SECTION FIVE

MY EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY INTO THE SANKOFA LEARNING CENTRE

(CD-S5Clip 1.mov)

The video clip above marks a defining moment for me in the life of the Sankofa Learning Centre. As I questioned the value of what I had been engaged in over the years I watched this video again. I was struck by a sense of achievement. Here, in living form, embodied by others was evidence of the positive influence that the centre had been. The young man speaking is embraced in the gaze of the adults and I see an appreciative and affirmative quality in that gaze. He has come to show his support at this meeting not because he feels obligated but because he desires to be part of a meeting that could determine the future of the centre. I see people of all different ages and genders, and celebrate this intergenerational connection, quality and warmth of interaction evidenced here. I see a welcoming enjoyment in his presence and feel that this evidences a living Ubuntu together. We are each because of the other. Through watching video clips like this I discover evidence of the educative influence I have been in my role of helping create, maintain and determine the educational direction of the centre.

In this section I outline my research into my practice as I sought to improve it in relation to the context, process and content of the education of children of African origin. I seek to give detail and richness through narrative, picture and video of how I have worked to be an

effective influence on my learning through engagement in action and reflection cycles seeking answers to the question, "how can I improve my practice as an educational influence in ways that transcend colonising and colonised approaches and influence the evolution of individual and societal identity that embodies more fully the values of Ubuntu?"

I show how I came to reconnect with an endogenous pedagogic approach that more congruently reflected my Ubuntu way of being. I explain how this is significant in terms of moving away from practices that reproduce existing impositionally hierarchical approaches. I trace these parenting and educational approaches to slavery and the need to protect the child, particularly the male child, from any expression that could lead to their death at the hands of the slave master and come to understand this embodied Ubuntu as a living standard by which we can judge our attempts to assist our children to have the lives they deserve.

My inquiry includes a focus on my influence on my own learning by, for instance sharing my action and reflection on my role as a teacher/learning partner with young people and the ways in which I have developed a practice that is much closer to the values I wish to live by. The values that have emerged through and in my practice are the living standards of judgement of my inquiry.

I show how I moved from holding particular propositional framings about what 'the problem' is and how it could be 'solved' that were grounded in orthodoxies of left and right. The journey I describe seeks to show how I have moved towards understandings that embody my sense of living African cosmology, in inclusional and relational ways that are more capable of being the decolonising influence that I have sought.

I begin by giving information about the background to my inquiring in this field.

What was my concern?
I was concerned that Black children were failing in the education system and that this was part of the pattern of factors that were having such a negative impact upon the quality of life for people of African origin in this country.

I was also concerned to find an approach to education that could help my son succeed in life and because I felt that it was important for people of African origin to have ownership of institutions property and other spaces in this society so that we could provide for those who had been excluded from different parts of the society. I wanted to contribute to building independent institutions /Black 'spaces' that we owned and controlled that could help us self determine and could provide services and even jobs for the African origin community in this country.

What were the reasons for my concern?
The statistics about the education of Black children are fairly well documented. Even though there is much contestation about the extent to which there are improvements, hardly anybody disputes the negative experience that a majority of pupils of African origin have in the British educational system. I draw upon the work of David Gilborn and his colleagues for some of the most comprehensive and, to my mind, informed work in this area (Gilborn, 2000, Gilborn, 1996). In 2005 Bernard Coard published a longitudinal

review of the situation in relation to Black children in education in the UK. 30 years after his groundbreaking book 'How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System' (Coard, 1971).

> The figures back it up. Over the past 30 years, standards across schools have undoubtedly got better, but achievement among Black children has remained comparatively low. In 2002, 30% of Black Caribbean children got five A* to Cs at GCSE, compared with a national average of 51%. Black boys are more likely to be excluded than any other group.
> The mayor's report concluded that Black schoolboys had been let down by local authorities' and teachers' prejudices for 50 years. Black boys still complained of racism and stereotyping, and their parents said teachers did not want to involve them. (Coard, 2005)

There is a sense in which even this description of the 'failure' is a 'sacred story' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). It comes from within a particular paradigm in which 'success' is measured by the amount of GCSE passes that a pupil gains. Apart from this being a poor measure in terms of wider notions of the purpose of education it is also serves to obscure the deep and wide spread concerns that exist within the African community, particularly the African Caribbean community about the impact that schooling is having upon their children, families and wider lives. These are an underreported set of concerns that have a big impact on the Black community.

Narrative inquiry scholars D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly have constructed a schema that shows how teachers describe their practice in the stories they tell from within what Clandinin and Connelly call "the sacred story" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). The scope and form of these stories of their practice and experience in classrooms is influenced by the dominant school of knowledge about educational practice as articulated and imposed upon them by academics, government officials, researchers, school governing bodies, parents and educational general tradition generally. These stories though are quite different from the realities that the teachers experience and co-construct in the living dynamic of their real world educational context and practice.

My experience led me to believe that just as when teachers describe their experiences and use a "cover story" that fits selected parts of their 'secret stories' into a form that fits into the dominant paradigm of the sacred story, so to do Black parents and the community at large have a tendency to withhold their secret stories from public contestation and consideration. Their views are often given so little credibility that many cease to behave as if their embodied implicit knowledge even exists. I have spoken with many Black parents who are stunned and dispirited by what has happened to their children in the education system. They speak of them having not just changed but, in the words of Bernstein (below) being 'altered':

> It was, I believe, Basil Bernstein, the British sociologist, who first pointed out (1971) that the curriculum is a mind altering device. What we teach, whether in the primary school or in the university, is a means for altering the ways in which students think. Our programs are designed to have such effects and, when they fail to change our students' ways of thinking, we regard ourselves as having failed. It is in this sense that education is an enterprise fully political in nature. The methods we espouse, the way we define knowledge, the work we regard as respectable,

reflect our conceptions of virtue and the courses we teach, in turn, are designed to help students achieve such virtues. (Eisner, 1988)

Appendix 1b Section 4, gives more detail of the context of schools, education and Black pupils.

I believe that failure to dialogue about fundamental issues like the ways in which their educational experience fails to prepare Black children adequately for their lives serves to reproduce the dominant status quo. In seeking to be a decolonising influence I refused to be bound and boundaried by the scope of 'sacred stories' and sought to develop my own explanations for us. Through my inquiring I came to an understanding that the discourse, analysis and initiatives being suggested and implemented by educationalists and policy makers could be beneficially expanded to include the impact of colonialism on the present realities of African origin children. In a sense I am arguing for the possibility of transforming the sacred stories into ones that include authentic narrative descriptions and perspectives from within the Black community. I have come to believe that it is possible to understand, articulate and garner support for an understanding that the situation of African children in the British education system is more than an isolated problem to do with working with a tiny minority of children. Rather, the needs of all children will be better served if we see is as a national issue to do with the evolution of a future identity of a truly post-colonial Britain. My contention is that this dialogue can take place by moving from oppositional mindsets and power positions and engaging relationally with each other. The 'failure' of children of African origin needs to be seen within a context in which there is a failure to recognise, appreciate and meet their needs. It is this failure that results in what Reeves and Chevannes (1983) call the ideological construction of Black underachievement.

> Mainstream psychological and sociological frameworks have participated in what British educational theorists Frank Reeves and Mel Chevannes (1983) call the ideological construction of Black underachievement. American educational research has led in disseminating this discourse, which has been espoused in Canada. In the minimal educational literature about Black children in Canada, most mainstream work still reflects the language of theories of Black cultural and linguistic deprivation, notions of disadvantage and underachievement, of immigrant deviance. In other words, research, for the most part, has perpetuated White supremacist ideological thinking (Lawrence, 1981; Saakana & Pearse, 1986; Yekwai, 1988). (Henry, 1993)

Children, flowers and gardeners

Historical and cultural realities, largely generated by colonialism, have created particular needs in children of African origin that the school system and wider society is presently failing to meet. The fact of these different needs is nicely summed up in this extract from a fable that Tish Crotty uses in the book Doing Practitioner Research Differently.

> *Each garden enclosure had its own gardener working in it. She walked past several before she plucked up enough courage to speak to one. 'Hallo,' said Phoebe and, holding up her plant, continued, 'Do you grow my plant here?'*
> *The gardener looked at it carefully, then said, 'Yes, I believe I do have one of those. Let me look at my notes. Yes, I have, but mine has never flowered, I didn't think it*

*could. It's here, look, in the comer of the garden.' Sure enough, there in the corner
was a plant like Phoebe's, but small and unhappy looking.
'But it needs sun,' said Phoebe, 'and a rich soil with not too much water in
summer, then it would grow flowers. You must move it!'
'Can't do that; everything's decided and laid down by the Director. We just do our
best/the gardener said regretfully, and went back to his work.* (Dadds et al., 2001)

Teachers in schools are often excellent 'gardeners' within the paradigms and parameters
laid down by education 'directors'. It is not their 'fault' that, despite their individual acts of
care and creativity they are unable to cultivate particular types of flowers with the
conceptual tools they have been given that are able to actually flower. We have been
engaged in debate over this for some time and I believe that the need to move away form
strategies that are obviously failing needs another approach. My inquiry has helped me
evolve an inclusional way of working with others that is characterised by guiltless
recognition of the other and of the factors that both cause our plants to wither and those
that would enable them to thrive and flower.

I was also concerned that the problem was being articulated as a "problem with the boys".
By the measures of 'success' in schools that predominate – the number of A levels or
GCSE's that somebody attains. There is a significant gap between the performance of
Black girls (African origin) and Black (African origin) boys, with the girls doing much
better than the boys. However the girls are still 'underperforming' and the focus on boys
detracts from a more systemic failure to meet the needs of pupils of African origin
irrespective of gender. The figures from Birmingham below are reflective of a general
pattern and shows that Black girls underperform compared to White girls.

* Statistics from Birmingham: Ethnic breakdown of pupils getting five or more A*-C at GCSE in 2003 in Birmingham. The figure in brackets is for 2001.		
	Girls (%)	**Boys (%)**
Indian	73(65)	67 (49)
Bangladeshi	58 (50)	43 (27)
White	54 (50)	45 (39)
Pakistani	50 (42)	37 (31)
African Caribbean	44 (34)	28 (17)
(Source: TES, 20 February 2003)		

What did I do about it?
- I taught my son myself. I was his tutor for History and most of his English GCSE exams. He took his GCSE's early and surprised himself by passing.
- In teaching my son and others I became a learner myself. I learned the subject matter and evolved teaching/ learning assistant ways of being that were congruent and facilitative of the ends I wanted from the learning process. I subjected my pedagogy to scrutiny in an effort to improve it and made many significant changes as a result.
- I worked with parents teachers, inspectors and others to help us develop our understanding of the causes of the problem and what could be done about it
- I set up organisations to take action which eventually resulted in the formation of the Sankofa Learning Centre

- I visited the United States and attended a conference on African Centred Education and visited several African Centred schools inquiring into their practice.
- I learned how to use computer equipment and even wrote the text for and designed web-sites. I moved from being a non-technical person to somebody who is very good with computers and software packages. I learned the technology in order to be able to better influence the learning of the children I worked with and social formations.
- I wrote articles and spoke at conferences as part of a strategy of influencing social formations.
- I subjected my thinking to scrutiny and revision as the subject of my Action Inquiring into being a living contradiction.
- I critiqued my leadership practice and made decisions as a result
- I learned about my embodied being and the difference I could make with the young people by the ways I used my physical presence to contradict experiences of intimidation or supplication. I would hug and hold them and not show alienation

I have also evolved a way of thinking about, and acting in the situation that builds upon ontological and epistemological influences from African Cosmology and an embodied practice of Ubuntu. From within this practice I have also been influenced by notions of inclusionality and relationality. I have also drawn upon liberationary and pedagogical influences from people like Friere (Freire, 1970, Freire, 1997), bell hooks (hooks, 1994c), Illich (Illich, 1971) and Reimer (Reimer, 1971). I have not just accepted any of these. Through my search in response to questions of how I can improve my practice I have evolved them into my own embodied living theory. An example of this is how I have found ways of engaging those who I once saw as colonisers (and therefore the 'enemy') with a practice of guiltless recognition and a purpose of societal reidentification. I have found inclusional forms that honour their humanity and aspirations as it engages them in transformatory action.

> This is what you have been doing in your research. At an individual level, you identified a situation which needed improving. You aimed to clarify your understanding around that area—to make your tacit knowledge explicit. You and others working collaboratively have raised your collective tacit knowledge about the values you share to a conscious level. You can offer a reason for your actions. In this way you are able to show your own accountability, how those actions are underpinned by moral commitment —the transformation of practice into praxis. (Lomax et al., 1996, 106)

In appendix 1 Section Four I outline my experience of being educated in this country and of a struggle over the last 40 years of the Black community to reform the education system such that it meets the needs of our children. Much of my tacit knowledge comes from my experience of being schooled in the UK.

Trying to create an alternative

For some of the reasons above, for many years I wanted to create an alternative type of education for children of African origin.

I spent most of my free time between 1992 and 1996 working on creating a 'school'. I worked with a woman who was a deputy head teacher. We both saw the building of a 'Black' school as important. We had very different notions of what this might be, but we were both committed and worked long and hard on the project.

Over the years we evolved the following paragraph to describe our vision:

> This school is a major step towards realising a vision in which Black people, as a whole, are achieving their individual and collective potential. It is about our growth as a community; about us realising and asserting our pride and independence. It is this that makes it more than an educational institution and more than a business. It is our hope for the future.

The project seemed to take forever. We recognized that we did not have enough money to start a school on our own and so we decided to present a compelling business case that we would get banks or other financial bodies to fund. In a short space of time I learned how to use a word processor and spreadsheets to produce business plans. Oveta and I went through department after department of what our small school would have and produced breakdowns of their expenditure over a number of years that took into account factors such as the rate of inflation, the predicted rate of growth, premises hire and a range of other factors. We even detailed the number of test tubes we would need in our third year of existence for example! I still have these incredibly detailed spreadsheets.

We described the reasons for our wanting to create something that was different to current provision (See Appendix 2 Section 4 Why an Independent School). It reflected what we saw as the problem and the kinds of processes we thought would make a difference to them.

Reading documents we produced at the time reveals that in so many ways our thinking still reflected the dominant paradigm and had failed to evolve a pedagogy specific to our needs. We wanted to do everything that a school would do, but better. The chief difference is that it would be Black owned, with high expectations of the pupils who would feel loved in that environment and consequently 'succeed'. (See appendix 2a Section Four: Why new Education Initiatives.)

The lack of what I now consider a sufficiently extra-paradigmatic approach was in part, to do with not wanting to scare people away from the notion of a Black run school. We believed that we had to be reassuring and manage the expectations they had of schools based on their own previous and current experience. I will enlarge upon this by revisiting the document Appendix 3. Section Four: What would make a difference. May 1996.

I think the document it is a rare example of the recognition and exposition of the complexity of factors that negatively impact Black educational achievement. The document systematically attempts to identify what gets in the way and seeks ways to individually assign strategies for addressing them positively.

Reflecting on it from my present understanding I am also critical of it because in trying to show that there is 'research' to support our position, the whole description of 'the problem' is given validity through reference to research carried out *on* the Black community rather than *with* it or *by* it.

- There is nothing there about the 'problem' through the eyes of Black families/children
- The pupils (and their parents) are still clients to be served rather than partners in a mutual endeavour
- Cultural relevance is seen as one of the factors that could make a difference. There is no reference to an engaging in the process of social transformation as part of the process of learning.
- A building is seen as a crucial necessity. It has to look good in order to be valued by parents and children. This places a financial imperative and signifier of success on the project that was not attainable at the time. It also locates 'education' in a building more than in processes of learning.
- In seeking to address the issue of parental involvement in the school it adopts a 'professional' approach in which the 'school' seeks to 'bring them in and keep them engaged. The parents are consumers to be wooed, rather than partners involved in a mutual endeavour designed to transform the lives of parents, pupils, family members teachers, volunteers, communities and institutions.
- It highlights the issue to do with Black male failure in schools and in so doing colludes with the notion that the girls are doing all right. Though they are doing better than Black boys they are still underperforming according to their potential as identified as they enter secondary education.
- These Black males " have to contend with a range of negative stereotypes that result in a self-fulfilling prophecy". A statement like this locates the behaviour of Black boys as purely problematic without identifying the (potentially) positive nature of their refusing to buy into a value system that so blatantly and painfully devalues them in so many ways. What this misses out is that these stereotypes cannot be successfully 'dealt with' without engaging alongside these young men in a process of achievement that might be free from the disciplines of academic conditioning and replete with 'strategies for success'.
- It may also imply that the issues we face can be rectified by the work on one type of institution rather than by social action of a broader nature.

For a variety of reasons my partner in the project eventually had to pull out and so in 1998 I pulled together a group of people to help me create the 'school'. This group had a more explicitly radical perspective. For example we said that the school we would create would be "African Centred". We drew upon African historical references in constructing our vision and were more explicit about notions like spiritual and community development. We called the school, after much debate and consultation, Pyramid Academy. (See Appendix 4 Section Four: New Education Initiatives/Pyramid Academy: Who are we?)

On reflection though we were more explicitly liberational in our espoused ideals, we were still conventionally bureaucratic in our ways of working. For example we tried to "get it all right" first of all and to bureaucratically organise it all in advance. We wanted to get all of our paper work in order. Given our limited amount of time, skills and resources, it threatened to prevent the school ever happening.

Frustrated at our inability to create an educational alternative quickly enough for my son to benefit from it I started working to create something else independent of the group that was based on a different model to that of a school. The model had emerged out of

conversations with Ife's mum who wanted to home educate him. I wanted him to be educated with other children and I did not think that I could provide the time needed to educate him myself and earn a living. So what I came up with was essentially a blend of home-education with African centred philosophy of collective endeavour.

In England, at that time, what constituted a school legally was that it, a) called itself one or b) had a regular teaching timetable. Once you did either of these things you would have to register as a school and become subject to the national rules and regulations for schools, including OfSTED inspection and regulation. Given that we did not want to be 'controlled' in terms of what we could teach then the alternative became crystal clear, once we had thought of it. It just hit me one day "Why call ourselves a school"? Philosophically and politically it would fit much better if we said that each parent was taking responsibility for the home education of their children and coming together with other parents to share resources, time and ideas in the education of their children".

The decision to change the way that we described the learning approach that we wanted was one of the most significant to the coming into being of the Sankofa Learning Centre. It reveals the value of starting off with clarity about what you need and then creating something that meets that, irrespective of labels and previous descriptions of what was needed to provide a good education. Once I had the idea the next stage was how to make it work.

Making the Sankofa Learning Centre a reality
We agreed that Ian Phillips would teach and manage the project for about 75% of the time. My role would be to bring in enough money from my own earnings to subsidise the project until it became self-sustaining. I believed that I could earn enough in the time I was not at the project to bring in enough and still be able to relieve whoever was performing the core role for much of the other 25% of the time.

We needed a name for the project. I was still unhappily toying with various titles that included 'Academy' in them. One day Ian suggested 'Sankofa'. It sounded good enough to me, especially as he explained that it refers to a mythical Akan (West African peoples located in present day Ghana) bird that is depicted walking forwards with its head pointing backwards. The bird holds an object in its mouth that signifies wisdom that it has picked up from the past and which it is using to shine a light into the future. I loved it and we very soon adopted the name, the 'Sankofa Learning Centre'.

We launched the Sankofa Learning centre in August 1998 after less than a years' preparation from conception to actuality. I had learned something huge about taking action to make things happen. Part of my learning from that experience was to do with the fact that by not doing all the 'proper' things, by not working to established values of professionalism, we had managed to create something that was dynamic, effective and different and, most importantly – it existed!

During the first day I reflected in my journal (See Appendix 6. Section Four: My log on first day of Sankofa Learning Centre). I did not have a feeling of success or accomplishment. Rather than being excited I was filled with the knowledge that a huge amount of work lay ahead.

Over the eight years that we have been in existence children, parents, teachers, volunteers have come and gone. We have survived largely through the sacrifices of a few committed individuals. Some of these people have made their contributions at a huge personal cost to themselves. Ian Phillips is one of these. His commitment and genius has been a key factor in keeping the project going.

We have managed to keep going by eschewing the 'normal' methods of organisation. People have contributed what they wanted to and could based on those factors more than position or ability. At some times it had been like a choir in exultant harmony and at other times almost farcically chaotic. At times it has been painful and extremely confusing. There have been moments when I have been lost for what I should do next. Though I am left with a sense of enormous satisfaction as I look back over the years, I am also tens of thousands of pounds in debt as a result. What buoys me up is the knowledge that many children have got educational qualifications that they would not have gained if they had not come to Sankofa. Young children from the age of 12 upwards have taken GCSE's and passed. We are far from perfect but we have clearly evolved a model that has something significant to offer those looking for educational structures and processes that are capable of providing liberating form and processes for the education of our children.

Educational Inquiry: Living, leading, teaching, learning: the Sankofa Learning Centre
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> 'the reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man' (Shaw, 1905, p 238)

In getting Sankofa off the ground we demonstrated that you can achieve the 'unreasonable' without destroying yourself (or others) in the process. I demonstrated to myself something of the influence I could have on my own learning when I stepped outside of particular forms of logic and operated from an endogenous perspective infused with Ubuntu. I have outlined how I came to work with others to set up the Sankofa Learning Centre. I described my own struggles as I experienced myself as a living contradiction and how I sought to transform that contradiction through engaging in doing things in different ways. These ways eventually led to the formation of Sankofa and have subsequently led to a number of other developments in which I have been an influence on my own learning, on the learning of others and on social formations. In this section I will seek to give evidence to this.

I will show my struggle to create, work in and through the Sankofa learning centre the cycles and flows of action → reflection → evolution → action → reflection → evolution that I have engaged in. These are presented as further evidence of my influence on my learning and that of others. It is also presented to share my attempts to living my life as inquiry in order to validate my knowledge claims. I am here following Schön's admonition to work as a reflective practitioner. In seeking answers to questions 'like how can I contribute to the education of children of African origin in ways that are liberational and transformatory' I am consciously discovering and creating my own living theory.

In the Sankofa Learning Centre we evolved an institution that is having an impact upon the consciousnesses and lives of families that has transformed some and given very real hope and changed expectation to others. Children who have been told that they are failures and been expelled from school have come to Sankofa and shifted their perspectives and behaviour and usually gained GCSE results that were beyond their previous expectation as a result.

Children have experienced positive role models, a nurturing environment, stimulating educational experiences, managing their own learning to a greater extent and succeeding where others saw them as failures. It is a significant achievement, albeit on a relatively small scale. Children from Black, working class backgrounds have astounded their peers at school by, at the age of 12 and 13, taking GCSE's and passing them.

I am both happy and frustrated with what we have achieved. There is so much that needs to be done and I believe that if we learn from our experiences and direct our thinking and energies more strategically then we can achieve even more 'unreasonable' goals. The discipline of reflecting and recording this thesis is an integral part of this process.

Reflecting upon my practice, troublingly, I become aware of the fact that the maps, explanations and beliefs that have informed and or been revealed in much of my actions

are not the theories that I would want to explicitly espouse to myself when I describe myself to myself.

As I worked with young people, their parents, teachers and volunteers it became clear to me that I was not as confident in what I believed in as I thought I was. In the face of passionately expressed views I sometimes deferred and decided to "try it out and see if it works" despite having reservations.

I was operating with parents who brought their own understandings about education into the process of educating 'their' children. There was also the reality of the complex weaving of different personalities, belief systems, levels of skill and commitment, child and parent background that was perhaps more complex than identifying the kinds of questions we needed to find answers to and facilitation of our collective explorations of them. The differing perspectives of those who contributed to the centre were both its strength and a serious contradiction. The following story hopefully illustrates this:

> I had a belief that it was important for the children to acquire practical business skills as part of the process of them developing the ability to control their lives and contribute to the economic well being of their community, This was a generally agreed principle. We had unanimous agreement that in order for the children to be able to "make a life" (Gardner, 1993) then they would need business skills. That could increase their chances of economic survival in a racist job.

> I ran what I thought was a really good lesson with the children. I said to this group of 13 mixed age children, "You have the responsibility. You will buy the food; sell the food and manage the cash flow. You will come up with what you do with any profits you make - if you decide you want to make profits". I explained the difference between surplus and profit.

> I took them to Tesco's supermarket, gave them a sum of money and let them buy their stock. I walked around with them pointing out things like "Why buy them one at a time when you can get a pack of 12"? I took them through the process of working if there would be a saving and what that saving would be. They were surprised at how much they could save by thinking like this. I was well pleased with the lessons they were learning as they walked around the supermarket.

> We came back to the learning centre and put the stock away - having done an inventory and working out how much they would sell the items of 'tuck'. I turned on the computers and got into a lesson, I introduced them to some of the basics on using spreadsheets, showing how they could be used to manage the stock. They picked it up really quickly and I felt that I was living and teaching the way I wanted to. This was a holistic lesson. The children were learning a whole set of related skills in a real life project. They also really seemed to be enjoying it.

> I was not in the Learning Centre the next day and when I came back, the day after, 2 angry parents expressing their concerns about the lesson confronted me. "But it was really good I protested. They learned so much. What's the problem?"
> "They bought crap," one said. "It's all sweets and chocolates, crisps and stuff. We should be moving them away from this rubbish food. They should be eating fruits or other healthy things".

I was shocked. There was no concern about the fact that the children had had a really valuable introduction to some business concepts and IT skills and awareness. Their major concern was their children's health. They had a point but I was so disappointed. I would have to take a lot more into consideration when devising lessons in the future. Not all the parents felt that way, but they were not the ones who were in the Learning centre every day and who would have the greater influence on the culture of the centre.

So the lesson was successful from my perspective but not from that of these two parents who were significant to the day-to-day running of the centre. Their reaction evidenced the contradictions and divergent views that we worked with. I asked myself what I needed to do to be a more effective influence on the parents' understanding of what their children needed to learn and could not come up with a good enough answer. It took some years for me to find a satisfactory answer in the need for me to give greater consideration as to what my leadership role was and to embody my leadership in ways that were non- traditional, congruent with my values *and* effective.

Working with emerging realities – discovering success

The African community in this country is strong and has survived incredible onslaughts on its humanity and its existence. At the same time it would be ridiculous to expect it to be able to have gone through the experiences and manifestations of colonial and racist oppression and come out of it skilled, healthy and able to participate in exactly the same way as a White middle class parent might have been able to. The attrition rate of the parents was, I believe and indication of the extent to which so many in the community are living and working close to the edge of their levels of physical and psychological tolerance. Working with children and their families I was reminded of this. The damage the Black community has experienced has a lasting impact upon their/our ability to transform our situation.

We did not set out to get rich or to create a business for its own sake. We set out to create an organisation that could help our community evolve towards greater control and success and Sankofa was part of our contribution to the forward movement of our people. It was one way in which we could, through the process of bringing people together around the education of their children, build organisation, institutions and community to support that.

I am not ashamed at our desire to push ourselves outside of sustainable ways of working in order to help. We hoped and believed that we would find a way of making it work. Anthony Robbins has a statement that goes something like "Its not where you get to, its who you become as a result of the journey you are on". I think for us, and for other parents, they enjoyed being who they were while they were on the journey despite so much not being right. It was clear to me that through engaging in the process of making things better they were transforming themselves and developing skills and insights that they could contribute to other areas of their lives. The response of some of the children to the questions "what success means to me" and "what African history means to me" provides evidence of the educative influence we were having on their learning.

We have been having discussions about what we as a people need our children's success to be and that had inspired the lesson. This morning though I was not feeling inspired. I was feeling that I could not go on much longer, the cost to me was to great to sustain. However, as I listened to contributions like the one below, I was forced to think differently.

The presentations started. Dee's is a good example of their quality:

> "Success means to me, that I have achieved what I wanted out of my life. I am honest, aware, respectful to myself and to others also self-disciplined. I am courageous but cautious, confident but not full of myself and creative but not stupid. Personally, if I can find my natural abilities and make a living out of them, that is a success in itself.
>
> If I have a family with children, I would like them to have known their grandparents, great aunts and uncles, etc. etc. if it is possible. Regardless of what happens between the mother, and me I would like them to have known I still love them and I will try and help them with whatever positive activity they need help.
>
> You cannot achieve success by yourself. E.g. if you get a basketball scholarship for a particular school or team, someone has paid for you to get that get that scholarship. It could be your parents, the team treasury or your council. So, this is just to say that if you achieve success someone has paved the way!

In that short presentation were most of the values we had wanted the children to develop. Moments like these told me that even though we had got a lot wrong, there was something about the quality of interaction that the children received from parents, teachers and pupils which was having a significant impact upon them. These positive moments, were in hindsight both evidence of the good we were doing and a seduction away from examining my leadership practice more rigorously and devising.

On being a leader

As I reflect upon myself as a leader in this period, I can both hold the reasons why we worked to meet the needs of those in crisis as being valid and I still believe that it would have been in the long term interest of the centre if I had said "no" to a few more people and stuck to it and if I had really focussed on clarifying our emergent vision and articulating what it meant for what needed to be done. I am still left with the thought that I may have been too seduced by wanting to help people in crisis and made their issues my responsibility. My intentions may have been admirable, but, by doing so, did I sabotage our ability to build something that could have had a greater influence in the longer term?

Heifetz (1994) differentiates between "Technical change" and "Adaptive change". Technical change involves applying existing skills, knowledge, tools etc, to a situation. His notion of "Adaptive Change" fits closely with ideas of double loop learning and "second order" change in that it requires people to shift their values, habits, expectations and behaviour because the ways of thinking and behaviour for solving technical problems are

not effective in certain evolving, complex situations (such as we experienced in the learning centre).

Heifetz position that the modern leader needs to act in ways that support people's adaptation to the conditions they face in order to survive. S/he assists people to engage in problem solving for themselves. This is very different from the 'visionary hero' model of leadership, which Heifetz argues, is a threat to democracy. People might want simple answers, but these do not deliver what they promise. The adaptive leader recognizes the importance of evolutionary approaches and so seeks to assist the people s/he leads to develop the capacity to so for themselves.

One of the issues that I had to balance was that I had no formal authority. Everybody was equal in the management of Sankofa and influenced on the basis of the degree to which others agreed for them to do so.

> Heifetz suggests four principles for bringing about adaptive change:

1. It is important to recognise just when a problem requires adaptive work through understanding the deeper issues and values at play.
2. Truly adaptive change is not easy and can be experienced as stressful in people being led through it. The leader must keep a balance and not underwhelm or overwhelm people; There is an optimum state in which there is enough stress to energise and enable momentum.
3. Focus is critical. Attention needs to be maintained on the real issue and avoid sidetracking.
4. The people who need to make the change are the ones who need to do the work of change themselves. Not the leader.

As I reflect I wish I had spent more time trying to think through my role and take more consistent action in relation to it. I knew this at the time but was caught up in survival and problem solving modes that I just did not have the energy left over to do it. Heifitz (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002) uses the analogy of the balcony and the dance floor. The leader should be fully engaged with reality as experienced by the dancers. In order to do so s/he has to dance! This gives an embodied experience of the chaos, distress, highs, competing interests of actual lived reality. I think I did do this. I taught, I cleaned, I decorated, I visited parents homes, I experienced nearly bankrupting myself financially, I experienced the distress over my son's own educational achievement. However, the leader also needs to be able to take a view that goes beyond that reality and from the advantage afforded from the balcony identify movements and patterns that people need to be aware of and adapt to. I think I did do that, but failed to take action to influence others sufficiently to help them adapt before they burned out or left through stress. In this sense I failed in my leadership task. Vision without the ability to convert it into successful action is pointless. I think that I did not give my leadership role enough time to work on the adaptive learning of those with who I had an informal leadership position.

How could I have done things differently given the pressures I was under? I tell myself that I should have been more strategic and spent more time involved in the big picture strategic stuff, but I had to earn money. Should I have made sure there was enough money available before we started to make sure that I could play that role? But then we would not have started for years and maybe never started.

It was a complex situation that, in part, reflected the relative lack of finance available to people like us who want to challenge existing ways of doing things by evolving ways that serve our needs better. What I think I should have done is spent more time thinking through my beliefs and values and finding ways of living these more consistently and articulating them more clearly and assertively. Through this embodiment I would have remained closer to the values I hold and that would have directed my actions more consistently. It is easy to see this now but that clarity has only come about through the engagement. If I had stayed outside of it (on the balcony) I would not have had the experiential knowing that I have gained.

Reflections on my pedagogical practice

When I started working with the children in the learning centre my initial approach to education was influenced by people like, Herbert Kohl (Kohl, 1967, Kohl, 1991), Friere (Freire, 1970), Ivan Illich (Illich, 1971), Cabral (Cabral, 1970), Holt (Holt, 1964), Argyris (Argyris, 1971), Bowles and Gintis (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), and movements like the Home School movement. As I engaged in my research I read the works of people more directly concerned with the education of Black children The following are critical references that I draw upon in relation to issues in education and the 'Black' child in this country: (Benskin, 1994) (Epstein, 1993, Elgin, 1993), (Sewell, 1997). (Channer, 1995) (Pearse, 1986), (Dove, 1998), (Wilson, 1992), (Wright, 1992), (Majors, 2001, Callender, 1997), (Shujaa, 1994). The core concepts I wanted to be working with, my espoused theory, were: -

- The teacher/ educator is a partner in the process of learning
- Parents need to be taking control of their children's education
- Children need to have great control over what they learn and how they learn it
- The learning of the children is a shared responsibility amongst all 'partners' – children, adults, parents, teachers & other concerned members of the community working as volunteers.
- Learning is about collective transformation or re-emergence. It is part of the broader social re-emergence of people of African origin. It's about more than gaining GCSE's.
- We are focussed on supporting the development of young people who have skills & competencies in "making a good life" and who are good citizens in the sense that they recognise the need to contribute as well as receive.
- In the process of learning we need to help pupils learn how to learn, to engage in double-loop learning
- We need to move beyond the didactic and include experiential learning activities as an essential component of a learning strategy that enables transformation
- We need to institute processes that work to the difference amongst pupils. e.g. Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993), Learning styles
- Focus on the child you want to emerge (begin with the end in mind) (Covey, 1989)
- Our education needs to draw upon an understanding of Action Learning cycles. We need to engage the children in cycles of action – reflection - action
- Myself as an activist enabler; a builder & facilitator. My role is to assist with a clear vision; provide & model alternative information and perspectives;
- Strategic learning – exams are a means to an end and not all of the content is valuable & so we can help the children to pass them by only focussing on what is good for them to learn for life purposes and what they absolutely need to know to pass the exam. This should make taking exams less of a long dragged out process.
- The learning centre will grow and provide a model for others to learn from.

In practice I found that for many, a 'Black' education was little more than a return to memories of approaches to education that they had experienced in the Caribbean or Africa. To my mind these approaches were colonial impositions, redolent with quasi-Victorian values of discipline, 'respect' and deference to power. Some of the parents were horrified at what they saw as my too casual approach. I thought that what I was doing was working in partnership with the children to facilitate their development. Some parents thought that my role was to tell them what it is that they needed to know. For most there was a

hierarchy of power in which the child is on a lower level than the adult and should do what they are told.

I found my behaviour being influenced by the values articulated by many around me. I ended up trying to impose discipline and focussing on establishing the credibility of the learning centre idea by demonstrating that we could effectively get children through their GCSE's. On a couple of occasions I found myself in direct confrontation with pupils. I too often shouted at them and used put-downs to push them to focus on their work. I too often found myself frustrated, and taking responsibility for the learning of the children upon myself rather than locating it with the parents and children.

I talked of the importance of showing love, but some thought this was done by expressing love through hierarchically imposed discipline. "If you love them you have to punish them and stop them doing things, thinking things that will be of harm to them. They won't like it, but they will thank you for it (the discipline & sanctions) in the future" was a commonly voiced position, particularly in the earlier days of the centre. I tried to explain to individual parents that telling somebody something was not the same as teaching them or as them learning. My voice did not have sufficient influence at this time to make much of an impact on their opinion.

As time went by, and I saw the results of the approaches we were using I became clearer about needing to practice a pedagogy that was as congruent with my own values as possible, whether or not they were understood by others. One incident in particular brought this to a head.

A critical incident

I was in an Art lesson. We had not had fees from many parents for some time. I had paid for the paints that they were using from my own pocket. I was paying the tutor fees for other lessons. I was coming in to work for free at Sankofa whilst I needed to be elsewhere to earn the money needed to keep the present level of activity going. I was having to work evenings and weekends and neglecting my own son who no longer attended the centre.

Apart from a few committed parents others were not living up the duties they had committed to and this was having a negative impact on the workload of the committed few. I resented this, as I had to work really hard to find the money to keep things going. I saw one of the boys mixing colours. I had explained to them before how to mix paints so as to minimise waste and to give them more exciting possibilities with colour. I had said something like "as you mix it up as you need it, you will find that it is never the same colour twice and this is actually good for the feel of the painting". The boy poured paint into a mixing palette and then doused it in water effectively diluting it to a point of uselessness. He walked towards me dripping it all over the carpet. I went crazy. I shouted at him and threatened him physically. He left angry and crying calling me a hypocrite. "You say all this stuff and look how you treat me"!

He was right. I reflected upon what I had done and tried to work out why. I eventually told myself that it was because of the strain that I was under. I realised that this was not the first time that I had done something like this. I was becoming the "shouting discipline man". What had happened to my dreams? Who was I?

I did not teach in the centre for nearly a year after that incident. My contribution over that period was administrative, attending meetings and making financial contributions. Over that year, distance allowed me to reflect upon the experiences that I had had and to reinforce for me the need for patience, caring and relationship building with the children. The following incident might have helped that process.

Discovering my own colonising gaze and its influence on my practice

I went to visit my son in college. I had received disturbing messages from the college about his work. I went in the college without telling him that I was coming. I wandered around the college grounds until I saw a group of Black boys with their hoods on smoking. They should have been in lessons I told myself. I watched them with a certain amount of disgust. They looked like a bunch of criminals skulking around, laughing and looking tough, trying to look bad. "They should put that effort into passing their exams" I thought to myself. For some reason I decided to walk up to them and ask them if they knew where my son was. As I got closer I felt myself experiencing a frisson of fear and I drew my shoulders back determined not to pull away now. I got close enough for them to be able to hear me and opened my mouth to ask the question and then … and then I realised that one of these boys was my son!! All of a sudden they no longer looked scary, they were a bunch of kids doing what too many boys think they have to do, hanging out trying to look tough smoking.

That was a really significant experience for me. I have reflected upon that experience many times. It has fundamentally shifted the way I view Black youth hanging out on streets. They're just kids. I remember the cooperative inquiry I had instigated with Black teachers. One of the key things they had all identified was that the White teachers saw the Black boys as a threat. They imagined into their physicality danger and darkness. They saw aggression from expressive gestures of fun and conviviality. They pushed these boys harder than White boys and when the boys reacted negatively they had the proof that they needed of their aggressive nature and this was punished far more firmly than similar behaviour from White boys. I conducted a series of interviews, or 'strategic conversations' as we called them with Black and White teachers between 1998 -1999. They were designed for us to jointly explore ideas around our practice with a view to deepening understanding and improving our ability to work with the children. These conversations confirmed the frustration that some Black teachers had with the ways that some White teachers viewed Black children, especially the boys. Appendix 2b. Section Four is an indicative extract is of one of these conversations. I had two really good strategic conversations with White inspectors (HMI) who did not want to be named. They confirmed that they too had seen this type of thing and, surprisingly, felt that they had little power to do anything about it!

In the collaborative inquiry with Black teachers we had explored, amongst other things, what it was about the boys, what did they (the White teachers) see when they looked at them that made them react in this way? Most of the teachers I was working with concurred that they (other teachers) saw threat, danger, sexuality and size, even when it was not there. This is supported by a substantial amount of literature. Interestingly enough, they identified that there were Black teachers who thought the same as the White teachers did.

As I reflect upon my experience with the parents and wider Sankofa community I become aware of the extent to which we reproduced these negative explanations of our children. What I had learned was that these 'threatening', 'rebellious' boys were just young males growing up with vulnerabilities, hopes, aspirations and beauty who were reacting to what they saw as attempts to crush something about their way of being that was important to them, They were carrying a level of hurt and disappointment in life that I did not see sufficiently understood or acknowledged by those who worked with them and often amongst those who parented them.

The incident of seeing my son brought home to me the extent to which I too was influenced by the dominant negative stereotypes of Black boys and how far I was moving away from the principles and values I wished to live by. I wondered about the psychological ramifications of losing my focus on what was most important to me in the educational processes of Sankofa. From being my family, friends, younger generation, the foundations of our future society, had I started to see the children as subversive to the educational strategies that I was trying to implement? Was that part of the reason that I had developed resentment and from that an alienation that subverted the realisation of those dreams I held?

I become clear that we were seeing our children through the lens of the dominant paradigm, rather than one grounded in our interests. Too often we in the Black community turn on our own children and their unwillingness to conform to a system that abuses their innocent enthusiasm to grow and actively participate; to be who they are and express that in class. It appears as if we desire to crush their misbehaviour – which we might alternatively understand as rebellion against the system that seeks to crush their living expressions of their identity. We do so often because we believe that it is in their best interests. Our concerns are admirable and evidence of our great love for our children but, the children often do not understand where their parents are coming from and experience it as disapproval of them as people. This is sometimes extended to believing that the parents are taking the schools' side against them. I have seen many parents who have successfully alienated their children from themselves through their desire to punish them into conforming (and surviving). One terrible consequence of this approach, it seems to me is that too often we end up losing them as they find the rejection of schools compounded by a rejection by their families that is tantamount to betrayal. Many Black boys *and* girls as well, feel rejected. They then seek the company of other rejected and participate in a dangerously hedonistic culture which at least gives them the sense of unconditional membership and belonging they have had removed from them.

Changing my practice
During the difficult reflections I engaged in I examined what I was doing and compared it with what I would like to be doing. I slowly became aware that I was not behaving in the ways that I would like to because of an overlay of influences from others. I realised that I did not value my Ubuntu way of being as it did not sound 'tough' enough in comparison to more overtly 'revolutionary' or, what I have called the quasi-Victorian approaches to education. From the deep discomfort with how I was operating I made a conscious shift in my practice and decided that I would live according to my values more fully if for no other reason than that was what would enable me to be the person I wanted to be. I tried to embody an approach of confidently expressing love, partnership and affirmative belief in the young people I worked with. I re-embraced more collaborative and spontaneous ways of working with the children. I would say things to them like "how come somebody so

smart as you is doing what you're doing?" I would listen to their stories and offer to support them in coming up with solutions. I would work in ways that acknowledged our oneness and did not see those who rebelled against learning as separate and deviant but as parts of our system that had been hurt and needed to be lovingly reengaged with

I thought that my son hated it when I started doing the same things with his friends when they came to our home. When he bought his friends around he would try to get them upstairs as soon as he could. I thought that he was embarrassed by me. There they were, doing their best to be 'bad' and here I was sitting down chatting to them as if they were young people whom I valued.

> One day I said to my son "You're embarrassed by me talking to your friends aren't you". "Yeah! Why you got to do that man?" he said with what felt like anger in his voice. "Don't call me 'man'. I'm your father. Nobody comes into my house without talking to me" I said. "Those are my rules. They come from parents with manners and they will use them when they come here or they won't come here at all. I don't care what they think about me". Later on he calmed down and we got to talking. "I know you're embarrassed by me son". "Nah, Nah, its not like that" he said. My friends respect you. They say you're an OG". "A what? What's an OG?" "An original gangster". "Shit. Is that a compliment"? "Yeah. They say you come from the street and you've made it and you're still here. You know, alive. Doing it."
>
> My log autumn 2003

Though I hate the 'gangstar' culture that has infected so much of Black male youth culture I was pleased to be thought of so positively by them. To me it reflected the extent to which I had managed to develop a practice of expressing enough valuing of these guys to be able to be a positive influence on them.

As I started going back into the Learning Centre I put that into practice. I would hug the biggest boys there if need be and tell that they were great. I would sit down and say, "Lets work out how you're going to be a success". There were still parents there who thought I was too familiar with them and maybe sometimes I was. What they could not dispute was that I was good at working with them and they usually behaved well when they were with me.

I described the ways my practice and thinking had shifted at the end of 2003 in my log: See Appendix 7. Section Four for the complete entry. In this I describe an embodied move to an appreciative embodied relational practice that is grounded in a clear strategic intent. In this extract I describe something of my practice with the children:

> I try to compliment them and seek to find as many new ways of telling them how intelligent, gifted, beautiful and able they are as I can. When they say they cannot do something I am more likely now to tell them that they are too intelligent to hold on to that position. "Lets find a way to do it". When that does not work I try to speak with them and find out what is really going on. Maybe sometimes they see these conversations as a way out of not having to do something that they do not want to do. I don't believe that you can force somebody to learn however. You can get compliance, but what is this teaching them? I know that in life they will have to do things that they do not want to do. Is not part of the purpose of education to

prepare them for these times? I don't think that I have seen better performance from young people who have been shouted at than I have from ones who have not been.

I believe that you can hold boundaries, administer appropriate sanctions without speaking in a way that affects the young persons' self esteem. I believe that a critical part of what we are doing is about building self-esteem. I believe that the more the young people believe in themselves the more likely they are to attain whatever their measures for success are.

I feel that the young people we work with are subjected to tremendous pressures as adolescents independent of the pressures they face because they are Black in this society. I feel that as they explore themselves and the environment they find themselves in they will make lots of mistakes that we can see coming. Telling them that they are about to make mistakes or that they have made mistakes can often cause alienation. Not telling them can cause huge frustration as they engage in activities that will have negative consequences for themselves and others. Whatever we do, they will make mistakes, if we are there for them, in a relationship that they value, then we can help them mitigate the damage of their mistakes. We can help them learn more rapidly from their own mistakes and those of others and find ways of travelling their individual paths to their goals quicker and more safely.

I began to more confidently and explicitly articulate my beliefs with parents. How do I know that changing my way of being 'worked'? What did it achieve? I was calmer, had more patience and was actually able to work with the children in situations that I once would have found deeply aggravating. I guess just the fact that I was there and could breathe without getting a tight chest because I was concerned about the quality of education or the nature of our pedagogic practice is an achievement. Towards the end of this section I share video clips of parents and children talking about the centre. I think that they evidence a relational quality that I use as a standard of judging success.

I hope to have shown through the preceding narratives how, through reflecting upon the experiences that I had while living my life in an inquiring fashion I became aware of the ways in which I was contradicting my values in my practice. I continue by sharing another experience that compounded my movement to working in ways that reflected a Ubuntu way of being.

I now want to share one of the most powerful learning experiences I had at the Sankofa Learning Centre. It revolves around a residential experience for Black boys and their fathers that I organised. I think it shows how, through an engaged encounter I was able to identify features of my thinking and that of other Black men that I think we need to pay attention to if we are to heal some of the rifts between us and we need to pay attention as we try to create new futures, new possibilities and truly liberated identities for our young people.

The Boy's Camp

The idea for the boy's camp came out of a conversation with a friend of mine who's ex-partner was no longer playing a significant role in her son's development. She was talking about how much her son needed positive adult male role models when the idea came to me - A boy's camp!

Within 4 days I had drawn up a list of objectives for such a camp and set some provisional dates. People responded really well to the publicity. I got several 'phone calls congratulating me on the initiative. Some came from Black women who did not have sons in the age group we were catering for but just wanted to say how important it was that we were doing something like this "for ourselves" and offering support. We eventually had 5 adult positive males going and 12 boys.

There is no doubt that their parents had a variety of reasons for sending them. Some seemed to feel that we could revolutionise their boys' attitudes and transform them into much more positive attitudes and behaviour. I hoped that it could create relationships that could help us move towards bring able to positively influence the boys' development.

I also saw it as an opportunity to get some Black boys and Black men together, away from everyday life to inquire into themselves. In the note I sent out to parents I was explicit about this being a form of inquiry See appendix 8a. Section Four: The boys' camp – an inquiry into evolving liberationary relationships. Here I am explicit that "The boys camp can be thought of as a form of research or knowledge generation into questions like: what does it take to inspire Black boys to break out of the stereotype models of maleness, to behave positively, aspire and achieve?"

Throughout the experience I kept a log, often making notes 3 times in one day. We had 12 boys and five adults with the boys aged between 13 and 15 years old. My son was one of the boys. The trip was 4 days long and I found it really useful. Sometimes almost traumatic *and* sometimes so funny that I hurt myself laughing.

Spending the week with the boys and their fathers was a significant experience for me. I noticed other men talking to their sons. I disapproved of the ways in which one of them did so, and then I noticed myself doing something very similar. This disappointed me but it got me to focus more on embodying my values.

The boys, by and large, just wanted to have fun. They did not see themselves as a problem. Some of them felt that the biggest problem that they faced was their parents' attitudes to them. I saw these young men behaving confidently with each other and with us and yet at the same time in private conversation with them many of them were deeply frustrated at the way the world, including their parents, viewed them. "What am I doing that's wrong" one said after he'd told me something of his experiences with school. I wanted to tell him that he was failing to play the game but I knew that he'd been told that many times before and it had not had an impact on him. I just let him talk and he thanked me afterwards for helping him. All I had done was listen to what some would call an extremely dittoed view of the world. I stuck to the thought that it was his view and that this is where *I~we* needed to start from.

One of the fathers spoke of finding excuses to drive his son places so that they could spend the time talking. I did something similar with Ife and rugby trips but as I heard this father talk I noticed bemusement in the eyes of another father. I asked him what he was thinking and he told me that his son was old enough to travel on his own and that his father never drove him anywhere. "In fact we did not even have a car. The trouble with young people today is that we've spoilt them". I tried explaining to him that whatever the trouble was, we were only going to be able to be positive influences on the boys if we had relationships with them. He thought he had a relationship. Other fathers there joined me in asking him to try to do something different with this son. In terms of my learning I reflected on the amount of time that I spent just listening to my son without trying to impose my agenda or opinion. It was disappointing to realise how rarely I did so.

It was also good just being with the fathers. I enjoyed spending time with other Black men. We would speak late into the night and that was good. But I enjoyed just watching them move. I got a sense of affirmation from their intelligence and male physical beauty. I knew that I needed to spend more time around Black men at the same time as I knew it was not going to be easy to fit that in.

One night all of the adult males got together and spoke about our parenting. We spoke about the importance of men being around to play a part in the adolescent lives of boys. I read a bit from Stephen Biddulph's (Biddulph, 1995) book and the bit from that discussion that registered with me the most strongly was where he says that men should be prepared to be at home with their children for several hours a day. It ignited a lot of discussion. I found myself defending Biddulph's position, not because I did think that men need to spend several hours a day with their sons, but because it seemed to me important to stress the need to spend significant amount of time with them in which there is actual communication and connection taking place.

We met a couple of times after the camp and reflected upon our learning from the event. I think that the greatest learning came from the insights we gained about our individual parenting. The biggest learning point for me was the importance of having a relationship with my son that he could perceive as respectful. I spoke with the guy who was shouting at his son about his relationship. He agreed that he needed to change his behaviour but he also felt that his son needed to change the way he behaved towards him. I told him that I thought that he did not have long to influence the way that his son developed and that if he pushed him away he would remove his ability to influence his son's development. We sat down and spoke about the various strategies we were using to maintain relationships with our sons. One guy spoke about journeys in the car and the ways he used to deliberately drive his son on his own so that they could speak. It reminded me that I did exactly the same (See Appendix 1 Section Three (Father) Research on a drive to a rugby match)

The anonymous poem (See Appendix 8. Section Four) captures this significant lesson I gained from the boy's camp, i.e. the need to create and maintain relationships; to enter 'their' world or, at least, to seek to understand it, if we as fathers were going to have any chance on influencing them. "Before I try to teach you I must first reach you." (Hocking, 1992) Seems an important maxim that I witness myself ignoring and which I saw fathers, in pain in their relationships with their sons, consciously refute or contradict unknowingly.

I had described the boys camp to the men who participated in it as a research experience from the beginning. I gave the following questions as ones we might focus on individually and together:

1. What does it take to inspire Black boys to break out of the stereotype models of maleness, to behave positively, aspire and achieve?
2. What do I do that makes a positive difference to the boys?
3. What am I doing that works?
4. How can I develop a relationship that is liberationary with the boys I relate to?

We set out to answer these questions and through spending time, playing, sitting in meetings with them, going places, cooking together, dealing with problems, I certainly developed my clarity in relation to many of the questions, In relation to questions 1- 8, I have the same answer: develop relationships in which they feel valued and listened to, - be there for them as much as you can. See them as children in need of help, don't be put off by their physical size, they're still children who need love as well as boundaries. I was moved by the extent to which by just being with the boys, opening and consciously seeking their beauty and brilliance, I was able to see and experience the extent to which so much of the ways we see them is influenced by a dominant discourse that alienates them from us and from greater 'success' in this society. I carried this embodied understanding into my work and relationships with other young men that I worked with in my released Ubuntu way of being and I preferred the outcomes that I got from those relationships as a result.

Educational Inquiry: Influencing the education of social formations

In this section I want to show how my increased sense that I had 'knowledge claims' of wider significance than the Sankofa Learning Centre. I track how my gaze shifted and I began to hold more comfortably, in an embodied sense, the belief that I could be an influence on the Academy and on some of the wider social formations that impact upon the life chances of Black young people.

Over a number of months in 2000 to 2001 Carliss Douglass and I played the role of "critical friends" to each other. When we met we did not assign ourselves a specific methodology, other than to speak our truths and respond with care for the other. We met to support each other's development. We listened, supported, challenged and affirmed. Though our concern was with supporting each other's endeavours I always had a strong sense that we saw what we were doing to help the others' development as part of helping a collective development that was larger than just the two of us.

One of the most challenging and generative questions she asked me (in 2001) was "why, if you want to influence the quality and nature of the education that Black children receive as widely as possible, do you tie up all your energies working with a small group in Thornton Heath? What about the rest of the children who do not and can not attend Sankofa?" She asked me to reflect upon the fact that the insights I shared with her so openly were not making an impact upon the wider society. They could do, and in fact they should do in her opinion, but I kept them to myself and to a select few. "What are you afraid of?" she asked.

I was startled and discomforted by the questions. After the session I reflected upon my discomfort. Was it that I did not believe in my own ideas? Was it that I did not want to surface them so that they could be subjected to critique from unfriendly sources that would take up too much energy to refute? Or was it something to do with being used to being an outsider and not wanting to be 'co-opted' into the dominant paradigm? I had loyalty to the Sankofa Learning centre and thought that holding our work there up to a wider audience would in some way negatively impact upon it. Was it that I wanted Sankofa to be working fine, a true alternative model of excellence, before I offered it as 'proof' of another approach to the education of Black children?

Or was it that I did not believe that the 'system' could reform itself and that it was so structured towards our destruction that there was little point in wasting energy engaging in it. It was far better to remain as low profile as possible and continue to spread our influence quietly and subversively and to seek to benefit as many children and families as possible independently of a discourse with the wider (colonial) education system.

I decided to challenge myself and test out my knowledge claims in a public forum. I took the opportunity to 'speak my truths' to an audience at the "Education of The Black Child Conference' organised by MP Dianne Abbott and hosted by Mayor of London Ken Livingstone [1].

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[1] (In March 2002 the Mayor hosted, in partnership with Diane Abbott MP, the first 'London Schools and the Black Child' conference. It was an historic event that brought together up to 2000 Black parents, teachers, community activists, school governors and policy makers.)

Education of The Black Child Conference

Thousands more people than predicted had turned up for the conference. I ran two workshops and after the second, flushed with the moment, I tried to capture what I had said and my on the spot recollections comprise Appendix 9 Section Four:

The workshops were important to me. At a meeting of Black education professionals and other concerned individuals, I was articulating some of my views on education and Black children. The audience was keen to hear what I had to say. That was important. I had gone into the experience with the thought explicit to myself that I would treat it as a piece of action inquiry. I would notice myself, living & articulating my values, notice the impact upon me and on others and use that as data. It was also about discussing Sankofa with a wider audience, testing out live what we had done and why, getting feedback and using that as a form of validation.

It was also about me living my values more fully, more assertively, more openly. I walked away thinking that "I can be, I have been an influence on the education of people here. I can be a wider influence in the field of education in relation to the education of children of African origin". Something about speaking in an environment with peers and professionals in a situation in which I could be held to account for my practice and opinions from and with people who wanted to support my inquiry into alternative thinking and practice, who wanted to believe in possibility, was both frightening and nurturing at the same time as it was truly educational.

In 2004 I attended a seminar that informed, extended and reinforced this thinking of myself as somebody able to articulate a position about the education of Black children that could be effectively influential. The seminar was organised by the Open University Black Researchers Group. I had never heard of them before but had gone along to the seminar largely because I had been invited so nicely. It was about reviewing the education of Black children 50 years after the Brown Vs Board decision on integration in American schools (and seeking directions of and for future developments).

Some of the speakers/contributors were saying that the focus on exam qualifications had distracted us from other measures of success. I found it helpful that they were thinking these things and pleased that their academic explorations had brought them to a similar understanding that the situation in relation to the experience that African descent children experience in schools is about more than a failure to gain sufficient GCSE grade A-C passes.

I spoke in that meeting of academics and was pleased with my ability to articulate a position that affirmed the individuals there and critiqued thinking on Black people in education that did not take into consideration the wider range of factors impacting upon Black children and the communities they are part of and conditioned by our post-colonial situation.

One of the women at the meeting, the chair/moderator, reported directly to the Minister for Education. She said that if we were to write to him it would land on her desk. If he became aware that 10 people had written and questioned or requested something he would ask her to do something about it. "… and I will have to" she said. I experienced this as an enticing

and challenging statement. It raised the possibility that I could be an influence on national government policy in relation to education and not remain an outside critic! It challenged the thinking that I/we could not influence the society sufficiently to create the kind of educational outcomes we wanted for our children. It also prioritised the need for me to develop my ability to articulate the kinds of interventions that I believed would make a difference clearly and to construct compelling formulations of my ideas.

As I reflected upon the contribution I had felt moved to make in the meeting I was reminded of my work with Carliss Douglass referred to earlier. It became apparent to me that what I said in the meeting was an internal and external marker of a journey I had travelled since her intervention. I had just demonstrated to myself that I was capable of speaking in front of education academics and activists of national standing and able to do so in a voice that was academically apposite and affirming at the same time as daring and inviting them to think something different. I sought to be challenging to the post-colonial reality as constructed and reflected in their discourse *and* be seen as a partner in the process of evolving something new rather than an angry critical outsider throwing stones. I did not feel that I had been as effective as I wished to be but I was pleased about the qualities and values it reflected. After the seminar was over I engaged in a number of conversations with people who wanted to either thank me for what I had had to say or to explore it with me further. I wanted to thank some of the speakers for what they had had to say and managed to speak with quite a few of them.

Not long after this I was asked to address the annual conference of an organisation called the Guidance Society. I took this as an opportunity to inquire into how I could work with education and career professionals and introduce ideas emerging from colonialism as a factor to be considered in their practice. I have attached the subsequent summary of my talk as an appendix (to this section). It was my first attempt to articulate to a predominantly White audience a) the need for a decolonising analysis and b) what a decolonising postcolonial approach to practice might be. I decided to share some of my failures and vulnerabilities with the audience as well as some of the dreams I had for what was possible if we could 'decolonise' our practice. It was an explicit decision. I wanted to test out not just speaking about theses ideas to this type of audience, I wanted to do so from an embodied position of Ubuntu rather than hiding behind PowerPoint slides, slickness and a 'professional' approach. Here is an extract:

> A Postcolonial perspective could look at racism as not just a disease of consciousness, which can be 'cured' by information that can transform that consciousness. It would hold that racism, as a creation of colonialism, can only be supplanted by more human patterns of behaviour and belief, as and when the conditions of structural inequality integral to colonialism are deconstructed and 'new healthier patterns securely in the process of reconstruction'. It is a critical challenge for all of humanity because until we evolve as a species to a state in which we are able to do this then we condemn ourselves to a future of conflicts, famines, disease and wars that diminishes our nobler claims for our selves.

This was also the first time that I tested out the emergent thinking that led to the formulation of the concept of societal reidentification.

> The colonised have been given/ have evolved a colonial identity that is a distortion of their own reality. Genuinely liberatory practices cannot evolve if their world is

seen through the lenses of this identity. A Postcolonial education has to be about helping people develop *other* identities for themselves ones that are much more empowering, life enhancing and life giving. It's about seeking the value of and in your past/identity as you create new identities that enable you to survive and thrive in this postcolonial reality. This is about a reclaiming of history. If the colonised have been given an identity of colonialism and need to develop another identity, this 'new identity' needs to be both a conscious reconnection with the past and a viable creation capable of enabling re-emergence within the present situation as it seeks to change it and live within it as it removes colonial domination. It would be one in which people feel proud of themselves, as they develop strategies that enable success within and beyond this postcolonial reality.

All of the above is also pertinent for the descendants of the colonisers. What would a perspective on the past look like that sought to valorise and validate the past (which is what creates identity) - without celebrating the horrors of colonisation?

The extract above contains explication of the need for us to do more than reclaim our history. It advocates a need for confident engagement inspired by a reclaimed understanding of history. It is also strategically future focussed advocating the need for 'us' to evolve new identities, and, it addresses the 'other' the "descendents of the colonisers' to re-evaluate their historical identity and through so doing contribute to the evolution of new ones.

When I finished speaking some quite harsh truths – expressed in a manner that honoured the best in the audience, people came to speak with me and offered to help in the work that Sankofa was doing. They thanked me for what I had said! There were some quite notable people on the platform, but I was the one that most people came to. I was treated as if I had done something quite amazing. I took from this experience reinforcement that I could effectively articulate things that others are aware of and which they need somebody to put into words to assist them re-connect with that awareness in their dreams and connect with that practically in their practice. It was also affirming of my Ubuntu way of being as a communicative as well as constituitive form for my practice.

Making sense of it all:

One day, early in the life of the centre I met Tony Sewell. In our conversation I mentioned the importance and difficulty of creating and maintaining and independent institution. I was shocked by his response which was to question whether it needed to be independent. I thought that he would have understood the need for an alternative to the horrors that were taking place in school. Gradually as I tried strategy after strategy in Sankofa I came to the conclusion that he was right in the sense that we need to hold on to our spirit and core values *and* find ways of establishing partnerships in order to achieve our objectives. These partnerships will need to be mutually beneficial relationships in which both 'sides' are learning from each other as we work to create a different configuration in our societies. I will return to this thought about 'Societal reidentification' later as I move to conclude this thesis. At this point in time I just want to repeat the observation that we cannot obtain different outcomes without trying different things. We need holistic, inclusional strategies that are transforming of themselves as they engage in influencing the transforming of ways of thinking within and outside of social formations.

It is not enough to evolve structures of learning that, in an abstract sense, are capable of transforming the ability of the learner to impact successfully and discordantly with the existing status quo; they also need to be protected and promoted by financial strategies, perception (or PR) strategies, political strategies and strategies that mobilise the support of communities and skilled individuals if they are going to be a sustainable feature of the changed state desired. Paradoxically they may have to be able to demonstrate the ability to survive in the existing status quo, if they are to be able to effectively challenge it. This calls for mind sets that are evolutionary and transformatory, capable of being able to work effectively with the present state whilst holding on firmly to an alternative vision and persistently taking action to help bring that into being. It calls for a set of organising skills that have to move beyond the 'skill' level if they are to be successful. By this I mean that in order to influence existing social formations the superficial (and cynical) adopting of 'matching' behaviours in order to be able to 'pace and lead' is likely to be an inadequate strategy because a) they are likely to be seen through, b) there is likely to be dissonance with what is expressed and what is experienced at some times and c) I believe that the ends become the means. If you work in a particular way to bring something into being, then the thing that you create will hold within it the strategies, tactics and values (one of which would have to be dishonesty) that you sought to utilise strategically. Effective strategy, on the scale necessary to make the changes desired has to be embodied in order to gain the level of momentum necessary to "leap the chasm in one go".

Despite the pain I associate with my engagement with Sankofa, I have enabled it to continue and be at a point at which it can make a significant contribution to the education of children of African origin in this country. I am saddened by the fact that my son was not able to benefit more from it and that time I spent working with others developing Sankofa was time that I did not spend with him. I will never regain that time or him his youth.

The years of spiritually uplifting and physically and financially debilitating commitment to the learning centre forced a shift in my thinking though. I began to see that my strategy of attempting to build something completely independent was problematic. I was working with a dichotmised Cartesian perspective that people like Argyris and Friere had discovered as flawed some time ago.

As I learned over the years, those with more and those with less power were equally incompetent to produce liberating alternatives, a conclusion illustrated by Friere (1972). (Argyris, 2003, p 1180).

Argyris argues that people will not produce alternatives unless they learn new ways of thinking. He also implies that those with power and those without have to work together. We at the Learning Centre, despite trying hard to think differently were, in the respect of seeing ourselves as disconnected from the dominant education system, still operating within that dominant paradigm. We were deliberately trying to avoid our struggle being distorted by the 'other', but in so doing we were opening ourselves up to other problems. This thought was sacrilegious at first, but the more I thought about it and the ways in which my understanding and embodiment of African cosmology was developing, the more I realised that it was a thought that I would hold on to. It was one of a number of reflections that contributed to my developing the need for societal reidentification. This implies, amongst other things, engagement and collaboration in the process of the evolution of a social identity in which the needs of African peoples and other groups in our society are recognised, valued and integrated into restorative practice.

In this section I hope that I have shown how, through the engagement with the Sankofa Learning Centre that I have had over the last eight years I have developed a clarity as to what it is I believe. My embodied sense of who I am and what I can contribute to knowledge and practice is much stronger as a result.

Other research activity

I have described how I came to make decisions about the sorts of strategies that I want to work with in the future based upon the inquiry I conducted as a researcher into my practice. I used an inclusional approach to this practice and apart from the living inquiry one I also engaged in other research methods and activities that informed the positions that I have arrived at. I have summed these up in appendix 11 Section Four. They include:

- Interviewing 240 people on the streets in South London
- A cooperative inquiry with groups of Black teachers
- Interviews with Black head teachers & senior teachers
- Creating interactive Web site (over 100 visits a month)
- Inquiring into African centred Education in the USA
- Interviews/ collaborative discussions with OFSTED inspectors
- Inquiring with a group of Black social workerslearning from the Sankofa Learning Centre and from my parenting. The positions that I have arrived at are also informed by a number of other research activities

These other inquiries contributed to the richness and rigour of the conclusions that I have arrived at. What have I learned form all this?

I have learned a lot about myself as somebody who makes things happen as I evolve living strategies for success that carry within them the values that I wish to live by and make myself accountable to. I am seeking ways of providing radical alternatives to the existing status quo without seeing that as 'anti'. It is contradictory, but not anti in the sense that I want to suggest 'fighting' strategies or rejection of all that is present within capitalist society. Rather, I want to build upon those elements of "the future in the present, those positive and emergent forces that I want to point out and encourage as they point towards other ways of us being in and organising society and the relationships between particular groups within it. It necessitates working with the contradictions and seeking ways of making the contradictory contributory.

I have been able to develop my clarity and thinking of my educational practice evolving my transformatory decolonising liberating practice and generate an analysis that others experience as personally affirming and embracing as well as deeply challenging and supportive of radical change in their professional practice. I am clearer that what I wish to be engaged in working from within the Black community in ways that collaboratively enable us to change our collective condition.

My activity, inquiry and informed reflection in the process of writing this chapter has helped me to clarify and (re)connect with my values and live and work in ways that are less of a contradiction with them. I have met some phenomenal people who are prepared to sacrifice their money, families and health in order to contribute to the, almost iconic, dream that the Sankofa Leaning Centre has become to many who have never even been there.

I learnt quite a lot about the 'us' that is the Black community. On an obvious and positive note I leant that we have a huge amount of skilled and committed people who have made the conscious decision not to engage with the career route of the dominant system and seek to build or live alternatives.

I have also connected with the damage that has been inflicted upon so many Black people in this society. This has a powerful impact upon their ability to work to support their children's education or to work with the Sankofa Learning Centre. We have worked with some people who are struggling with such huge issues that at times we have had to accept that we cannot give them what they need and change the relationship with them. People had problems with their own families, health, finances which restricted their ability to perform in Sankofa. That is part of our condition as a people and is what we need to take into consideration when seeking ways of making things happen in the real world

My job should have been to develop epistemological, pedagogical, and organisational theory in action that could have found ways of moving us forward. I failed in that aspect of my leadership task by becoming caught up in survival mode & earning the money to keep the project going. Many times I said to people "lets stop or at least give ourselves more space & time to work things out and then move forward". I argued for greater quality rather than more time. But I did not follow it through sufficiently well. As a consequence, predictably, people suffered from burn out and absenting themselves as they tried to maintain their lives. I too needed a more sustainable way of working, as I too got involved in supporting my son through the crisis he found himself in.

Video saves the day

As I was concluding this chapter, not feeling that good about myself and my role over the last eight years, I turned to a video I recorded in approximately April 2005. It was a presentation evening in which we had invited a local councillor to come and visit us. We combined that with giving out a few prizes to parents for their contribution. We called it an open evening and invited ex pupils to attend. I was seeking to include the voices of the children in this piece.

Watching the videos dramatically changed my mindset. I became excited as I watched the beauty of the parents and children. I was filled with pride as I was reminded and informed of what I had achieved in the Sankofa Learning centre. Watching the parents and community sitting together with their children. Looking at the walls of the building and realising that it was my hard work that had paid for it. That had enabled them to have a good clean modern, well-equipped space for them to learn. A space for love had been created – irrespective of exam success.

As I watched I imagined that I saw dreams in people's faces. I remembered that when I had asked parents what they wanted from the learning centre one of the most important thing for most of them was that that loved the fact that we were positive Black male role models to provide examples for the children to aspire to and, more importantly to form healthy relationships with. They affirmed my maleness and did not try to subvert it. They loved the kind of maleness that I modelled, that Ian modelled and that other of the adult males there modelled and they wanted their children to be associated with it.

I remembered that we had had a great time together over the years. I reconnected with the knowledge that the experience has challenged and extended all of our thinking and our humanity. It has transformed and developed our practice of working with young people. We have developed ways of being together as we work through difficulties and provided a

source of inspiration to others in the Black community and a site for learning of alternative strategies freed from the restrictions of a school. Here is one of the boys speaking about how he got to be at Sankofa and his feelings about being a pupil there.

(CD-S5Clip 2.mov)

He speaks of the difficulties he got into in school and starts to smile when he talks about Sankofa. It has given him a sense of identity and self worth – he's proud of his achievements

And here is a parent speaking and demonstrating the extent to which she embodies the values we strove to realise by creating Sankofa.

(CD-S5Clip 3.mov)

It demonstrates the space that I have helped create in which this woman feels a strong sense of support. She mentions being in an afrocentric context approvingly; she speaks of the relationships with young people in which they are valued and appreciated and part of a community. She speaks of the centre as being an inspiration. She is getting a better understanding of what the centre is trying to do in terms of developing the young people. She talks of the sense of camaraderie that relates to Ubuntu. The young people are approvingly referred to as positive influences on each other.

As I look at her speaking, I see other people surrounding her and I see their faces sending messages of inclusionality, of love and connection of shared pride, they are proud because the other is proud. There is a quality of Ubuntu in the room and I have been a significant influence in enabling that to be present. There is no clearer evidence to me of the influence that I have been on the education of the young people and parents who through, working together, learning together, overcoming together have transformed themselves and their relationships with each other. As I watch, I am convinced of the value of my Ubuntu way

of being in co-evolving spaces characterised by recognition of each as identities of success are evolved. That value is also evidence to me of the validity of my form of reflexive inquiring practice in the creation of knowledge claims that I have evolved through this rigorous and sustained engagement.

Conclusion

My standards of judgement for my work and learning in Sankofa include:

- Effectively critiquing the dominant approaches to the education of African origin children and developing thinking about what is needed. This involves not accepting the descriptions of the situation as produced by government and the dominant paradigm and engaged in inquiry from within my own experience of the situation and worked with others to develop strategies & understandings that reflected that.
- Being prepared to rethink and embrace new ideas and ways of being
- Being prepared to listen to others and shift my values as well as the strategies I use / advocate.
- Developing strategies that are inclusive and embrace love in their approach
- Evolving transformational strategies
- By sharing that thinking with parents, teachers, educationalists at conferences.
- Leading through offering alternate visions and examples
- Influencing social formations
- Working with the spirit of African cosmology in developing educational strategies
- Working collaboratively with parents to help them explore how they could empower themselves in taking control of their children's education
- Developing ways of working with African origin young people that are loving, valuing and which offer them opportunities they would otherwise not have
- Developing organisations which enable parents and educators to meet and work out strategies for making a difference
- Engaging in teaching and co-learning with parents and children and helping them achieve their dreams

The list above reflects and helps constitute my original standards of judgement emerging from my values of humanity expressed through an inclusional African cosmology of Ubuntu. It is a critical part of the criteria by which I evaluate this evidence-based account of my learning. This learning has been consistently shared with my critical friends and partners in learning and change and, as such, has been continuously evaluated.

I have explained my educational influences in my learning and that of others by sharing the narratives showing how I have influenced the nature of what many Black parents see as possible for their children.

The accuracy of my conclusions is measured in a number of ways not least of which is how I actually feel in my body as a result of living closer to my values. It also lies in the conversations that I have had with parents and teachers many of whom are grateful for the fact that I can articulate values that they did not have linguistic form for in an educational context. In a way my speech has enabled theirs. I think that they are fair in that they help tell stories and give voice to perspectives and insights that are not typically giving credibility. They are also fair because the perspectives that have been influences on my learning have come from different groupings and interests.

I have shown the potential significance of my research in my articulation of my conclusions to educators, Black parents and teachers, policy makers and central government officers implementing policy. The implications are that we can co-evolve

transformational educational processes as part of engaging in seeking new identity for our society assisted by a guiltless recognition of occluded dimensions of oppression. I think this has huge significance for enabling us to implement policies and strategies that actually have a chance of success.

I have shown how I have moved from my original concerns of creating an independent institution to recognising that what I want to create are liberating learning spaces that can help develop restorative, truly interdependent organisational and learning forms. I have also shown how I have changed my sense of my purpose from being an influence on the children that I work with to being an educational influence on the learning of those who condition the learning environment for all children. Through the relating of narratives of when I contradicted my values and how I re-evaluated my perceptions and practice, I have also shown how I have modified my concerns, ideas and practices in the light of my evaluations.

- o I now want to go on to the section in which I explore how I have tried to live, and inquire into, my values in my work as management consultant in order to improve my ability to be a generative influence.