

Chapter 10

Case Study 2

The Country of 'Effective Local Partnerships' Recognition between Women

Introduction

This second case study explores collaboration and my consultancy role in the transnational project, Effective Local Partnerships (ELP).

I explore the tensions I experienced as I moved between three different worlds: the organisations which sponsored ELP; my internal world of subjectivity, emotion and felt experience; and the project world created by women participating in ELP. I describe the challenges that arose for me from these tensions and how I negotiated and conceptualised them through my inquiry.

In the following sections I introduce the ELP project, describe my inquiry methodology for this case study, and introduce my inquiry findings. My findings are in two sections. The first describes how I experienced and negotiated tensions between enabling collaborative working and claiming individual accreditation for my consultancy. The second is concerned with how I developed a methodology that enabled learning to take place and how I conceptualised this in terms that met the requirements of sponsoring organisations.

At the core of this case study are challenges that confronted feminist consultants and colleagues as we moved across thresholds between the worlds that we created as we developed new knowledge and practice and the organisational worlds within which we enacted these. In a further cycle of inquiry, I conceptualise these challenges and the associated skills for working with them as core to feminist consultancy (chapter 12).

An Introduction to the Effective Local Partnerships (ELP) Project

This section provides a brief overview of project activities and describes my consultancy role and approach. Finally I introduce key challenges which are explored in this case study.

Effective Local Partnerships (ELP) was a three-year project led by London Borough of Lewisham and funded by the European Commission¹. The aim of ELP was to develop transferable methods for mainstreaming gender equality.

'Gender Mainstreaming' is a term first introduced by the European Commission and is now widely used by development agencies and by national, local and regional governments. It has been widely promoted in Great Britain by the Equal Opportunities Commission and is defined by the European Commission as 'the systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all Community policies, at the point of planning, implementation and evaluation'.

The ELP project was funded by an EU programme designed to promote gender-mainstreaming projects. The project brought together organisations working to promote women's equality in a range of different sectors and countries to develop practical methods for mainstreaming gender equality within their fields of policy and practice. Each national partner organisation in the transnational project was to work with local partners in their chosen field, to develop and evaluate context-specific gender mainstreaming interventions. With their partners in the transnational project, they would evaluate the methods they had developed, and select practices that might be 'transferable' to other contexts. Through a joint process of evaluation and piloting, the transnational partners would produce 'transferable tools for gender mainstreaming'. A full account of the project and of project results is given in the ELP publication (Page 2000) and on the ELP Website <http://www.4thapelp.com>.

Partner organisations were selected by the London local authority that initiated the project. They were varied in the sectors in which they were active and in their approaches to women's equality work. Individuals who took part in transnational activities also varied in levels of experience of transnational working. All except one were women and all except

one were salaried. Partner organisations were: an Irish trade union centre for the unemployed; a Dutch provincial women's council; an Italian national public sector trade union federation. They worked at national, regional or local level on women's equality issues. All were new to the concept of 'gender mainstreaming' and wanted to use it to build on their existing work.

The lead partner was responsible for reporting to the project funders within the European Commission and for project management and co-ordination. She employed three consultants to support her: a project manager, based in Italy; an evaluator based in Ireland; and a methodology consultant, myself. The project manager was responsible for communication between partners; she produced regular newsletters in three languages, and developed a project web site and discussion board. The evaluator's approach was formative; she provided regular feedback on process and project direction at transnational meetings, and worked closely with me to conceptualise the project methodology and in drafting the project publication. From the second year of the project, consultants and lead partner worked increasingly closely as a team at transnational meetings and in producing the project publication. An advisory board made up of representatives of national and European policy making bodies acted as a resource for policy information and as a sounding board for strategy development throughout the project.

My role on the project was 'methodology consultant'. I co-designed the project proposal, with the project leader, and during the project worked closely with her and the other consultants to ensure project milestones and objectives were met. I designed and facilitated transnational meetings of partners. In the final year I took the lead role in conceptualising the ELP methodology and in writing the publication that was the final product of the project.

Transnational project activities consisted of working sessions for representatives of partner organisations. These sessions took place twice a year for three years and were hosted by each partner in turn. The work method I developed for these meetings aimed to enable partners to exchange and develop practical initiatives to achieve gender mainstreaming at local level. In facilitating the meetings I balanced partners' need to tell each other about their work in their local contexts with the need for a process through which to develop shared evaluation criteria.

Through their participation in the project, partners did develop new gender mainstreaming practices in their local contexts and methods which were transferable to different country

and organisational contexts. The 'product' of the transnational partnership was a publication which describes the gender mainstreaming methods developed by ELP partners, and provides a 'Toolkit' for others to use (Page 2000a). This publication was launched at a high profile conference in London hosted by the lead partner.

There were significant challenges throughout the project. These concerned finding ways of working which honoured diversity between partners; building sufficient common ground to work with; and finding ways of representing the project which gained institutional support in environments. In facilitating the transnational meetings I aimed to build relationships between partners that would motivate them to engage in joint work with each other. I set out to build a dynamic transnational partnership within which partners would move beyond information exchange into joint conceptual thinking and development of new practice. This was more ambitious than the usual EU transnational project meetings where partners simply reported on their country specific local practice.

I initiated a joint process to write the project publication and to conceptualise the project methodology. Through this process I arrived at a stronger sense of my individual consultancy approach and methods. It was not until I came to write the handbook that I was able to conceptualise as a methodology the way in which I had been working, and to show how this was based on the action learning principle of learning through cycling between reflection and action (McGill and Beaty 1992).

The work of ELP had many positive practical **outcomes**, which are summarised in the ELP reports and publication. In the project evaluation and in discussions at transnational meetings participants identified results that included personal and professional development as well as organisational initiatives. These are described in *The Power of Women Affirming Women*, a later section of this case study.

There is no doubt that objectives were met both by partners within their local contexts and within the transnational project. Despite this establishing legitimacy for project achievements was not so easy. The organisational environments in which participants worked increasingly favoured short-term results and did not prioritise women's equality in either their policy work or their resourcing strategies. Within the European Commission gender equality work was increasingly under scrutiny and political attack. This was a challenging environment which to work and created pressures on relationships within the ELP project.

The programme from which ELP was funded was the only specific gender equality programme within the EU, and was itself under scrutiny. While the ELP project had been approved in principle as a three-year programme, funding had to be approved on a year on basis and was subject to evidence demonstrating that the previous year's results had been achieved. Requirements for financial reporting were strict and detailed.

Representatives of the programme expressed enthusiasm for the emphasis on learning and exchange between partners at our transational meetings, but were uneasy about the project methodology's orientation to process rather than to products that they were accustomed to seeing as project outputs. They passed their anxiety on to the project leader. Much of this tension was enacted within our consultancy relationship.

In my inquiry I tracked how these challenges impacted on relationships between women within the project; and how they were enacted between myself and the project leader. In this case study I select from this material to describe how I worked with these tensions, and how I tried to develop and maintain a space within which women were able to value, sustain and learn from each other.

Methodology

This case study is a selective account of a multi-levelled inquiry. My inquiry activities consisted of cycles of action and reflection, undertaken on my own and with others over a period of three years. I moved from reflective practices on my consultancy activities, in which I drew from earlier cycles of my life process inquiry (chapters 3 and 4), into inquiry based discussion with others. In the following I describe the layering of inquiry cycles through which this case study was produced:

- Inquiry as life process: cycles of reflection on action through which I considered how I was taking up my role as feminist consultant on the project, issues of identity and of accreditation which arose as I moved between business, feminist and political frames of reference. Emotional and experiential knowing were my primary source of data.
- Inquiry within my consultancy: cycles of reflection and action on my own and with colleagues to develop, test and enact the project methodology for transfer of learning. Practical knowing was my primary focus.
- Writing as inquiry, generating propositional knowing: in the final phase of the project I worked with the evaluator and lead partner to conceptualise the

method for exchange and transfer of learning which I had developed, to draft the project publication and to engage participants in discussion of how to represent the project 'product'.

Crafting this case study, selecting from material from previous cycles in order to illustrate multiple levels of engagement in my inquiry and my use of these inquiry methods; inviting and working with feedback on drafts from my supervisor, members of CARPP inquiry group, and my client on the project. In redrafting and crafting I sought to represent how I worked with these multiple layers of inquiry and how I cycled between different forms of knowing as my inquiry developed.

In writing this case study my initial intention was to tell a story of achievement as consultant and reflective practitioner. Instead I found myself writing the story of my struggle to negotiate the tension between collaborative working and my need for individual accreditation as a consultant in the project. In discovering the space between my intended narrative and what emerged I found my inquiry.

I began these cycles of writing inquiry immediately after the final ELP conference. My positive experience at the conference shaped my initial account. Powered by energy from this successful public event and by the experience of mutual affirmation expressed at the evaluation day, tension between my inner and the outer worlds was acute as I relived the story of my consultancy on the project. These tensions between the public image I would normally project to clients and colleagues as a feminist consultant and my experience of the lived and gendered reality between women are explored in my case study.

My writing was driven by felt emotion; holding my inquiry position required me to both 'feel' the emotion, and to work from a position of sufficient detachment to exercise judgement in how to use and interpret it within the context of my inquiry. Clinchy describes her and her colleagues' difficulty in establishing how the women who contributed to their research used the procedures they described as 'connected knowing' (Clinchy 1996 p. 229). Her description of using the self as an instrument of knowing and of engaging deeply with the 'object' of knowing convey key elements of my inquiry practices.

As I wrote I listened 'with the third ear' (Reik 1948) to the music behind my own words, alert for signs of censoring or of imbalance, noticing which parts of myself were more readily coming into voice. I stayed attuned to bodily and emotional sensation, engaging with my inner voices, being alert to changes in energy level such as sensations of vitality

or exhaustion. Where sensations of vitality were strong I read them as signs of being on the right track; where there was lack of energy I probed for signs of resistance, of inner censoring. Sometimes responding to these shifts of energy opened up a new angle. At the beginning and end of this case study, for example, I introduced different voices into my text, inviting them to introduce new data and to challenge my previous account and analysis. In this process I kept in mind the notion of inquiry as life process, the sense of life issues and of my inquiry being 'empty' of 'full' of meaning drawn from current life issues (Marshall 1992, 1999).

In the process of my writing different voices emerged and jostled for position, each with their own story to tell and audiences to address. In this final version of my case study I use italics to represent these voices in the text. The first voice spoke as a consultant, addressing an audience of clients and colleagues; she spoke in a language of roles, of tasks, of achievements, and was strongly disapproving of the second. The second voice spoke from my inner world, seeming to address an audience of intimate friends, speaking of passion, relationship and of identity between women. I had the sense sometimes that she had ambitions to be writing a novel, in contrast to a consultant's textbook. These two voices spoke from positions associated with the private world of women and the public spaces designed and defined by men. It has taken courage to keep the space open between them, in order to allow the third voice to emerge, narrator and holder of the vision for the overall case study. At points in the case study, I allow the first and second voices to 'take the microphone' to tell their story.

In writing this inquiry I recognised that an ability to work with these tensions creatively was the defining quality of my feminist consultancy. I sought to express them explicitly in the verbal content of this case study, in the sequencing of voices and narratives and their analysis, but also to convey their quality through your experience of reading the text.

In reading this case study, I ask that you watch for evidence that I worked consistently with these tensions, and kept the spaces open between them.

Competing voices

The three different voices I am about to introduce emerged spontaneously as I wrote my first draft of this chapter. Through allowing them to speak to each other I moved this case study from an account of consultancy and inquiry work completed, to a further cycle of

inquiry conducted through the process of writing. Through working with conflicting feelings and voices as they surfaced, and drawing from reflections conducted with colleagues during the consultancy process, I 'found' the purpose of this case study within my wider inquiry. I became familiar with the characteristics of these voices, and associated them with different ways of being I adopted in relation to others in work-based and social contexts. These were the voices in which I spoke when in consultant mode and the voices I used with friends with whom I shared the passions of my inner world. They were in this sense appropriate to specific contexts, relationships, and ways in which I constructed my identity. Inviting them to speak to each other, in the context of this inquiry, opened up a space for 'doing consultancy' differently, for reconstructing my consultancy identity.

In the dialogue that follows, the purpose of this case study within my inquiry emerges:

Consultant's voice

In this case study I will focus on how I developed a transferable methodology based on inquiry and action learning, how I enabled a process of learning and exchange between women working on equalities issues in different contexts, and how I conceptualised the methodology developed by the transnational project. My consultancy role within the project, consultancy relationship with the project leader, and to a lesser extent with other consultants, and partners, will be a focus of inquiry in the case study.

Inner world voice

Stop right there! Isn't that rather grandiose – and dull? You make it sound as if you did it all single-handed! And aren't you going to put in the late night sharing of our lives, over dinners in Dublin, Delft and Rome? The competition, the love, the power struggles, and our shared passion for the work? Of my figuring out what to wear and how to look the part – and what part to play? Of moments of collaboration and of asserting leadership; of knowing when it was right to make a claim for recognition? Where should I begin?

Consultant's voice

Well all right then; but it all depends who are you talking to – and for what purposes! If you want to be marketable and impress potential clients don't expect them to be interested in women having fun together! They want to see a product – and that means gender neutral! And they want to hire someone who can deliver - preferably single handedly! But since this is an inquiry, let's try this:

In this case study I will focus on how I worked with gender role and identity issues which arose for me in relation to colleagues in the final phase of the ELP project. I will describe how through a process of authoring the ELP publication, I came to understand and conceptualise the methods I had used and my contribution to the project more clearly. Intertwined through the story of the results I achieved is the story of my lived experience of this process, in relation to other women with key roles on the project. I will explore key issues that arose in these relationships, and their significance for my developing sense of my professional identity.

Inner world voice

Well.....That's better! But watch out - remember you promised to let the others read this! Don't say anything you will be ashamed of - no false claims now and no boasting! And no self-pity or self-abnegation either!

Inquiry voice

This inquiry is for me – not just them! Isn't this an illustration of what my inquiry is about: the gendered nature of knowledge and internalised as well as external barriers to asserting the value of women's knowing in environments in which it is neither recognised nor valued?

As I began to write, the desire to engage more deeply with these different voices became stronger. I felt daunted and exhilarated - and alert to internal censors at work. Already they were gathering strength; and continuing with my inquiry felt increasingly dangerous and exposing. I wanted to speak with the voice of success, of achievement and adventure; but to acknowledge others too, and to speak of vulnerabilities and the darker side of women 's relationships. Somehow I must maintain the tension between the inner and outer world voices, using inquiry to keep the space open between them and to prevent one voice from drowning out the others.

Inquiry Findings

My inquiry findings are in two sections.

In **Findings 1, Women Valuing Women in Public and Private Spaces**, I explore how I used inquiry to negotiate tensions between my need for individual accreditation and my desire to sustain and validate collaborative working relationships.

In **Findings 2, Developing a Secure Base for Women's Transnational Learning: The Making of Feminist Methodology** I explore the methodological and epistemological challenges I experienced in facilitating transfer of learning within the project, conceptualising how it worked, and presenting it in the public sphere.

In **The Country of ELP** I introduce a different voice into the text, which speaks of care and passion in relationships between key players on the project. I assert these qualities as core to my inquiry, and to the enactment of power, leadership and collaboration on the ELP project.

In **Conclusions**, I relate the inquiry conducted through this case study to my own developmental process.

Findings 1

Women valuing women in public and private spaces

In this section I explore how issues of public legitimation and accreditation were lived out in relationships between ELP partners and between partners and myself as project consultant. The section is divided into three subsections; each explores these issues through a key moment in affirming the value of project and accrediting contributions to it. These take place at the final conference, in authoring and negotiating accreditation for authorship of the final publication, and at the final evaluation day.

In the inquiry a mirroring emerges between my desires and needs and some of those voiced by women in consultant and client / partner roles. Different voices intertwine as women speak of their desire for public legitimation, and articulate the sense of affirmation they received through their work with each other on the project. I show how I used inquiry to explore how these issues emerged for me within my consultancy role, and how I invited colleagues and my client to help me resolve them in ways that honoured our joint work as well as my individual contribution to it.

Accrediting feminist consultancy and collaboration

The ELP final conference was widely publicised and high profile. Designed by the lead partner and myself with input from the project evaluator, it aimed to give participants a flavour of the quality of our work and of the methods we had developed, to launch the final product, a publication, and to inspire them to use it. Speakers were selected to draw it to the attention of the European Commission, national bodies concerned with gender equality, and key personnel within the lead organisation. For partners and consultants on the project team it was an opportunity to profile their work and make useful contacts.

In the paragraph below, I describe a critical moment in my experience of the conference. To convey the quality of lived experience of this moment I speak in a different voice, the inner world voice of drama and passion introduced earlier in this chapter. In the analysis that follows I use this description to illustrate and introduce the multi-levelled tensions which I held together as a feminist consultant on the project. I explore these tensions further in the rest of the chapter.

As the moment drew closer for my presentation at the end of the conference I shuffled my notes; ten pages of near illegible handwriting put together during the day. My brief was to reflect on the themes of discussion and interactions at the conference, in order to illustrate the methodology we had developed and the nature of our work on the three-year project. I had 15 minutes, and unlike previous speakers, no power point props. I was confident but nervous. My name went up on the huge digital screen. Lavish bouquets of flowers matched the multi-coloured publication front cover and conference logo: 'Patterns of Change'. My Italian orange linen suit, worn only once before, in which I felt rather too shoulder padded, heterosexual and managerial to be quite me, seemed right for the occasion. I was on!

I set aside my notes and spoke with passion without pausing for breath: weaving together fragments of conversation with individuals I remembered; acknowledging interactions and exchange which had meant something to me; trying to convey something of the quality of lived experience, the interactions through which we had influenced, inspired and sustained each other. I named action learning as a method, and used metaphors to which I knew partners would relate to describe it. Being myself as I had been in role in the project, I urged all to use the publication

to 'taste' the quality of exchange we had experienced for themselves, through their participation at the conference. Making eye contact with partners and consultants I could see they were listening and nodding and I felt great! I had found my element - a medium at last for bringing myself more fully into the public arena.

In my inquiry voice I can say that this is a story of how it felt to introduce playfulness, passion and politics into my public 'organisation consultant' voice, to taste a moment of being fully present in the public arena. It also signposts complex dilemmas concerning public representation of professional competence and authority in relation to gender, passion, and sexuality.

In the following paragraphs I unpack some of these dilemmas for my inquiry. I use italics to indicate that these reflections concern a part of me that is different and separate from my work persona:

The Italian orange suit had associations for me with public images of senior women managers: glamorous and attention loving. It also had associations with Italy that spoke both to my own life experience of passion and adventure, and to my association with the project – I had bought it after a successful project meeting in Rome. I felt as if I was in disguise, definitely not recognisable as a lesbian feminist or activist, 'in drag' and playfully so. Playing at 'mainstreaming' for the occasion, I was aware of entering risky territory. Daring to 'do' gender - and sexuality - differently; I was hoping to look the part, but also aware I was unsure how I might be perceived by colleagues, who were not used to seeing me in this mode. I also was nervous of feeling in some way self-silenced, disconnected from my political identity.

In my presentation I wanted to find a way of asserting both my own individuality and the value of joint achievements. With this double objective in mind I felt powerful and fully myself, present in the moment. I was acting as a channel, but also accrediting my part. I knew I was performing, but felt I was acting as spokesperson not only for myself but also for all of us. I was speaking in a voice which reached deep into my being, yet also reached into our shared passion, and out to others; holding attention, and using it to reflect back to the audience our collective achievements.

Afterwards, colleagues and partners told me that they had received my presentation in a way that felt positive and affirming for them. My feeling of empowerment was not just in the speaking, but in these interactions. The suit had worked for me as a statement of readiness to claim a place 'in the mainstream' for myself and for the work I was representing.

Described as a moment of individual experience, my sense of legitimacy and power was firmly embedded in relationships with co-workers. It asserted the power of authority in relationship rather than in individual attributes as a basis for leadership. It was gendered and ambivalent in sexuality and identity; both passionate and task focussed. It signalled the complex and embodied nature of issues around leadership and identity for women (Hall 1989; Sheppard 1989).

Feminist research has shown how women in gender mixed organisations often manage their self-image and presentation with fine political judgement. In one research study on the image and self-image of women managers, in-depth interviews were conducted with fifty men and women managers and professionals in Canadian organisations (Sheppard 1989). Responses suggested a number of ways in which sexuality was used to promote and maintain existing arrangements of power and control within their organisations. Women were faced with a series of dilemmas: being female was problematic; women were unpredictably seen as being sexual rather than organisational. In response they adopted strategies for gender management, yet had always to be vigilant in protecting their positions.

In a study of the experiences of lesbians in organisations, researchers suggested that lesbianism was an opposing reality, a refusal to be available as 'other' within male narratives of self. Both strategies of disclosure and of non-disclosure had dangers; lesbians were caught in the crossfire of conflicting cultural and subcultural imperatives.

The strategies lesbians used to manoeuvre their way through this thicket of contradictions reveals that the old reductionist notion of 'coming out' is not an act, but rather a never ending and labyrinthian process of decision and indecision, of nuanced and calculated presentations as well as impulsive and inadvertent revelations - a process as shifting as the context in which it occurs.

(Hall 1989: 137)

The women in these studies had to exercise vigilance in relation to female and male colleagues. They had to challenge social gender and sexual stereotypes sufficiently to assert their professional competence, while remaining sufficiently within the bounds of acceptability to protect their status and working relationships. Lesbians who disclosed their sexuality risked having a new career thrust upon them of 'representing their category' (Goffman 1963:26) or of being tokenised by heterosexual workers (Hall 1989:183). These environments were fluid and unpredictable. There was no strategy which could be guaranteed to work; resolution was achieved if at all in moments, and might quickly disintegrate.

In my story I show myself in one such moment of resolution in relation to my experience of tensions associated with being a feminist lesbian consultant in relation to self, feminist colleagues, and conference participants. At this moment the credibility of the project was at stake and had to be demonstrated in terms of the lead organisation's values. I experienced these tensions both in relation to my personal gender and sexual identity and in relation to my feminist colleagues. I needed to demonstrate both my allegiance to collaborative relationships which we had built within the project, and my individual contribution as methodology consultant and facilitator. I wanted to demonstrate the value of our work both on the basis of outputs valued by the organisations represented at the conference and on the basis of the values and the process of learning and development experienced by project participants. In addition I wanted to convey the quality and value of my work to potential clients without betraying the collaborative working relationships we had constructed.

At an ontological level I had brought passion and sexuality into my 'consultancy' identity in an environment that favoured bullet pointed presentations and measured voice tone. I had broken with organisational stereotypes by adopting an appearance not associated with 'lesbian feminist'. In this sense I had refused to enact 'difference' by adopting a public 'lesbian' identity, a strategy which would have increased the risk of being marginalised as an individual, and might by association have marginalised the project (Hall 1989). I had succeeded in describing the project achievements and my own, and had found a form to convey how we had worked together which expressed something of what I had brought to my consultancy role. I had described this in terms which project participants could recognise and identify with, and which seemed to add value to the other organisations present.

The sense of empowerment I experienced at this moment signalled convergence and resolution of tensions that I experienced at other times.

Consultants and lead partner were all actors in this process. Each spoke in her organisational role to accredit the collective achievement of project participants and each also spoke to her own contribution.

Feminist researchers have drawn attention to the ambivalence experienced by many women in identifying with 'heroic' representations of leadership (Boucher 1997; Oseen 1997). In my story I described myself as 'mirroring' the collective achievements of the project *and* staking a claim for my individual contribution. The style in which I told my story signposted tensions between a desire to represent my individual contribution to the project as 'heroic', and my desire to protect and honour the collaborative elements of leadership which I also within the project.

Individual accreditation within collaborative relationships

The lead partner and myself drew up the conference programme with assistance from the project evaluator. In planning the conference the priority was to secure legitimation and profile for the project both within the lead organisation and externally. Working towards this objective raised my own anxieties associated with reaching the end of the project. These concerned how I should market the skills and methods I had used on the project in the future and how my role would be described or accredited at the event. Underneath these were more painful inner-world doubts about recognition, at a deeper level, from my female colleagues. How could I avoid repeating my recent experience of being present at the launch of the publication I had written and not being accredited (chapter 9)? How could I make a claim for myself on an occasion when the focus should be on the project and its partners?

This time I addressed the issues by inviting the project leader to explore these issues with me when we were planning the conference. In response she invited me to make a presentation at the event which would model and describe the project methodology and the facilitation role I had played. At the beginning of the conference she described the contribution of each of her consultants using text agreed with us in advance:

Margaret helped me to draw up the original project and offered me regular consultation and methodology advice throughout the project. Through an action

learning approach she designed and facilitated the transnational meetings to ensure we fulfilled our aims and objectives. She drafted the initial text for the handbook and after we read it, considered it and mauled it during our last meeting, and she still had the energy to redraft and edit.

In reflecting on Margaret's role I would say that she 'held the vision' for us all. In those days when it felt like we would never get anywhere she was able to find a way of taking things forward. She managed some very difficult individual and transnational sessions, not shying away from conflict but helping myself and all of us to learn from it. A great skill, thank you!

ELP Project leader

This description affirmed how we had worked on the project and the values we had enacted for. In making it part of her presentation she made a bridge between the values enacted in the project and the register of values in her organisational world, and enabled me to bring a different voice to my presentation at the conference.

In earlier cycles of my inquiry I had explored with the project leader how we enacted our consultancy relationship (chapter 6). I illustrated how we used second person inquiry skills to explore the tension between care and challenge, power and leadership. In this and subsequent discussions we acknowledged that we had both drawn on inner world skills as well as skills related to our organisational roles to manage conflicting demands within our working relationship. We had used inquiry practices to negotiate a potentially explosive area for women, as indicated by contributors A and E who I also interviewed in this previous cycle of my inquiry (chapter 6; appendices 3 and 4). The meta-discussion sustained through my inquiry added a level of communication that enabled me to broach discussion which would have been more difficult within the consultancy frame and which was not possible within my first case study (Chapter 9, and Red Thread 2).

At the end of the project I discussed with members of the editorial board how authorship of the handbook should be attributed in the publication. On the basis of this discussion I felt I had permission to make a claim for authorship without misrepresenting our collaborative approach to drafting. On the strength of this I opened discussion with the lead partner. In response she stated her intention to name each contributor on documents to which they had contributed in the pack. She invited me to circulate a form of words which described my contribution; I circulated a claim for lead responsibility to the editorial group members for comment and invited others to make suggestions to ensure adequate

acknowledgement of their own contribution. I went on holiday, suspended my emotional investment in the outcome, and let go of my expectations.

On my return, the lead partner and I met with the graphic designers. As the design took shape, and I finalised the text I could see her confidence in the product increase. Finally she let me know she had made her own decision to make me the named author associated with the ISBN number. I wept. It was as if through her act of recognition the skills I had brought to the project had been acknowledged. I felt 'known' at a depth that was new and deeply affirming. As if I had been given this as a gift a gift of love when I had been expecting to have to either give it up or to wrest it from others.

At this point my inner world voice says:

This moment of recognition had a felt quality that was healing and deeply empowering. In my inquiry voice I asked - but what is the wound that was being healed here?

I ask my readers to hold this core question in mind, knowing I will return to it when I conceptualise feminist consultancy in chapter 12.

My inquiry practices had enabled me to shift into a position from which I negotiated a role for myself at the conference. From this position I was able to publicly affirm the value of our collaboration as well to demonstrate my individual contribution. I had moved out of a strategy of self-erasure and into self-recognition; I had claimed accreditation of my individual contribution from colleagues and had experienced a moment of healing.

Contributors to my inquiry interviews reported that in relationships between women in organisational settings individual success was often experienced as betrayal of collective identity. Individual women experienced a double bind, each course of action leading to a loss of an aspect of self as it was constructed in relation to others (chapter 6, contributors A and C). In contrast mutual accreditation by ELP participants in the public sphere implied a different possibility of maintaining a sense of self-in-relationship while also claiming individual accreditation.

In the following subsection I explore how participants described what they valued about their relationships within the project. In the chapter 12 I develop a conceptual framework for taking this further.

The Power of Women Affirming Women

The ELP project ended with an evaluation day that I helped to facilitate. Participants gave permission for me to draw from their discussions for this inquiry.

At the beginning of the day they were invited to share:

Something that is different for me as a result of my involvement in ELP; something I'm going to miss; and something from ELP I will take with me into the future

ELP evaluator

In response, they spoke of experiences that had been transformational at personal and at professional levels. Partners and consultants stated that participating had in some way enabled them to flourish.

I will miss, and take with me into the future the country of ELP

Project manager

The qualities of this 'country' emerged in discussion: participants named them as the quality of the environment in which they had been working, and the quality of relationships they had made with each other. Their collaboration had been challenging and mutually affirming; it was international, and diverse; it was political, involving knowledge of the power and role of women's organisations. One partner, a highly successful lawyer and Member of Parliament, stated:

I have never had so much praise for what I do!

ELP partner

They said that they had gained a sense of personal self worth, and a sense of the value of their work in the public sphere. Partners referred to the value of the relationships they had formed as a key aspect of the method we had developed to sustain their work:

The personal and professional relationships; the method of work – in groups instead of as individuals, stopping and reflecting, affirming and evaluating; the time out in different surroundings where we became very creative together.

ELP partner

Yet ELP partners were not in any sense lacking in self-esteem or competence, or at the beginning of their career. They were in most cases highly experienced and skilled professionals who simply did not get a sense of affirmation for their work on women's equality and who as individuals continued to be vulnerable to being devalued in their work environments. Nor had they had opportunities to reflect on their work in the company of other women who shared their commitment to women's equality. In 'the country of ELP' their relationships had bridged organisational divisions and moved between personal and professional worlds. It seemed that the sense of valuing and of being valued which partners and consultants gave each other in relationships which were built during working sessions, was precious and not something found elsewhere.

Inspiration, affirmation that what you are doing is OK; the knowledge that this way of working has enormous value

ELP partner

One partner said in a private conversation that she experienced the evaluation session as a 'slow love making with each other', a nurturing and mutually energising erotic exchange. Her remark signalled the presence of sexual energy in our working relationships, and by implication challenged the absence of reference in organisational literature to sexuality between women. Contributors to my interviews also named 'shared passion' as one of their preferred features of women working together - and two of them linked this to falling in love, or to sexual feelings.

The importance of 'mirroring' as a consultancy method, of reflecting back to women what they have achieved, was highlighted by ELP partners and consultants. Both Italian and Dutch partners linked this to evaluative inquiry: taking regular time out to reflect on their work as a way of correcting the tendency of women to impact of their actions. Interview contributor E also identified 'reflecting back achievements' as a vital consultancy method for working with women's organisations. Both she and the Dutch ELP partner stated emphatically that women consistently underestimate what they have achieved and need help to pause and 'see' the results and quality of their work. Taking time out to reflect on achievements was modelled by the method I developed for transnational project work and partners reported that as a result of experiencing its value in transnational meetings they had incorporated into their practice within their local partnerships.

Some feminist psychodynamic research suggests that 'mirroring' meets women's need for a 'sense of being', but can be a potential danger as it sometimes undermines differentiation in groups (Minetti 1993). This returns me to the moment of 'healing recognition' that I experienced when accredited by the lead partner. This 'moment' represented affirmation, but was based on recognition of separate roles and different contributions rather than on sameness. This moment was one of recognition of the 'otherness of the other' described in my literature review (chapter 8); of connection while maintaining separateness described by Buber as an I/Thou interaction which is a necessary condition for dialogue (Buber, cited in Clinchy 1996: 222).

During the three years that partners and consultants worked together we moved from a disparate set of individuals from widely differing partner organisations and countries, to a 'country' that we had created together. Participants agreed that this 'country' had been a space for reflection on action, for mutual inspiration and sustaining through exchange of good practice, for generating new ideas and practice, and for personal transformation (Page 2000b). The relationships and the method seemed to have enabled us to create an affirming and transforming environment that partners internalised to sustain personal life changes. Moreover we had succeeded in creating tools for partners and others to use in their gender mainstreaming work in organisations.

Feminist researchers celebrate the hidden passionate quality of friendship between women (Faderman 1985; Raymond 1986). More recently feminist organisation literature has begun to explore friendships between women in work settings (Andrew and Montague 1998). In organisations where validation is not to be taken for granted, these friendships have the potential to sustain political and professional identity (Wiseman 1986 cited in O'Connor 1992: Andrew and Montague 1998).

While none of this feminist literature on friendship in work settings refers specifically to erotic energy, it does talk about passion between women - a topic noticeably absent in organisation literature about sexuality and emotion in organisations (Fineman 1994; Hearn et al 1970). I suggest that erotic and sexual energy may often be present in interactions between women who work together and that this is not necessarily going to correlate to their declared sexuality. As feminist psychodynamic research suggests, recognition of the other is a decisive moment of differentiation and can be closely linked to the erotic experience (Benjamin 1990).

In her research Sinclair explored the relationship for women between sexuality, self-esteem and leadership (Sinclair 1998). Women she interviewed experienced sexual energy in a wide range of ways associated with passion, wholeness, bringing themselves more fully into their leadership role. She linked self-esteem with sexual expression, and identified the position of greatest power for women as one in which they are able to be most forthright in their sexual expression at work. Women in this position constituted their own meanings of sexuality as part of asserting themselves in leadership (168). The difficulties for women in negotiating this territory were high and required skilful management.

The sexual energy referred to at the ELP meeting, and which I experienced in the presentation I described earlier in this chapter, expressed an element of the creative energy brought to the working relationship within the project.

The 'country of ELP' which we had created was a 'secure base' in which individual participants sustained each other and their women's equality work. The organisational and political environments in which they were working were resistant to change, to gender mainstreaming and to the ways of working we had developed. Nevertheless participants generated an energy which was playful, creative, and challenging. It was characterised by a secure enough matrix of relationships between participants, within which differences could be explored, and common ground established.

In the next section I explore how we created this 'secure base', the relational skills we developed and used, and what my role was in the journey.

Findings 2

Developing a Secure Base for Women's Transnational Learning: the making of feminist methodology

This section is the second of the two narratives to which I referred in my introduction to this case study. It is the story of the part I played in creating an environment that enabled women to learn from each other across power and difference within the ELP transnational partnership. I describe the challenges that I experienced in conceptualising this process and finding a form in which to represent it as a 'product'.

The section is divided into two parts. In the first I describe how I enabled collaboration and exchange to take place between partners, drawing from knowledge located in different contexts and identities. In the second I explore the epistemological challenges of demonstrating that we had produced new practice that was transferable to other contexts, and describe how I worked with my colleagues to respond to them.

Devaluing environments, valuing women:

Creating a secure enough base for collaboration between women

Transnational meetings took place twice a year over the three-year period of the project. I designed them as working sessions, aiming to meet the project milestones and to stimulate transnational exchange. It was not enough for partners to report on results achieved in their country contexts; the added value of the transnational partnership had to be experienced, articulated and demonstrated.

Partners needed to feel motivated to work together and to do so at high intensity in the short time available for each transnational meeting. These took place over two to three days, twice a year. At the first meeting differences seemed as wide as similarities. In the account below, I describe some of the challenges, and how I worked with them:

The Dutch partners hosted the first transnational meeting. As we gathered for our first evening at the home of the Dutch lead partner in the official residence of the royal family, I noticed that I felt discomfort at the contrast between the elegant surroundings and the politics I had brought to the project. This alerted me to potential ideological differences and to differences of power and identity between partners. I became aware of how my perceptions of participants were already influencing shaping how I was relating to them. It felt essential to find a way to acknowledge our differences and what they represented to each of us, in order to find common ground.

At the meeting the following day I decided to work from differences as well as similarities in order to avoid the trap of building false consensus. I was aware that political differences were likely to reflect the organisations and the constituencies that they represented, and that interactions were also likely to be shaped by their different levels of seniority within their organisations and experience of working in

transnational partnerships. I wanted to surface unspoken assumptions between partners about unequal power and access to resources, and to engage in a dialogue about how these differences would need to be addressed within the partnership.

I invited partners to explore what was unique to each and suggested this would be a starting point for joint work to develop new approaches to gender mainstreaming. This seemed affirming to partners and I spent more time than planned encouraging partners to name differences in their approaches.

During the session we acknowledged that partners were diverse in ideologies, sector, organisation and country. They differed in the amount of power they had as individuals as well as organisations, and were operating with different models of how to achieve change. They spoke different languages and had different levels of experience of transnational working. More importantly, as trade unionists, community activists, members of political parties, and local authority advisors, they were each identified with a context-specific history of equalities work in which were embedded beliefs about how to bring about change.

In the course of discussion, partners acknowledged that in forming a transnational partnership they were making collaborative relationships with agencies that they might not have considered possible or useful in their local contexts. Partners' understanding of the core concepts of 'gender mainstreaming' as well as of 'partnership' differed, and was informed by historical, political and sectoral context as well as organisational politics.

Once we had named differences between partners we struggled to arrive at a common understanding of gender mainstreaming. With the help of the evaluator we drew up a list that encompassed approaches unique to each partner. This encompassed 'top down' policy led approaches of local authorities and trade unions, and 'bottom up' activist driven approaches of women's and community based organisations. It was effectively a statement of the need for a range of approaches in order to achieve gender mainstreaming. Later this became the basis of the ELP framework for developing context specific gender mainstreaming strategies in partnerships.

In agreeing this framework, partners moved away from advocating their own approach as more legitimate than others and recognised the need for multiple strategies to achieve the necessary changes. They described this as a need for both 'bottom up' and 'top down' approaches.

At the time, I experienced this shift as a pivotal moment in the process of building the transnational partnership. For the purposes of this inquiry now it seems important to understand more of what it represented. At the time, I understood it as a statement of willingness to move out of separate individually defined contexts, into a shared territory. In adopting a common framework which included each partner's definitions of good practice, partners made a statement that affirmed the value of each other's approach. In doing so they shifted from identifying the different strategies with opposing ideological positions which had to be argued against, to a 'both/and' position (chapter 8). The organisations and sectors to which each partner organisation belonged, 'government', 'trade unions', 'community or voluntary sector', or 'women's' organisations', no longer represented potential opponents who were operating from different ideological standpoints but had become potential allies in complementary strategies for achieving common goals.

The naming of different approaches to gender mainstreaming, followed by acknowledgement of the value of each approach within the context in which it had been developed, enabled participants to take a first step towards developing a shared 'country' within they would move on to develop a common language.

Through interaction at transnational meetings, partners built relationships that cut through divisions arising from their different positioning. Through this process they began to reach a new understanding of how to become effective actors within the policy process. They could see that each used the power to which they had access from the position in which they were situated. As they came to understand each other's perspectives and approaches they began to see potential in their local contexts for cross-sectoral influence and to build alliances with partners which they had not previously considered.

In their reports to transnational meetings partners stated that these new relationships had enabled them to extend their influence, and credibility. A process of cross-fertilisation was occurring. Partners were influencing each other, trying out aspects of each other's approaches, and adding to their repertoire of skills.

This process did not follow the rather mechanistic plan for 'exchange of gender mainstreaming methods' drawn up for the funding proposal, but seemed to be taking place spontaneously. A process of cross-identification was occurring, as a matrix of relationships developed within the partnership. We swapped recipes, holiday plans, news of children and of significant others, and encouraged each other through relationship breakdown and separation, health difficulties, and other life crises. This process was tracked by the project evaluator and is documented in her comments in the project publication (Page 2000).

At this point I will introduce another interjection. My case study was to explore and how I addressed tensions I experienced in relation to colleges and the project leader. Yet I have edited out descriptions of conflict included in earlier drafts, and may in the process have implied that they did not exist. As a result this case study may be giving a somewhat sanitised version of relationships between project participants (feedback on an earlier draft from Judi Marshall, my supervisor). In anticipation of my readers' possible scepticism, I have added the following paragraph:

The process of cross-fertilisation that I have described was far from harmonious; rivalry was never far beneath the surface and had to be managed and contained within project roles. This was done informally in discussions between consultants, with the project leader, within country groupings, and between consultants and project partners. At times partners or consultants made challenges to the project leadership or to me as consultant responsible for facilitation and for setting objectives for transnational meetings. However there was little scope for flexibility as funding was conditional on demonstrating that project and partner objectives had been met on an annual basis. As project objectives were met through transnational working sessions there could be little flexibility in how these meetings were run. Under these conditions tensions were high; these were managed within my consultancy sessions with the project leader and within the consultants' team.

Levels of participation by partners were uneven and there were sometimes tensions concerning delivery of results by some partners. There were sometimes power differences and conflicts within country groupings. The project manager and evaluator, based in Italy and Ireland respectively, developed close working

relationships with these country partners and were able to help address country specific issues and on this basis to advise the project leader.

Consultants discussed how participation was affected by culture difference and language barriers, by political and organisational contexts specific to each partner, and by power relationships within country partner participants. These issues were then picked up by the project manager and addressed within project activities and by the consultants' team.

I will develop a discussion about the politics of my selection and analysis of material in the 'Red Thread' that follows this chapter. Meanwhile this paragraph is intended to situate the analysis that follows in the more challenging aspects of the political environment in which the project was located.

The feminist concept of 'situated knowledge' makes a radical critique of positivist notions of science and of objectivity. In this view:

Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of object and subject...

These knowledges are necessarily partial, locatable and critical sustaining the possibility of a web of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.

(Harding 1991:191)

During this first meeting ELP participants took their first steps from sole allegiance to knowledge claims rooted in their specific locations towards willingness to acknowledge the located and partial nature of their claims. This shift opened up the possibility for a web of connections to be made, a process that developed over the following three years of the project. It did not take place only through a process of intellectual exchange, although this was one dimension of the process, but in the context of an environment that had been created to bridge differences between women. It occurred in the way they lived reciprocity within the matrix of relationships that we created and in the use of methodologies that invited inquiry into the nature and process of shared learning that was taking place.

At a meeting of partner organisations in the second year of the project, we reflected on the methods that we had used to facilitate exchange between partners. Partners stated that as a result of these methods they had felt that discussions had been unusually rich and

valuable compared to their experience of other projects. As a result of their learning from this experience Dutch and Italian partners had modified their local practice, making their local conferences more interactive, building time for reflection into their meetings, focussing more on context-specific differences between participants and setting time aside to jointly evaluate results. Visits to partner organisations had also generated a sense of potential to introduce changes. As a result of their visit to the lead partner organisation, Dutch partners initiated a diversity project to increase participation of black women in local politics.

However partners' shift towards development of new practice through dialogue and exchange of context-specific knowledge was not a shift made once and for all. Participants did not arrive at a given insight and then apply it. Working in environments of flux and change, they reported a process at transnational meetings that had to be constantly re-affirmed and re-tested over time. Their process of learning and the development of new knowledge through exchange proved to be fluid and not fixed, more of a moving back and forth which had to be sustained, and developed.

After the final conference of ELP I reflected on similar experiences of facilitation to conceptualise the challenges faced by women who come together to generate new knowledge about how to achieve gender equality, and then move back into their organisations to develop new practice. Working with a co-researcher, Anne Scott, I drew from feminist epistemology to conceptualise some of the challenges of this process. The following piece, taken from the paper which we co-authored, draws from Lorraine Code to speak of knowledge produced by women in relationships of trust (Code 1995; Page and Scott 2001). I introduce it at this point in my inquiry to illustrate the relational and political quality of the knowledge produced by participants in ELP:

Lorraine Code (1995: 144 -153) develops the socially devalued concept of *gossip* as a way of thinking about the creation of new knowledge. She describes a film in which a suspicious death has occurred in an isolated farmhouse. While the sheriff and his assistant are engaged in an orderly, methodical, but ultimately fruitless, search for evidence that will implicate the dead man's wife, their two wives are collecting some items needed by the imprisoned woman, tidying up her kitchen... and gossiping. Through an engaged, emotionally interested, discussion of the domestic details they notice as they are working of the imprisoned woman's childhood, and of the links they see and feel with their own lives, they are able to move through their own differences, and reconstruct a narrative of brutal domestic

violence, which was ended when the woman murdered her husband. In the process these two women overcome an initial lack of trust associated with their own differences in status, build a new solidarity with each other and with the imprisoned woman, and decide to conceal what they know from their husbands.

This is knowledge that has arisen within relations of mutual trust and shared activity. It has not been collected in a methodical manner; in fact, it seems to be completely spontaneous. It has not been 'taught' in the traditionally understood sense of that term. It has arisen in relationship, through dialogue motivated by an emotional engagement with something outside itself. Although it is deeply particular – rooted in a particular context – its power comes from the fact that it both draws on and contributes to a wider understanding. This is shared knowledge which can be used for the purposes of social change. This is knowledge - both reliable and useful - which is not composed of individually owned, abstract, propositional facts. What is most necessary for its development is the provision of a safe space in which differences can be articulated, dialogue can take place, and relationships of trust can develop. This is the type of knowledge, we are arguing, which can be produced within a learning community of women (Page and Scott 2001).

At the meeting in the second year of the project I initiated discussion with partners about the nature of their exchange at transnational meetings. With help from the evaluator we arrived at an account of this exchange as a process of 'cross-fertilisation' rather than transfer. Partners referred to an exercise I had designed at the previous transnational meeting to enable them to help each other identify elements of transferable good practice. During this exercise partners had worked with partners from at least one other country. It had become apparent how difficult it was for partners to individually identify what might be of practical value to each other or to communicate how they worked to other partners. I had asked them to select aspects of each other's work that they had found valuable, and to make commitments to help each other develop new approaches based on this 'exchange' of practice. In feedback on the exercise they indicated that questions from partners working in different contexts had given them new insight into their own approaches and a new sense of the value of what they were doing.

We had moved from a process orientated to producing 'transfer of learning' to a process which allowed spontaneity of learning to take place within a matrix of relationships built on shared political commitment of women's equality. In the final year of the project we had to

find a presentational form for the process we had experienced which validated it within the product-orientated cultures of the organisations sponsoring the work. The challenge was to demonstrate that this process was indeed a new 'product' which would meet the requirements of the funder.

Epistemological struggles:

From women's knowing to public knowledge; crossing the threshold

In this subsection I explore the conceptual challenges posed by the new approach to transfer of learning which we had adopted, and the process through which I worked with them. These conceptual challenges were interwoven with relational issues that I also explore.

At the beginning of year three I was given lead responsibility for the task of writing the ELP publication, the final product of the transnational partnership. Both lead partner and evaluator made it clear that they were relying on me to discover how this could be achieved. It was not until I began the process of writing the publication that I was able to move from intuiting to conceptualising the processes we had used for learning and exchange within the transnational partnership and to represent this as a transferable method.

Funders, partner organisations and consultants had a stake in our producing a definitive ELP recipe for gender mainstreaming. This product was to provide evidence of added value that could justify the time and resources invested in ELP. This was a requirement of the funder and in our funding application we had defined our product as 'transferable methods for gender mainstreaming'. This went beyond the considerable local results which partners had achieved.

Project participants had different views about the form that this product should take. Partners wanted something tangible and simple which they could show and circulate; an example given by one partner was a credit card sized checklist for gender equalities work that had been produced by a similar European funded partnership. There was a general feeling that our processes had not reached any firm conclusion, that while local results were tangible and good we had failed to produce the transferable good practice which the project had promised. Holding the lead responsibility for producing this, like a rabbit out of a hat, felt like a real challenge, alternately exhilarating and burdensome.

During the final year of the project I kept a journal to track my process in writing the handbook. In the following paragraph I quote from my journal to describe some of the qualities of this experience:

As I began writing the first draft of the handbook I found a language to describe how we had been working at transnational meetings. Reading the transnational meeting reports and evaluator's comments, I was able to see with fresh eyes the quality of interactions between partners. With a growing sense of excitement I began to see that as trust built up between partners we had been increasingly explicitly reflecting together on action at our transnational meetings, and that these exchanges had inspired participants to develop new practice. We had effectively been engaging in cycles of reflection and action, developing and enacting new practice.

I decided to use action learning to describe how we had been working within the transnational partnership (McGill and Beaty 1992), and to present our variation on it as a core element of the ELP product.

However in order to achieve transferability in practice I had to arrive at consensus with my colleagues. In the next period I steered a course between holding onto lead responsibility in order to shape the end product, and building a collaborative team approach to ensure joint ownership and shared responsibility. This was not an easy balance to keep. In designing the process for production of the ELP final publication I balanced the need to meet production deadlines and the need to ensure ownership by partners and project team. I also addressed my own needs for support and collaboration.

I initiated an editorial board and during the next ten months meetings were held where I 'reality tested' my conceptual framing of the methodology. It was not easy to step back from the exciting but solitary process of conceptualising in which I had been engaged, in order to enable colleagues to engage and contribute to the process. In the journal extract below I describe the quality of this experience:

It was as if the method was so embedded in the relationships we had created within ELP that it was difficult to see what was there – and difficult to believe it could be reproduced outside the relationships we had made within the project.

I suggested that we might think of transnational meetings as a 'holding space' for partners, within which they had energised and re-motivated each other; and that the cross-fertilisation that had taken place through interactions at the sessions had inspired and encouraged them to develop their gender mainstreaming work and to produce results at local level.

The 'products' of ELP were the working method we had used in the transnational partnership to sustain and generate gender mainstreaming initiatives carried out by partners, and the framework for gender mainstreaming which partners had drawn up and agreed at the end of the first year. The 'results' were activities and gender mainstreaming interventions taken by partners at local and national level. In my text I described it thus:

The ELP 'product' is a method for developing gender-mainstreaming practice within a learning partnership, using a framework of core principles that can be adapted to local context by members of the partnership (Page 2000b).

It was difficult to arrive at this description, which in retrospect seems so clear. In the anxiety-laden context of pressure to demonstrate product, I felt that my professional competence and our consultancy relationship were at stake. This was an issue 'for me' but also 'for us'. Could we demonstrate that this project, on which we had build our professional relationships and staked shared passion and commitment, was worth something within the culture and priorities of her organisation?

Arriving at an agreed final draft was a difficult process that involved concentrated thinking work on my own and dialogue with colleagues on the project team and with partners. All needed to feel identified with the publication as a accurate description of the results and analysis of the processes in which they had participated. I embarked on a process of moving back and forth between drafting material and presenting it to partners and editorial board for comment, refining it and redrafting. This raised it's own issues of power between team members and with partners. Partners had to be encouraged to specify who their target audiences would be, enabled to think through what content would have maximum impact on them, and encouraged to draft case studies which would do justice to their initiative. This was achieved through a process of consultants' visits to partners. I tape recorded partners' accounts of their project work, and then used quotes from these discussions to enliven their case studies. In these discussions and in working with

subsequent feedback on draft text I aimed to honour their perceptions of results achieved, to engage with them on issues of presentation and on plans for material to be translated.

In drafting the publication I found myself effectively engaging in another cycle of knowledge making. I had drawn colleagues into this process and with them weathered the anxieties that it raised. We had not written up a description which had already been articulated, but together addressed the politics of representation: how to represent the way we had worked and relationships we had built as a method for gender mainstreaming? How to represent our method of cycles of reflection on action as adding value to organisations which valued outputs, but not processes?

At certain points I wondered whether I was describing a process that had actually taken place, or had created a good story to tell about it. I had shared my reflections and analysis of our work process with consultants and the lead partner on the editorial board, and with them arrived at an analysis that was reflected in draft text. But did partners share this analysis? I discussed this with the project evaluator, who reminded me of the quality of discussions of content and design at transnational meetings, of partners' feedback and discussion of draft text, and of consensus reached on the basis of critical and challenging discussion on the editorial board.

The Country of ELP

In writing this case study I relived much of the exhilaration and more painful challenges and tensions I had experienced on the project. In drafting and redrafting, I selected what to include or discard with different readers in mind and gained a sharper sense of the different stories I might tell. One of these was a story of collaboration and celebration of joint achievement, written for my clients and colleagues; another was a story of individual achievement, written in the voice of a consultant to potential clients. During the project this tension surfaced at points when project results had to be presented publicly in the publication and at the conference. In the earlier stages of drafting this case study I relived some of these tensions and found this to be a painful experience. Through the process of writing inquiry I have come to experience them differently and arrived at a different understanding of them.

At the certain point in writing an early draft I panicked, unable to go through with a narrative that seemed to be writing itself, against my best intentions, in a voice of individual subjectivity and need. My story was beginning to feel like a betrayal of our joint achievements, and to be too exposing of vulnerability within my professional identity and relationships.

I took this dilemma and my associated distress to a meeting with CARPP inquiry group, asked members for feedback and tape-recorded the discussion. During the session my supervisor suggested I could simply 'STOP the narrative'. This intervention enabled me to ask myself what was the story I wanted to be telling, and to whom?

As I was considering this, F telephoned, and I was able to explore with her some of my vulnerability related to the ending of the project.

This 'interruption' was timely, and a reminder to return to the voice of passion which had engaged my consultant voice at the beginning of this case study. I decided to use this opportunity to change the narrative of my case study. In the exchange that follows I show how I re-engaged with the shared political passion that had inspired our collaboration, and carried us through the more painful aspects of working on the project.

Writing from my inner voice

F just phoned to make an appointment to debrief, following our work on ELP: 'You can tape it', she said, 'for your research'.

Then I told her my dream.

We were on the underground, at the end of the project - or a holiday together. We arrived at my stop - and I grabbed up my bags and got off - in a rush and some confusion. The bags seemed a lot lighter than I remembered - I checked that I had them all with me. Then I had a real sense of disorientation - I could not see where I was or where to go - or remember what to do next. I told myself that I knew what to do in an underground station, look for the exit, and I only had to wait until my eyes would focus to see where to go. The most important thing to do was to wave F off- to give

her a good send off. I could not be sure where she was but waved anyway. At least I felt confident that that was the right thing to do.

This dream and interaction has enabled me to bring an aspect of my relationship with F into my case study that I had not adequately voiced. The dream reminded me of the reciprocity of care between us throughout the project. I was back in touch with the explosive tension between my responsibility as a consultant to ensure she was able to carry out the tasks needed to meet the project goals, balancing our individual needs with the needs of the project. In the dream I gave her a good send off, and was left holding my own disorientation, with a sense that there was no one to care for me. The lighter bags suggested that I had emptied myself out but was also freed up to move on. This inquiry has also helped me to do that.

But in the telephone conversation F had acknowledged the need to move on. We would after all share the work of ending the project, and the meaning we each made of that ending. The tension between the inner world of our inter-subjectivities and the outer world of presentation and product had taken a toll; but the connection we had forged was based on reciprocal care and acknowledgement of our individual needs.

In this moment of insight, I knew that this tension between inner and outer world realities in feminist women's work based relationships was what my inquiry was about.

Women in ELP, in common with many women who work on women's equality issues, brought a passion to their work, and this brought challenge and tension to their relationships with each other. This case study shows that these can be worked through, with careful discussion and attention to relationship, using inquiry based skills.

Conclusions

Breaking out through inquiry

In order to fulfil my consultancy role I held in tension three sets of needs: care for the individual client, care for the overall project, and care for my own needs. Achieving this balance was not easy. In relational terms, partners and consultants sustained each other through reciprocal acts of care; there were also moments of tension when challenge was

needed and given in order to attend to task. Shared passion for the work spilled over into relationships between participants and raised issues that could not be neatly resolved at a level of 'task' and 'role'. This lent a quality to interactions that I maintain was about passion and care between women committed to working together towards equality in the public arena. In order to access this material I developed a method which allowed my different voices to speak.

In this case study I have tried to illustrate how I lived out some of these issues and negotiated them with women in client and consultant roles on the project. This was not a simple or straightforward matter. I have shown that for me they raised complex issues concerning self-image and self-presentation as a feminist lesbian consultant, as well as concerning presentation of my consultancy methods in ways that demonstrated their added value to organisations. I experienced these issues in relationships with my colleagues and in order to address them took account of the values enacted within the project as well as within our organisation and policy environments. At different moments of the project I experienced competition, rivalry, envy and anger, and observed this in some of the other participants.

As a personal journey, writing this case study has provided me with opportunities for dialogue that introduced an element of healing to my inquiry. In her feedback on this chapter F confirmed that while we had different perceptions of some of the dynamics between us during our work on the project we had shared passionate involvement in the project work and had been able to engage in dialogue from our different perspectives.

However I do not wish to convey a sense of closure or too tidy resolution. This would imply a stasis that would belie the dynamic elements in my account. In our process of working together, participants created a dance in which we affirmed or withheld affirmation in our roles as partners and project consultants, and experienced moments of insight and moments of confusion as we struggled to make meaning together. The materiality of the ELP 'product' belies the fluidity of its meaning, as each partner stated that they would use it in their own contexts, in their own way, for their own purposes.

The 'country of ELP' which we created was an environment in which good enough relationships were sustained to enable partners to negotiate power relationships, to move between shared passion for the work and care for each other, in order to carry out the tasks of the project.

My inquiry during and after my consultancy provided me with a non-judgmental space from which to consider how I was enacting my role in relation to others on the project, similar to the reflective space that I tried to provide for participants in the project. Within these spaces my colleagues and I used high level relational skills; skills which are undervalued and largely invisible in organisations, and almost inevitably taken for granted when used by women (Fletcher 1998). In this sense writing this case study was an act of 'mainstreaming'; revealing hidden relational skills and activities needed to sustain a gender-mainstreaming project.

Writing this case study enabled me to conceptualise further the process I led as methodology consultant to ELP. It has also enabled me to clarify some of the tensions and conflicts I experienced in reconciling collaborative approaches and accreditation of individual leadership. I have arrived at a new sense of clarity about the methods I used and, like the partners in ELP, an ability to describe and see which of them I may continue to use in my consultancy in different contexts in the future.
