquiry as weakness and not-knowing, and seeks to substitute top down direction.*

How ironic that the project is all about supporting staff to undertake building trust in local communities.

There are times when patiently shouldering the 'bad'/old behaviour of the client is desirable – to sit with them through the changes – and there are times when it is not helpful. This may be one of the latter.

How sad, bearing in mind the foundations we have built through JU over the last three years. It just goes to show different parts of the organisation learning at different paces, and that if the core culture (CEO and Board) is not conducive then the culture is very difficult to change because of anxiety and depression in the system.

See *Collaborative writing project* proposal (endnote) for an example of me moving between the moments.

I did a lot of **holding things together**, and feeling responsible for doing so. I wonder now (2005) whether the Pig aspect of my Pig and Deer moment would now enable me to put some of the responsibility back to other team members, to the group as a whole, to invite them to take responsibility for either making it work or accepting it was dysfunctional. Or at least to be inquiring together about it!<sup>237</sup>

**The controlling nature of the LGA and its culture** (after all, one of its prime functions is as a regulator) Throughout the project the controlling behaviour some of the LGA's senior managers (e.g. some members of Project Board), and of our client Jack, caused a strong reaction in me, taking me straight back into Tigers of Wrath moment reactions – that is making me want to push-back strongly, tying me in knots of anger and anxiety internally. Over the length of the project I

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<sup>237</sup> And in fact in my 2003 reflections on the project and working in the project team I noted: 'I have a question now about whether it might have been as valid to let it roll as it was going, and to stop trying to get it back to what we'd agreed the task would be, what happens if you just facilitate these extremes getting more and more extreme? It didn't feel like an option at the time, it felt like it could get into self destruct'.

got better at managing this reaction and being able to step-out of its constraints and stresses<sup>238</sup>.

**'What me a swan? Ah go on! I'm just an ugly duckling'**<sup>239</sup> – Part of my Unicorn moment is a lack of belief in myself, so that I cannot see and feel confident in skills and abilities in myself which others can appreciate. In this Unicorn moment I am not secure in my knowing about myself at times e.g. when approached by Paul and invited to facilitate a group which was to pilot a policy development process and had a crisis of confidence and sought others' opinions of my abilities.

Today I would spot this self doubt for what it is more quickly and refuse to allow it to spoil the pleasure of feeling flattered to be asked, of being appreciated by someone for what I do. This refusal is my Pig aspect. I would still feel the doubts, and I would act on them by seeking out a second opinion from someone I could trust to tell me the truth. There are some things I can't undo in my own biography, but I have learnt how to notice and check 'reality', and how not to get swamped in old reactivated stuff – even if I don't always manage it.

The **collaborative writing** attempt shows my desire for an inclusive process in order to be able to access more than one kind of knowing in the consultant team, this meant I had to advocate for such a process, and did this building on the Malvern retreat to engage the team. These are considered Pig and Deer actions; Pig-solid in my enthusiasm and holding the process, Deer-sensitive and vulnerable to the trauma in the team and wider organisation, being compassionate. Not raging against resistance and asserting the moral high ground.

The **sense of not-knowing** and a sense of needing to know more, which take up so much energy early on in this project, and which are both Unicorn moment characteristics, contrast with later stages when I see myself growing into finding my own knowing and a place for it, a more Pig and Deer characteristic. The LGA project sees me learning

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<sup>238</sup> However I am amused to note that as I put the finishing touches to writing this (May 2005) the client finally wants to publish our reports, completed over a year ago. In order to do this he wants substantial changes made to some of them, and for us to make these changes in a matter of a few days. I notice in myself how easy it is to rise to his demanding and inconsiderate behaviour with a mixture of anger at the disrespect and anxiety at being found wanting. But also now, better rooted in my Pig aspect, I am also able to make a space to notice this reaction, and to choose to take control of that aspect of the situation which is my engagement with it; that is to say clearly what and when my input could be.

<sup>239</sup> When I was a child I can remember that there was a popular children's song, written and sung by Danny Kaye, and based on a Hans Christian Anderson story in which a cygnet is vilified for being an ugly duckling until it finally starts to shed its down and is recognised by an outsider as a swan. The cygnet's image of itself by this time is conditioned by the attitudes of those around it and it believes itself to be 'just' an ugly duckling.

through inquiring *with* colleagues and participants, rather than learning by pushing against them.

Typically this project finds me **writing to make sense**, using both notes made in meetings and more reflective and even imaginal writings. Unusually in this project I share my writing to make sense with colleagues – I have found my own meaning through the writing process and am trusting it enough to expose it and myself to others. This confidence is typical of Pig and Deer moment behaviours, but I note that I take more risks than strictly necessary with a Tigers moment recklessness, daring colleagues to see me.

By the mid stage in the project I am sharing my passions increasingly openly via writing and speaking, but not beating people up with them as I might have done in a more Tigers of wrath mode. I am working with more **active compassion**, which I think of as a Pig and Deer characteristic because the balance of Pig-security and hardiness and Deer-poise and balance means I do not need myself or others to be 'perfect'.

### ***LGA Culture – late stage insights***

In 2004 I shared an email exchange with Duncan, trying to summarise some aspects of our experience of working with the LGA. I include these here as a conclusion to this practice account.

*I wrote:*

In supporting the LGA to work with social issues and processes there have been blockages because of culture which we have been unable to facilitate our way through. In our experience the LGA too often mistakes a paradox for a problem i.e. something which is in need of a solution. *'Paradoxes don't need solutions they need confronting, nourishing even, they are full of learning possibilities because they contain an innate comparison: sameness with difference'*. Paradoxes are grist to those who use comparative judgement, but anathema to those who use absolutist judgement (i.e. don't consider alternatives) e.g. politicians (or those playing very political career games<sup>240</sup>), and single minded regulators. So it depends on how we look, and it depends on who the looker is.

In the JU Project we have tried to work with Action Research, and specifically Action Learning. However we have only shared the explanation of our method explicitly with a small number of participants (the Project Development Group (PDG) and first Project Board). It strikes me now in retrospect, that Revan's helpful deconstruction of problems into puzzles and problems might have offered a good basis for working with some staff around the paradoxes which are often at the heart of social issues, for

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<sup>240</sup> I was referring to some Project Board members who were also senior managers in the LGA.

example the simultaneous sameness and difference at the heart of diversity in communities and stakeholders. Had we followed more closely the AR model and taught the method explicitly we might have constructed a better platform, a shared frame for understanding. Our 'discovery learning' (or AR) approach engaged many participants willing to let go of 'knowing' and absolutes and to explore their unknowing with us. In this way we were able to 'demonstrate through doing' key learnings for change, innovation and leadership in the project (mutuality, giving and taking cues, sharing the spotlight/taking turns, being energised through mutual effort, risk taking, being technically competent and being novices). It's just that these participants were interviewees, members of workshops, design groups and the PDG, rather than some of our Board members who are key gatekeepers to explicitly embedding this learning from JU.

I have no doubt that we have succeeded in introducing a very beneficial virus into the body of the Agency, but I also have little hope that it will be welcomed by the absolutists anywhere in the organisation.

*Response from Duncan:*

I suspect this is also why many at the top of the LGA will be resistant to the ideas of systems thinking and analysis. Absolutists (fundamentalists) need to see the world in simplistic, mechanistic terms and force fit 'understanding', as in control, into this frame of reference.

*I replied:*

Absolutely (oops, sorry about the pun), and also why they can't engage with us in inquiring conversations about issues – why they need to see 'data' and at the same time dismiss the stories told and gathered as part of our research as not valid evidence. I'd be interested to think together how we might, with this hindsight, have 'diagnosed' whether a management group could travel with us on a project like this. And how to support them in this process.

I realise we have had some important conversations in one to ones and small groups – important that is to the participants and their agendas as well as to ours – e.g. the Head Of Function interviews, our core group meetings with Jack, the PDG (at times), and the sorts of instances that J and CS described when they spoke of the significance of the JUp project to them and their thinking<sup>241</sup>.

But I have never been present when this has happened at Board level [and I notice for myself the Board reduces me to silence, something in me responds by despairing of being able to converse, to participate with them in 'social sense making or communicative action'].

Ho hum,  
Sue.

**Endnote.**

**From the proposal to the project team to write collaboratively (2001)**

...There is also the more pragmatic argument for continuing to explore a shared [writing] form. We have not been entirely successful in our attempts to date; no doubt we all feel frustrated by the draft and circulate approach adopted for some reports :- the originator gets little feedback, and often the feedback that there is

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<sup>241</sup> The PDG members who reviewed the project with us and reported it helpful.

can be couched in terms that are simply redolent of the gratitude everyone else feels for the task being done by another rather than a robust engagement with the content, or it can provoke responses similar to those of a school master, with critical comments that can feel as if they destructively unpick the careful stitching of the original, however constructively they are intended.

The more adventurous model suggested at our retreat has largely failed to date, as team members have been unable to prioritise/engage with it, and so the writing/receiving /reading/ reflecting process has become derailed, and I would suggest is largely irretrievable now.

Sally and I recently threw out an invitation to others to join us to put together a reflection in writing on the larger research cycle, which in our perception includes all elements of the JU Project, but that too failed to engage others.

I also hear in our discussions peoples frustrations in other settings when they wish to collectively write, but recognised that the finished product is often simply the stringing together of individual's writing with well crafted linking pieces. A good sum of the parts but not more than the sum of the parts, not the richness and congruence described by the team in the quotation above.

I am therefore proposing that we attempt the process described below and look for two distinct but interrelated outputs:

- o a truly shared reflection on the issues and process of the JU Project to date, that will contribute to any second stage and
- o a better, respectful appreciation of each other and our diversity as a basis for improved team working.

### **A Proposed Form.**

Since our retreat in November I have been thinking about congruent form, taking every opportunity to ask those who I know write how they have approached such challenges.<sup>1</sup> In putting forward this model I have tried to respect the pressures of time upon us all, and our potential for different levels of comfort with experimental form and uncertainty.

I am assuming that we are exploring the potential for a collective, overarching voice, that this would be our best outcome *if* it can encompass our diversity<sup>1</sup>.

I am also assuming that we do not have the time to simply allow form to emerge through asking 'What do we want to say to others?' and experimenting until a form settles. This might be an exciting approach but not one which any client is likely to be able to sponsor, even if they can appreciate the multiple benefits it could bring. Were we starting from scratch with this Project we could take a simple approach which might include;

- o Talk
- o Transcribe
- o Write under agreed heads
- o Compare

Following several cycles until we are all happy with the outcome.

However I think we need a process that draws us together more due to the way in which the JU Project has always separated ways and domains of knowing i.e. the action research and desk based research, the expert input and whole systems designs of workshops etc. *I think we need a design that allows all to contribute their expertise and experience, encourages us to read and listen to each other, and to reflect individually and in small and large groups.*

This is not rocket science (not that I have ever understood rocket science to be the greatest contributor to the well being of the world), nor need it take longer than a day, with a prompt start and the right setting.

*The method:*

- o Large group – agree key headings (postcards exercise to focus ‘This is what we should be writing about’)
- o Small groups/individuals – each write chosen bit (flip charts, key points<sup>1</sup>)

Coffee

- o Large group – stick up on walls writing, read each, write comments and any thoughts sparked onto each others flips
- o Large group – round of reflections

Lunch

- o Same authors rewrite (or not)
- o Large group – Comments and reflections again

Tea

- o Small groups write up
- o Review and identify any changes/gaps – including mandating an editor if needed to develop final draft.

In order to complete at least two or three cycles we will need an early start, a long day and refreshments on tap. We will also need to reduce any disturbances to a bare minimum and find ourselves a good working space with access to break out rooms. (Good hygiene as Marv Weisbord and Sandra Janoff would describe it!)

Writing can be more detailed as the process gets to later cycles, using laptops to generate copy in large fonts.

I am happy to facilitate the process, and would be happier still to share the facilitation, and I would also like to participate in the writing.

### **Making it Happen.**

Well, I did say it wasn't complicated; the challenge will be in the doing of it. Not just the writing but getting there on time with our whole attention for the task.

My question to you is ‘Are we able to engage with this? Are you up for it?’ And if so when, because we need to get this together as part of Phase1



## Practice account 5 – Children’s Commission

2001 -2002

### *How this account has developed:*

My own writing and reflecting with supervisor  
Case study for teaching purposes 2002  
Children’s Commission report for wider distribution 2003  
First draft March 2004  
Discussed with supervisor  
Revised draft June 2004  
Revised draft May 2005.

### ***Brief description:***

Work with children and their parents in seven peripheral estates (with high levels of deprivation) to identify their vision of play facilities for the neighbourhoods. Not just what they wanted from a playground but trying to get to the core of what they valued in play and about the places that met their needs and desires.

Developed with a team from Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network, workers from the Neighbourhood Projects (NPs), children’s workers, a play space designer, staff from the County Council’s Early Years Development Unit, but missing the youth service.

Elements of the project:

- Research team works with design group to develop project
- Research team trains Neighbourhood Project (NP) workers to run focus groups
- Children take play space designer on guided walks of the places they like to play
- Children record a day in their lives on disposable camera
- Video maker spends time with the children filming what they think about play, where they want to play, what they want to do, what would make it better etc
- Group discussions with children (for 6-11 year olds and 12-16 years), and separately with parents, focus group format
- Video box – this last element did not take off due to lack of time to set up the project
- Commission Hearing with children (representatives) and chosen professional champions as Commissioners, before an audience of research participants and professionals.

In order to involve workers from the local NPs and children’s workers in the project the delivery team trained the entire design group in basic research skills, including the basics of inquiry and running focus

groups<sup>242</sup>. The local project workers co-facilitated the discussions with members of the delivery team.

### *How I was inquiring:*

- Working with a group of colleagues sharing feedback and planning together: We too were going through cycles of activity and inquiry as a team. This happened at two levels, that of the Sustainable Futures delivery team (RK, AP and myself) and of the larger design group.
- Recording my feelings about the project in workbooks and my journal.
- Watching the video/CD record of the Commission hearing and noting my own part in the event; style, presentation etc.
- Commenting on the linkages to this (and other projects) as I continue my reading e.g. on reading Patricia Maguire chapter from the HAR.
- Dreams and discussions with my therapist.
- Discussions with CARPP tutorial group and supervisor.
- Discussions with students when using case study of the project – their questions illuminated my own understanding.

### *Why it's of interest here:*

An example of me developing my capacities as a facilitator as I **gained confidence to work alongside other disciplines** (video making, play space design) **developing a radical research package** which then delivered its messages to an event (Commission Hearing) in which children were the majority of the commissioners with an invited group of other participants including the power/resource holders as well as other experts<sup>243</sup>.

It enabled me to continue to experiment with issues of **congruency and inclusion and voice**.

**Children were at its heart and its head**, they were co-researchers and headed up the hearing<sup>244</sup>.

Literally capturing pictures of children's lives enabled their desires to be understood by parents, service providers and funders.

Shows me being **less controlling as designer/facilitator**, and working to gather stories from parents and children which will **engage and enchant** all present at the Commission hearing, and so build a platform for partnership working to take actions forward.

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<sup>242</sup> Exercising transformative power through capacity building.

<sup>243</sup> Working with 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> dimensions of power – understanding both the structural and the discourse/relational aspects of the expression of power in the system in order to challenge the status quo.

<sup>244</sup> Trusting the 'oppressed and their ability to reason' (Freire, 1993:48).

### ***Issues raised:***

**Paternalism** – as a researcher I was an outsider, as were many others in the design group. There was a need for respectful practice (Chambers) and an acute awareness of the risk of paternalism of the ‘we are the experts come to show you how to do this’ type. We worked with this by asking for guidance from the NPs<sup>245</sup> on all aspects of design and delivery, and by modelling being vulnerable, asking questions, welcoming feedback etc.

### **Inclusive practice**

- o There was a ‘lived experience’ based focus for the work, experiential knowing translated into propositional knowing in order to communicate to the power holders.
- o Choosing meeting places that are familiar to participants, their patch.
- o The project was deliberately designed to be very visual, not bounded by language. This was done to increase participation and make the project more inclusive. Also the children could see themselves participating, people could identify familiar places and people in the photos and video.
- o The discussion groups were designed to encourage story telling and to keep the exchanges that happened in the groups very conversational. This maximised participation by people unfamiliar with advocating their own wants and needs.

**We were creating communicative space** – in order to identify cross generational knowing and enable cross generational learning, community wisdom – to challenge media hype and engage both the community itself and resource holders in developing solutions. E.g. this led to discussions about safety and restrictions on places to play and to parents working with agencies and through the NPs in their neighbourhoods to change things for the better.

The new commitment and confidence generated was fed by the process of sharing and confirming together what they knew – what Kemmis calls the ‘formation of communicative space’ ... done in a way ‘that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do’ (Kemmis. 2001:100). A special chemistry. This offered agencies the opportunity to work with local people on shared agendas after the Commission day, which they have done.

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<sup>245</sup> These organisations are resident owned and managed and so more likely to be integrated into the community than voluntary sector providers. However see *Power and Political Context* section for a description of the potential for these community organisations agendas to be usurped by pressures from government.

It relates also to the point made in the Tewkesbury Older People's work regarding complexly interdependent oppressions manifesting in the world in the ways people name the world and their experiences of it. This also applies here (see *Practice Account 6* for explanation).

**The research gave a voice to voiceless kids bounded by parental anxieties** – mediating between parents and kids to uncover a shared desire for wilderness and adventure. This had aspects of social learning to it (Bandura). Social learning happened within the inquiry focus groups and 'leaked out' to wider circles (the design group and the Commission Hearing). I say leaked out but of course it didn't just 'leak out' to those wider circles, it required careful facilitation to ensure that stories were told (through the data gathered ensuring participants' words were used wherever possible) and people were supported to hear those stories – that meant helping professionals to feel undefensive and open wherever possible.

Parents learnt about their children's need for risk being similar to their own at that age, children heard parental concerns unpacked, agencies heard wants and commitments, all heard the negative effects of alienation within these communities e.g. the disproportionate fear of 'stranger danger'.

By 'stranger danger' I mean the belief that the biggest threats to the children in the community come from outsiders or strangers who might attack or abduct or otherwise harm children. This belief is fed by the media coverage of incidents of this type which do not explain how rare it is; by far the largest number of attacks on children are perpetrated by adults known to the child, often family members. What this research exposed was that it was adults from within the local community who posed the greatest threat to the children largely through thoughtless or reckless behaviours e.g. discarding syringes in play areas, dumping cars and other rubbish, driving in pedestrianised areas or at speed through residential areas in which children play on the street. As the kids put it '*adults mess things up for kids*'.

**Developing a better (shared) understanding of social relations** – As Dorothy Smith writes (from her experience of social relations in organisations) by beginning with hearing lived experiences it becomes possible to grasp social relations (child/parent, residents/agencies, child/school) 'in which we participate and to which we contribute, that have come to take on an existence and power over us' (Smith 1992:95 quoted in Maguire, 2001). In this way the Commission Hearing and the extended design group were both arenas for those who participated in them to develop an understanding of not just the issues but also the social relations, mechanisms and structures of power that affected the lives of all players; residents, young people or professionals from the agencies represented.

### ***Developing my capacities and presence as a facilitator:***

**Holding things more loosely** – It was a really wild design, and right down to the Commission Hearing itself fairly unpredictable, a real roller coaster journey for the whole team. Before this I can't imagine I would have been keen to work with people who had a reputation for being uncontrollable (e.g. the play space designer) even if they were very good at what they did!

Another benefit of holding things more loosely was when one of the 'warm up' questions we asked parents started to produce really interesting information about their childhood play places; we could redesign the way we were looking at the data to gain the benefits outlined below (valuing memory).

And not so loosely – I got very agitated when delays by the NPs in convening the groups meant that the facilitators started to run out of diary dates on which to run the groups; I felt deeply what I perceived as the lower levels of commitment from others to complete the task.

**Design for inclusiveness** – The early design was shared and shaped with the design group and then tested out with some parents and young people by the local project workers. This resulted in revisions. I had to be pragmatic about the design as it was co-evolved by the wider group.

**Teaching research methods** and making them accessible to local workers, parents and young people, demystifying the term 'research' – The research team, led by me ran sessions to explain the project and the research methodology in plain English terms, and taught local community project workers and volunteers (many of whom were parents living on the estates) the basics of focus group facilitation. We then co-facilitated the focus group sessions with them.

**Exploring ways to turn experiential and practical knowing into propositional form for wider dissemination** – working with telling stories, through the way the research findings were presented, was a significant change for me from advocacy and petitioning to engaging all participants in the system in hearing the stories and making sense together.

I wrote in my journal on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2001 of

Story telling as the link to expressing lived experience – In fact to work both ways: *expert* ↔ *experience* via a medium that enchants rather than is abstract.

In this project it was the stories told which engaged the agencies and the community members together in listening, sense making and the subsequent action. And the engagement was of the heart as well as

the head; professionals were able to feel moved, appalled and enthusiastic, rather than chastised, guilty and torn by demands.

One example of the stories told was the one about the school roof: Children were filmed talking about needing flat space to play after school. They explained that the school playground was locked up but that they had found a way to get onto the (flat) school roof, so that was where they played ball after school. I don't think I shall ever forget the look on the face of the Director of Education as he sat in the Commission day audience watching the video clip. I can only hope the look of horror was caused by the nonsense of excluding children from play areas outside school hours, rather than just the thought of them playing on the roof! Certainly the well argued case of the children on the video would have helped, as would the demonstration of the care they took when climbing the building. The result was that very shortly after the Commission day the school agreed to leave the playground unlocked, although the way up to the roof was firmly blocked too.

The account below illustrates what was going on in my mind at the time of the commission hearing<sup>246</sup>, and a reflection on that incident from my position today (July 2004) comparing my facilitation then with that shown in other practice accounts included here.

### **Reflecting on the Commission day shortly afterwards – recalling my internal cycling**

On preparing for the Commission day:

I can feel how it was [me] moving amongst the data and finding this story [of playing on the school roof]: the glee at finding such a perfect story with images to crack open the rather smug professional veneer of some members of that commission audience of '*we know, you don't have to tell us*'. To challenge how things are now, and open up the space for change.

And on this point in the meeting itself:

And I know there is a mischievous me in there; in that glee, in finding a weapon with which to strike the powerful, a real charge in the room, to the debate, for me.

And I want to gently unfold the reality and ask all to *listen*, I want a gentle change where possible. I want shared ownership, shared concern, shared outrage.

Managing my mischievous (and vengeful) self takes care, I need to act with humour, good timing and the right desires. I need to leave my mischief at the door. And I can't, I have to keep noticing it and stepping in front of it, keep making the connections rather than throwing down the gauntlet and all with enough punch to make things happen, to keep them and us alert as well as committed.

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<sup>246</sup> Caught using my noticing pocket practice, exposing the feelings arising for me in the moment. Trying not to get caught in the emotion, and failing at times.

In the moment it is almost literally a movement of stepping in front of this mischievous part of myself and saying the next bit [of my presentation], monitoring my smile, watching out for who I make eye contact with. I manage to stay just on the right side of provocative to be thought provoking, and its exhausting.

I judge myself: And I'm cross with myself for being so tempted to hit out, to risk it all for that satisfaction. *And* I'm disappointed with myself for 'going soft' and stepping in front of the vengeful me. At this time (just post the session) I can't win, I'm in pain in both ways with nowhere to turn until I can discharge both sets of feelings to a colleague who will understand how both are seductive and what's been sacrificed personally for the general good (Mark). I need him to congratulate, to commiserate, to appreciate the effort it's been, the self denial, the values enacted, the satisfaction lost and gained.  
(Workbook November 2002).

Speaking with Judi Marshall having written the first draft of my practice accounts June 2004:

I just don't think I'll ever forget his face [the director of education], and I didn't know what he was thinking because I couldn't tell and at that point I was presenting the data and completely separated from him so there was no active, interactive sense making going on and I was just praying that he was moved by the same thing as had moved me and I couldn't influence it at that point.

But it seemed that that account (above) might bring a little light into what happens in those rooms when people are saying things that embarrass other people who hold power. Those Making Sense Meetings are incredibly difficult things to facilitate because the power holders are put on the spot while [in the room] with the participants, and you are facilitating with the intention for people not to be humiliated or embarrassed or shoved up against the wall, and you are trying to support them.

That's what struck me with the Tewkesbury work<sup>247</sup> ... working with compassion with the person who commissioned the work in order for her to be radical about what she commissioned but also [for her] to really be there in that Making Sense Meeting to be open to what was coming out of the research. And how in the early days I'd have got into a position of advocacy which was really *poking*, whereas now my feelings are more like they were sitting with the Children's Commission where I can see how painful it is for him, he's responsible for this service; and he's either thinking '*what the fuck are they doing on the roof*' or for '*what the fuck are they doing locking up the playground*', and either way its acutely embarrassing as director of education.

But now I find myself in a different place which doesn't mean that I feel any less passionate about what it is for kids not to be able to explore what play really means because of adults' fears for their safety, and the fact that its adults that mess things up for kids on the estates. And somehow the passion doesn't go away but I'm in a different position with it, which I couldn't be with CPC where I could barely bring myself to speak to some of

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<sup>247</sup> See *Tewkesbury Older Peoples Services Practice Account*.

those people outside of the meetings I was facilitating, outside of my role, because I was so cross with them, just so outraged about it that I knew the only way I could cope with it was to back off and just not do those power broking meetings and leave it to people who were desperate to do them. Now I'm in a very different place and I wanted to try and open that up a little bit in telling the story about the school roof and the director's face.

**Gathering upstream and downstream companions** – the project closely involved the Early Years Development Unit, including them in the design group and in the training as well as the Commission Hearing process. This gave them exposure to both the process and the sense making and learning coming out of the project. It was very much a project done *with* them rather than *for* them. The approach described above of 'engaging' professionals rather than petitioning or lobbying them also made them more likely to be upstream companions-in-high-places.

This project also points up the issues for working with projects based on advocacy if one also wants to engage the wider system as NP workers often tend to be adversarial in their approach to those in authority. As I wrote in my work book in September 2000 of my experience of facilitating a series of Making Sense Meetings after some Rapid Appraisals we had undertaken for GNPN the year before:

NP participants behaving like a (dysfunctional) family, enacting the relationships, or lack of them, and the behaviours they were describing and criticising' (23.9.00),

and again

The problems of Neighbourhood Project workers especially focusing on difference and difficulty, rather than overlaps of interest, common ground and moving forward, and their lack of awareness of the destructiveness of this; [someone saying] "that went ok didn't it?" after one of the most unconstructive meetings in the series. How the workers reflect the area (and its needs and behaviours), and their behaviour affects their ability to develop partnerships, the types of relations/partnerships they can develop and sustain (dysfunctional – said of meetings "we set them up but no-one comes"), what are the lessons for meeting design, facilitation etc?

Noticing me being really (what felt to be) controlling, yet workers very positive afterwards! Me wondering are we in the same world?' (25.9.00).

By the time I led the Children's Commission work a year later I had moved away from the very strong ('controlling') style of facilitation which had made me uncomfortable and was trying out a style of 'enchanted' NP workers as well as professionals through letting the participants' stories speak for themselves more.

All of which begs the question what do I think are the qualities of a good meeting and therefore the qualities I'm trying to facilitate? For me in 2004 it's about:



- Hearing all voices, and not privileging one over another, learning to listen with care and respect
- Recognising multiple knowledges, and not privileging one over another
- Creating empowered and empowering space – being mindful of the different expressions of power going on (discourse and structural)
- Sense making happening in real time
- Facilitating the potential for openness to happen: where people do not get pushed into defensiveness, aggression etc. this may require coaching/supporting work outside the meeting
- Negotiating a shared understanding of what integrity means.

For many of my clients a good meeting has been initially viewed by them as rather different. It's:

- A platform from which they can advocate for the needs of their community/group or organisation
- A forum for arguing that they know more than the professionals/community/group about the issue and what is needed
- A space in which they can feel secure and powerful
- A place in which to gain information, which they can then take away to inform decision making or practice
- An occasion on which to be guarded and an opportunity to embarrass or shame others, to score points
- A place in which each organisation acts according to its own beliefs.

It's my belief that the role of facilitator therefore needs to extend beyond simple meeting management to supporting each participant/stakeholder through the process of learning to listen, speak and act differently. This takes courage on their part to abandon old forms of operating which have often been at least partially successful in the short term.

**Letting go of doing it all myself** – on this occasion I led the team of researchers but did not run any of the 21 inquiry groups myself due to other commitments. This was a new experience for me, both the letting-go and the experience of being part of the sense making that happened outside the inquiry groups. I had initially anticipated that this would mean that I'd feel less 'attached' to the material coming from the research but I discovered it did not when I presented the results to the Commission Hearing on behalf of the team.

**Working with a positive appreciation of place and a valuing of memory** to unmute voices within individuals and a community – In these neighbourhoods, place is significant, although too often only

used negatively to label and exclude. By designing the research to be appreciative we were breaking the pattern of problematising these estates, and the people who live on them and the young people in particular. By working with the memories and desires (visions) of both parents and young people we created a common language which spoke eloquently about freedom, wilderness and the need for risk to all involved in the project. As bell hooks writes:

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).

This work illuminated the present and accessed energy for transformation which might otherwise have continued to lie dormant and would almost certainly not have been harnessed through the type of partnerships that developed from the project.

### ***Relationship to my learning journey:***

Pig and deer stage project – maybe the earliest example.

My powerful 'pig' presence in the delivery team and the design group was fed by my close and caring relationship with Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network and the individual Neighbourhood Projects, and respect for what they stand for<sup>248</sup>. I believe it was the strength of my 'pig' security in what I knew about the settings and the people, as well as a confidence in my own core skills, which enabled me to take risks with the design and with letting others deliver the inquiry groups. It also enabled me to start to let the stories of the research participants speak for themselves.

**Me: there are some little gems ... like the Children's Commission which is beautiful, a radical design and to have the research heard by children as the group to whom the research reported (in audience with the power holders) as well as those who were co-researchers, and it was so visual. And there's work still going on as a result of that research. (Tutorial 3/04)**

I need to own my Tigers feeling of outrage which fuels my work with and for these groups – and showed its self in a pretty degenerative way in my struggle described in the story of the school roof.

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<sup>248</sup> Community owned and led projects – responding to the wants and needs of the neighbourhood. Enabling and nurturing participation, inclusion, reciprocity and good governance.

## Practice account 6 – Tewkesbury Older People's Services

2001 –2002

### *How this account has developed:*

My own writing and reflecting with supervisor

Case study for teaching purposes 2002

Discussions with students

First draft March 2004

Discussed with supervisor June 2004

Revised June 2004

Revised May 2005.

### ***Brief description:***

A participative research project with older people, who worked as co-researchers to interview their peers about support needed to maintain independence.

I was involved in designing and facilitating the second person inquiry process which included a Co-operative Inquiry group of older people with my co-facilitator Louise and a research team of health psychology trainees.

Third person inquiry elements involved a 'Making Sense' meeting between older people participating in the research and a wide range of service providing agencies and voluntary organisations, at which plans and commitments were made for service developments<sup>249</sup>. I designed and facilitated this Making Sense meeting.

The Co-operative Inquiry (CI) group, the enriched research team<sup>250</sup> and most particularly the Making Sense Meeting meet Kemmis's description of AR as *a process that opens communicative space*, which 'brings people together around shared topical concerns, problems and issues ... in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do' (2001:100).

### ***How I was inquiring:***

**Taking the project as a case study to my CARPP group** – I did not discuss this project much in my CARPP group, I'd just joined a new tutorial group,

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<sup>249</sup> Stakeholders engage in social learning together (Healey, 1997).

<sup>250</sup> Enriched with older people who added to our existing research team of young women mostly in their 20s, and Louise and myself either side of 50.

but I think it was also about the perceived status of the work in my mind<sup>251</sup>.

In 2001 I was reviewing the material I had written in preparation for compiling my transfer paper, I wrote:

Writing about my direct client work came very hard – I thought I'd not done it earlier but that's not true, but somehow I could not bring my client work fully into the CARPP group discussions, was I ashamed of it? [Was I] so unsure about it? [I had a] strong feeling (I think not unreasonably) that the academy in at least some aspects doesn't value the arenas in which I work<sup>252</sup>.

It seems appropriate that this piece of work was instrumental in helping me to break through some of the barriers, real or imagined, to bringing my work into the academy as I started to teach and mentor within this research project, and I have since used it as an example of my 'pragmatic' AR practice when teaching MSc and CARPP students at Bath and in teaching and mentoring AR practitioners in the WMSEP project<sup>253</sup>. See also *Relationship to my learning journey*.

**How I was reflective about my fear of not-knowing** (re teaching and mentoring). What made me confront my reluctance? – partly it was necessity; my co-worker Louise's absence through illness left an important gap in the team and it fell to me to fill it as well as I could. I could therefore risk being 'good enough' because the project and the team depended on me stepping up to the challenge.

Also:

- Discussion in the research team meetings
- Discussions with co-researchers in CI group
- Discussions with sponsoring client
- Notes in my workbook
- Dream work and discussions in therapy sessions
- Discussion with Louise<sup>254</sup>.

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<sup>251</sup> This being a feature of the transition from Unicorn to Pig and Deer moment; as I moved into my Pig moment I got more clear and confident about my work, its nature, its value, its significance and legitimacy, and was therefore less dependent on the academy for approval, acceptance and legitimation.

<sup>252</sup> See also discussion in CPC practice account of searching for legitimacy in the academy. This project is a good example of the move between learning journey moments, the move to a confidence about legitimacy.

<sup>253</sup> WMSEP – West Midlands Social Economy Partnership: I undertook some consultancy work on behalf of CARPP teaching regeneration practitioners AR. Talk about facing my demons! This really was the Bill Booth test – could I explain AR in a way that showed it as a useful tool for empowerment, rather than the preoccupation of a bunch of tree huggers.

<sup>254</sup> Discussion with my co-worker has been important regarding many aspects of the project, however I am also mindful that there are some areas in which I need others to challenge/inquire of me, and for this I have my CARPP group. Both have helped me to review and re-plan aspects of this project.

**One of those other noticings:** Sometimes seemingly unconnected events present the opportunity to reflect on my practice from another angle. These can be dreams, associations made in my regular supported reflection sessions with my therapist or, as on this occasion seemingly coincidental happenings such as getting lost, in which the feelings evoked and my behaviour in/reaction to the situation can tell me a great deal about what was on my mind that is less than conscious and otherwise inaccessible.

I got lost on the way back from Tewkesbury after the Making Sense Meeting – the familiar but unfamiliar landscape has appeared since in dreams and in my therapy sessions – symbolising feeling that I have to go on, can't go back, I believe I must come to something familiar eventually, I think I know where I am but the reality confounds me. But I am curious – it's a mix of fear and curiosity and trust in myself.

These feelings are very much those with which I facilitated the Making Sense Meeting; I was missing my co-worker with whom I'd usually be able to reflect in the moment to moment process of facilitating the meeting, I was unfamiliar with being solely responsible for the rest of the team, familiar with the form of the meeting but alert for the potential fireworks that can get lit in such meetings as the different parts of the system come together – in this case particularly so because of the nature our relationship with one of the co-sponsors of the research. I was afraid and rather lonely, curious as to what we could make from the opportunity, and at the same time reasonably solid in a sense of my own competence.

### ***Why it's of interest here:***

This project started-off looking very conventional when the request came from the client for a piece of research into the needs of older people living in the Tewkesbury area. The interest and learning in this work for me came from supporting the client to think more widely about what outcomes they wanted for the client group – a brave and committed client made a significant difference to all involved in the project. Because of our client we were able to move to a more radical design which drew on elements from Rapid Appraisal, Co-operative inquiry and Appreciative inquiry designs to achieve not just service improvement, but also the empowerment of individuals and potentially of a much wider group of older people living in the area (through participation in the local group implementing the National Service Framework (NSF) for older people's services).

*In this way the work is bringing the radical into the mainstream.*

**In this project I placed myself alongside my client (Julia), one of the power holders in this system;** I developed and practiced empathy with her as a tempered radical in her own organisation as it is faced with

demands to grow and change its practice. I supported her to be radical rather than advocating change to her from my position on the margins, supporting her to take risks in the service of putting her values into practice, and to develop more questioning insight<sup>255</sup>. In this way I acted with more compassion and humility than for example in my work with CPC, LPT or even the Children's Commission. In supporting Julia to think and act differently I facilitated larger change through micro changes/contacts. I supported Julia to overcome what Gramsci called 'the pessimism of the intellect' and to develop the 'optimism of the will'. However in this same project I tried and fail to work in a similar way with another PCT<sup>256</sup> manager Carol, who subsequently challenged us, both about the cost/benefit of the project for her constituency and the approach we took in the Making Sense Meeting.

The learning for me also related to stepping into a leadership role: partly through design as I worked with the client and facilitated the CI group, including teaching the co-researchers (older people and the pre-existing research team); and partly through accident as my co-worker on the project was diagnosed with breast cancer mid-way through the project and I took on supervising the research team and completing the project<sup>257</sup>.

### ***Issues raised:***

**Ageism** – Attitudes to the older people who were originally the research 'subjects', which originally framed them as having only *needs*, rather than the more assertive *wants* or *desires*<sup>258</sup>.

The project was also interesting because of the age of the majority of the research team, who were young women in their early 20s.

**Multiple identities and interlocking oppressions** – As Patricia Maguire points out:

Multiple locations and interlocking oppressions manifest themselves in the varied ways people name the world and their experiences of it ( Maguire, 2001:62).

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<sup>255</sup> I remember talking to her about Roger Harrison's writing on sustaining change in stressed and action focused organisations.

<sup>256</sup> Primary Care Trust – the local purchasing arm of the NHS.

<sup>257</sup> Of course this also raised fears and anxieties in me for the well being of my friend/colleague, and caused my own fears about my experience with cancer and my condition to come to the fore.

<sup>258</sup> Not only did the service providing agencies see older people as being made-up of needs, the older people themselves had moderated their desires (Elster – adaptive preference formation) because they had no expectations that their wants would be taken seriously or prioritised.

For our co-researchers this was an issue for some who were working class and elderly, in addition many of the interviewees were disabled and/or had chronic illnesses.

This intersection creates different opportunities, choices, privileges and inequalities, rewards and lifestyles for different groups of people. The resultant interlocking system of oppression is not simply additive as in double or triple oppression, but complexly interdependent (Dill and Baca Zinn, 1997:45-50).

The design of this project attempted to take account of this both in the CI group and in the interviews, including the way the questions were phrased (very open and appreciative) and in engaging older people as interviewers of their peers.

**Voice** – Older people have a very low status in our society, in addition the majority of our CI group and interviewees were women. Both status and gender can cause these participants voices to be silenced or at least hard to hear, we therefore wanted to achieve as participatory a design as possible for this research.

Commenting on Freire's (1970) work to pierce the culture of silence among marginalized groups, Budd Hall notes,

Participatory research fundamentally is about the right to speak ...

Participatory research argues for articulation of points of view by the dominated or subordinated. (1993: xvii).

Our design was influenced by feminist research as well as action research. Feminist-inspired action research challenges us to consider how we create spaces for all voices to be heard, as well as how we use our voices to unsettle power differentials wherever encountered. So our process was very participative and also sought to engage the power holders and other stakeholders in the process both at the beginning and in the final Making Sense Meeting.

Shulamit Reinharz observes

By dealing in voices, we are 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 (1988:15).

The interview design deliberately encouraged the telling of stories by the interviewees in response to very appreciative style questions, as did the Making Sense Meeting, and the reports took care to use participant's words wherever possible. Our attempts to work with a steering group of organisations working with older people convinced us that we would need to support our client strongly and design-in opportunities for ownership by organisations, and ongoing influence by participants over the sponsoring organisations.

A subtext in the research project for us and our client was the opportunity presented by the National Service Framework (NSF) for older people's services. If our CI group members could gain others' views to

add to their own lived experience and acquire the confidence to speak out and the skills to inquire with others, they would make formidable members of the local NSF implementation group, which would have considerable power to change services for older people.

This project literally got participants a seat at the table in the CI group, the Making Sense Meeting and the NSF and other local planning groups.

**Everyday experience, lived experience** – There is obviously no unitary older persons' experience but lived experience still provides legitimate knowledge, not from a focus on sameness but from an acknowledgement and celebration of diversity. (In fact in this project there was actually found to be a remarkable similarity in the 'dreams' of older people when they were asked what they enjoyed doing, what else they would like to do that they were not doing at the moment, and what they valued about their lives).

We shifted the ground of (expert) 'knowing' from service providers setting questions for the research, to older people (our co-researchers) using their life experience to form a set of appreciative questions which harvested a wealth of information to guide the provision of services<sup>259</sup>.

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

The project also had the potential to politicise the participants (co-researchers), with the CI group acting rather like a consciousness raising group at times for both our older co-researchers and the young research team. Other action researchers have made similar observations (Gaventa and Horton, 1981).

We were also confident that life skills could be turned into research skills, so that our CI group members were also the interviewers for most of the 53 people interviewed, a decision based on the belief that peers asking questions of each other and sharing information was likely to glean a particular quality of sharing that would give better information. After all it's quicker to teach participants research skills than it is to teach outside experts a detailed understanding of local knowledge and the way the studied group experiences life. (Greenwood and Levin make a similar point, 2000:141).

### ***Developing presence and capacities as a facilitator:***

**Humility** – in relation to the skills of co-researchers, the stories of research participants, the knowledge and commitment of the sponsors of the research.

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<sup>259</sup> 'Trusting in their ability to reason' as Freire puts it (1993:48).



**Strong leadership in team enabled risk taking** – both the sponsoring group and the research team took risks in commissioning a radical design. This required strong leadership from the commissioners and also from myself and Louise heading up the research team.

**Process and aims congruency in design and facilitation.** It was about empowered older people therefore led by older people where possible (via CI), supported by research team, as they inquired with other older people.

**Moving from advocacy to supporting power holders to change.** This required me to work with compassion.

**Facilitating while feeling provoked** – links to working with power holders. One of the co-sponsors of the research, Carol, was much less involved in its inception and appeared at times unconvinced of its value (financial cost/number of participants interviewed) for the geographical constituency of older people which her PCT served. She absented herself from critical planning and mapping meetings and used her contact with me in the context of other projects to make critical assertions about the research project e.g. about cost/benefit, while avoiding entering into a fuller discussion. This is not the place to speculate about her motivations but the effect of her behaviour was to make those of us managing the research project feel uneasy, this culminated in an additional pressure on me as facilitator in the Making Sense Meeting where her antagonism was expressed through challenging the design, specifically the small groups which worked on topic areas identified through the research. However she did not reject the research findings.

I remember the challenge which came at a time when I would normally move from a very firm holding (while the data was presented and people expressed their first reactions in the large group) to a more dispersed holding as the meeting participants moved into smaller groups of a mix of stakeholders. A research assistant was placed in each group to lightly facilitate and to answer any questions about the research and the group's task was to discuss what they had heard and to make plans based on the data and their knowledges. It's my practice to move between the small groups to listen into their discussions and to check that task and timekeeping are being taken care of and that the facilitators are able to manage the group so that everyone can be heard. As I approached the group of which Carol was a member she was participating in discussion but shortly afterwards broke off from the discussion in the group to assert 'its your job to do this' (meaning mine as facilitator), which gave me the opportunity to explain again that the group members (research participants, service providers and other stakeholders) were best placed to explore what could be done to rectify

the gaps identified by the research and to build better support services to improve quality of life.

However inside I was furious with her open antagonism, and bitterly disappointed that this could compromise the next steps of the process that would make actual changes. I was unable to voice my anger or fears and found myself feeling tearful and wanting to remove myself from the room to gather strength. At the same time I wanted to be able to hit back; to accuse her of being unprofessional, to voice how unfair I felt her behaviour was and how irresponsible she was being.

Standing there I could see the alarm on the face of the research team member facilitating, a sort of startled and confused look which also carried a sense of it being her responsibility to hold things together. I could also see most of the rest of the group members who too looked startled but also rather impatient, as if wanting to get on with their talking and wondering why it had been disrupted.

In the moment I could not give in to anger or disappointment but had to breath deeply, seeking to revisit the source of my hope and will for this project. I looked around at the faces of the CI group members and other professionals in the group and drew strength from their looks of concentration. I responded from and with an appreciation of the contribution she and others could make to developing recommendations and plans. I smiled when inside I was snarling. My compassion failed me<sup>260</sup>. I drove home questioning whether I had acted with integrity; took an unfamiliar route to avoid doing a U-turn in a busy street and found myself lost in a landscape half remembered from childhood when I'd visited Tewkesbury with my parents<sup>261</sup>.

### ***Relationship to my learning journey:***

This project demonstrates me largely acting from my Pig and Deer moment, although it sits close to the transition from the Unicorn moment. I still have uncertainties and anxieties but now I can use them to inform an inquiry into my practice, rather than feel immobilised by them or driven to defending myself and my approach. If one of the big issues for me personally and in my practice is legitimacy then here I act from an inquiring sense of my own legitimacy. The key elements include:

- **Confidence and trust as a theme** – the participants', the clients' and the research team, and mine re design, teaching, leading. Also who one is drawn to work with and who are drawn to me – my work in the world

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<sup>260</sup> If I had not been using my noticing pocket practice I would have been unable to be so aware of feelings arising, and less able to note them and either let them pass or use them to inform action.

<sup>261</sup> And now I find myself writing this listening to Arvo Part's Litany and am suddenly aware of voices singing 'oh lord give me patience .. shelter me from certain men, from demons and passions' ... Amen says I.

- **Crisis of confidence** – reluctance to teach co-researchers/research team; not keen to lead research team and Making Sense process. Facing this lack of confidence in myself, finding a solidity
- **Being provocative/radical** – radical design, work with client to be radical, mapping meeting involving wider system, Making Sense Meeting
- **Working with compassion** – for clients and research participants, and research team members
- **Celebration** – co-researchers rising to the challenge, stories of thwarted autonomy and such small wants from data turning into a picture of older peoples' view of a good quality of life, clients able to hear criticism and commit to action



## Practice account 7 – Governance project

2003 - 2004

### *How this account developed:*

Contemporaneous notes and discussions with co-facilitator led to early drafts in format which separated facilitation practice and process notes.

First draft March 2004.

Shared with co-facilitator March 2004.

Discussion in CARPP tutorial group June 2004.

Shared with Supervisor June 2004.

Revised June 2004.

Shared with client July 2004.

Developed as case study for Emerging Approaches to Inquiry conference August 2004.

Discussed with Vital Network<sup>262</sup> Peers November 2004.

Revised May 2005.

### ***Brief description:***

#### ***Framing the project:***

The original initiative came from the Home Office Active Communities Unit (ACU), who wanted to know how to widen participation in governance of voluntary and community organisations. Previous research had identified that development workers were key to extending participation but they themselves often needed support. Co-operative inquiry (CI) was proposed as a space in which development workers could learn together.

Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) chaired a steering group for this ACU funded project, and Peter Reason was invited (expected) to be a member of this (London based) group – this was not negotiated in advance and there was nothing in the budget for this.

The process of getting funding started as co-operative (VAC worker and I contributed sections to proposal), but got less so (VAC not sharing information or decision making power, or even the whole picture). I felt this behaviour was incongruent with my values and what I felt to be the values of the project and certainly of CI.

The project included 3 CI groups; in London, Bristol and Gloucestershire, and Chris Seeley (CS) and I co-facilitated the CI based in Gloucestershire. We<sup>263</sup> adapted the brief (in Gloucestershire) to focus on

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<sup>262</sup> Vital network is the name of the group of CARPP associates, including those who undertake consultancy through CARPP.

<sup>263</sup> We in this account refers to Chris Seeley and I as co-facilitators, unless otherwise stated.

one timebank (NCCTB<sup>264</sup>) with its group of development workers, advisory group and participants. This timebank was running out of funding and already reviewing its structures.

We had eight meetings with the timebank, with a total of 43 people involved in advisory group meetings and CI meetings.

**Process followed by the Co-operative Inquiry:**

1. Introduce CI to NCCTB advisory group, get 'buy in'
2. Convince workers to give us their time and commitment, particularly hard when they suddenly lost their only full-time worker (Jon)
3. Hear participants' stories of involvement with timebank and mindmap what participants value from project, what they want in the future, and how they/others can help.

They were inquiring into what they knew and wanted; we were supporting their inquiry and challenging their self perceptions of not-knowing. We carefully framed the questions appreciatively, always looking to see what the potential was, giving an unconditionally positive response to virtually anything that happened, seeing it as an opportunity (non-judgemental therapeutic position)

4. Identify and mindmap clusters of points/issues/development areas. From this stage on we might very often appear to have 'disappeared', but were actually doing very firm holding facilitation. In addition we were often provocative: asking 'where's the mutuality/reciprocity in that?'
5. Identify information participants feel they need
6. Arrange sessions to meet these information needs
7. Arrange working sessions on money, fundraising and alternatives to fundraising- including the realisation that the timebank might need very little monetary resource if it applied its approach to running itself, and that being in thrall to big external funders skewed the direction of the time bank and consumed resources in itself. When the time bank actually needed monetary resources there were a wide range of ways of obtaining these without the 'strings' attached to grants. Big shift from dependent to independent mind set liberatory, taking real control for themselves (Freire)
8. Demystify through deconstructing the tasks involved in running a time bank
9. Develop and look at a structure where participants are more engaged in managing the project. Examine what can be taken out of the worker-done 'core' and shared

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<sup>264</sup> North Cotswolds Community Timebank.

10. Evolve decentralised 'cluster' structure and start to plan how to take this forward via communities of interest and geography
11. Remind group of processes and methods followed (the research tools)
12. Involve group in evaluation of approach used through a dialogue based evaluation conference (where they were very eloquent advocates for what they'd learnt about content, funding, workers/participant relationship, and structures *and* the process used). They had learnt something about turning the experiential into the propositional, and the confidence to do that, through their involvement in the CI.

Activity and reflection were taken both in the group and with a wider group outside sessions. Action and reflection were integrated rather than separated. 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 are do-ers, we (facilitators) hung the process on the concrete rather than the theoretical or purely reflective<sup>265</sup>.

### ***How I was inquiring:***

- Discussions with co-facilitator (Chris)
- Discussions with CARPP consulting supervision group and Peter Reason
- Reflections with CARPP6 tutorial group and Judi Marshall
- Reflections with Martin Simon (FairShares<sup>266</sup> client) – this included a meeting to reflect on the project itself and the lessons that could be drawn from it for the wider timebank community. In addition Martin approached the workers and others from the NCCTB to ask for their reflections on the CI group, their response was typically brief and focused:  
 Very good feedback from Moreton re your project – consensus was that you were clear and focused and that they felt well equipped to proceed [personal email communication, Martin Simon, 15.6.04].
- Feedback from participants in inquiry group meetings, particularly our final CI group session, and at the evaluation conference
- Photographs of me facilitating (taken by Chris) taken to enable me to get additional feedback on my facilitation-in-action. This feedback also fed into my wider reflection on my facilitation practice (see *Inquiring Conversations About My Practice*)

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<sup>265</sup> Reminds me of being brought up sharply by a participant in another situation many years ago for saying 'that's interesting' (abstract, theoretical interest). She pointed out it might be very interesting for me but it was real for her and was giving her enormous grief!

<sup>266</sup> FairShares is the umbrella name of a significant group of timebanks, the first in the UK, including NCCTB.

- Evaluation conference – the conference (which I co-designed) was designed to give feedback on both content and process (CI), in the course of which it was possible to reflect not only with the participants of the NCCTB but also with the other two CI group members and a range of invited national stakeholders<sup>267</sup>
- Workbook writing
- Dreams and regular reflective therapy sessions
- Journal writing
- Drafting of this practice account, redrafted after discussion with Judi Marshall, shared with Chris Seeley (co-facilitator)
- Writing up practice account of project in two parts: process and facilitation, drawing on these accounts to develop this project account for my thesis.

### ***Why it's of interest here:***

This is a very **recent example of me as facilitator**, acting strongly from my Pig and Deer moment.

The project is a CI group which I co-facilitated with CS, a CARPP colleague, which gave a lot of **opportunity to be inquiring about our practice**, and my facilitation in particular. The CI is nested in a larger third person inquiry through an evaluation conference involving other stakeholders and participants.

The project **demonstrates me being trusting** in my co-facilitation, in contrast with my CPC account.

Issues raised through the project include: power, inclusion, mutuality, community and voice. It shows me working with integrity<sup>268</sup> and some skill with these issues, and it demonstrates what continues to be challenging and downright frustrating working from my place in the world as a radical.

When I came to select from my projects over the last 9 years to compile these project accounts, I began to think that this was a bad example to finish on because it makes me (us) look just too good! Such a lot of the things I believe in and value came together on this project and the risk was it could sound very smug and self satisfied. However it was both a

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<sup>267</sup> These included National Council for Voluntary Service, The Charities Commission, Dept. of Education, Dept of Trade and Industry (DTI), Community Development Foundation, national charities and the national steering group for the project.

<sup>268</sup> By integrity I mean being better able to join-up my espoused value and my practice, and to work with the issues that arise in an openly inquiring way. I feel more authentic in my practice and more satisfied (although of course this does not take away the frustrations e.g. getting the project's steering group to publicly accept the value of participants' knowing).



joy *and* a challenge; the project was in many ways a dream of a project, but it has its 'nasty' side as well as being 'nice'. It was 'nice' because of the congruency between our values as facilitators/researchers and those of the participants, because I came to feel warmly towards our participants, and nice because it was an opportunity to work with a colleague for whom I have affection and respect and the push and pull of our shared facilitation and reflection worked well. And again it was 'nasty' because of the discomfort of being faced with the issues relating to the steering group and the evaluation conference, and however hard I tried (and I did try) being unable to facilitate a fully shared understanding with two participants at the conference. This and the messiness of the contracting process. So I came to the conclusion that it wasn't so unrepresentative after all.

### ***Issues raised:***

**Definitions of governance** – 'Governance is a word which appears in all sorts of contexts and as such its meaning is becoming contested as well as potentially being very context and/or discipline specific. There is also a danger that [because of] its ubiquity, governance becomes a meaningless term<sup>269</sup>.'

Bebbington defines Governance in three ways. As:

1. 'the action, manner or fact of governing' – which raises questions of who has power over another, what are the consequences of power distributions, what are the goals towards which governance is focused and who decides what they will be.
2. 'a controlling or regulating influence' – raises questions of formal (legal or legislative) or/and informal governance (norms, cultural expectations, habits etc )
3. 'the conduct of life or business behaviour' – raises questions of what constitutes 'right' behaviour and conduct and what is wrong with the status quo, who has a problem with it.

Bebbington writes: 'Implicit within all of these definitions are ideas about responsibilities to do/refrain from doing activities. Clearly there are relationships between various parties, and there are accountability relationships which require information in order for them to be discharged. Accounting in its broadest focuses on providing information around accountability relationships, especially in the context of organisations.'

As Peter Reason, writing about the Governance project for a conference in Bangladesh wrote: 'This word 'governance' is a strange one,

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<sup>269</sup> Jan Bebbington, 'Governance from the perspective of social/environmental accounting', text of talk presented at EURAM conference. St Andrews. 2004.

belonging more to the language of government bureaucracy than to the experience of people in community organisations, so we had to keep translating to find a way to make sense on the ground.'

**My personal commitment re governance issues and the organisations involved:**

- Inclusion – As a trustee myself of two charities I'm very aware that trustees are usually the great and the good (not that I'd count myself amongst the great or the good, I often feel like a bit of an interloper at trustee meetings). How can we extend trusteeship without creating a new class of the great and the good i.e. as in the community entrepreneur situation which has created another class of privileged individuals, rather than address inequality of opportunity.
- New forms – do we need such formal structures, or can we create new, more flexible and accessible structures which also deliver better accountability? Less formal structures are likely to feel and be perceived as more accessible, open to the quieter voices. The new forms need to focus on experiential knowing (lived experience) rather than propositional knowing (expert theory based) and how to work with this knowing and reframe it for others
- An affinity with these particular organisations (timebanks, FairShares), the links with Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Projects Network (see Children's Commission practice account), my history with Martin as two survivors of similar roles (which goes back to my Tigers moment)<sup>270</sup>.

**What we were facilitating was the enabling the timebank to continue to self-create** (its autopoiesis?) – To develop in a way where it was more fully self realised as a time bank. We could be said to be 'allowing them to enact their values because they had them<sup>271</sup>'. We brought another language and some tools to do the work they believed in.

**The NCCTB group demonstrated several things about moving away from a dependency creating situation:**

- 'That people however short of resources they may be, can keep moving forward by mobilising whatever they have, while those waiting upon outside resources may be wasting their time and

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<sup>270</sup> Martin was employed by the County Council to champion community development during the same period as I was working for the health authority on public participation, our roles brought us together on many occasions and we share a common background in social work and community development.

<sup>271</sup> Judi Marshall, CARPP tutorial group 3/04

energy and/or falling into the trap of patron/client relations with outside quarters surrendering their self determination'<sup>272</sup>.

- That this mobilisation is the response to an appropriate stimulation – we did not bring a solution, we brought a process of inquiry
- That this is a question of social interaction and psychology; of creating a community of inquiry in which the relations between those involved move toward inquiry and learning.

### **Congruency of process and content, process and intent:**

#### Incongruous

- Bidding relationship with VAC – wasn't congruous and damaged trust i.e. insufficient transparency and involvement for CARPP consulting group
- Relationship with steering group – distant from practitioners/researchers; interest/commitment not 'present' or communicated to researchers, in no way nurturing of the project at ground level – couldn't even say anything valuing at evaluation conference, took no part in the sense making process with the research team (despite regular reports from team re the work)
- Timebank was already taking action to address their governance issues, but it was itself incongruent – i.e. a working group of *workers* who were producing written guidance for participants. They had not yet deconstructed their inherited subjectivity and identities (Foucault)<sup>273</sup> and were still enmeshed in the paradigm of 'workers know best'.

#### Congruous

- Values of the methodology and the values of the timebank<sup>274</sup>
- Values of the facilitators/facilitation and the values of the participants
- Timebank values of reciprocity/mutuality radicalises how we value things (Marilyn Waring on feminist economics), not just financial values.

### **Our needs as facilitators were well met by this project:**

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<sup>272</sup> Peter Reason, writing of this CI in a paper for PRIA conference in Bangladesh 2004. [Action Research: Forming communicative space for many ways of knowing](#). Response to Md. Anisur Rahman International Workshop on Participatory Action Research Dhaka, March 2004-03-27

<sup>273</sup> Our inquiry with them enabled them to do this.

<sup>274</sup> The core principles of co-production underpin TimeBanks, these are:

1. that every human being is an asset and has something to offer to others
2. that building home, family and community is real work which we as a society need to honour and reward
3. that 'one-way' giving is never as strong as 'two-way' giving which asks the receiver to reciprocate by contributing in turn
4. that no person is an island – being an active part of a social network strengthens the network and the individuals who belong to it.

- Wanting to work with(in) our values
- Wanting to work together
- Wanting to work close to home/own community
- Wanting to support this organisation (commitment)
- Me – wanting to work on governance issues because of my own experience as a trustee plus wider issues regarding inclusion
- Wanting a 'doing thing' project, where we worked with participants, action not just theory. A particular issue for 'doing things' projects is to keep them inquiring, not just doing
- Attraction for me: *'close to my heart ... because they're resident owned and managed projects. They're like theory and practice with all its failings and all its beauties'*.<sup>275</sup>
- Both of us felt a 'heart connection' to the project which is itself enacting participation, (except in its own governance)
- Mutual friend in Martin Simon.

**Entry point – The importance of the right timing, the real issue, the shared question.**

This organisation was just entering a period of crisis<sup>276</sup> and their first reaction was to exclude us as yet another demand on their time at a point when they had no time to spare. Our challenge was to get them to let us in as we were convinced that we had something to offer them which could be useful.

As Roger Harrison observes:

There are formidable barriers to the improvement of learning in organisations.

Two of the most important barriers are:

- The inhibition of learning by the presence of fear, anxiety, and other strong negative emotions in the organisation.
- The bias for action that is embedded in the character of most leaders and managers and in the culture of their organisations.

And he describes a vicious circle which impedes learning: People are motivated by task urgency to decide quickly and move ahead, but uncertainty, anxiety, and fear of failure lead them to spend large amounts of time in inconclusive meetings, and in other unproductive business (1995:395-400).

The timebank met both of these barriers and yet it felt to us that only *learning together* was likely to offer them a way forward.

**Hard to gain entry if you don't have a shared question:** by which I mean that we had an issue of extending governance that we wanted to explore, and a question about how to support development workers to do this. We needed to be sure that the timebank had something like the same question(s), and that they were pressing enough for them to

<sup>275</sup> Transcript of CARPP tutorial group. March 2004

<sup>276</sup> Not only was their start-up funding running out, but one meeting into our work with them Jon, their only full-time worker resigned.

commit the time and energy to answering them. We knew they cared about extending participation, but could they prioritise it at this time? We needed to coalesce around a shared question.

Chris and I needed to keep putting ourselves in the shoes of the timebank – (Covey's Habit 5 – "*seek first to understand and then to be understood*"). Which comes back to a question of how we 'marketed' the project and what our intention was, which for me was not to 'convince' but to 'be there' for the timebank and to support them in whatever way they were open to – even if ultimately that might mean not participating at this moment.

### **Pressures to conform for the timebank**

Our role included helping them to explore whether they wanted to conform to these pressures, and to explore the alternatives; *resistance* (Foucault) in which timebankers define and enact life for themselves.

Pressures were:

- Funders priorities and (limited) expectations
- To produce structures and processes that would look 'robust' to traditional organisations who might be judging/evaluating them. Possibly including a board or advisory group that local funders could be part of?
- To demonstrate leadership as residing in one or a small number of people, rather than having it disseminated and embodied by participants. And for these leaders to be the 'usual suspects' rather than a number of previously unknown participants.

### **What we did to extend participation:**

- Accessible community-based venues, flexible times and frequency of meetings (including going to the playgroup building in half term and having three short meetings in one day)
- Providing childcare or an invitation to bring the kids
- Drop in sessions
- Providing good and nourishing lunch
- Strong message that nobody was 'outside the group', no who's in and who's out of the group
- No set or formal agendas, but brief informal but informative notes
- Publicising meetings via office notices, newsletter, posters across district, phone call invitations
- Visual tools e.g. mindmap and diagrams – created by participants in the meetings. We carried the story of the inquiry via mindmap and diagrams from meeting to meeting (avoiding the focus on us or workers as holders of the story) was theirs not ours. Kept the focus on the map not on either of us. (Chris noted how tenacious I was about this)



The TimeBank MindMap, which went from meeting to meeting with us

- Project workers sharing seriousness of the timebank's situation via newsletter and conversations – gave up their expert problem solving role and invited participants to build solutions with them (facilitated by our CI), revealed themselves as vulnerable and not knowing what to do, needing participants to help, 'we're all in this together', 'we can't do this without you'<sup>277</sup>
- Later on *workers' roles* were taken apart so that participants could see which elements lay within their skill sets or were learnable
- Demystifying the work done to sustain the organisation by *advisory group, trustees and Martin* (as founder/charismatic leader)
- New structure embodying professionals on tap (rather than on top)
- Facilitators not shrinking from distress, not censoring it, making space for it and always looking for the opportunity it provides
- Resisting pressure to write a report of our work with the group, but providing a written record as we went along, largely consisting of their work in the session, photographs and plus any further reflections we might have had since the session. This provided within a couple of days of each session<sup>278</sup>.

<sup>277</sup> Demonstrating vulnerable leadership – connects to bringing the maternal into learning as per Women's' Ways of Knowing.

<sup>278</sup> Products from the inquiry can be classified as data, knowledge and documentation.

### ***Developing my capacities and presence as a facilitator:***

**Managing our anxiety, and distaste for 'selling the idea'** when we could not get a foothold with Martin and later with Jon. Then we were hesitant. It felt like 'a relief' when our first meeting with Martin fell through – I think for me this was because I knew it would be hard to align our needs; we were being 'proactive' in Block's terms and at this point proposing a solution before the problem had become acute for the client. It felt like 'a relief' when our first meeting with Martin fell through – I think for me this was because I knew it would be hard to align our needs; we were being 'proactive' in Block's terms and at this point proposing a solution before the problem had become acute for the client.

I note how very different this felt from our determined chasing of them (some suggested almost bullying) after we knew Jon (the paid organiser) was leaving and they wanted to cancel meetings.

Others in our CARPP tutorial group spoke of this as a 'forceful' intervention – which initially made me worry because I think we were forceful, we concentrated a lot of our energy on convincing Jo and Kate(x2)<sup>279</sup> to let us work with them at this point when they wanted to batten down the hatches. Recently Chris and I discussed this period in the project and relived it through telling each other the detail of what happened; the analogy that occurred to us was that of stopping a child from running into the road in front of a truck. The workers were already running towards what we perceived to be danger so we had to shout, to speak softly would have been to fail to be heard through their anxiety. Earlier it was about wooing (Martin and Jon) and later about holding our breath while we drew the Mandala of the action research process, but at this moment it was about shouting stop, and then explaining more softly why.

**Managing our anxiety re attendance:** would anyone come? Who might come, the disruptions of children etc. – I felt we hung fairly loose on this, I remember thinking it was better not to be attached to any image of who and how many might come. This made for a different sort of planning for sessions, developing a loose sense of where we might go but not becoming attached to it. This changed as the sessions progressed and the group developed a clearer idea of the areas it wished to cover and we agreed at the end of each session where we might travel together in our next session. However we still didn't ever know if the same people would come again, how many new people would join us and what agendas they would bring with them.

**Working with their distress:** not avoiding or censoring it, viewing it as an opportunity, as fuel (indicative of energy and commitment). People were anxious and distressed about the threat to their organisation and the pressures to conform. This rumbled and flashed like thunder in many of our meetings with the group.

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<sup>279</sup> Jo, Kate and Kate all had a very part time involvement as workers with the timebank.

**Emergent processing all the time** –We could only do the most skeletal of planning to construct a session that would meet our commitment to the group at our last session but be open to what everyone brought on the day – both as a result of the actions and reflection they had undertaken between sessions and because new members joined the group at each session and brought their own agendas and reactions to the work the group had done so far.

This must be an issue for all AR groups to a lesser degree as the content is emergent, as is the knowledge the group produces.

**Our belief in the process was important** - because we believed in it, it was alive (Schrödinger's cat-like), it therefore happened.

Me: There was a time when we had to hold that for the whole group, because at one point we were the only people who could make sense of all those various things that were going on and see that they might be part of one pattern and not umpteen little patterns. But rapidly the group that could see that got bigger and bigger and bigger... (Tutorial session, March 2004).



**Me working with and connected to the group**

**Something about the process was like holding our breath** (Chris's metaphor). I likened it to watching monks making a Mandala with fine pigments and sand, and having not to disturb the coloured dust forming the intricate pattern:

Me: it's a different sort of leadership... we made the structure of the Mandala, we had in our minds the history of what that should look like, that was made again and again and again and always will be<sup>280</sup>. And the depth and the colour and the life in it had to come from the occasion on which we were doing it, with the people with whom we were doing it ... that felt very important, what we were doing was part of a whole stream of doing the same thing, and it was that particular instance (Tape of tutorial session, March 2004).

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<sup>280</sup> A sense of there being an 'eternal' action research form.





### Working together with a co-facilitator:

- Working with someone who has shared values, shared commitment to these organisations
- Gaining power from each other – ‘it would have been really hard to do this job alone’ (CS)
- Challenging each other and ourselves with the questions: ‘where’s the inquiry in this?’ and ‘how action researchy can we make this?’
- Complementary and somewhat different styles: e.g. Chris tenacious re the practical detail, starting from the abstract; Me: getting close to participants through finding common ground of experience and people, using plain English, going from the practical to the abstract
- We’d had lots of time together in CARPP groups etc but had not worked together with a client before
- Some changes in our interaction noted by our CARPP colleagues as they observed us presenting this work to them and reflecting together:

A more professional, aspect, more clear cut role playing, acting it out, taking cues from each other, being more serious (Felicia); understanding each other better, only taking a bit of eye contact for one to understand where the other was coming from and whether somebody gave permission, closer mutual respect and support, willingness to let the other go when ever they wanted, more comfortable with each other (Meretta);

You somehow moved and worked in different ways at different times being more and less present, a gravity and a solidity to what you did and at the same time there was an awful lot of chaos, even when there was no one there you were holding very precious values but also a lot of sheep dogging – both of these qualities are seen in how you’ve moved and acted complementing each other (Alan); dovetailed (Judi) (tutorial session, March 2004).

We were enacting reciprocity between the two of us in our co-facilitation, something the timebank does/aspires to. This enabled me to be much more trusting than I would usually manage to be, and us both to make time to think about the work outside of planned time. This lack of firm/rigid boundaries seemed congruent with the project somehow. We could also ask our ‘planning’ questions in a lighter, more open way, not ‘what are we going to do?’ but ‘how could it be?’ the way we

planned, visioned and digested what was happening was different. Our work became a different thing:

Chris: I think we were visioning more than planning and I think that both of us had enough confidence in our facilitation skills... to be able to do what we needed to do, but I think that our work, our discussions and work, was around the visioning of how it could be for them and looking at the congruence between the whole purpose of the timebank and the forms that it was taking. (Tape of tutorial session, March 2004).

### **Our power in this situation:**

- Convening power – and encouraged others to take on convening power as we went on. At times we took this power very firmly, i.e. pushily setting up a site for inquiry when the timebank wanted to cancel our meetings
- Expert power re the research/inquiry process and the tools – kept sharing these and used theory of method to frame at beginning and end of the series of meetings
- Using accessible tools e.g. visual tools, meant power more shared than otherwise, also drawing things in the moment rather than pre-prepared stuff made tools feel accessible and increased participants' ownership – 'we made this'
- Financial enabling power – we had been given the resources to offer our time to the timebank
- Sharing power - we changed the dynamic from what it might otherwise have been by introducing ourselves as students, as part of being clear that we were not going in as experts (about content, that was their expertise) and we were always learning about our professional practice. This made sharing power with members of the group easier

Me: we weren't saying we're all in this together, we don't know any more than you do, but [instead] we were saying 'we do have some idea of what we're doing here but we're still learning about our own practice' (Tape of tutorial session, March 2004).

Stressing that they held the answers to in their own inquiry, and that theirs was a problem, not simply a puzzle to be solved (Revans).

**Values of our leadership and facilitation** – We were enacting the values and principles of the timebank (reciprocity, mutuality, participation, democracy) in our facilitation and the method (CI).

**Outsiders/insiders** – We started as outsiders, with limited knowledge of the 'inside', but rapidly became accepted as fellow insiders – bound by shared purpose – and able to create form with them to hold their inquiry (and ours) into how to become sustainable. Creating a holding space for their inquiry at the critical time we became insiders, timebank participants ourselves in our commitment.

**Action/reflection** – The action and reflection were integrated in the project, but it still maintained the rhythm of cycles. Reflection was an organising, collective process rather than an individual practice (Vince).

**Keeping with the concrete** – This project was very much about enacting participation, not theorising about it. It's about *values in use*, not just espoused values (both of the timebank and its participants and ours) – always allowing for us all as living contradictions!

The group moved *from individual reflection to organising reflection* (Vince, Reynolds) - we enacted 'a scheme of things in which reflection is a dispersed activity integrated into the fabric of the project, reflection as a collective and/or organising process rather than an individual practice'.

The decision to stay very practically focused was a conscious one; influenced by the impending crisis for the timebank, and also by what I understand to be acceptable starting points for very practical 'doing' organisations like the timebank (and community development projects like GNPN). When these organisations feel they have no time and little energy, and if they see their major objectives to be outside themselves (the cause they are working for) they 'resent' time spent on developing strategy and planning for the organisation's learning and sustainability. Abstract concepts and theorising are likely to be seen as a distraction and a waste of time.

In this way the timebank's looming crisis proved to be an opportunity for our Governance inquiry in that it could have proved very difficult to engage both timebank staff and timebank participants in focusing on governance questions otherwise, despite their value based commitment to participation. Like other very different organisations I have encountered (GHA, LGA) the idea of participation is accepted as something to be worked towards (either as inevitable therefore necessary (GHA) or embraced with reservations (LGA – where such aims were described as "wholesome" but unacceptable to the Board by one senior manager) or embraced heartily but still mysteriously hard to enact (GNPN)) but how to embed it is less clear and anyway there is always 'the job' still to be done.

The opportunity presented for us was to facilitate a very practically focused inquiry into extending governance in the timebank (in service of their questions about their own survival and more specifically how they could manage with very few paid hours of staff time). Our facilitation was therefore rooted in the practical and very action focused; there was little space for reflection separate from action until the last meeting and the evaluation conference. Before that action and reflection were well integrated and performed largely as a group activity within the facilitated sessions.

The group did sense-making together, with individuals becoming increasingly confident to do their 'catching up, catching on' out loud in the group.

Emotions were shared, either spoken out or as silences which could then be explored when noticed by the facilitator and the silent participant invited to share where they were at (not a compulsory activity).

The group sought out information that enabled them to understand the nature of the pressures on them, and who and what was creating those pressures (conscientization – Freire), and also who else was affected (seeking solidarity).

Because of the support they were able to give each other, and our strong holding facilitation which kept a pace, ensured the information resources they needed were delivered, encouraged courageous sharing and assured them that they were not alone (in this struggle and in the process), they moved through despair and anger into fighting back and creatively taking control of their future. This required repeated interventions from us to see where the questions they were struggling with could be moved on by returning to their values – the point that they already held the key/knew the answer.

Outside of these sessions participants made contact with others to check perceptions, talked and reflected together, put into action some of the ideas formulated in and through the group.

**Did we disappear? A discreet holding presence–** At times it came to feel that the group moved on together and that we, as facilitators, were outside of much that was happening. However I am clear that this 'trick' or craft of being able to move out of the limelight, out of the focus of the group is not about facilitator absence but about a strong but discreet holding presence. We held the space strongly in which they could get on and work.

How did that feel? At times I remember sitting on a desire to contribute because the group had closed and was working together. Me feeling left behind as the group made decisions and plans to enact decisions together – as they grew to need our 'active' facilitation less.

Of course these feelings are always present to a small degree as a group moves through stages of increasing independence towards autonomy (and my values and sense of what is responsible practice requires that this is what one should facilitate), but in the case of this particular group the feelings were given a particular poignancy because both of us wanted to be part of the group in that we shared their values and their passion for mutuality and cared deeply about them and their survival. As one of our tutorial group colleagues, Alan, observed when we told the story of the project to them

I'm curious about the story of you being outsiders.... You described a fairly critical time of holding it when you were by no means outsiders but you were completely, you *are* time bank participants yourselves.

The other aspect of holding the space for the group is that of 'holding' its potential, by which I mean having an embodied, enacted faith in the group being able to identify their needs and to know the answers to their own questions. In simple terms this can mean challenging the self-diminishing remarks that people make such as 'I'm only a timebank participant' when introducing themselves. It's another version of 'it's not for people like us' which I've so often heard from residents on estates as they count themselves out of a service or more often out of a consultation exercise in their area. This self-diminishing attitude militates against participation as the speaker is working from a deep-rooted assumption that they have nothing to say, and even if they did no-one in authority would want to hear it. Trust needs to be built that they will be heard, and that reassurances that they have something valuable to say are reliable.

Part of our holding role was to have clearly in our minds/consciousness the potential of each member of the group and the group as a whole. To hold them with a deep appreciation. We had to have faith in them individually, faith in the group, faith in the process and faith in the larger world-scale possibility for participation and mutuality!

### **Could we have done this if we had had no previous knowledge of the timebank?**

It's an important question for many of the pieces of work I undertake where one is not privileged to develop a strong bond with a group over an extended period. I believe the answer is 'yes' one can hold a mind that is open to the potential of the group and its members from a stance of love and a belief in positive human potential (Freire), but it is more based on a necessarily 'theoretical' belief, rather than a detailed knowing of the organisation and the people in it.

There are ways of feeding this warm connection with a group which I practice, ensuring that I have a felt connection with group members e.g. through shaking hands as they arrive or at least introducing myself to each person individually, scanning a group carefully to register each person as an individual, trying to make a heart connection with group members when the contact I have with them is longer than a one-off. These techniques vary according to the size of group and the task in hand. And I am aware that much as I try to make these connections there are times when I fail to do so to my own satisfaction<sup>281</sup>.

### **What we needed as facilitators**

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<sup>281</sup> I'm also aware of trying and failing; being too tired, maybe working with someone else's design I'm not comfortable with, feeling too stressed to connect etc. And the odd time when I've just not wanted to give that much of myself. What a living contradiction!

Nowadays I'm more choosy about who I work with, as well as how I work, as I am disappointed when we can't make these connections between us and I think those pieces of work are a failure even if the client appears happy.

How would we have felt, making this commitment to the group as we did, if no-one had turned up? Well on one occasion that did happen, and at the time I think we were both quite relieved rather than disappointed because we were already tired and to give our all for the third time that day would have been too much.

But if it had happened on another day? I think we could have felt rejected, as if we had given out our all and got nothing back, "we invited them to our party and no-one came".

But I also believe that these things have their own rhythm and what will be will be, that we cannot force this magic to happen, we can only create the conditions and wait and see. In this way it reminds me as I write of a period at school when we would regularly hold séances at the end of school, with levitation and table tapping neither of which could be made to 'appear' but sometimes (many times) did, and when they did there was no doubt that something was 'present'. Time and experience have convinced me that it's my responsibility to ensure that the start conditions are as good as they can be, and after that it's in the hands of the goddess and the participants!

### ***Relationship to my learning journey:***

The Governance project is a definite Pig and Deer moment project with its balance of confident practice and delicate inquiry, of challenge and awareness.

Not to say that this balance was totally effective in delivering the hoped for effect into the wider system at the evaluation conference held at the end of the wider Governance project (which this was a part of) Mr DTI still didn't 'get it', even hearing the learning points made by the participants and reframed by the facilitators. And I still grieved for this failure to influence and for the disrespect shown by some of the members of the steering group by their privileging of the views and voices of the already powerful<sup>282</sup>.

Robert Chambers writes of 'uppers' imposing their realities on 'lowers', devaluing the knowledge and experience of the 'lowers', and what he terms 'normal professionalism' which creates and reproduces power relations by circumscribing the boundaries of what is knowable. Chambers argues professionals replicate hierarchies of knowledge and power that place them in the position of agents who know better, and to whom decisions over action, and action itself should fall (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001:73), or in the case of the Governance project the inability of the man from the DTI to 'get it' meant for a significant number

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<sup>282</sup> As Foucault described when he wrote of 'regimes of truth' sustained through discourses, practices and institutions (*Discipline and Punishment*. 1977. London. Allen Lane.).

of the steering group that there was no 'it' to 'get' despite the clear messages coming from the CI group participants!

One of the things I've really loved about undertaking the Governance project with Peter Reason as the consultant team supervisor has been finding myself more confident and 'earthed' in my pragmatic approach to the inquiry group. I feel like I'm growing into a Pig and Deer confidence in my practice. I hear myself speaking about being a colleague not a novice. As I told the story to my supervisor in March 2004 when talking about writing my practice accounts:

Me: what I like about all of them, although at one time it would have worried me greatly, is that they are very pragmatic. It's not a perfect form, it's not something where I have to worry have I done this right? It's what is inquiring about this, how action researchy can I make it, and how am I in this? It seems to me much more interesting than 'does it fit the text book definition' and am I going to worry about all that. It's been great working with Peter on this one because I've stopped worrying that Peter will think its not co-operative inquiry. I want him to appreciate it but that's different, it's like we're both involved in this, we've both got an attachment to it. It's very different.

Judi: very different from a dependent or counter dependent position in relation to authority isn't it, its mutual. And presumably that would be part of the start of the telling of the story – about the attitude to inquiry that you've got in there and it may not be that it's a contrast to every previous one but it's a refining and development of the questioning isn't it?

Me: it's completely different from where I came from. If we go back to Tigers, then Tigers was about saying 'sod you it *is* inquiry' and then the Unicorn was all so conditional, all so uncomfortable, and now its just so much more bedded in. So from that one story one could tell the whole learning journey story, it's a great place to reflect back from.

## What I'm curious about now

I'm curious now about the next steps from the practice described here, particularly the three later projects (Tewkesbury, Children's Commission and Governance).

- Inquiring into what it is to 'hold' the facilitation of a group ever more lightly, flexibly and responsively
- Continuing to practice to increase my ability to check moment to moment using Bill Torbert's framework of sensation, thought and attention (Torbert. 2004), and my 'noticing pocket'
- Using inquiry as an approach to developing partnerships continues to interest me, particularly as the context of political interest in and support for partnerships has grown and led to an increased sharing of learning approaches
- Using action research as a tool for organisations to come together to inquire (as in the Governance project)
- Building the preconditions for 'being heard': I am continuing to explore forms for presenting different kinds of knowing and experience and for ways to share these
- Supporting groups and community organisations to move from advocacy to self advocacy and on to dialogue and partnership working
- Building the preconditions for 'hearing': Supporting organisations who have traditionally held power to understand the implications for changing the balance of power and to build capacity to engage in listening and power sharing.
- Looking for opportunities to deepen my understanding of the mutuality of the journey through inquiry; how to reduce the dependence on the facilitator and increase the autonomy of the group, and the reciprocity within the group.
- Inquiring: I started to ask about 2 years ago how could I work-less, do-less and cope-less and I am still actively inquiring into how I can be less driven about my work, how I can do less as a facilitator – working more through my presence and less through reliance on tools and fancy designs, and how I can give up struggling to cope and listen to the changes I need to make due to my increasing disability. Approaching these changes with an appreciative mind rather than seeing them as an encroaching deficit, wondering what unfolds next.

In these practice accounts I have endeavoured to show the qualities I referred to in Chapter 2 *My approaches to inquiry*,

- Persistence
- Lack of complaisancy
- A willingness to engage as a learner
- Awareness of self



- Courage
- Judicious judgement
- A commitment to positive social effect
- The discipline of sustaining micro practices of inquiry.

Not of course that I have always managed these qualities, more that I have striven to achieve them. Again and again I have fallen short of my 'ideal', but having practices with which to reflect and learn I have been able to make steps towards a more crafty practice. It is very hard to give you a real sense of this learning going on in such short summaries.

I gathered further evidence of my practice, and my progress, through a series of 'inquiring conversations' with colleagues. I write about these next.