

PRELUDE

WHAT I AM SEEKING TO DO IN THIS THESIS

My embodied practice of Ubuntu

It is my Ubuntu way of being that is of greatest significance in this thesis. I know about my Ubuntu way of being through the increasing awareness gained through my reflective practice. I am bringing that way of being into the academy as a living standard of judgement that is highly original in terms of what counts as knowledge in the academy.

What is Ubuntu? There are many descriptions of Ubuntu. Some see it as ‘African group solidarity’ (Rwelamila et al., 1999). Most others extract from the embodied notions of solidarity in the Ubuntu way of being and extrapolate it more generally. I like to think of Ubuntu as a clear manifestation of African cosmology. It is popularly thought of as an approach to being in which people recognize their interconnection and interdependency. This is reflected in the phrase “I am because we are”. However Ubuntu goes beyond that. Founded on centuries of a tradition that traces its roots back to ancient Egypt,

'African humanism' is another recurrent theme in discussion of the past quarter-century that has attempted to identify values and life-practices indigenous to African peoples which distinguish them, in non-trivial ways, from peoples of European descent. In the words of Buthelezi (1984:2): 'Long before Europeans settled in South Africa little more than three centuries ago, indigenous African peoples had well-developed philosophical views about the worth of human beings and about desirable community relationships. A spirit of humanism-called ubuntu (humanness) in the Zulu language and botho in the Sotho language-shaped the thoughts and daily lives of our peoples. Humanism and communal traditions together encouraged harmonious social relations.' (Outlaw, 2003. p154)

Humanism as reflected in Ubuntu is not a replacement for political realism, ubuntu *is* realism. Remaining in ways of being that are conflictual is to remain in a discredited tradition that we should have evolved away from by now. Ubuntu has relevance to challenging such circumstances and many of the deep issues that confront us today too. It has a restorative approach that is deeply pragmatic which has impacted positively in Southern Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee is an example of how, when it is allied with a decolonising focus that draws upon a reclaimed understanding of our historical constitutivity and a decolonised appreciation of self, African cosmology can make a significant contribution to the evolution of transformational human relationships. Ubuntu demonstrates the living power of a reconnection with African cosmology in the practice of people engaged in some areas of critical importance to human macro political and social relationships as well as to their interiority. So even though there was some concern and criticism of amnesty provisions that allowed perpetrators of alleged crimes to go free this was a manifestation of deep realism. (Rigby, 2001. p136) notes:

Tutu was the key articulator of an alternative conception of justice in his efforts to justify the process. In his writings and talks he returned repeatedly to the principles of restorative justice embodied in the concept of Ubuntu. At the heart of this was the basic insight, shared by so many spiritual traditions, of the thread of interdependence that links us all. Hence, to the extent that we treat others as if they were less than fully human, so we dehumanize and impoverish ourselves. From this perspective, then, it is in all our interests to try to restore social harmony once it has been fractured. Therefore, to forgive others and welcome them back into our common human household is not altruistic, it is the highest form of enlightened self-interest, insofar as it affirms the humanity of the other, and hence of ourselves, and thereby helps restore community. (Rigby, 2001. p136)

And in the words of the Archbishop himself:

We have had to balance the requirements of justice, accountability, stability, peace and reconciliation. We could very well have had retributive justice, and had a South Africa lying in ashes—a truly Pyrrhic victory if ever there was one. (Tutu, 1999)

My embrace of Ubuntu (or maybe it embraced me?), a living manifestation of African cosmology, does not mean that I clothe myself in it as if it were a suit of clothes existing outside of myself that I put on and then act in ways that are predetermined by what I am wearing. My practice of Ubuntu is unique to me. It is also original in terms of my own form of life and contains all of the life experiences, the values, and the ambitions that constitute who I am.

The journey to clarity about the importance of my way of being and the knowledge claims that emerge out of it, though not at all linear in reality, can be described thus:

African cosmology → living inquiry → inclusional engagement → values making themselves known and clarified through practice → awareness of contradiction between my espoused values and the values that were emerging in my practice, contradicting the propositional theoretical explanations I held in my head with their living form → my embodied Ubuntu way of being emerging out of my values expressing itself in inclusional form → Through study on my embodied practice embracing the decolonising possibilities that the new types of relationships enabled for me → improving my practice through embracing this Ubuntu way of being → expressing that Ubuntu way of being in my practice of guiltless recognition and societal reidentification → through the intention of these ways of being developing ways of enhancing my educational influence on the learning of others though → a reframed and decolonising practice in relation to Equal opportunity and Diversity and → an active model for working with Bicultural Competence.

Or, to put it another way; my embodied Ubuntu way of being which, emerging out of my values and through the application of those values to my living an inquiring life, has led me to particular inclusional ways of working with others. It has also led to me evolving embodied communicative form for the educational influence that I want my values to be. It is through this way of being, in fact, that the contributions of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition emerged. I trace the approaches of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition firmly within this Ubuntu way of being.

I demonstrate the validity of my methodology and knowledge claims by showing how the narratives I produce are evidence that I have evolved my living practice and how, through this, has emerged my living theory. This living theory is grounded in my values and these form the standards by which I want my inquiry to be evaluated. This is an approach pioneered by Whitehead (1989).

As somebody who has a long history of involvement in 'Black' and African liberation movements, I have a passion for avoiding strategies and mental states that may sound radical but which end up reproducing the existing order. This thesis documents aspects of my seeking alternative strategies of being, practice and theory in critical areas of my life.

Though drawing upon propositional theories and sources of evidence, this is essentially a living theory inquiry in which I have sought to inquire in real time in the real world as I engage in real activity and reflection on developing a practice that went beyond colonised and colonising ways of being and of formulating pedagogical method and practice. It is from the experience of this action and reflection that I ground the knowledge claims that I make. It is as a result of this engaged inquiry that I advance my major knowledge claims.

I seek to describe and evidence in the pages that follow how, through my study of African cosmology, and the evolution and emergence in my practice of my embodied Ubuntu way of being, I have engaged in inclusional relationships that have transformed my propositional understandings and explanations as well as my ability to be an educational influence on myself and others. This transformation emerged through my embodied presencing of my Ubuntu way of being in my life and work. In my work I have developed an approach to my practice that has enabled me to find inclusional ways of actualising, conceptualising and articulating my learning in effective communicative form. This thesis shows how I have come to work with and embody Ubuntu through my inclusional engagement with a decolonising intent seeking to answer the question about how I can improve my practice. The prime areas, emerging out of this Ubuntu way of being are the approaches of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition. These have infused my work, generated and found form in other original contributions. These include a reframed and decolonising practice in relation to equal opportunity and diversity and an active model for working with Bicultural Competence.

I have worked with the notion of and spirit of decolonization. That is how I explained to myself and to others what it was that I was trying to do. However, as I write up, I experience a discomfort in the use of the term and I recognize that it has been there for a while. I realize that it is because it contradicts my value of positive generativity. Let me explain. I have tried to work in all aspects of my inquiring practice with a focus on moving towards rather than moving away; of creating possibilities rather than stopping things happening; of building rather than destroying; of being for something rather than focusing on what it is I am against. The 'de' in 'decolonization' is a negative and contradicts those values and that way of thinking. I find 'societal reidentification', with its strategic focus on what a different type of society might be, a much more affirmative, heliotropic, optimistic and generative approach. Though throughout the thesis I have left in the phrase 'decolonizing' I believe that in the identification of societal reidentification I have moved beyond some of the limitations of decolonization.

I have inquired into how I can improve my practice through seeking to apply African cosmology as a propositional counter to dichotomous, colonising strategies. However, in

inquiring into my practice I have become aware of the ways in which the very question contained values that belonged, in a structural way, to the order that I wished to change. I eventually ended up clear that it was my living practice, encapsulating all of the political, economic and psychological concerns that I had, that was proving to be the biggest contribution to my being the educational influence that I wanted to be. That is, I discovered my deeper values had taken form in an Ubuntu way of being that was being manifest in my practice and was in fact conditioning some of the directions that my thinking was taking. In a way, part of what I have inquired into in this thesis is how I became aware of it through practices like drawing people and watching and reflecting upon videos.

It is through my Ubuntu way of being that I have arrived at knowledge claims, that is, a belief that I know something that I wish to make public. These are principally: the value of an Ubuntu way of being; societal re-identification and guiltless recognition. I know that what I do works for me in my life in ways that other approaches have not. This thesis seeks to bring that Ubuntu way of being, as a dynamic relationship with the conditions that I seek to influence into the Academy as a standard of judgement. I judge this work by the extent to which it has enabled me to improve my emancipatory practice in ways that are valuing of humanity and practically capable of contributing to transformational change. I believe the academy will validate it on the quality and validity of the inquiry methodology.

My Ubuntu way of being has informed the intent and form of the perspectives I have discovered and evolved. For example, I have developed the idea of ‘guiltless recognition’ and I advance this as one of my original standards of judgement. It is a form of expression and connection that is relationally dynamic and communicates a guiltless recognition of the value of the other and their creative and life-affirming expression of themselves in the world as we engage in ways of living and working together that are mutually decolonising and which move us towards new personal and collective identities. In arriving at this practice and these understandings I have evolved a practice that is making an impact on my own learning, on the learning of others, White and Black and social formations.

This thesis is seeking to bring Ubuntu as a living standard of judgment in the Academy and has to meet certain requirements of the Academy in the form of the writing. These issues will now be addressed.

Writing for the Academy

This thesis is a search for theory as much as an account of action. It is theory of a kind that Argyris describes as ‘actionable knowledge’.

In sum, the commitment to the development of actionable knowledge, in the service of one’s core values and feelings, with the intention to help human beings and organizations to act more effectively in the ‘real world’, and with the ultimate concern for justice, has helped to make life full of learning and fun. (Argyris, 2003, pp 1178-1192)

In submitting this thesis for academic validation and accreditation I want it to contribute to and extend a recognised body of knowledge. It has to be validated and accredited and in order to do so it must meet certain criteria. These criteria are supplemented by my own and include the usability in action of the accounts, narratives and theoretical contributions that this work seeks to make.

Let me talk about validation firstly. I believe that this work, if it is to be successful and not just a means to gain an academic qualification, needs to meet standards of judgement that may go beyond those of the Academy. For example, I want it primarily to be experienced as of being real value to myself. I believe that I have carried out an enquiry over a period of time that has helped me live out my values more effectively than before and improve my practice significantly. It has been systematic in that it has been disciplined and sustained over years. Through carrying out this systematic inquiry I have met my second criteria of validity. That is that it is experienced as being of value to those whose learning I seek to be an educative and decolonizing influence on. I believe that in meeting these two criteria of validity, my own and those of people whose learning I wish to be an educative decolonizing influence on, I have positioned myself to meet criteria of validity that meet the requirements of the academy.

Whitehead and McNiff outline the “requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy” (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) . I reproduce the first four of the six requirements.

Thesis

1. The thesis must address a clearly defined subject or field and must form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of that subject or field.
2. The thesis must consist of the candidate’s own account of his/her own research and must show clearly the respects in which this work advances study of the subject.
3. The thesis must show evidence of originality and independent critical power, through the discovery of new facts or methods, or through the development and application of new critical insights.
4. The thesis in all or in part should contain material that, in the opinion of the examiners, is worthy of publication

I continue by addressing these in more detail.

How does this thesis address a clearly defined subject or field and form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of that subject or field?

I believe that this thesis addresses the field of human endeavour that seeks to find ways of sustaining our existence on this planet. The subject is not an abstract academic area but is myself in action or motion (can action ever be static?) dialectically interconnected with others. I am the subject of my inquiry. The field that I have chosen to locate this work in is action research. Specifically notions of living theory as advanced by Jack Whitehead, Jean McNiff and others. I am claiming that this work makes a distinct contribution to knowledge in this field. It does so by being my own account of my inquiry and, among other things –

- Including a decolonising perspective within its scope that embraces and critiques post colonialism as explanatory and descriptive of our present situation. I believe that this work makes an original contribution to the study of social change vis-à-vis people of African origin
- Seeking to position African cosmology and its present manifestations such as Ubuntu as a contribution to extending what is regarded as valid knowledge in the academy. In embracing African cosmology and embracing aspects of thinking by Europeans and others that carry within them the same or similar insights about the nature of humanity's place in the world (e.g. Inclusional, Participatory world views, etc.)
- Being an account of a Black male in the United Kingdom who contradicts many of the stereotypes and limitations that Black males are subjected to. This has been achieved through processes of developing a practice, through inquiry, that seeks to make a contribution to the wider body of knowledge about what is socially possible.
- It is personally emancipatory. It seeks to offer thoughts on decolonising organisations and society and integrates that with personal decolonisation and emergence.
- Bringing connections between liberational, decolonising African strategies and the epistemological, methodological and social concerns of Action Research and post modernist work that has advanced the need for an end to meta-narratives generally and in particular that which sought to, or inadvertently succeeded in, perpetuating White western domination and colonisation. My contributions of *guiltless recognition* and *societal reidentification* are manifestations of this and reflect the transformatory nature of the knowledge claims that I make.
- Including issues to do with politics, economics and power as inseparable from a study of self.

How is this thesis an account of my own research and how does it show clearly the respects in which this work advances study of the subject?

This thesis is an account of my own research in that it engages the reader in narrative journeys in which I demonstrate how I have evolved my own living theory through engaging in action designed to answer questions about how I can improve my own decolonising and re-identifying practice, primarily in three areas; myself as a father, myself as an educational activist and myself as a consultant.

I believe that it shows how I have 'advanced' the study of my interconnected, relational dynamic self from an espoused approach that was about disconnection and seeking to

make change by being an outsider infused with a kind of righteous anger to one in which I work with and embody an inclusional perspective in which I am both insider and outsider. Through the quality of the engagements that I have subsequently and consequently had with others, and the ways in which I have noticed that engagement, I have improved my ability to be a decolonising and re-identifying influence on the education of myself, other individuals and social formations. I demonstrate what Winter (Winter, 1996) calls “theory and practice transformation / internalised” in that I trace how both have been transformed as part of the process of responding to my inquiry question.

It also shows that I have advanced study of action research by bringing in standards of judgement to do with my living embodied practice of Ubuntu into the subject.

How does this thesis show evidence of originality and independent critical power, through the discovery of new facts or methods, or through the development and application of new critical insights?

I believe that I show originality of mind and independent critical power as I outline the thinking and revised practise that emerges as a result of the processes through which my embodied and implicit knowledge has made itself known to me and to others. The connections that I make between African cosmology, Ubuntu and inclusionality and the application of these to embodied approaches to transformational change is both an original contribution and one demonstration of independent critical power. The application of these critical insights to my practice, and the subsequent reflections and explanations for my actions that have emerged from this, constitute my living theory.

How does this thesis in all or in part contain material that, in the opinion of the examiners, is worthy of publication?

I believe that this thesis contains matter that is worthy of publication as a PhD thesis because I believe it embodies certain values in action that can offer information and inspiration to those who seek transformational change in iniquitous social relationships. I believe this to be a hopeful study that offers possibilities of a more positive future. The theorising that I have done on African cosmology, Ubuntu and Inclusionality and personal and professional practice is, I believe, of value to those Black and other peoples who want to engage in decolonising their own practice and that of others. I am advancing the relationally dynamic notion of ‘guiltless recognition’ as one of my original living standards of judgement. This understanding has evolved through my practice and I strive to embody it as I engage in valuing the ‘other’ and their life-affirming and creative engagement and expression of themselves in the world.

The epistemological contributions from within the Black community which this thesis reflects are critical to evolving a more inclusive scope of the academy. Coming from within the spirit of Ubuntu they are contributions to transformation rather than oppositional critiques of the standards of the academy.

Validity

I believe that as we struggle with issues of colonised legacies, traumatised identities, social exclusion, inter-communal and international suspicion and conflict, often founded upon unjust power relationships, that the practical approaches I have embraced and or evolved

are worthy of wider consideration. Philosophically and conceptually I think that the consideration that I have given to inclusional ways of engaging in decolonising approaches in the academy and elsewhere is also of value. I am particularly thinking about the foregrounding of cosmological and epistemological, approaches and traditions that have not traditionally been included or considered valid by the academy.

Also worthy of publication is the approach of working with contradiction that goes beyond dialectical framings and works with contradiction as non-contradicting in an inclusional way. This initially emerged from my understanding of African cosmology and increased its communicative power with a Western readership through the embracing of ideas that Alan Rayner describes as 'inclusional'.

Rayner's explanation of 'inclusionality'

“... expresses the idea that *space*, far from passively surrounding and isolating discrete, massy objects, is a vital, dynamic inclusion within, around and permeating natural form across all scales of organization, allowing diverse possibilities for movement and communication.” (Rayner, 2004)

This is critical because it speaks to a notion of the universe as made up of elements that are all interconnected and involved in a dynamic relationship that is inclusive of what would be conventionally understood as opposite or different and therefore disconnected. Rayner is arguing that not only are they interconnected but that their connection is more organic and in fact they also include each other. This dynamic and relational inclusion of the opposite or the different is what I discovered, through the inclusional urge of African cosmology, as a way of increasing my understanding and relationship with people who I had placed as different to me. An example of this is found in a description in the Consultant section of the way that I found my students understanding and seeing me. I also show how I could not stop myself engaging with them in deeper ways than I had intended to. First I did it despite my conscious intention and then, as I experienced new possibilities as a result, I did it more consciously and again increased my understanding, connection and ability to affirm and influence through the recognition of the inclusional relationship that exists independently of our will or awareness. The consequent increased awareness of the 'other' helped me to see through perceptual barriers and recognise that they have aspirations for themselves and for humanity that they contradict from ignorance, greed and or fear. I describe how through my entering into particular relationships with them, characterised by 'guiltless recognition', the fear is reduced, their sense of their value is increased and their preparedness to engage with issues that colonise and disadvantage others is increased as they themselves connect with latent aspirations that I, through our dynamic relationship, assist them to reconnect with and experience optimism as to their ability to contribute towards the creation of that decolonising state.

A concern with validity has been an ongoing characteristic of my inquiry largely because I need my claims to knowledge to be sufficiently valid as to produce the learning and outcomes that I am seeking. I draw upon Habermas' notion of social validity to enhance understanding on the part of the reader of the validity of this work. The communicative form of this thesis has been enhanced by reference to Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity.

- Uttering something understandably;

- Giving (the hearer) something to understand;
- Making himself thereby understandable. And
- Coming to an understanding with another person. (Habermas, 1976, pp. 2-3)

I believe that I have met these through having written/ presented my work in ways that are inviting of shared understanding. By this I mean that what I am trying to say is clear, comprehensible and communicates something that encourages shared understanding (at the same time as encouraging individual meaning and interpretation). I have presented to the reader content in the form of narrative, analysis, imagery, data and reflection “something to understand”. In this sense it is a disciplined inquiry. My aesthetic form has a self-regulating discipline. In the process of creating I am disciplined by seeking to create something that can communicate. That is, the discipline of the inquiry is to be found in the effectiveness of its aesthetic communicative form.

I take as one example of evidence of this ability to communicate my meanings clearly this response from Whitehead in which he demonstrates an understanding both of my written meanings and of my embodied communication:

Eden’s Ubuntu way of being includes a gaze of guiltless recognition. This recognises injustice, pain and colonialism. It recognises these with a flow of hope in a recognition of the humanity of those that have experienced injustice, pain and colonialism. The recognition is hopeful in the sense that it does not communicate a guilt of the other because the other is living within a socio-historical and socio-cultural context that has emerged from a history of colonialism. It is hopeful in that Eden’s Ubuntu way of being, flows with a life-affirming energy and a love of his own humanity that embraces the energy and love of the other, without violating those who may not wish to accept the invitation in the embrace. (Whitehead, J. 2007. E-mail correspondence)

In this extract Whitehead delineates ideas that are critical to much of what I hope to communicate in this thesis and beyond.

As this is a practice-based study, I believe it is also appropriate to say that in my practice I have been engaged in exploring ways of improving my practice largely through the dialectical, inclusional, communicative form of my practice not just as I report it. So my claim for social validity lies as much in the process of my inquiry as it does in the communicative form of this document. This provides evidence of my educational influence on my learning, on that of other individuals and on social formations as well as evidence of the evolution of my living standards of judgement emerging through my relationally dynamic inquiry.

I also draw from Lincoln and Guba (1985) as they define validity as trustworthiness. I have tried to communicate in ways that are transparently honest and sincere, in ways that are appropriate to my knowledge claims. My hope is that you, the reader, trust what you read. I have included third party voices as well as my own to assist in this.

In addition I am advancing the proposition that through inquiring into how I can increase my decolonising influence on the education of myself, individuals and social formations I have discovered and evolved theory and practice that has made a contribution to being that influence. I include in this notions of: -

- Societal reidentification
- Guiltless recognition
- An understanding of ontological, cosmological, political, epistemological and methodological inseparability
- An embodied, dynamic, decolonising inclusional and relational transformational, living educational practice that is a living form of expression of a Ubuntu way of being.

Both Habermas (1976) and Winter (Winter, 1996) speak of the need to contextualise inquiry within normative influences. I locate this thesis within political, economic and social influences that seek to order thinking around issues to do with people of African origin in reformist strategies that help reinforce rather than decolonise the existing power and cultural relationships. I also locate it within colonial notions of the self-identity of people of African origin as I seek to live alternatives that help evolve generative narratives of African humanity and achievement in ways that can be a wider educational influence on other people of African origin and on humanity generally. It also exists within a dominant epistemological discourse in which African people's knowledge and ways of knowing have been denied or devalued. The tradition of propositional, 'objectivity', 'science'-based approaches to inquiry is another normative influence that this work exists in relation to.

Lather, with her "four postmodernist kinds of validity" advances the notion of 'trustworthiness' and suggests a variety of other ways of thinking about validity which go beyond the positivist approach. She highlights "Ironic validity," "paralogical validity," "rhizomatic validity," and "embodied validity". Ironic validity points to the fact that the written word is never the same as the phenomenon that it describes or refers to. The validity of an inquiry comes not so much from the rigour of the text, as if the text *was* the research, but the extent to which it has truth-value, that is, is it trustworthy? Another determinant of validity that I think is particularly relevant to this thesis is that of 'authenticity'. This refers to the extent to which a work is 'fair', leads to enlarging people's "personal construction and improved understanding of the construction of others, stimulates action and empowers action" (Creswell and Miller, 2000). I have tried to communicate in ways that are transparently honest and sincere, in ways that are appropriate to my knowledge claims. My personal construction has been enlarged and I hope to have shown that that of others has also, through the influence that I have been on their learning. Through my inquiry I claim to have a better understanding of the construction of others through decolonising the perceptual and experiential barriers that kept me separate from them. It is precisely because of this increased connection that I hope to have shown how I have stimulated and empowered action. My hope is that you, the reader, find sufficient richness in this text to trust what you read. I have included third party voices as well as my own to assist in this and I have also included doubt and uncertainty. I am not claiming to have discovered something that has objective validity. I am claiming, through the use of "plural structure" and the sharing of "multiple resources" to have presented rich descriptions in my narratives, with the intention of presenting for interpretation, believable and useful explanations and interpretations that describe aspects of the evolution of my decolonising living theory.

Rigour

A work that makes the kinds of claims that this one does has to show that it is rigorous if it is to be believable, trustworthy and of wider value. I think of rigour as being associated with robust determined attempts to arrive at a situated and relational truth that has personal and social value. To achieve this I have engaged in a wide variety of activities with the desire to find a truth that is located within the realms and purposes to which I seek it to have value. In evolving a decolonising personal practice I have reflected upon my constitutivity, explored and challenged my understanding of cosmology, recognised occluded ontological values, fundamentally subverted my espoused epistemological position and subjected my practice to critique from a number of experiences and individuals. It is from this constellation of activity that the rigour of this work is established.

Winter (1989) outlines the following criteria for establishing the rigour of action research:

- reflexive critique, which is the process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases;
- dialectic critique, which is a way of understanding the relationships between the elements that make up various phenomena in our context;
- collaboration, which is intended to mean that everyone's view is taken as a contribution to understanding the situation;
- risking disturbance, which is an understanding of our own taken-for-granted processes and willingness to submit them to critique;
- creating plural structures, which involves developing various accounts and critiques, rather than a single authoritative interpretation;
- theory and practice transformation / internalised, which is seeing theory and practice as two interdependent yet complementary phases of the change process.

Reflexive critique

I have tried in this work to show my perceptual biases and how my awareness of these has grown as I have engaged in this inquiry. Significantly I locate this work in my subjective position as somebody of African origin living in the UK. I place my experiences within historical and political contexts. I show how I entered this study with a belief that African cosmology had propositional value to the wider society. I describe how my desire to work with this perception was undermined by the emergence of embodied knowing that reflected a truth that was more grounded in my living experiencing than in the theories and explanations of others.

Dialectic critique

In this inquiry I am engaged in a critique of my values, aspirations, embodied presence, skills and much more. I am also simultaneously and interconnectedly, engaged in a critique of normative and dominant explanations for my situation. I do so through dialectical and inclusional engagement with others in the process of seeking to find answers to how I can improve my (decolonising) practice. The dialectical process I am engaged in, in which boundaries are permeable and inclusive, results in the disconfirming and clarifying of the explanations I have for my beliefs and actions. I share these with the reader in order to enhance their understanding of the rigour of my inquiry.

Collaboration

I do not believe that my view is the only interpretation or even necessarily correct for others. I have arrived at it through collaboration with others but it is my interpretation. What has been fundamental to the development of my interpretation (and development of my living theory) has been the extent to which I have been influenced by the voices, feelings and experiences of others. Through being prepared to open myself up to the internal worlds of others I have enabled myself to increase the sense in which I recognise the fragility of the boundaries of distinction between us and, in so doing, understood more of what I can do to be the decolonising influence that I seek to be.

Risking disturbance

This inquiry describes a number of fairly fundamental risks that I have taken. I have risked my understanding of who I am and what the meaning and purpose of my life is. I have placed myself in a number of difficult situations and taken risks within them in an attempt to increase my ability to be an effective decolonising educational influence on my own identity in action and on the learning of others.

Creating plural structures

This work draws upon a number of areas of my life and professional practice. Each of these, though interdependent, interconnected and interrelated, has different contextual, political, psychological, personal and social identity. I have provided accounts that reflect these differences. These accounts take different forms of expression and representation to reflect the different places, processes and qualities of engagement that has produced them. These include drawings, photographs, stories, narrative accounts, desk research, reflective journals and the accounts of others engaged with me in action and reflection contribute to the plural structure of this inquiry.

Theory and practice transformation

Both my practice and the explanations that I give of it (my theory) have evolved during the life of this inquiry as a result of it. I have discovered and evolved knowledge and practice through the inclusional dialectic of critical relationships that I have engaged in with others that has enriched and, in some instances, transformed my practice. In this thesis I share some of the processes that I have engaged in that have helped evolve my living theory in each of the significant domains of this work; father, colonised subject, teacher and management consultant. I show how I started at one place and moved to another in order to complete a narrative journey *and* to demonstrate the rigour of the thoughts and practice that have emerged out of it.

This thesis is a contribution from a practitioner researcher in that my practice, located in the identified domains and drawing upon the de-colonising action research contributions to research, seeks to make an original epistemological contribution within the academy. I am aware that action research from a practitioner perspective whilst credible in the eyes of practitioners is not seen as having contributed significantly and credibly to educational theory. As such its ability to influence policy and practice has been limited. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p.157) remark upon this and argue that practitioner researchers have a responsibility for changing this by a) producing “research reports that will stand the test of public critique” and b) specifying their own standards of originality, significance and rigour by which they wish their work to be judged”.

Because I want my work to be influential, a ‘cultural artefact’ (Whitehead, 2006), that can help influence a move towards academic, political and social ways of being that increase

possibility for wider sections of humanity I want to position it as making an original, significant and rigorous contribution to educational theory. In order to do so the work has to be seen as being of the highest standards of quality as already defined by the academy. In order to meet some of my social requirements though it has to also meet an extended set of criteria that are my living standards of judgement. That is, the ontological values that give meaning to my life, that have emerged and been clarified through my practice, are also the epistemological standards of judgement that I wish this work to be assessed by. I feel that this is necessary both to meet my requirements and in order to make the kind of original contribution that can contribute towards a positive inclusionary evolution within the academy and beyond. I am suggesting that we work with an extended and extending understanding of appropriate standards of judgement for evaluating the quality and validity of practice-based research. My contribution centres on decolonising standards that embraces and extends our humanity into new relationships that carry hope for humanity.

I believe that it meets all of the dimensions of quality that are outlined in the recently published criteria that will form the basis of assessment in the UK 2008 Research Assessment exercise. In this Furlong and Oancea (Furlong and Oancea, 2005) critically evaluate and attempt to address the issue of quality in applied and practice-based research. They sought to, amongst other things: -

“... develop an understanding of quality that could assist subsequent development of quality criteria appropriate for different types of applied and practice-based research.” (Furlong and Oancea, 2005, p.4)

They produce at the end of their study a model that attempts to summarise their findings of what standards of judgement of quality in practitioner based research could be. I find it extremely helpful and consider that this work meets all of these criteria, even ‘Marketability and Competitiveness’. ‘Cost-effectiveness’ is the only one I struggle with though I do believe that the insights of my practice could save a lot of money wasted on efforts that are doomed to failure and the fact that the learning takes place in real-time in situ means that it does not require substantial amounts of funding (!). I include their summary model below:

The dimensions and sub-dimensions of applied and practice-based research quality proposed here can be summarised as follows:

		Dimensions of quality			
		<i>Epistemic: methodological and theoretical robustness</i>	<i>Technological</i>	<i>Capacity development and value for people</i>	<i>Economic</i>
Quality sub-dimensions	Trustworthiness		Purposivity	Plausibility	Marketability and competitiveness
	Builds on what is known +contribution to knowledge		Salience/ timeliness	Partnership, collaboration and engagement	Cost-effectiveness
	Explicitness		Specificity and accessibility	Reflexivity, deliberation and criticism	Auditability
	Propriety		Concern for enabling impact	Receptiveness	Feasibility
	Paradigm-dependent criteria		Flexibility and operationalisability	Transformation and personal growth	Originality
		<i>Scientific robustness</i>	<i>Social & economic robustness</i>		

(Furlong and Oancea, 2005b, p. 15)

In this work I wish to represent an understanding that works of this kind can reflect and contribute to action that positively impacts and increases justice and fairness in the world and at the same time (almost) necessarily be of the highest standards of academic quality as they help extend and redefine what these may be. I think that this is important because for this work to be successful it has to be of recognised quality and practical and conceptual value. Reason (Reason, 2005) quotes Argyris' view that "learning occurs when understanding, insight and explanation are connected with action" (Argyris, 2003). He also argues that action research has to be about much more than just 'what works' and cautions against a purely outcomes based approach to action research.

What I am cautioning against here is view of quality in action research simply on the basis of "Does it work?" Yes, action research addresses practical issues, but if the 'action' in 'action research' tempts us to become hegemonically agentic—and there will always be a temptation for this to be so, particularly when we are bidding for funding and attempting to respond to the urgently experienced problems of managers and politicians—our vision will be narrowed and the effect will be suboptimal or dysfunctional. (Reason, 2005, pp. 15-16)

One of the key bits of learning for me in writing up this thesis is the importance of the generation of relatable theory that makes an epistemological contribution to the breadth of scope of the academy. This work is not then about offering models of 'what works' it is a contribution to theorising the practice of those who seek to contribute to decolonising transformational change.

I have demonstrated my educational influence on my learning and of that of others and of social formations as I have written this thesis. In this sense the form moves away from linear structure.

I hope this work demonstrates how my originality is intimately connected to my relational way of being that flows from an engagement and understanding of African cosmology and its manifestations in my Ubuntu way of being. What I seek to communicate is the need for new living standards of judgement in the Academy that are inclusive of my understandings as a Black man working within a particular culture and social context. These living standards of judgement have emerged from my experiences and understandings of African history and cosmology in a way that is inclusional of the transformatory values that carry hope for the future of humanity and myself. I seek to show the emergence of the meanings of these values and understandings in the course of my life and learning in a range of social contexts and through the quality of my reflections on the meaning of my life, relationships and productive work as I seek to be a positive influence on my own learning and on the life chances of people of African origin generally. In this process I show the influence of various insights from propositional theories and my dialectical engagement with contradictions and a dialectic of question and answer (– the inclusive ‘call and response’ patterns of African music). With the help of video-footage I seek to show the development and meaning of my decolonising, inclusional way of being with the living standards of practice and judgement that I use to account to myself for my own life and learning and that form my living epistemological standards of judgement in this thesis. This is a holistic engagement in which I seek to make apparent the connections between my ontological, epistemological, methodological, political and scholarly activities.

I trace how I have come to embrace African cosmology and Ubuntu as a living practice and in so doing transformed the way that I work from oppositional and dichotomised to synthesising and relational. By this I am referring to the ways in which the tactics and strategies that I worked with from my radical past were from that colonial order (European world view) epistemologically and strategically. Reflection upon my experiences of seeing conflict in Africa and of working with freedom fighters from Southern Africa have informed a move away from approaches that lead to mutually destructive cycles of reprisal and sought ways of working with the positive values that the ‘other’ holds. I seek to show how the approaches that I use in articulating “Strategies for Success” when working with groups and individuals as a consultant and in educational strategies for children of African origin have evolved as a result of embracing that synthesising holistic perspective and increased my ability to positively influence.

What I am seeking to show is how, through appreciative, relational and inclusional engagement, I have entered into the ‘secret’ stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995) of those I worked with and, by so doing understood them in new ways and, as a consequence, found ways to improve my practice as a decolonising influence. I have tried some things out, failed and then tried something else. I have increasingly found that the quality of the logic that I use is only of value if I am experienced as congruent and present with the ‘other. That I can only gain this congruence by seeking the ‘thou’ in the other, by having the confidence to see them as interconnected with me and understanding their fears and motivations not as mystical, inexplicable and inhuman but as profoundly human and explicable in terms of the contradictions fears, insecurities, hopes, loyalties, notions of ‘identity permissions’ of those I engaged with.

It is by inquiring into this experiential engagement that I have come to understand that through participatory engagement with a life enhancing pro humanity perspective fused and interpenetrated with a decolonising intent suffused with African cosmology/Ubuntu

that it is possible for me to live a rich, full life at the same time as working in ways that make a significant difference to colonising patterns.

Where I am now?

I am at a place where I believe that as a result of the action and reflection that I have engaged in over the last few years I can advance claims to knowledge that are of value and have validity. I have developed my 'living theory' and 'embodied knowledge' (Whitehead 1989) through a struggle to improve my ability to contribute to thought and action that can positively impact on the life chances of people of African origin specifically and, by extension, people generally.

I write at a moment in my existence at which I feel infused with the richness of humanity. I feel a sense of membership and belonging to this society and to the wider world. I feel a psychological sense of peaceful membership of a differentiated oneness. I experience this as embracing and pleasurable. This pleasure is a contrast, coming, as it does after years of searching, avoiding, doubting and many moments of pain and anomie.

My initial intentions for conducting my inquiry included wanting it to assist me to find personal peace. In choosing to 'live my life as inquiry' (Marshall, 1999) I have opened myself to a range of experiences that I have noticed as participant and observer. In refusing to settle for easy answers I have pushed myself and my inquiry into asking questions of myself, my friends, colleagues and partners in inquiry and life that have challenged some of the notions I thought were fundamental to my being and inquiry.

In the Abstract of her PhD Submission J. Scholes-Rhodes writes

I allow generative questioning to take my inquiries into new and unanticipated places, holding open the boundaries of a woven truth to qualities of relational sense-making and learning to listen attentively to the richness and creative possibilities of the responses. ((Scholes-Rhodes, 2002, p. 3))

I am attracted and inspired by the artistry of form of Jacqui's inquiry. I have tried to work with a spirit of spontaneity and creativity conditioned by care and purpose. I have tried to be an honest participating human in these experiences and to be open to the directions I found myself pushed or/and attracted to. I have put my initial research theses to tests of practice, critical dialogue and reflection and I too have travelled in "into new and unanticipated places" as I found my initial thoughts challenged and transformed as well as confirmed. In this state of reflexivity, I have evolved ways of thinking and being that enable me to feel and experience my presence in the world with greater congruence. I feel blessed and, as I invite you to share my journey, I hope that you share some of my sense of joyful awe.

My initial motivation for conducting this inquiry was to do with my being a Black man of African origin experiencing the various forms of oppression that impact upon African people. I wanted to find strategies for impacting our oppression that actually worked. This reflects concerns and commitments to do with placing 'my' inquiry within the context of the inquiry of a group of which I am part to find liberating strategies. This is reflected in my concern that my actions are strategic. I am seeking to embody ontological values in which my 'I' exists in a dynamic, co-creative interrelationship with other people of African

origin and with other humans (and non-humans) generally. My concern that my actions are strategic also reflects a critical perspective, born out of years of involvement in Black political movements, which challenges the reasoning and efficacy of many of the strategies that we have adopted and developed in the past.

I have learned experientially how the experience of racism can lead to self-imposed, self-perpetuating mental ghettos that, paradoxically, reinforce and extend the impact of the racism as it constricts the sense of possibility of identity. Rediscovery and reclamation of an occluded past; celebration of my identities of Africaness, colour and ethnicity; coming together with others for strength, reaffirmation and inspiration with other people of African origin is critical to my thriving in this world. It also does not require me to exclude other parts of my connectivity with the wider humanity and with the world as a whole.

There may be a paradox in the fact that in seeking to place on the map of human perceptions the enormous contributions to world civilisation of people of African origin, I have become engaged in the humanity of the not African 'other', at a deeper level; I have seen myself in 'them' in ways that transcend boundaries of colour and oppressions. I have formed relationships with people from all around the world, from different cultures, ethnic groups, nationalities, experiences, religions, gender, appearance, etc. The more I have become engaged with my own humanity the more I have felt able to embrace the humanity and community of others.

I have worked all over the UK and Western Europe, I have worked in other countries in different continents; Ecuador, Columbia, Santo Domingo, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Senegal, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and engaged in ...

“...seeking to bring attention into more moments of being and action; to reflect on my purposes, assumptions and patterns; to act awarely and choicefully; to encourage mutuality in relationship where appropriate; and to find ways to assess effects in the worlds in which I participate. (Marshall, 2004, p 307)

Through this process I have had many of my thoughts challenged. I have engaged in relationships with individuals and groups, developed friendships, eaten at tables with people from more than 20 different countries and felt myself welcomed and embraced for who I am. As I articulate some of the challenges I seek to pose to the existing order I have found people either in agreement or in kind, wise and (otherwise) disagreement. Through it all, I have been left with a sense of membership and belonging that so challenged and subverted the perspectives (of 'outsideness' or 'otherness') that I have consciously and subconsciously carried for years. There is a sense in which the colonised dimensions of 'me' found liberatory and transformatory experiences from the quality of being and inquiry I brought into my dialectical, existential and inclusional engagement with others.

What do I mean by 'decolonising'?

For me decolonising means a movement from a psychological state of subservience to White power, a belief (not always conscious) in White superiority, negative attitudes towards other Black people, ontological and epistemological alienation from self; restricted visions of what one is and what is possible to be and become; living along conceptual paths laid down by the dominant stereotypes of people of African origin reinforced through the dominant discourse of western societies. It means an embrace of self and of others like self, other Black people, as we individually and (therefore) collectively transform our

psychology, relationships, economic and political positions. One of the first steps to decolonisation is awareness of its existence and the impact it has on one's life. This is not easy as the dominant discourse is both incredibly powerful and simultaneously largely invisible in its colonising effect. As I describe my engagement with African history and cosmology I describe my amazement at the extent to which these other truths I was discovering contradicted those that I had held closely, internalised and advocated. As my awareness increased so did my sense of self and I began to see possibilities for living a productive life and being the kind of person that I had not allowed myself to hold (as a probability) in an embodied sense previously. My work increasing my connection with other Black people is decolonising as is:

- My work in the Sankofa Learning centre – creating and evolving different educational paths for Black children
- My work with African cosmology and history
- My approaches to being a father to my son
- My work with managers and leaders of organisations
- My empowering work with people of African origin and of other ethnic groups in this country
- My attempts to influence the educational approaches of colleagues working in development organisations

So I have been working on my own internalised colonised self and on evolving practice that is effectively able to offer discontinuous approaches to collective decolonisation. I think that the internal and external dimensions are mutually inclusive.

I have also come to the conclusion that the ability to be an effective decolonising influence on the learning of others and of social formations is founded upon effective and continuous decolonising personal practice.

What I do not like about the term 'decolonisation' is that the 'de' centres on the removal of something and the 'colonisation' centres on the negative state and neither speak of or point to alternatives. They are about what we want to move away from; what we do not want. The term is not appreciative and therefore I am concerned about the extent to which this enables it to be generative of truly transformational other states. I have started, with the notion of 'societal reidentification', to point to the need to evolve different notions and experiences of society characterised by some of the essential features of a state free of colonial practice.

I do not think that it is yet possible to describe the kind of state which is decolonised because so long and deep has been the history of colonisation that the new state would need to be actively engaged in supporting action that related to the present state and consciously took action to remove its destructive, iniquitous and divisive manifestations. What I am trying to say is that it would probably exist in reference to the state it was trying to evolve something better than for some time. So when I speak of decolonisation I am speaking of a process at the same time that the focus on colonisation (in the phrase 'decolonisation') can help reinscribe it.

The narratives in this thesis show how I have come to an understanding that it is important to evolve and tell stories and co-evolve visions of what is possible if we human beings are to stop our exploitation of each other. My inquiry has revealed to me that my embodied,

dynamic, relational and inclusional practice is generative of spaces (physical and psychological) in which people from different backgrounds feel able to explore the potential of other visions that lie latent within them. As I work with them they often come to identify the contradiction between the descriptions that they have for themselves, their organisations and their country and some of the values that they hold. I have begun to think about the importance of people having descriptions of who they are that fit with the values they hold more congruently. In order to do so they need to believe that it is possible for the values they hold to be realisable and are more than adolescent dreams that they have had to grow up and out of. So I help people reconsider their identity.

What do I mean by ‘societal reidentification’?

The identity that you have or give to yourself permits you to see certain things and obscure others; to believe in some things and deny others in ways that are not always logical or supported by empirical evidence. One of the thoughts that I hold more strongly as a result of this study is the importance of influencing on the *identity* of this society if it is to be effectively decolonising of itself. This does suggest a need to influence the paradigms that prevail and, if this is the case, it is also about influencing the epistemological identity of the academy in ways that give greater value to knowledge for decolonisation and reidentification of national and international identities as manifest in social, economic and political national and foreign policy. Some of what I claim as the originality and significance of this thesis emerges through the struggle to find appropriate language to express a way of being that can be a generative influence on transformational processes.

When I think of societal reidentification I am thinking of an affirmative flow towards explanations and descriptions of society whose identity is characterised by the best of what is in our present society embodied in a commitment to justice, and equality. This would be an identity in which the impact of colonising policies and practices in the past would be recognised and action taken to restore balance to the allocation of justice, wealth, education and social and personal health. The Ubuntu concept of pragmatic restorative justice is built in to societal reidentification.

Societal reidentification moves beyond decolonisation and, rather than focussing on what is not wanted, focusses on what is wanted. Societal reidentification is a living concept that finds creative energy from the sharing of dreams, visions and stories of the best of what could be.

Allied to societal reidentification is ‘personal reidentification’. For some people this is about evolving identities for themselves that have moved past their colonised identities and enabled action and aspiration to come together in identities, which flourish, in and through the creation of new social identities. For other groups of people this is a concept that engages them in recognising those values of theirs that celebrate values of humanity and find ways of bringing this identity more fully into their descriptions of themselves, into their lives generally and into the social and political actions needed to ‘re-identify’ our society.

Societal reidentification is consciously and strategically appreciative in that it is about moving away from patterns of operation which produce guilt, fear and the concomitant

resistance, avoidance and lack of ownership that results in traditional oppositional or impositional strategies.

What do I mean by ‘guiltless recognition’?

This is an approach, again emerging from my ubuntu way of being that builds strategy and practice on the identification of strengths and seeks to build upon these. Rather than seeking to ascribe blame, culpability or ‘guilt’ it seeks to affirm the best of what is and seeks inclusional paths to engagement in which what is at issue is not responsibility for what is wrong, or unjust, but on recognition of injustice and on what needs to happen to create something better. It is founded on a belief in the interconnections between humanity and the possibility of evolving ways of being that can celebrate and make that a more explicit and accurate description of our identity.

With guiltless recognition we are removing the guilt that prevents recognition. This is because we do acknowledge that some people’s actions have a negative influence upon others and we both want them to be aware of that fact *and* feel sufficiently valued and empowered to take action.

I am also meaning with guiltless recognition a personal approach in which people do not feel guilty about acknowledging their own strengths, contributions and values and that of the ‘other