

SECTION SIX

ME AS A CONSULTANT



[\(CD-S6Clip 1.mov\)](#)

In this clip I am recounting an experience from a working trip to Sierra Leone to my research supervisor, Jack Whitehead. I went not long after the end of the devastating civil war there. I think that this clip contains something of the living dynamic of my Ubuntu way of being. I am speaking about people who have gone through the most horrific of experiences and who will live with the consequences of that for the rest of their lives. I am not dwelling on the horror of the tragedy of that civil war, even though I am visibly moved by it. Instead I am praising the humanity of the women rather than condemning or dwelling on the evils. I am also demonstrating my connection with the women in Sierra Leone and seeing, feeling themselves as part of me. Despite living and working in Europe I feel and not just understand the oneness of our condition. My values of humanity, my ontological and political urges are provoked and I am filled with generative passion to engage in work that can bring about a better situation. I carry this spirit into my work a consultant in which I see it as a site for being a positive influence on restorative processes of reidentification characterised and enabled by a guiltless recognition.

Introduction: Me as a consultant

In this thesis I am making knowledge claims that I believe are an original contribution to the epistemological standards of judgement of the Academy. In order for the reader to feel that this is a substantiated claim in this section I am showing how I have arrived at these claims to knowledge by describing moments in my inquiring practice as a consultant as I seek to earn a living and influence my learning and the learning of individuals and social formations. I have sought to do so in ways that recognise and creatively address the colonial legacies that still play a powerful role in the life chances of people of African origin. I show in the pages that follow how, through the learning that I have engaged in, I have become more aware of my embodied practice of Ubuntu and how that awareness has been manifested in my presence, my practice and, emerging from these, the original knowledge claims that I make of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition.

The rigorous approach that I have taken demonstrates sustained attention over time, dialectical reflexivity, methodological inventiveness, a search for congruence with my values and an embodied commitment to producing theory that works for me in my context, with the aims and value base that I hold. I hope that it is believable knowledge because, though I am not seeking to demonstrate that it is generalisable in terms of replicability, I am seeking to achieve ‘relatability’ (Bassey). That is I want my knowledge claims to be ones that others can relate to and engage with in ways that influence their learning and subsequent practice.

It is practice based and, I believe, this enhances its value. I agree with Hirst (1983) when he articulates the need to review the way we think about knowledge emerging from “immediate practical experience”. The knowledge claims that I am making have emerged from the cut and thrust of my practice as I seek to improve it in context and interrelationship with others. If something does not work I have had to change it and try something different. Over time patterns of success have emerged that I embrace and build upon. For example, I have learned that by engaging with the people I work with and for, in an inclusional manner in which I do not constrain my Ubuntu way of being, I am better able to be the type of influence that I want to be. This is an understanding rigorously tested in practice over time. When I have used other approaches I have not had the level of success that I have desired. I therefore claim to know and claim that that knowledge becomes relatable theory as I describe it.

I begin with the context and history. Here I outline the background to me becoming a management consultant and the contexts I have inquired into.

I then outline the specific concerns that motivated my inquiry in this sphere. This takes me to explaining how I sought to operationalize my values in my practice. I give specific examples of aspects of that practice that gave me concern. I explain my struggle to develop my thinking and original voice as a consultant seeking to be a positive influence on the lives of people of African origin and the forces that condition them. I share narratives from my practice that show how I discovered, through becoming aware of my body’s inclusional urge, that I was operating in self-defeating Newtonian ways in which I saw myself as separate, distinct and opposed to the very people that I wanted to influence. The narratives evidence the processes of inquiry through which I began to operate in ways that were more in keeping with the values that I claimed to hold, at the same time as I questioned and transformed some of these. From this basis I explain how I began to

develop new understandings that I tested out in my practice in flows of action and reflection, new action, new reflection, etc.

I show how I developed forms of articulation and embodied Ubuntu ways of being that transformed my relationships and the outcomes that I sought – as I allowed my cognitive processes to focus on what was actually happening in my practice. As I did so new learning emerged, my practice improves and this provides the basis of my knowledge claims.

I trace how, through working with a desire to improve the position of people of African origin in an (increasingly) inclusionary perspective, I came to understand my quest firstly as a decolonising one and then as a search for reidentification.. This has assisted me in distinguishing my practice from what I believe to be the limitations of the current discourse about ‘race’ and ‘equality of opportunity’ and ‘diversity’ and make a contribution to thinking about how we move forward as a society that is an original synthesis.

This context of this inquiry has been my professional work as a management consultant engaged in a wide range of activities that include:

- Working for 11 years (from 1986) at Roffey Park management Institute.
- Running courses for managers at all levels in organisations
- Facilitating with men’s groups
- Running self-managed learning sets over long (two years) and short (five months) periods and anything in between. Gaining insights into the experienced lives of White and Black senior managers and leaders as I seek to inspire, inform and facilitate their greater success in ways that are experientially and theoretically decolonising.
- Speaking at conferences around the country for a variety of organisations and to a wide range of audiences. Through this extending my ability to influence, discovering things through the interactions and relationships that emerged whilst I was speaking with others, extending my thinking and evolving presentational form for the influence that I was seeking to be.
- Working with groups of Black managers in a wide range of organisations including the civil service, local government organisations and voluntary organisations and as a coach to individuals.
- Facilitating Diversity courses for middle and senior managers. Running action research projects in organisations from the private (e.g. a major international pharmaceutical company) and government sectors
- Working with young Black people from Universities inspiring them to achieve and contribute their uniquenesses to the world
- Living, evolving and modelling a different aesthetic, challenging expectations and giving love at the same time.
- Working around the world & also extending, embracing & affirming my sense of who I am. Experiencing being 'at home', all around the world as I work through internalised oppression, limitation of expectation and evolve friendships and connection with people from South America, Asia and, of course, Africa.
- Working in Africa. Extending, embracing & affirming my sense of who I am. Discovering myself in others, seeking to learn, connect and support positive decolonising thinking and practice.

- Being a financially successful consultant and businessman capable of winning large contracts. Through this creating the experiential data from which I draw as I offer support to others seeking 'success'.
- Working in organisations living, modelling a different aesthetic, challenging expectations, giving love
- Reflecting upon my practice both as a consultant in terms of my knowledge and skills of consultancy and as a Black man, crossing and opening barriers, seeking to be a positive decolonising force whilst operating in ways that are deemed credible and effective in my profession.

I have been, throughout my work, seeking to develop and apply theoretical understandings that I can articulate in ways that are effectively transformational. I have inquired into my practice as I conduct it. It has been about having a commitment to respond to questions of the kind "how can I improve the influence I have as an African male seeking to influence the learning of individuals and social formations in such a manner as to increase justice and equity?" Another question, linked to and part of the first one has been about how I can engage in earning a living in a manner that enables me to enjoy my life in the now in the context of a pattern of factors that oppress and limit people like myself. This latter question is about quality of life and holds the hope that whilst seeking to assist the evolution of other patterns of being it is possible to live a full and happy life and thrive and not just survive.

I describe moments in my being of interaction and engagement to provide a lens that delineates my attempts to live according to my values at the same time as contributing to their creation. I have engaged in an emergent creative process that I have sought to record in stories, logs, images, records and artefacts that I examine, interrogate and use as evidence and corroborative triangulation. At the same time, this reflective process of re-engagement with the emotions, memories and materials; the people and the processes, provide new insights and learning.

I am working from a holistic understanding that emanates from my understanding of African cosmology. From this perspective individual change is interconnected and indivisible from wider cultural, group or institutional change or whatever context that individual change occurs in. Action research approaches share this understanding as reflected in statements like the one made by Reason and Bradbury in their introduction to Handbook of Action Research:

“... the purpose of human inquiry is the flourishing of life, the life of human persons, of human communities, and increasingly of the more-than-human world of which we are a part. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p 10)

I have chosen to enquire into my professional life because how a person earns their living impacts upon all other aspects of their lives. All inquiry exists within and or rests upon an economic base and mine is no exception. In the wider area of concern for broader social and economic development for African peoples, the workplace is an area of critical concern for many who share a desire for African re-emergence. A critical criterion with which I evaluate my inquiry is the positive impact it has on the life chances of people of African origin in the world. My self-reflexive inquiry into myself as a consultant is then transparently and explicitly about more than my own economic or professional 'development'. In seeking to work with the insights from African cosmology and bring my

Ubuntu way of being into how I inquire, I work from an I-we frame. In this frame my development is about *our* development and it is about social change. It is then my hope and intention that this makes my narratives and knowledge claims of value to others who also have to earn a living in this contested sphere. I am particularly keen to share how I have managed to bring my Ubuntu way of being into the development of transformational strategies and practices.

I am seeking to describe my approach to inquiry as relational (Thayer-Bacon) and inclusional (Alan Rayner) ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically. I bring my whole interconnected self with me as I engage in seeking “strategies for success”. Therefore even when I am not consciously aware of the totality of my engagement I am still knowing and experiencing as a result of that totality.

African cosmology

The starting point of my inquiry into myself as a consultant was largely influenced by a desire to find out how I could work with the ideas from African Cosmology that I had identified, with managers from all different backgrounds in a manner that could influence individuals and social formations towards a situation in which people of African origin benefited more fully, fairly and justly from the benefits of this society and beyond. I wanted to be able to influence people into recognizing the interconnectedness of their behaviour in an organisation to the life chances of people in Africa.

Included within the Meta questions I have identified so far as motivating my inquiry are others:

- How can I operate as a proud Black man in a way that feels true to who I am and be an effective management consultant?
- What do I need to do to increase and improve my ability to effectively encourage the people I work with to rethink the orthodoxies that determine what we do and what we conceive as possible to do, so that we engage in action of mind, body and spirit with the purpose of generating transformed patterns of interaction that lead to greater global equity, peace and sustainable use of the resources of our planet?
- When working with Black people, how can I influence them into seeing the value of us working, as part of a social formation, in a manner that improves our individual and collective life chances?
- How can I become more of the person whom I wish to be?
- How can I become more effective at influencing people in the areas I want to be an influence in?

Economic questions

There are also questions associated into my inquiry to do with me trying to earn a living in a country where unemployment among Black males is more than twice that for White ones from the same socio-economic groupings.

In engaging with an inquiry into these areas I have had to resolve inner conflicts to do with beliefs that in a colonial setting the colonised who make money are either sell outs – betrayers of their people, corrupt, or both. My inquiring experience has led me to other ways of understanding the complexity of surviving in times of oppression. By embracing African cosmology and refusing to hold contradiction as comprised of mutually exclusive opposites I have been able to work with a perspective that includes. For example, I have

sought ways to make money *and* to contribute to ending colonialist and racist disadvantaging of groups of people. For example it is the very money that I earn that has enabled me to support the continuing existence and growth of the Sankofa Learning Centre.

It is also because I have been able to, for example, live well and earn ‘decent’ money that I have been able to speak with authenticity and inspire people to do the same. I have tried to influence people to embrace the possibility that they can contribute to the re-emergence of ‘their’ people, ‘their’ communities at the same time, and through the process of, their own financial growth. Making money and being selfish do not have to go together. The experience of Sankofa has taught me something of the humiliating levels of vulnerability and dependency that lack of financial power results in, in this country. My ‘research’ then has been inseparably ‘for us and for them’ (Marshall and Reason)

As I have inquired generally and specifically around myself as a consultant, I have found myself to be also inquiring into and about myself as a human being trying to live life more fully, to embrace life more wholly. I have learnt that I am both able to live, and perhaps influence through my living, *and* also able to articulate in a way that has influence on others’ ability to live their lives more fully. This realisation feels immensely gratifying and a realisation of some of some of my original intentions.

The values that underpin my practice are rooted in my sense of my deep historical identity and in the identity that emerges through my engagement with others in committed action as I strive to reclaim and live my humanity more fully.

I have experienced the devaluing of myself from others, my internalisation of that and my consequent devaluing of myself. In my work with Black managers and communities I work to assist others to replace the stories they have been given and which they reproduce (and consequently reproduce oppressive patterns in their intra relationships and with their interrelationships) with stories that are located in their reconnection with their greatness, humanity and optimism.

For me this is part of my contribution to a reconfiguring of the present postcolonial patterns into ones that are more life enhancing and generative.

The History and Context

My work history has included being a full time artist, a labourer and trade union activist and a political activist, a school teacher and a youth worker managing a project for a London borough. After my long history of involvement in radical politics I found that going to work and ‘just’ doing a job was unfulfilling. I did not want to go back to revolutionary politics because I was clear that there was something wrong about the way that we had tried to evolve strategy and practice. I myself had been the victim of lies and manipulation from people who claimed to want a better world for all. My involvement in politics had taken me from working with the most beautiful and honest dreamers with the highest of principles and ideals to working with people who I discovered to be corrupt and dangerous. I was devastated when I left because it felt like I was leaving my dreams behind. Large parts of my identity were tied up with my life as an activist and I almost did not know who I was without involvement.

Keen to develop a better theoretical understanding of organisations I enrolled on the Post Graduate Diploma in Management by Self Managed Learning programme at the then North East London Polytechnic (NELP). Whilst there I engaged with management theories and a whole raft of approaches to self development, managing and learning including assertion theory, transactional analysis, Neuro-linguistic programming.

I chose to use the programme to explore and make sense of my past and give me a sense of the directions I could take in the future. I worked with people who were committed to their self-development and who got me involved in developmental activities such as T-groups. This self-development exploration, with its focus on the “I” felt in many ways a contradiction to my left wing politics. However I gradually began to find ways to fuse my wider political positions and the Black feminist writers’ contributions, particularly the integration of the personal into the political and the voices of the unheard into what I/we believe it is important to consider as we seek liberation. I revelled in what felt like a subversive quality of the self-managed approach to learning.

During this time I read the work of people like Hay (Hay, 1984), Vanzant (Vanzant, 1996, Vanzant, 1993), Jeffers (Jeffers, 1997), Dickson (Dickson, 1982), Smith (Smith, 1985) Benjamin Hoff’s *The Tao of Pooh* (Hoff and Shepard, 1985). I liked Roger’s optimistic existentialism (Rogers, 1961). I favoured its spirit over that of Laing, though there was something about the masculine toughness of Laing’s persona that appealed to me. My own experience of people close to me with mental health issues warmed me to Laing’s position in which he distinguished himself from the orthodox psychiatric understandings in not seeing their behaviour as ‘un understandable’.

I went freelance as a management consultant in 1986. This led to a period of experiential discovery about the wider world. I realised that whilst I had been involved in radical politics, I had been separated from the lives of the people I now found myself engaged with.

I found myself confused by the way the world had changed during my prolonged and blinkered engagement, with radical politics. I discovered that thoughts that I had thought were subversive and radical and dangerous to the existing status quo were the linguistic currency of those who were obviously not interested in radical transformation of the

existing power systems and structures. They worked in local and central government and racism was an acceptable, though not comfortable, phenomenon to discuss at work. I saw people feeling comfortable about describing their White colleagues as racist and expecting to be treated with respect by them in the process. I was used to accusations of racism being aligned with a position that desired the end of the capitalist structures of society and of imperialist and colonialist practices. I had not been party to the incorporation of many of the phrases and demands of the Black radical left into established professional concern in the organisations I worked with. I worked with predominantly local authorities and they did things like hold racism awareness courses and organise courses for Black workers that were about their equitable integration into organisations.

I was confused at first, and made many mistakes in my assessment of people and situations. I witnessed the existing status quo quite comfortably paying attention to reducing unfair discrimination towards those that meet the criteria for selection and who were prepared to work within the paradigms and structures of the existing status quo. In fact, this incorporating helped sustain and reproduce it without fundamentally transforming it. This gradually helped me understand my unease with equal opportunities, anti-racism and racism awareness courses. They were about incorporating 'us' into the existing status quo and not about transforming it.

I started running positive action self-development and management development courses for Black managers and courses on recruitment and selection. I used thinking from the self-development theories I had become familiar with and my experience from Black independent organisations to bring a perspective that many found fresh.

In April 1991 I presented a paper at a predominantly Black conference that set out my thinking at that stage. I wrote the paper to try to express my unease with just taking the models we had been taught as being good management or personal development theories and approaches and using them, unquestioned, with Black peoples or with other groups of people. It was also an expression of my wanting to work with the broader strategic realities and not just focus on the immediate givens. In making my views public I was testing and evolving an approach that has provided some of the foundation of the position that has gradually evolved over my years of inquiring into my practice. The following excerpt is indicative of that:

To conclude: Most, if not all, (particularly if we accept that the medium is the message) management education/development approaches carry within them the ontological assumptions of the existing order. These assumptions are constantly changing their appearance but the end result is the same. It becomes apparent then that the way to change the conditions of those who suffer from the creations of that existing order is not simply to 'give' them the 'skills' that the management theory offers, as this is to simultaneously be imparting the ideology. What I believe has to happen is to replace the existing approaches to being in society with ones that are more congruent with the needs of the whole of humanity and of our planet. There exists, within the wisdom of the suppressed world, all the necessary spiritual and philosophical frameworks to create a new world order. We can create one that can reframe, rethink, the purposes of western science and technology. We can help evolve a synthesised scientific paradigm in which we can stop its use for the oppression of the few and put it to use assisting us to live in harmony with each other and with the planet. (Charles, 1994b)

The extract above reflects aspirations that I still have today. My inquiry has largely been into ways of improving my practice in ways that effectively actualise these aspirations.

My concerns

I did not want to be assimilated into the dominant way of being and doing. I wanted to find ways of working and earning a living and bringing my values with me and contribute to equity and justice within the economic sphere.

I continued to explore ways of addressing my concerns that most approaches to thinking about management ignored or devalued contributions, perspectives and needs of African peoples. These approaches' self-perpetuating 'truths' are hegemonic in Gramscian terms in that they constitute an educational alliance. I wanted to counter that "negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (Strinati, 1995, p 165)

I had a belief that how people thought about management, leadership and organizational intent and purpose contributed to oppressive practices in the UK and abroad. If we could change the thinking and the value base we might change the practice and the outcomes for people of African origin generally. A large motivating factor for me then was a desire to influence the cognitive, social, psychological, institutional and physical structures that constrain the lives of people of African origin.

In the following narratives I trace my struggle to find form to my practice that reflected my concerns positively.

Searching for transformational ways of working

Less than two years after going freelance I was headhunted to work at Roffey Park Management Institute. I worked 63% of the time at Roffey and spent the rest as an independent consultant. I had the most fantastic time working there. It is the oldest residential management college in Europe and I came in to it at a time of change as the college sought to modernise itself. I worked on programmes like 'Personal Effectiveness and Power', 'Interpersonal Relationships in Organisations', 'Consultancy Skills for Organisational Change' and 'The Street wise Manager'. I also ran introduction to management courses for new managers and did consultancy work in outside organisations. I was (probably) the first Black man in this country to work at a residential management school operating at the level that I was and I did not want anybody to be able to accuse me of only getting the job because I was Black so I worked really hard and in one year I won the largest contract for the college of any of the consultants there.

I organised two weekend events for Black managers at Roffey Park. These were hugely moving experiences. I learned a lot from them and it was during the first one that I tentatively introduced the idea of what is different in African and Asian cosmologies from the European. Most of the practitioners were interested by the model and almost surprised that I was introducing a different dimension to their work. There were some who liked it and were positively critical of the linear, disconnected polarisation that appeared non-

organic in form as shown on the table I sketched out. I agreed with them that the form contradicted the content and since then have been seeking appropriate presentational form for the idea

Through organising the events and experiencing them as facilitator, participant, Black man in collaborative connection with other Black people, co-inquirer and other less identifiable identities, I made a major contribution to influencing my learning.

I took some photographs during the weekend. I love the one of us going for a walk in the woods surrounding Roffey Park Institute. I used to love going jogging there early in the mornings. I experienced the world in an entirely different much more connected way than when walking or driving. I have jogged there throughout the seasons and had powerful memories associated with them. I had taken my son bike riding in them when he was a small boy. I had glanced a clearing of bluebells carpeting the floor of a clearing spotlighted by a funnel of early morning sunlight one dewey morning that had made me stop to admire it. When I broke up with my sons mother after an eleven-year relationship I had jogged through this forest and had to stop every time my body remembered the pain and the enormity of what had felt like the end of my world and refused to carry me any further. I remember jogging through and looking out over many miles of countryside and being infused/suffused with light, wonder, gratitude and deep happiness. I ran when the sun was shining in shorts and vest, taking my top off deep in the woods and feeling the wind and the sun play over as much of my body as I could. I ran in snow and ice marvelling at the beauty of the sun glinting and sparkling off the ground I ran on. I startled deer and they bolted out less than 6 feet in front of me. I have experienced being in and being a part of the woods and they a part of me. I felt pleased to be there as a Black man. I felt pleased that I had not been defeated and could experience my humanity and connectivity with the universe in this way.

These woods had a great symbolic and emotional value to me. In my experiential engagement with their beauty I developed a connection that was a healing, nurturing and inspiring contribution as I decolonised the limiting stereotypes that blocked my fuller engagement with the world. Being on my own in these woods and being so happy whilst there gently subverted the constraints of ideology on just what my 'Black identity' could enjoy and include.



I did not mention the emotions I attached to the woods to the participants on the programme. I told them the woods were beautiful and suggested we went for a walk in them. It was a communicative walk. We exchanged ideas, feelings and thoughts as we slowly moved along muddy paths. There is something about the being in the woods with other Black people that meant something to me. I was quietly proud and pleased to be sharing this experience with them. As I look at the picture in the woods I realise that there are only men there. I cannot remember if there were any women with us, but I do remember how good it felt to have some of the conversations that we did as we walked. I had missed male company and I wanted to spend more time with Black men like these. I also got the sense that I was not alone or weak for being engaged in my quest for meaning. These people were interested in the ideas that I thought that they might find sacrilegious. They expressed curiosity and interest and they shared their own explorations. It was a powerful experience to feel so validated and valued by people like these. Why? Largely, I think, because I wanted what I was doing to be and who I was becoming to be of value and relevance to other Black people and they seemed to be confirming that.

The picture that follows was taken on the last day of the residential as we were preparing to leave, I think it captures the joy, spontaneity and connectivity that participants on the weekend felt during it. Some people cried as they left, so closely had they connected to others. I think that they reflect my educative influence in the sense that I was able to make the weekend possible and facilitate it in a way that enabled people to bring out more of their true selves. The weekend was self managed and I did not 'train' people per se. Jack Whitehead talks about my presence and I think that what I might have done that was most successful was to be a person working in a relatively prestigious institution such as Roffey, modelling pride in himself and his culture and a connection with 'his people' and a concern to change the status quo. I was both an insider and an outsider and making connections with and between people as a result.

I was also embodying a particular position in relation to my values of humanity in which I

wanted to open up the hegemonic areas of concern of a place like Roffey to different possibilities. In doing so I was striving to negotiate ways of being more congruent with my values and aspirations

Running events such as the Black manager ones was both a way of seeking to influence the culture of the organisation and of opening up an opportunity of experience to Black managers and trainers. It was also a way in which I was influencing my own learning and identity. I experienced the strength that I drew from being with the participants and I experienced an inclusional dissolving of some of the boundaries to my identity that I had formed as part of my practice of existing in predominantly White organisations. It really brought home to me the importance for the 'us' that is Black people, to discover, create, locate and populate 'liberated spaces' inside organisations. This space needs to be one in which we can be ourselves as fully as we wish for at least a short space of time. I believe that sometimes we need to not feel shy to hug each other, to "grab up" each other with a physicality unrestrained by the dominant cultural norms; to belly laugh till we drop on the floor; to speak with our creoles and languages that embody our deep experience, wisdom and spontaneous creativity, our culture and resistance; to open our mouths and speak loudly, spontaneously without inhibition or craft. I think that these spaces can provide the nurturing, strength and inspiration to enable us to continue inside organisations. It also means that when we face great difficulty we have a space we can go back to and recuperate and or gain new strategies. Being with the Black participants on the weekend workshops I experienced an instinctive inclusional connectivity that fed my soul and inspired me. I learnt from the ideas that people shared but more by their embodied interconnection and the ways that that helped us all to grow.

At the Black Managers workshops I had managed to enable a special place for people in which they could be who they wanted to be for a time and explore themselves and others with a greater degree of freedom than was common in their daily lives. People spent a lot of time hugging each other during both events. I spent a lot of time looking at people and just being overwhelmed by their beauty. I remember there was one woman there who I renamed "the smile". She had such a wondrous gifting smile that I just had to keep telling her how beautiful she looked when she smiled.

It was not just me either. I had the strong feeling throughout that people wanted to experience each other's talent and wanted to be impressed by each other. When people ran workshops their ideas were rigorously, and usually humorously, explored at the same time as being appreciated. I felt that people wanted each other to excel to be great and their challenging came from a deeply interconnected, inclusional, appreciative place.

I remember, in one morning session people chose to sit on floor cushions rather than on chairs or on the floor. There were not enough cushions for everybody to have one to themselves and so people shared. As the morning wore on people leant on each other, rested their arms on others and I have a picture in my memory of the group of people - who would wear formal clothes in their professional lives and walk around in the distanced ways determined by the norms of their respective work cultures – so lovingly intertwined with each other in ways that were non sexual and celebratory of each other. The group seemed to be one bejewelled dynamic metamorphosing organism. It was wonderful to be able to be there and to just see us, loving each other. It was a celebration of the reality of ignored Black love I thought.

I am hoping that the pictures that follow convey the energy and connectivity of the relationship, the loving dynamic space connecting participants that I am trying to describe

with words.



This is a picture of the last day of the first workshop. People are preparing to leave and have been putting their bags into their cars. I ask for a picture and people gather.



This is a more formal picture! I've managed to give the camera to somebody else and have got in it.

What have I learned from the experience? As I reflect upon the pictures and the hundreds of events I have facilitated for Black managers over the years I am struck by the memory

of how common it is for the people who come on the courses to just want to be with each other. Time after time the first part of the programme is subverted by people's desire to just connect with other Black people and just be able to be themselves. So often there just is this desire to share thoughts, stories, experiences, aspirations. They seem to want to just speak without too much structure. I think that ultimately they are sharing and enjoying their strengths and collective beauty in a place of respite from being defined as 'other' and 'less than'.

I was struck by the thought that it is a heliotropic, aesthetic and sensuous engagement. I do not think that people are so energetically positive to each other and engage so openly with each other (only) as a reaction to the oppression that they face in their 'real' work lives. I think that at some level we just like being with each other. I think that there is a bodily communication that draws life, affirmation and identity from the reflection of oneself in the person of another. "I am because we are". I can see your beauty. You can see my beauty and so we are made more conscious and therefore more beautiful by our interaction with each other. There is something about our way of being as bodies in relation, connection and interaction with each other that carries a living denial of claims that we have been completely mentally colonised. I experience it as being a celebration of our achievement in not only having lived through the most destructive of histories but of having done so and kept our humanity alive and our love for each other, problematised and traumatised, but still somehow immanent and transcendent.

In the courses and programmes I have subsequently facilitated for Black people in organisations I have tried to maintain and defend the need for this inclusional possibility of connection. This means in practice creating space for people to experience themselves 'breathing out' and just 'being themselves' and connecting with others with similar backgrounds to theirs. I believe that this is one of the reasons that the programmes I have facilitated for Black managers have had a major impact upon their ability to operate in organisations in ways that are more sustainable and life enhancing. Their value goes far beyond the parameters of people's organisational experiencing and have contributed to 'us' wanting to work together more in positive ways that contradict the colonised mentality of self and group hatred. This is a standard of judgement that I wished my inquiry to be held to account to.

Influenced by the work of Edgar Schein and others, I have come to believe that the best way of achieving these spaces is not by "demanding" them (in an oppositional voice) as this sets up dichotomous, oppositional and polarised dynamics the spirit of which too often leads to increased resistance, people shutting down and entrenching themselves. On the surface things are achieved but the underlying tensions remain and resurface. Inquiring into myself in relation with others as I sought to live and evolve my values has distanced me from the strategies of opposition and 'fighting' that I went into organisational life with. Opening myself up, allowing and encouraging other forms of knowing to enter my web of conceptual and embodied possibility has, I believe, generatively expanded the range and flavour of the responses and strategies I have come to favour. I have sought, in turn, to apply this knowing to my practice and what I suggest to other Black people as successful and positive "strategies that work for us".

It was through experiences like the Black managers weekend workshops at Roffey that I became aware of and discovered the kind of contributions that I wanted to make. The affirmation I gained from our coming together and from the sharing of my nascent thinking

on African cosmology, strengthened me. I was both saddened and experiencing a sense of loss as we left Roffey at the end of the first workshop as well as excited and proud and full of a sense of possibility. People who mattered to me in my wider life had embraced my identity and humanity.

The workshops in Roffey were about me discovering, engaging with and living according to the standards of judgement I want my life and my work to be held to account to. I believe that I was able to enable these events to happen because of the nature of the relationships I had evolved with people in Roffey and because of my embodied commitment to furthering thinking and processes that were focussed more on transformation, possibility and decolonisation than they were on being 'anti' racism or other integrationist approaches. As such my actions were the creation and consequence of an embodied strategic awareness. This awareness emerged out of the quality of intentional, inquiring engagement with the people and the situations we co-experienced with as we evolved relationships that informed mutual possibilities that enabled the parameters of those strategies as they emerged to be wider, more inclusive and more capable of enabling the types of change that I desire in the world.

The Black managers workshops evidence my educational influence on my learning and on that of others. From the experiential power of the coming together I had brought home to me the power of spaces such as this. It has remained with me as I articulate with organisations the benefit of having spaces in which Black people and other minority groups can come together as part of a transformational process.

Evolving my practice

I published my initial thoughts in the journal *Voluntary Voice* in December 1991, a couple of months after the first Black managers residential event I organised. I had been asked to write an article about 'time management'. I chose to do it from the perspective of challenging the notion that 'time' is a universally uncontested and accepted concept that is culturally neutral. I wanted to use it as an opportunity to challenge the western notion of time as a way of challenging the hegemony of approaches to management development that treat a range of concepts unproblematically. I was concerned to show that African and Asian cosmologies have other ways of thinking, feeling and being in the world in relation to time. It was the first time I had put these thoughts into writing into a publication that would be read by a large audience of people from many different backgrounds.

I got the opportunity to expand on this thinking when I was asked me to write a chapter for a book on management thinking for the future. This time I tried to organise my thinking more carefully so as to enable White managers to see the relevance of African and Asian thought to the present economic trajectory towards global destruction. If we were going to develop different strategies we would need to think differently and drawing upon thought from other parts of the world offered hope in this. I was trying to position it as in their interests to seek alternatives from other parts of the world.

On one occasion in the early 1990's, I challenged a man who was about to smoke during session in a large group of local authority workers despite objections from people in the room. He argued that it was his right to be able to smoke and aggressively rejected their objections. I asked him to reconsider and when he declined I told him that he was not going to smoke. He was shocked and responded almost as if he wanted to fight me. I stood my ground and repeated that he could not smoke in the room and if he wanted to he would need to leave the course. There was tension in the room as our eyes locked. He looked like he was going to explode. I repeated that I would not allow him to smoke in the room. He eventually backed down. What he said to a fellow participant as he did so was revealing. "He's too big". This confirmed for me that he had been considering violence. I knew that I was ready for it at the time. Though I was pleased that I had stopped the man from bullying the group I was concerned about the fact that I might have got into a physical fight at work in circumstances that were avoidable. I was not happy with the way that I had handled myself and knew that I would need different responses to this in the future. I was able to stop him, but was not happy with how I had done so. I was annoyed because I had reacted in a classic male, meet-violence-with-violence or, rather, the-threat-of-violence with the-threat-of-violence way. I was unhappy with the values that that embodied but I also wanted to have ways of being that could successfully prevent abuse of power. My search for other ways of being in situations like this has been one of the motivators to my inquiry.

In my inquiring practice I have been noting the physical and cognitive responses I experience that tell me that I need to do something different. My struggle at the time was how? This led me to explore and challenge my own practice and some of the theoretical frame in which the actions I take in my work are located and seek explanations that were extra-paradigmatic and more congruent with the values I wished to hold.

Narratives of transition

I now want to recount an experience of working with Police commanders. I went into doing so determined to prove my credibility. I carried a whole bunch of baggage about the racism of the police force and part of me still remembered things that police officers have done to members of the Black community generally, to members of my family, to my friends and to me. I have been beaten over the head with a truncheon merely for informing a police officer that he had arrested an innocent person. So, to say the least, I went into working with these police leaders with mixed emotions. I expected to be challenged and resented for being Black. I expected them to see me as an outsider. I decided that it would be a great piece of inquiry to get involved and see what happened.

I spent hours preparing my PowerPoint slides and what I was going to say and how I was going to work with them. I prepared a host of interesting activities. I was better prepared than normally and yet I went into the event feeling unprepared and anxious. I remember meeting the first officer there and really looking at him to see what I could discern visibly and otherwise. Was he really being friendly? Did he really have to rush off like that? Does he feel uncomfortable with me? I am feeling uncomfortable. My body is tense. I can't get the words out as smoothly as I would like. I scribbled notes down as soon as each interaction had taken place. One note is instructive, "you don't know what's going on here do you son. Something is missing. You're not connecting it all up. I am scared about my session because I don't know these people".

The next day I ran the session. I got the officers to talk about the issues that they faced in working with issues to do with equality, diversity and working with communities promoting safety rather than focussing on 'fighting crime'. They were surprisingly open. The idea was that we would get the issues out and then look at creative ways of working with them. As they spoke some of them shared the difficulties that they faced trying to change the culture. I was surprised at the fact that at least 70% of the officers there spoke as if they actually wanted to make a change. They spoke of the difficulties that they had persuading their more junior officers – many of whom had been recruited with promises of an exciting career driving fast cars and taking risks – to work alongside communities. I facilitated their explorations and some leaders spoke of the strategies that they used whilst others spoke about their difficulties. Some spoke about devising ethical approaches to motivating their workforce and a couple spoke about different types of tactics that they used. I noted down an officer saying that the most important thing was "just making them do it. If I've got to lie to them to do so then so be it". In fairness I need to say that most of his colleagues were friendly but firmly critical of him and tried to persuade him to try more honest and motivational approaches.

I was absolutely fascinated. After a while it dawned on me that the feeling I had had gnawing away at me was one of recognition! I had worked with people like this before. They were not some strange breed of people. They were basically senior managers struggling to enable the strategic changes that central government had dictated to them. I breathed in deeply and knew that I was still uncomfortable. I still did not know if what I had to share with them would be of any use. I started my presentation and did an excellent job of explaining a whole range of ideas to do with creativity and diversity. My mouth was drier than normal and I had adopted the role of a lecturer more than that of a facilitator. I was sharing ideas with them. I knew that what I was trying to do was to establish my credibility with them. I had a strong sense that it wasn't working and so I introduced more

and more ideas that I thought would be relevant to them. In the end we ran out of time before they had a chance to apply the ideas to their situation. They gave me the feedback that they had found it really interesting but would have preferred to have spent some time working with the reflection model that I had promised to use with them.

I was emotionally shattered and disappointed with myself after the workshop. I had used PowerPoint as a kind of defensive shield that I had justified with my fears and prejudices. What had emerged during the session was that the police officers were giving explanations of what they did and why that showed their reasoning and concerns and their logic and their human fears, uncertainties and I recognised them! These were not aliens! Though I had failed to engage with them satisfactorily, I had discovered a belief that I could do so in the future. Their stories of their lives had invited me into their worlds and I related to much of what they were saying. Even more significantly, I allowed the seductive thought to entertain my mind that I could also be an educational influence on their learning as well!

I still believe that there are racist police officers, but the police force is not an impermeable solid wall of oppression. They are many different people working together, with a common purpose but different dreams and aspirations and values. If I could connect with those values of humanity that some of them had revealed to me then I just might be able to be that decolonising influence that I wanted to be, but how to do so? Let me share an experience that had a very different outcome.

About two years later, 2004 - 5, I facilitated an action learning set that contained similarly senior officers from the police and the armed forces and this time I engaged with them and their personal and career aspirations a lot more. I shared my life story as they did theirs over glasses of excellent red wine and a great meal. I told them that I was passionately interested in issues to do with African development. When the conversation turned to racism and they asked me what my 'take' was on it. I took the risk of saying what I actually believed because I wanted to find out what the outcomes would be of me doing so. I had eaten and drank with them. I had affirmed them and enjoyed their company and we had laughed together. They seemed to listen and did not argue with my description of the ways in which Western interests corrupt the economies and political structures and processes of African countries to serve their interests. Could I speak out against the injustices of the present status quo and still maintain this relationship? I got my answer a few months later.

I went to the toilet during one of a number of sessions with that group and one of them, a senior officer in a police force, came in after me. I had not been able to work out what he thought of me. He had a military bearing and always spoke with a sense of professionalism and assuredness. He had not shared his weaknesses with the group. He was very well defended and I had been wondering what he was getting out of the action learning set. While we both urinated he started speaking:

“You’re good at this aren’t you”?

I responded formally;

“Well, I do try my best to do a good job”. (Shit. I feel uncomfortable. What a place to start a conversation. What’s he up to? Is he trying to suss me out? Is he going to say something here that he wouldn’t dare to in the room with everybody else? How do I handle this? I’m not going to be a pushover that’s for sure. If he fucks with me I’ll fuck him back.)

“You are exceptionally observant and you tell people things that they aren’t used to hearing”. (That’s praise isn’t it? What’s going on? His face is not so hard. Is that a smile? Check this out son, but don’t let your guard down)

“Do you think that’s a good thing?”

“Yeah. It’s quite a talent. You’re good.”

I think this was his way of making contact with me. His face never looked the same again after that interchange. It had softness and a humour to it that I hadn’t detected previously. I worked hard with him and the rest of the set to help them move past or through the barriers in their lives and careers and I was genuinely sad when the set came to the end of its prescribed number of meetings. I had really come to see the great human beings that they were. We met the night before the set meetings to eat together and prepare for the next day. We often drank wine while we ate and had wide ranging conversations. They honoured me by arranging dinner the evening before our final meeting aboard a historic warship. I enjoyed the meal and the protocol that surrounded everything from how we entered the dining room (cabin?) to how the food was served and the ‘proper’ way to pour and pass the sherry after dinner (or was it port). I was struck by the loyalty of these people to their country. I listened closely to how they spoke about their sense of duty. It became clear to me that their notion of their country and whom they served had very little to do with respecting the current government of the day (or of any day for that matter). They did not serve the government they served the country and if that meant having to obey commands by “untrained idiots” then, rather than disobeying and risk destabilising their country, they were prepared to pay the ultimate price. They were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their ideal. They were impressive human beings. But I couldn’t just sit there in the belly of an ‘imperialist machine’ and not comment. I said something like the following:

“You know I think you guys are really great. You make me want to get patriotic for this country. But at the same time I think it’s a colonialist country and that what it does internationally impoverishes people like me around the world. I can really like you guys and be totally opposed to the ways that you are used to support this oppression.”

To my surprise they didn’t have a problem with what I had said. Maybe because we had already established relationships, maybe because they were well-mannered people and didn’t want to be rude and maybe, I suspect that this might be the case – they either actually agreed with me or knew that this was my position already. Which ever it was it encouraged me to believe that I could articulate a perspective that challenged the purpose of their institutions while valuing them as human beings whilst maintaining and developing a communicative relationship with people in senior positions in critical organisations. It was a fascinating reaction that has helped me be more prepared to speak about and explore different possibilities for organisations like the police force and armed forces. These possibilities have only emerged I believe because of the quality of the engagement that I had with these people.

What had changed? How was I now able to operate like this? Largely because, through the increasingly congruent and authentic engagement with others in my work, I began to experience the ‘other’ as less disconnected from me than I had previously. I could see me in them and them in me. As I embodied my values of Ubuntu more confidently I was stepping into different types of relationships that enabled different possibilities to emerge in my practice. Let me be more explicit here. I think that it was because they did not feel

like I was blaming or guilt tripping them personally, and because I embodied a communicated and experienced appreciation of them, and because of the connections that now existed between us, that they were able to respond in a non-emotional manner and discuss the issues with me without getting defensive. It was experiences like this and reflection on them that contributed to me developing my approach of guiltless recognition.

The following narratives give some examples of what triggered the expanded awareness that became a significant educational influence on my learning and enabled me to enter into inclusional relationships more confidently. They are:

1. People 'seeing' me on the Masters programme
2. The man crying
3. The tree outside
4. A visual inquiry
5. The men's courses

People 'seeing' me on the Masters programme

Over the 6 years that I ran qualification programmes for Roffey I pride myself on the fact that none of my students ever left before they completed the programme or failed to get their Masters degree. I worked with love (maybe sometimes despite myself) and challenge with my students and in the process learnt a lot about the restrictions I had placed upon myself in terms of working with White people in a truly engaged way. Over a period of two years I got to know people deeply and they me. I found that I could not seal myself off from them while working with them. If I was assisting them to explore some of the psychological blocks to their success I had to share some of myself in the process. I kidded myself that they never really saw the real me but they would surprise me sometimes with comments that came from a caring insight into my own positive and negative patterns. We had residential events approximately every three months. In between that participants worked, testing out their learning intentions in their places of employment, reflecting upon their experiences and revising their actions. They would also be writing essays, largely on areas that they had self-selected. We would start each session with a 'check-in' when people would report on what they had achieved and learnt over the last few months and what the current issues were for them in their work and broader lives. I used to participate in this session as well.

I was disturbed when Wendy (not her real name) reflected upon my check in and said that she saw this pattern of endless business in my life. "Eden. I don't mean to be rude or anything but every time you check in you mention your busyness and the fact that you are doing something about it to change. You never have time Eden. You say that you want to do lots of things that you can't do because you are doing so many other things but each time you come here it's the same story". I thought, "shit. She can see through me and see my fallibility". Personal log July 1993

This was one of a number of experiences I had that showed that I had not been as protected from the perceptions of the White people I worked with as I thought that I wanted to be. Working with this group of White managers over two years they had come to know me as a human being in ways that I found threatening. Threatening of what? I had given hugely to them emotionally as they had shared their vulnerabilities but I was operating from a

position in which I felt that I did not want to do the same. This was not only because, as facilitator, I wanted to maintain some kind of professional separation in roles. Philosophically I was against that. It was deeper than that. As I interrogated myself as to what it was that explained my reticence I came to the difficult conclusion that it was, at least in part, I did not want to let these White people enter my world to the extent that they could hurt me. I did not want them to do so and then be able to disassemble this life, this identity, I had constructed for myself

I had gradually built a wall around aspects of myself that I closed off to my White acquaintances. That wall had become such an integral part of who I was that I did not even know that it was there! Walls are delusional things though and Wendy's comments showed that mine was not as impermeable as I had fooled myself into believing.

Her feedback was one of the interventions that a) challenged my existing strategies and b) stimulated me to think about seeking other ways of being with White people.

The man crying

Let me give another example. I remember on another programme a man starting to cry during a session. I walked him out of the room and sat with him while he continued to cry. In between sobs he told me that he had been triggered by the conversation in the main group into remembering feelings that he wanted to forget. I told him that he could speak about it if he wanted to. He burst into even louder sobs. I was tempted to hug him but just got close to him and put my hand on his shoulder. He cried some more and then started to speak about him having been abused as a young boy by a member of his family, somebody whom his mother had great respect for. He couldn't tell anybody and had kept it inside himself for years, blaming himself. He must have done something wrong, he said. As he spoke I felt his pain and was angered for him. I spoke calmly and told him that he should not blame himself. "You did nothing wrong". He told me that this was the first time that he had ever told anybody about it. His body convulsed as the tears flowed and his voice became guttural with the emotion and the rawness.

I stayed with that man for most of the morning and affirmed him and praised him and showed him love. Afterwards he thanked me profusely saying that the tears and our interaction had been a life changing experience for him. I was drained and also uncomfortable I think because in order to help that man I had engaged with him more fully and authentically than I had become accustomed to. The barrier I had gone through in doing so that was causing me greatest discomfort was not the professional one, it was the one about being cautious in terms of how much I came out from behind myself in engaging with White people. I was confused and angry at the same time as feeling that I had done the right thing. The emotional intensity I experienced subsequent to my intervention with that man was evidence that I was holding contradictory positions located cognitively and bodily that were starting to undermine the mental models (Senge, 1990) that I held.

The tree outside

Here is another example. I was working with a manager on a personal effectiveness residential programme during an individually focussed workshop. He was in a lot of pain in his life. He had come to the course to get answers. I tried to ask him good questions, to

challenge him into thinking in new directions, but as I looked at him all I could see was pain. I desperately wanted to help this man but was myself exhausted. I did not know what to do. I had tried everything. I looked past him, over his shoulders into the lovely fields that the room opened up to. It was cloud-covered day casting gloom on most parts of the grounds, but a young tree standing on its own had somehow contrived to be bathed in sunlight. Its beauty captured me. I watched and as I engaged with the beauty of this tree, its youthfulness and its future promise, I felt passionately that the man in front of me deserved to feel happier than he did. I found myself consciously calling upon the tree to give me strength and wisdom. I begged it to help me to help this man. I knew that people in some traditions in Africa do this and I thought I could suspend my rational logic and just let go. After a while I felt myself feeling stronger and fresher. Something had shifted inside of me. I turned to the man and smiled. I spoke with him. I cannot remember what I said I just know that he felt cared for as I spoke. Something happened in our conversation and he relaxed, we moved on, he saw hope and possibility again. After the session he thanked me profusely. I was a bit confused as I knew what I had intended to do but was not clear as to what I had actually done. I also felt good that I was able to help him

The men's courses

In this narrative I recount how I have influenced my own learning through the quality of my engagement on courses I run for men only. They show me transgressing the boundaries I had set myself in terms of how I came to know, how I perceived others – and myself and what was possible for me to allow in my relationships with White people.

I have been running programmes for men over the last 6 years or so for London Boroughs. It has been an amazing experience in which I have been learning about myself & about them, evolving optimism from the stories of triumph they tell. I have engaged in a visually and emotional inquiry as I work with these men; looking at them; listening to their life stories, drawing pictures of them and finding myself breaking down the categorisations I had begun to place them in. I found myself being surprised at the extent to which we shared a common humanity despite our differences and the different social conditions we face based on our differing histories and relationships with power.

As I describe my work with groups of men I am sharing a practice based context in which I came to shift my beliefs through a process of engagement with the men that I was working with. That engagement was one in which I was both seeking to assist the development of the men and inquiry into myself as I did so. I was inquiring into my practice as a facilitator, myself as a man, and into my embodied beliefs and values. These are interconnected dimensions of course. I have spoken about wanting to work with ways of knowing that are decolonising. What follows is an example of me coming to know through ways that I characterise as decolonising in that they are outside of the methods of acquiring valid knowledge that are usually privileged in the Academy and therefore undermine those aspects of its hegemony that preclude and exclude other ways of knowing. Heron and Reason speak of:

“... a radical epistemology for a wide-ranging inquiry method that integrates experiential knowing through meeting and encounter, presentational knowing through the use of aesthetic, expressive forms, propositional knowing through words and concepts, and practical knowing-how in the exercise of diverse skills -

intrapsychic, interpersonal, political, transpersonal and so on. (Heron and Reason, 2001)

Through activities like sharing life stories with other men, predominantly White; I engaged in inquiry that had a powerful impact upon me. It was a coming to know through “meeting and encounter” through listening with my heart as well as my propositional head. I recount how through seeking to ‘see’ the men through my drawings, “the use of aesthetic, expressive forms”, I was deconstructing (my) ways of knowing that put people in comfortable categories. These categories keep groups of people apart in ways that maintain the interests of colonising forces in our society. I have found that drawing is a way of getting past my preconceptions. I discover qualities and am enticed into reflections and considerations I would have avoided otherwise. This methodology has produced unique and transformational insights for me. I believe that the reader is brought closer to my process by the sharing of these images. These non-verbal pictorial discoveries though giving me access to a presentational knowing, can only be described in part, verbally. The descriptions that follow demonstrate a responsiveness over time to the visual that I think produces evidence of my learning.

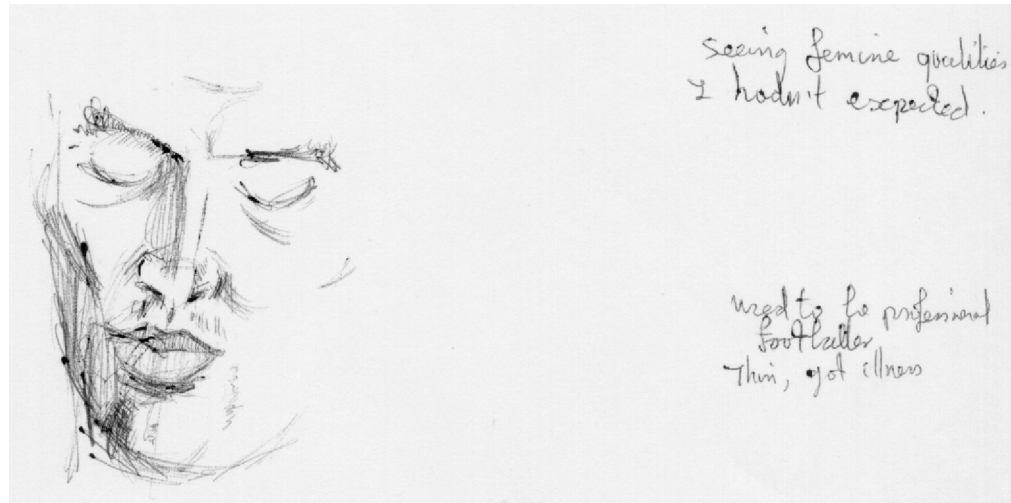
I begin with an account to do with drawing men as I worked with them. On the 4/7/2004, whilst running a men’s programme I was making drawings of them as they participated in the activities we had prepared for them. I became aware of myself interrogating the gaze I brought to bear on these men. I wrote in my log:

“In drawing people I am transforming myself. I am engaging with the humanity of the people I draw. I am ‘drawing-in’ something that is created deeper than the surface of the exteriors that I ‘draw’, and is the creation of who we both are and, more importantly, maybe, the mental processes, judgements that inform my aesthetic and human judgements. As I draw I look, I see, I look and discover much more than what I see than what I see when I just look at them. In fact, maybe what I am doing is creating an expanded understanding.

Private log 4/7/2004

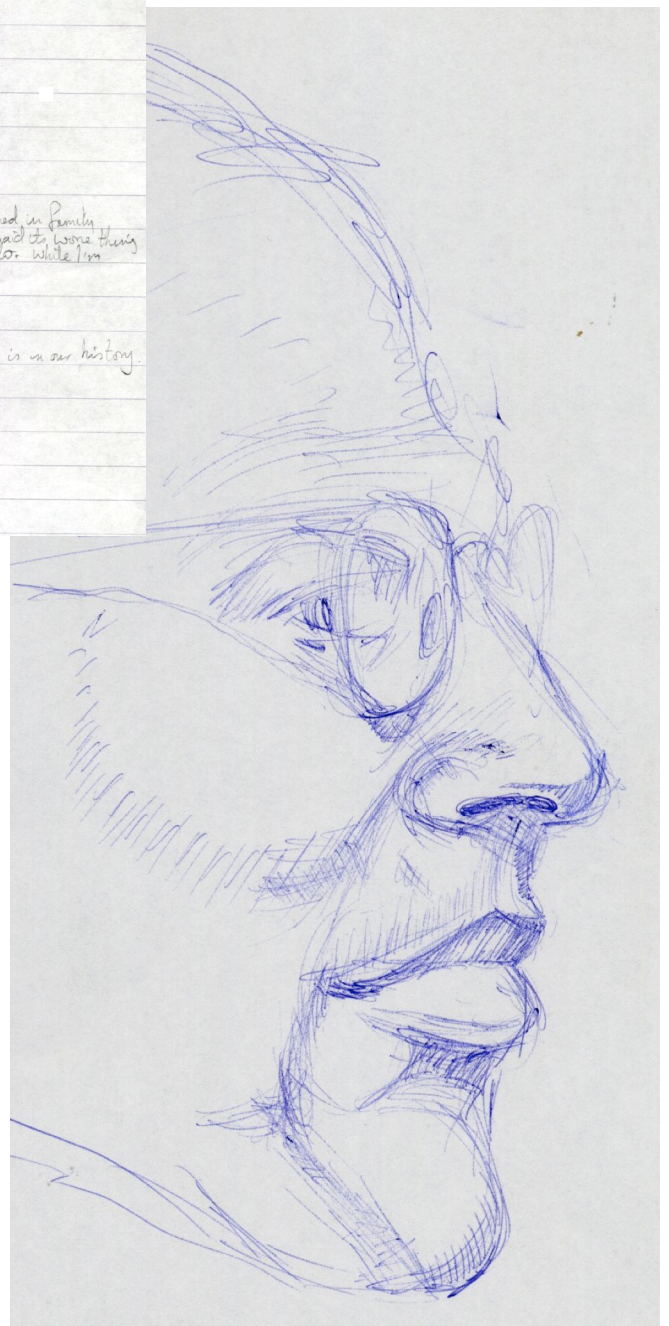
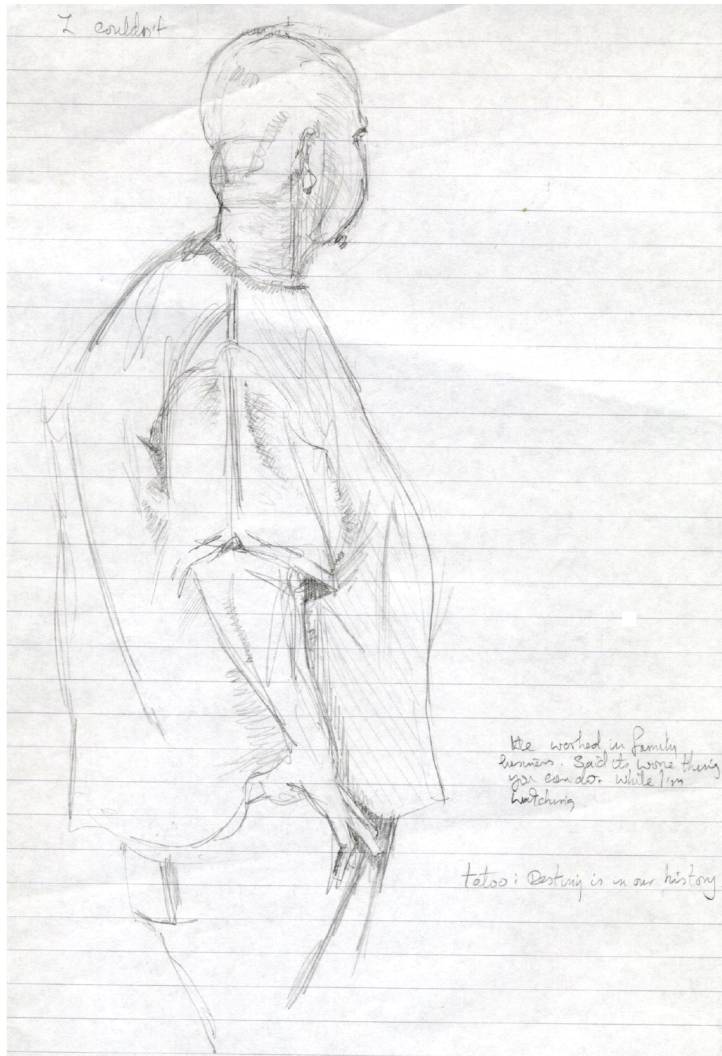
As I look at the drawing I made of another man I see notes that describe my reactions to what I had drawn and what I had experienced whilst I was drawing and I remember the sense of discovery and transformation of judgement I experienced whilst I was drawing him. The notes say, “Seeing feminine qualities I hadn’t expected”. And “Used to be a professional footballer and then got sick”.

I remember this man as somebody who looked as if he had it all going for him in life. He dressed stylishly and still looked like a professional footballer – or at least the playboy stereotyped in TV series. He looked as if he did not have a care in the world, but as his story emerged I experienced the pain behind the good looks. I felt the humanity of somebody who had gone from the verge of riches to working for a local authority doing an unspectacular job. The pain did not come from the job that he was doing or just from the illness that had terminated his career. It came from the other vicissitudes of life common yet devastating to so many of us.



I saw fat, dirty looking men, with few educational qualifications, who would probably never 'make it' into management positions who lived full lives. They were intelligent, had excitement, passion and such rich stories to tell of their hobbies, their loves and their wider lives. Their stories forced me to question again the notions of success that had begun to solidify subversively in my mind. These men were complete human beings who thought as deeply as anybody in higher management or leadership positions. They were no more simple men than the complex men who would describe them as such.

As I watched the man below, speaking and doing a presentation about himself, I found myself attracted to his determined refusal to see himself as anything but great. Resisting norms and fashions (and health advice) he stood stubbornly proud and open to give to the humanity of the other men in the group. He saw himself as a man of style and those who he mixed with outside work did so too. They loved his intelligence, humour and shared his interest in his hobby.



I discovered something personally transforming as I watched and drew these men. I found myself moved and proud of the ways in which they had, in some instances, managed to overcome serious issues in their lives. In some other cases they were working with serious problems to do with relationships and facing difficult decisions. Throughout most, if not all of their stories I was struck by their desire to do the right thing. There were no macho stories of just moving on and not caring about the children or their ex's. These men revealed to each other the huge amounts of pain and hurt that they individually had bore and none saw as being something more common. In their desire to bear the pain in order to live according to their

values their was a sense of their nobility that I reflected back to them and which they revelled in – once they got used to being placed in such an unusual position. One guy said to me "Eden. I'm not used to being praised or told that I am noble. It's a new experience. It's weird, but good. I have to think about it". I encouraged him to do so and watched as he fought back the tears.

There were Black and White people on these courses and I have enjoyed and been frustrated as a result of the dynamics I have observed. They all gave to each other. Despite the fact that the White guys sometimes did not understand some of the unspoken issues of the Black men, they all wanted to give assistance to the Black guys and all wanted to receive it from them in turn.



As I worked with these men I was moved to understand racism to be something far more complex and contradictory than is often assumed in the literature, particularly when the label is used to describe a person. These men might well have had views and applied behaviours that had had negative consequences for Black people and yet, this did not, in my mind, devalue the sincerity of their wish to give to their Black male colleagues. I made the following note whilst I drew:

“As I look at and draw the man (to the left of this text) I am struck by the warmth, I sense and experience. There's gentleness and a pained yearning that I had not heard in his voice. Then, as he tells his story to the group and I look at him deeply, I hear and feel it there. He is a large Black man who is becoming more articulate as he talks. I am looking at the group and surprised to see what I think is real engagement in his story and his individual humanity. They like him – Brian says something and I realise that they recognise some of their story in his story. There's a real connection going on here”.

The courses that I have run with men have seen me engaged in what I experienced as a transformatory learning connectivity. As I worked with these men and other people generally the quality of the relationships that we established influenced me. I shifted from holding and applying a theoretical frame about racism that worked as perceptual filter

and obscuring lens to becoming prepared to move away from simple and safe explanations and work with the reality of what I perceived and try to develop theories that made sense

from these explorations of vision and experience. The thoughts and structures and representations of Scharmer (Scharmer, 2000a) have been useful in providing structure and affirmation of this.

I learned to suspend judgement and just 'be there', experiencing, if I was to learn anything that was qualitatively different to the things I knew before. This knowledge did not always offer itself for immediate application and I also learned that that is actually part of its strength. In seeking to suspend judgement whilst working with and "breathing in" (Scharmer, 2000a, P 10) understandings, embodied and conceptual, I have gradually moved away from some of the relatively bounded simplicities I worked with before.

Suspension of judgment is the sine qua non of observing and seeing. Instead of projecting mental models and judgments onto the world, one opens up to what is actually happening in the world. By taking off one's self-created filters, one can see differently (Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, 1999; Husserl, 1985).

(Scharmer, 2000a, P 20)

In working with these men I was engaged in a collaborative inquiry into our individual evolution in our lives as men. Though I was the facilitator I was also exploring my own being as a human, father, man and as a facilitator of change. As I 'breathed in' these men's stories and helped them prepare themselves for new ones I was doing the same for myself. I would often share with them, at times when I thought it would not distract them from their own issues, some of what I was experiencing and how I was learning from the experience and how I was thinking of applying that learning. I was uncompromisingly committed to reflecting back to them their beauty and ability.

Through engaging with people like this I forged relationships in which I found myself coming out from behind my walls and as a result we have truly met and I have come to learn more about them as people. This highlighted to me the extent to which I have been previously operating with stereotypes of White people in my head that have been barriers not just to my engagement with them but with my engagement with reality as a whole and, therefore, to the emergence of strategies that were sufficiently grounded in their realities for me to be able to be as effective an influence on their learning as I wished to be.

The development of my ability to support real transformational change (as distinct from what I perceive and experience as reformist models; explanations and practice) has been directly influenced by these insights. Consequently I have sought to step outside or suspend perceptual and conceptual paradigms and put myself in a position in which other possibilities could come to awareness. I have engaged in this way of working before I knew that that is what I was doing. This is what Merleau-Ponty refers to when he speaks of the body leading prior to the mind knowing what, or why, it is moving in particular directions.

The engaged observations and drawings that I did with the men was an important way of accessing fields and dimensions of knowing that temporarily bypassed cognitive processes and opened me up to understanding that I have subsequently integrated into the living theory I seek to embody and the claims to knowledge I make. I regard it as a generative mode of inquiry emerging from my bodily knowing into my cognitive awareness through engaging in practice.

In Appendix 5 Section Five, I share some feedback from one of the courses that I ran for men. It affirms that I was experienced as both highly effective, professional and capable of facilitating real change with the men and that I did so while working with the values of connection, collaboration, engagement, and spontaneity. I regard it as evidence of a shift in my practice. It also informed me that I was more successfully finding ways in which I could bring my 'outsider' self into the work I do on the 'inside'. I began to believe that I could have those good relationships with White people at the same time as offering different conceptualisations of the reality of life as a person of African origin operating in the same professional and social arenas as they do seeking to contribute to evolving a post-colonial identity in which equality and justice on a national and international scale are part of the living identity of this society. In fact, I came to the conclusion, if I did not have those relationships I would not be in the position to influence social formations, live my life more fully, experience love more widely, grow as a human being and stay true to my vision of myself as a Black man with the commitments I hold to influence society towards greater valuing, justice and equity of and for all peoples. That has been a significant shift in how I see myself.

The accounts that I have given are of moments of action and simultaneous inquiry in my practice as an educator practitioner and as a theorist. I present them as data that shows how I have moved from a protected engagement that was driven by propositional approaches to opening myself up to experience in ways that were grounded, emergent, destabilising and generative. As I did so I give myself permission to 'be' in different ways and as I do so I received data about the impact that was having on my own sense of self and on others that encouraged me to continue.

I had found that White managers either resisted the ideas of African cosmology as relevant to their practice or said things like "yeah, this is really interesting, but what are we supposed to do about it? I'm not paid to change the values of my department. I'm paid to do a job. What do you suggest that we do as a consequence?" I did not have simple answers. It became clear to me that an awareness of Africa having a great history and having significant contributions to how we think and work as people on this planet was not enough to lead to the transformation reflection and change on the part of the managers I was working with.

I struggled. I sometimes felt as if I was begging White managers to do me a favour. Which felt as if I was operating from a position of weakness and I did not like it. I struggled to find ways of working with my ideas about their value to the purpose of mainstream organisations. At first I would tell people that ideas that I was introducing them to were influenced or emanated from Africa or from Asia as the case may be. Then I tried to be telling them about how the Western World view was destroying the planet and that they needed to develop alternative ways of working. Not surprisingly, I did not get very enthusiastic responses when I used the latter approach. I gave a lot of thought to how I could spread the message that I wanted to in a manner that would achieve the outcomes I wanted. The chapter I wrote in the book *Managing the Unknown by Creating New Futures* was an attempt to do just this (Charles, 1994c). In that chapter I sought to provide White managers with compelling reasons for them to change. I sought to provide explanations and other perspectives of the reality that they might have been taking for granted. I sought to extend possibilities of 'us', people from all over the world, establishing partnerships characterised by mutual learning and seeking mutual benefit as a way of building a sustainable future for all people on the planet.

What I was learning from these men (on the men's courses) though was about our shared humanity. I could not distance myself from the aspirations and dreams that they had for themselves and their lives. And as I engaged with them, I saw that they were my aspirations as well. We all wanted something better for our children, we all wanted good relationships, we all wanted economic security, we all were prepared to fight for our principles and were proud of those moments in our shared history when we had done so collectively, if not harmoniously. I saw that through the quality of the relationships that we had engaged in, I could understand why they would not see African cosmology as a solution for them to engage with. I gradually began to evolve the idea of 'guiltless recognition' as a way of working with them. It starts with engaging and creating relationships based on shared truths and then, if and when the relationship allows, I am able to articulate the injustices in the existing status quo *from their perspective*.

As I experienced myself valuing these managers more and, through the engagement and through beginning to see that we were interconnected parts of the whole and embodying an Ubuntu way of being more comfortably, I understood them differently. They might be living in a society that still benefited from the accumulation of wealth instigated by slavery and continued by colonialist policies but that did not mean that I could not allow myself to like and value them individually. But I had always liked some White people. Is that really what was different?

Part of what was different was that *I* was different now. I had developed a real confidence in myself, I had a good grasp of African history and cosmology and was embodying a way of being in which I felt much more comfortable and powerful. I believed that I had power. I was getting confirmation of my ability to make things happen in the Sankofa Learning Centre, in my career, in my thinking and in my relationships. I had moved from the colonised inferiority complexes and actually believed that I could be an influence. I discovered that I had an embodied presence and Ubuntu way of being that reflected an optimism and life-affirming energy that others found inspirational. I looked in the mirror and liked what I saw. I, who had been raised to believe that I was ugly and not too bright, was proving to be none of the above!

I have been trying to show how engaging in the experiences I have described, in the ways in which I have, was deeply and positively destabilising. The 'experience of the experience' presented me with choices as to whether to work with the realities of my engaged, embodied participation in ways that challenged the descriptions of my values that I used with myself honestly or consider them aberrations that left the original explanations intact and valid. Working as an inquirer into the 'truth' meant that I reflected deeply upon the experiences and gradually allowed other explanations to evolve that more closely fitted the values that had revealed themselves in practice and which subsequently I articulate as part of my living theory. The benefits I have gained from this preparedness to explore, reassess and make changes to my embodied practice emanate largely from the fact that I inquired with more than my intellect. I was engaged spiritually, bodily and in webs of interconnected dialectical intertwinings with the people, environment and contexts I engaged in and with. I have found the notion of 'extended epistemology' particularly valuable as a means of explaining the ways in which I was 'knowing' through action. It is this embodied engagement that has enabled me to make the changes that I have.

What I was also recognising was the extent to which the world had changed around me and new identities had evolved in reality but not captured in the dominant discourse, or the theories of 'racism' that pertained in organisations. Many of these men had gone to school with Black people and had some had real good friends that were Black. Some were married to Black women. That did not stop them from expressing racist views, but it also did not stop them from expressing genuine love to some Black people. Over the years, relationships had been forged through conflict, disagreement, friendship, confusion, denial and love. I believed that I saw, contained in those relationships the elements of an identity that was radically different from the one I grew up with 40 years ago. In conversation with men, from all different walks of life, I learned to acknowledge that identity shift I saw and explore how I could be the kind of influence that supports and enables that identity 's growth.

I shifted my practice slightly but significantly and when I told stories to audiences of managers I prefaced them with stories of acknowledgement of what they had done to contribute to the evolution of the present state of our society. "Things still aren't perfect" I would say. "We still have a long way to go. But let us start by celebrating the relationships, the services, and the philosophies of equality and justice that have become a living reality for so many people in this society. Our task is not to focus on what is wrong, but to work together to create stories that extend the stories we have created through our shared living practice into new realms that reflect those aspirations and values that you speak of with pride. Here, through engagement and dialogue I began to develop the practice of societal reidentification. I was asking people to partner with me in fulfilling their own aspirations. Things shifted in response to my shift. Resistance declined. People wanted to hear what I had to say and I became in high demand as a speaker and consultant on issues of diversity and equality.

I applied this Ubuntu way of thinking with its characteristics of guiltless recognition, restorative justice and societal reidentification to my work with organisations. The results have been quite outstanding. Positive action programmes that I have run for organisations, designed to increase representation of BME, women and disabled people at the most senior levels in organisations have had success at an order that is significantly greater than what has been achieved previously. I believe that my work has had a direct influence on the learning of participants and facilitators of programmes that I have facilitated and / or designed. Let me give some statistical support to my claim. On one programme over 70% of BME staff gained promotion within 12 months. This compared with the previous programme, designed and facilitated by others, which had a success rate of less than 4%. On another programme we have a promotion rate of over 50%. Though the statistics are useful, my standards of judgement are to do with the extent to which people feel better about themselves and their ability to achieve their ambitions for themselves in their lives whatever they might be. I see my role as informing possibility and assisting people to recognise their value and ability and deservedness, not to determine what they do with the learning they gain.

Reflections on working and learning with Black people

How I moved from reformist propositional advocacy and strategies founded in modernism to an embodied transformational approach in my work with Black managers in which embodied form is part of the unit of measurement.

I have been working with local and central government organisations both as a consultant generally, facilitating action inquiry groups, action learning sets and running positive action training courses for Black people into management and for existing Black managers for a number of local authorities. Over the years I have worked with hundreds of Black managers. Even while I was not happy with the political direction of my work I was still clear that I was making a positive contribution to peoples' learning. I remember a participant who had been on a course for Black managers run by a large consultancy saying that he had not expected much from my course, but he had been amazed at the impact on him of addressing issues specific to Black and doing it from an affirmative perspective. One of the most powerful moments of my life as a trainer was when I asked a woman to stand up and say her name out loud. As she did so she burst into tears. Through her sobs she explained that her Nigerian parents had placed her with a White English family to raise her in the countryside where there were no other Black people. She had endured years of ridicule and devaluing of herself. As a result of the positive affirmation that she had received from myself and the rest of the group her picture of herself had changed and she was crying because this was the first time in her life that she had ever been able to say her full Nigerian name out loud with pride. I think we all started crying at that point. I knew that I was making a positive contribution though seeking to work in ways that were authentic and addressed our specific needs. When she said that the previous programme they had been on had not covered anything about being Black and having something unique and positive to offer I knew that I was on the right path.

I had originally started off working with Black workers from a position that was essentially about sharing information that I had gained about how they could 'make it' in organisations. I taught them the standard management development skills that I taught White managers. I was dissatisfied with this though and tried to introduce ideas from African history and cosmology and give the message that we can draw upon them in feeling good about ourselves as we go into organisations and don't just need to feel that we have to learn from the organisations. The message went something like this:

We have a great history that disproves many of the negative myths that are spread about us. If we are aware of that then we can operate with more confidence in organisations. You have to develop skills in communication with those in senior positions if you are going to progress in their organisations. You need to know the hidden rules and language. How can you find out?

Qualifications are almost irrelevant. What matters is your ability to work effectively in the culture. But if you start from a position in which you ignore your own culture and the strengths that it gives you then you are almost working with one hand tied behind your back. Psychologically its important to believe that you have a strong foundation. Given all of the negative messages about Black people in society.

To a lot of the Black people I was working with though all they wanted to do was to progress in organisations. I started to articulate the message of “why should I support you in progressing in organisations if you will behave exactly the same as those who are there already? What is important are the interests you serve when you get there. You can be a good worker and help make a difference to organisations – but only if you believe that that is important and that you can do something; that is that you have the power and ability to be a positive influence”.

I am uncomfortable with the tone of my argument here. I am not valuing their individual life choices and am pushing people away. I am saying agree with me or I won't support you. In doing this I am polarising amongst us and being counter productive. What to do?

I found the answer by going over pages in my reflective notes and asking myself what I was doing when I felt best about my practice. The story of the woman crying over her name stuck out as reflecting a pattern of affirmative interventions on my part that had been a significant educative influence on the people I worked with. That woman went on to found a successful education company that supplied Black parents with educational resources for their children to help counteract the failure of the education system. Others set up their own businesses, other applied for more senior posts, many more ‘just’ believed in themselves more; they felt more proud of their history and identity. I thought that that influence had come from the logical construction of the positions I advocated, but I could not find a causative link.

I spoke at a conference on sexual abuse in the Black community. I presented a paper for the called From: ‘Towards An Anti Colonial Approach To Therapy to: Thoughts On A Transformational Approach To Our Work’ (Charles, 1994a). (Appendix 4. Section Five.) In which I tried to articulate the relevance of African cosmology to Black people. I got a lot of applause from the audience and I thought it was because they were impressed with the arguments that I had articulated. When I sat down with a group afterwards and asked for feedback the thing that they experienced as most powerful in my presentation was not my ideas, but the values that I had embodied. At the time I thought that I needed to learn how to articulate these ideas better. I did not understand the significance of what they were saying.

I asked people for feedback about my practice and videoed myself working with groups in order to increase my understanding of what I was doing that worked and what I needed to do to improve my practice. One critical experience was watching a clip of me working with a group of central government Black managers. As I watched it (07-6-02) I saw embodied an energy and love of life as well as an ability to speak in a captivating fashion to a group of managers for nearly two hours. I was pleased at the comfort I saw in my body and myself generally. It's a comfort that I am aware of having experienced but only after watching myself on tape am I able to find affirmative language to describe what I have been celebrating – almost in secret from that conscious part of my self that would find such things immodest. I see and experience what my supervisor Jack Whitehead, amongst others has described as ‘life affirming quality’. This energy that I exude is, I believe, critical to the success I have had in engaging with others in the processes of personal, organisational and social transformation.

My colleague had asked me to tell the group about an experience when I, as a group of consultants had hired the Olympic stadium in Barcelona for a team-building event. I

thought that she had done so as a way of inspiring people into believing that it was possible to achieve things that they might not have thought about. However, when I asked her for feedback she said that it was to do with the spirit of fun and life in me as I recounted it. Not so that they could see that they could ‘make it’ but so that they could enjoy watching a successful Black man who was able to hold on to his life affirming energy, his spontaneity and joy of life while working with pride in himself with the top level of managers of one of the top three pharmaceutical companies in the world.

I asked people to write down some feedback for me. I have included most of it in Appendix 8 Section Five. Here is one indicative piece of feedback:

Dear Eden, 13-6-02

There were many valuable insights and inspirational points to your much appreciated talk yesterday. One was “Think Differently” but what I really got the most from, was the fact that you were a strong intelligent Black man more than willing to share your wisdom with us.

Much respect + love

I began to realise that what influenced people was not just the ideas that I shared with them or the logic of the stories that I told that inspired them. More important was my embodied Ubuntu way of being, the understanding of a need for a decolonising perspective, the optimism of a belief in societal reidentification, my confidence and cheek, the open expressing of love and affirmation to them, the believability of the stories that I recounted. These stories I told were founded in the African oral tradition passed down to me through my family. They are the linguistic form through which my embodied values of Ubuntu are conveyed. Story is a critical element of reidentification. Ben Okri, that beautiful Nigerian storyteller, speaks of the power of story to create the future. Otto Scharmer speaks of the ability to sense the future in the present and ‘presence’ it. Howard Gardner says that great leaders tell great stories, in fact, they make themselves a part of their story. My practice can be seen as drawing upon these understandings. I see a part of my role to notice the characteristics and potential of a society that describes its identity in different ways to the presently dominant one. I draw this from noticing the great and positive existing in the past and in the present and I try to ‘story’ them into future reality of identity.

Here is an extract from a participant on a course I ran in January 2007. She has given me permission to quote it. I think it describes what I am seeking to do and provides evidence of the value that she experienced from this way of being.

By sharing very personal and private insights in your life, you in-part to the group, although I talk primarily for my self, an extreme sense of strength. For example there is nothing wrong for a Black man to show emotion, the message is clear that you are connected to your feelings and despite this you stand strong. Being connected to your feelings means that you strive to live in the now, you work at remaining conscious. It also shows us that you too have survived all that you have been exposed to on your life journey.

You also had the intuitive ability to draw individuals out of their shell. This you did with Tharat and Joan. This also includes myself as I too have to learn to accept how people see me and often struggle with the insight that I receive as I don’t see what others see. This is a very special gift. This ability helped them to “face their fear” leading them to embrace it. It was not just drawing them out of themselves but the

ability to hold out an invisible hand for them to lean on, as they move through a very important transition.

The journey that you are on also tells us that you are willing to share your experiences and help us to also reconnect with ourselves as we have disconnected ourselves as a survival strategy, which in my opinion removes our strength. This then has a disassociation and we no longer remember our gains and experiences, and if we are not careful, we can be left with nothing to draw on in times of turbulence.

You made me feel safe and willing to share, but most importantly feel energised to want to share my personal experiences with the group. By the time we discussed the ground rules they were already in place.

You also have life affirming energies and this was transferred to the group which gave me the feeling of hope and that it was indeed a real possibility that this journey would be really achievable, i.e. it is never too late and everything happens for a reason, and most importantly nothing ever happens before its time.



[\(CD-S6 Clip 2.mov\)](#)

Inquiring in meeting at major international consulting firm.

The meta-reason for my inquiring into my practice was a desire to influence individuals and social formations towards greater justice by being an influence on their learning through a) articulating and providing different perspectives, ideas and information and b) embodying different ways of being that reflect the values that I seek to represent in the articulation.

In Appendix 6, Section Five I share an account of me inquiring into my ability to articulate the ways in which I have integrated some of the most significant learning I have gained from my inquiring practice. It is, in part, a description of me paying close attention to my body and the impact I was having on the 'system' I was engaged in. It is me reflecting upon myself in a room with others, in my professional capacity, seeking to live values that I believe are transformatory of the dominant paradigm. As I engage with my inner and outer 'arcs of attention' I am also seeking to inquire into the impact I have in this new situation through paying attention to the knowledge I am gaining from explicit and implicit, conscious and sub-conscious, cognitive and bodily, rational and emotional engagement with the interconnected field I am participating in co-creating.

The significance of this meeting is both its form as explicit evidence of my inquiring practice and that it demonstrates one of the first times that I was able to articulate and embody in a public forum an encapsulation of the thinking and practice I had evolved that I was happy with. I am hoping that it shows me engaged with others with an Ubuntu way of being

I shared the account of the meeting with another one of my other 'critical friends', Paula Cook. Paula and I have worked together for an international NGO in South America, the UK, Bangladesh and some parts of Africa and asked her for feedback on part of an early draft of this section. Her full response is in Appendix 7. Section Five. I include an extract from it here.

I don't think that you are necessarily a better orator than writer. I think you can do both. I think that you just miss the relationship with an audience when you write. You certainly do have a talent for engaging people who listen to you. It is not for nothing that we call you Mr. Charisma! *The spoken word allows you to use all of your body and personality and to tap into the energy of those around you.* The written word is per se different - more limited in terms of energy and spontaneity, which are your hallmarks.

The receiving of feedback from others has been tremendously valuable to me as I seek to improve my ability to influence my learning, the learning of others and that of social formations. It tells me that I can do so. It also tells me that the more aware and confident I am about that ability the more I can work with others confidently in extending that influence. In this sense it is part of my decolonising re-emergence as I evolve an understanding of myself with greater clarity as somebody who can work connect with and work with those in 'power' in ways that are decolonising.

I spoke with one of my critical friends Shaama Saggar Malik about this. She has been present in some of the situations when I am speaking to and working with groups of people

from different backgrounds. She has a background in action research. There follows parts of a transcript of our conversation

“You project a sense of otherness”.

“What do you mean, otherness?”

“That is what I see. It does not feel an us and them, a you and me. I see others relating to you simultaneously at different levels of being and with different degrees of consciousness.

They see themselves as one, an ‘other’. You come into their room, their circle, their meeting their whatever. You come into their room and the reality is that another person has walked into the room. But actually it isn’t an other person that comes in. Coming in when Eden comes in it is an us. It shifts actually. There aren’t two others in the room there is an ‘us-ness’ in the room.” it is an us.

There is a part of them that connects, that links. It links. It does link. There is something of themselves that they recognise in you.

I think I am understanding what you mean. My shift has been that I cannot work with people and be detached from them. When I am working well I am totally attached I become a part of them. That White guy who was crying about being abused as a child, he was a human being in pain and I was using every part of my being to help that man escape from his pain”.

“You became a part of him and he saw that and that’s what you have. You don’t see it but I do and others do and they see it in action and that’s why they say, “wow, inspirational, awestruck”. You don’t threaten people as well. You don’t”

I felt that Shaama might have put her finger on the elusive quality of being that I have been seeking to identify. I am now clear that it is my Ubuntu way of being that cannot be deconstructed into its elements mechanically. I asked a number of other colleagues what they thought made me effective as a facilitator and speaker and was pleased by some (see Appendix 13 Section Five), surprised by others and disappointed by responses like this

“Its just you Eden”.

“What do you mean it’s just me? Is it the content of what I have to say? The ideas that I have worked hard to evolve and the strategies I have formulated and am proposing”?

“It’s all of that Eden, but its something about the way you come over. The way you look, the locks, the suit, the charming smile, the passion, the sense of you as a successful Black man who is not arrogant but obviously powerful. It’s, it’s all of that...” In conversation with Anita March 2005.

I was disappointed because so many responses mentioned the way that I looked. One person even said, “It’s the locks and Gucci suit”. Though said appreciatively this angered me. “Does that mean anybody could fling on a suit and grow their hair and have the same effect? Have I been fooling myself? Is it nothing to do with content and all about presentation?” I wondered whether it was easier for them to use explanations of this kind to describe my practice than to deconstruct and identify what it is about me that they agree has a significant and positive affect on people’s learning. I went back and spoke with Anita

again and she elaborated that it was to do with the ways in which my visual image and my way of being combined to invite people in. I am not sure that I understand the feedback but I do know that how I look is part of who I am and that my, or for that matter anybody's body is inseparable from how they are experienced as well as of what they experience. I cannot experience or be experienced independently of my body's intervention. Amanda Sinclair (Sinclair, 1998b) locates the body as central to leadership and criticises the ways in which the engendered body's considerable impact on models of leadership and management education have traditionally been ignored.

Bodies are not objective, static facts. They are seen, appraised and responded to. Connell (1987, p. 87) says, 'in the reality of practice, the body is never outside history, and history never free of bodily presence and effects on the body'. Bodies are not outside cultures nor educational contexts. No body is ever inhabited or appraised as pure physiology but rather it is 'situated', reflecting and reflected in cultural norms, dominant institutional practices and defined pathologies and the shared psychic significance of groups (Gatens, 1996, p. 11). Quoted in (Sinclair, 2005)

It is through my body that I am experienced. I have written elsewhere that my very presence and appearance is a living contradiction in some of the spaces in which I work. As I write this I experience a certain sense of dishonesty. It is, I think, to do with the fact that it no longer feels like a contradiction. As a Black man with dreadlocks I have got to a position where I feel that I belong in the boardrooms of major multinational corporations and other organisations, with my skin colour, my history and my hair as part of what I bring to the generative collaborations that I am paid to contribute to. I feel that there is so much (that I have discovered and created) that connects me with the people I work with, and so much that my difference has to offer to enrich that relationship that, if it is a contradiction, it is no longer an antagonistic one.

I recall participating in an award ceremony at the end of a year-long programme for women, Black people and ethnic minorities. I wrote a careful description of that ceremony and of my observations visually and emotionally as I participated in it. I have included the whole of my inquiring account in Appendix 10. Section five: I offer this account as evidence of where I have got to as a result of a long journey in which I have moved through the colonial doubts and restrictions imposed upon me. In this state I embody an 'I' that is reconnected more fully with my history, cosmology, community and with wider humanity as I recreate a love of self and other through interconnected participation in the world. I also offer it as evidence of the ways in which I have managed to develop an inclusionary practice that is explicitly transgressive of colonising boundaries and enabling of new relationship formulations centred on an explicit connection with the deeper values of humanity of the people I work with in 'professional' settings. In the account I describe the way I spoke with the Chief Executive and the powerful impact it had on my learning as his reaction confirmed and affirmed the connection I sought to establish.

The influence of my learning on my embodiment and articulation of theories, models and practices

I hope to have shown how I have come to work with and embody Ubuntu through my inclusional engagement with a decolonising intent seeking to answer the question about how I can improve my practice. Through my embodied presencing of my Ubuntu way of being in the areas of my life and work I have developed an approach to my practice that has enabled me to find inclusional ways of actualising, conceptualising and articulating my learning in effective communicative form. The prime areas, emerging out of this Ubuntu way of being are the approaches of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition. These have infused my work, generated and found form in other original contributions. These include a reframed and decolonising practice in relation to equal opportunity and diversity and an active model for working with Bicultural Competence.

Societal reidentification

This is an important concept in my evolution because it is founded on an inclusional awareness of my place in this society. As long as I saw myself as an outsider, I could advocate that the 'system' change and could rail against it. For me to embrace the idea of us working together to create a new (decolonising) identity for our society I have had to embrace the humanity of White people and the possibility of change. This marks a significant shift in my thinking. Though I have fought for change for many years, at some level I did not believe that it was possible. I now believe that through an aspirational, relational and decolonising intersubjective connection with each other, real, deep, system evolution is not just possible, but is already happening. My role is to recognise this, tell stories about it and bring that future to the attention of as many people as possible in a form that will connect with them.

When I work with managers I ask them to remember their dreams for themselves, for their organisations and for their society. I ask them to reconnect with those of their achievements that have helped extend the humanity of those they work with and for and ask them to both celebrate that and to consider how they might be able to bring them into their lives at work as they extend their influence. I am asking them to honour their values and to develop living theory that enables them to operate closer to those values of humanity that I reflect back to them from the stories that they tell.

This may sound naïve but I tell stories to senior leaders and they ask me to come back and spread these ideas more widely in their organisations and so I know that this is connecting with something real which they desire and which takes them further than the normal approach to diversity and equality. People have described it as an approach that liberates and enables them to step outside of the confines of political correctness and engage with more of their total selves than they had previously considered possible.

Though I have conducted formal appreciative inquiries, I think that the original contribution I have made is to infuse aspects of it as spirit into my practice. I include in this a focus on solutions and possibilities and not on 'problems'. This appreciative quality has helped evolve the practice and thinking from which the idea of societal reidentification emerged. It includes a recognition of the need to 'speak' a different future into being - -I

am influenced in this by my understanding of African cosmology. This speech has to be inclusional in that the abstract disconnected form is unable to engage people at a deep enough level. Through, necessarily embodied, engagement I have found ways to avoid unnecessary conflictual arguments and focus on being an educative influence on learning wherever I can. I do not need to 'prove' that my way is right in argument. That is not my role. My role is to help identify stories and pictures that can help bring about a postcolonial reidentification of self and society.

This leads to the key notion of redescription: "a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument for cultural change" (1989:7),

The... 'method' of philosophy is the same as the 'method' of utopian politics or revolutionary science... The method is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behaviour which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it... it says things like 'try thinking of it this way'. (Rorty, 1989:9) Quoted in (Reason, 2005)

Guiltless recognition - -a strategic practice

Part of the reason that this 'works' is my practice of guiltless recognition. African people have been subjected to large-scale slavery and attempts at the inculcation of an ideology of inferiority. As I embraced my Ubuntu way of being and ceased to resist it I enabled myself to come to the position that an appropriate response to this might be one that consciously acknowledges this, not in a blaming way, but which says "this happened and the implications of it are still here with us today. Let us see what we can come together to achieve to evolve strategies and practices that, enabled by this guiltless recognition, enables us to make contributions that are capable of being truly transformational". I think that with guiltless recognition I have found a form of expression that is relationally dynamic and communicates a guiltless recognition both of the issues that need action and of the value of the other and their creative and life-affirming expression of themselves in the world.

In embracing it I had to put away impulses of blaming and punishment and hatred and anger. I was able to see these as self-defeating approaches that lead to cycles of mutual destruction rather than evolution. Guiltless recognition is different to denying inequality and the responsibility that some have for its creation and perpetuation. It is saying that if we can move away from defensive positions by removing the attribution of guilt then maybe we can recognise the existence and the forces that maintain that inequality and injustice and work together to changing it.

To those who I used to be involved in wanting more confrontational strategies I say "what we tried before did not work. It did not work because our humanity was not fully integrated into the approaches that we used and we came from conflictual mode, that polarised, dichotomised it was a political and epistemological approach that was problematic. Also we did not engage with the other. We saw the other as being alien to us and as a consequence we operated with stereotypes. Part of what that meant is that we were not able to make a significant enough change because we operated from within that same paradigm from the same frame as the one we were trying to change. If we are going to move forward we need to think and operate in different ways". What I have been doing is living my life inquiring in different ways and what I've found is that through this

inclusional engagement with the other with a decolonising intent wanting to build something different I have discovered that, through a guiltless recognition of the humanity and the commonality between us that we can co-evolve something different between us that does not mean that we let go of (our uniqueness and) the need for greater equality and greater justice, in fact that enables that to happen. As I read more about Ubuntu and the social and political contributions of people like Reverend Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela I feel affirmed in this approach. I have seen the consequences of war at first hand and have enabled my experiences to be a positive influence on my learning and development.

Equal opportunity and Diversity – a transformational approach

The position that I have arrived at in relation to equal opportunity and diversity is basically that equal opportunities policies and practices are based on perceived inequalities in our society. In order to redress the imbalances that exist the assumption has been that you have to count the representation of groups of people in the organisation and compare that with their representation in order to 'equalise' it. In order to count then, you need categories. Sometimes these categories are arbitrary and filled with euphemisms, and specious descriptions, but people inside and outside of them take them as 'real', they become ossified instead of transitional categories.

The identification of groups was supposed to be a tactical and transitory stage in order to identify the specificity of disadvantage and take action to transform that disadvantage. What has happened however is that there has not been sufficient movement out of disadvantage and so the policies have stayed in place. In so doing they have helped give a permanence of identity to these groups that is associated with their 'outside', or 'impoverished', or 'disadvantaged' status. These groups, ossified by policy, turn around and compete against each other for the 'rewards' that government has allocated to them. Paradoxically what this means is that people are encouraged to stay in their distinct boxes that are defined as much by their culture as by the degree of disadvantage that members of that group experience. Their distinctiveness is financially important to 'leaders' of these groups and so, paradoxically, can work against the generation of action or desire for greater integration into the mainstream of society and organisations.

By and large, equal opportunities today does not concern itself with fundamental questions about the nature of our organisations. It is about inclusion, not about a change in the ways that organisations work as a result of embracing different gender, power, culture, class and disabled needs, perspectives and life experiences. My experience suggests to me, that in most instances, managers today are more interested in compliance than they are in transformation.

'Diversity', as a principle, offers this (transformation) as a possibility. Diversity is a basic organising principle of life and without it we cannot survive as a species. As articulated in organisations it rightly advocates that we need difference in order to be able to meet the needs of the market and is touted as being much more business focussed (and therefore likely to be taken seriously) than the ethical and moral basis of equal opportunities. It advocates doing things in different ways and even doing different things. It therefore addresses organisational culture issues in ways that are conceptually important. However, the purpose of organisations in both public and private sector are still inadequately

reinvigorated by approaches to diversity. The purely diversity approaches, advanced by people like Kandola (Kandola et al., 1998) do not consider power differentials, many of which are the determining factors to those differences. The purpose of organisations is not sufficiently extended by the dominant exponents of diversity. I am referring to the potential for a diversity perspective to seek to be explicitly decolonising and contributory to the reidentification of organisations in ways that reflect the hidden or secret aspirations of many of the people that work for them. Inclusional approaches that reveal and celebrate the connections, humanity and commitment of people in organisations can move away from Newtonian separations and politically inspired divisions whilst still enabling moves towards creating more just forms.

Bicultural competence

This is another key concept that I have embraced and extended through applying it to my own life. I first came across the concept of “bi-cultural competence” in the work of Gloria Bravette. The origin of the term ‘Biculturalism’ can be traced to the work of W. E. B. DuBois. (Clarke 1970, p.45). The concept does have some problems. For example, it is dichotomous and suggests separateness between cultures that is too rigid. It also implies a narrow definition of what culture is and focuses on ethnic or national culture both of which are also. A further concern about the notion of biculturalism is that it focuses attention on ‘culture’ as the factor that needs to be worked with rather than class or, for that matter colonialism. However, the concept has some researched validity. To become “biculturally competent”, i.e. competent in two cultures is seen as a way of increasing life success. This is what Bravette argues and, given that there is such denial of the existence of a valuable historical culture amongst people of African origin, I believe that there is no doubt that increasing competence in what you understand as being your historical culture as well as in the majority culture is a powerful contribution to psychological well being, collective re-emergence and greater ‘success’ in organisations and society.

The issue for many Black people is how they are going to manage their careers in organisations given that success in them can be experienced as adopting a different culture? (and therefore rejecting their own). The existing approaches advocated in the literature on how to be a successful Black manager have sometimes felt to me to be problematic. Mohoney, (Mahoney, 1995) quoting from Dickens and Dickens’ book “The Black Manager”, probably the most influential book in this area, shares a long list of things that Black managers need to do to be successful in White organisations. As I look at the list I do not doubt that if people were to follow it that they would gain, *and* I use some of these approaches myself. However, there is a sense in which they are about fitting in to the existing realities as they are. Perhaps more importantly, is the implicit acceptance that the organisations will *always* be racist. I do not experience optimism or human connection here. I would like to believe in other possibilities. I believe that evidence exists that we can influence organisations and society and have in fact already done so.

I have developed a pictorial form for working with people and helping them to understand my strategic implementation of bi-cultural competence. (See Appendix 12 Section Five) It seeks to show the importance of becoming competently skilled in both the dominant organisational culture and your own culture – however you might define or describe that.. It has proven to be tremendously well received and influential, particularly the understanding that people cannot become successful in a sustainable way, unless they are part of the relationships that constitute the hidden culture. What I am seeking to do with

this model is to help people feel that they do not have to let go of their values, their culture or make a choice between cultures in order to be successful. What I am trying to show is that competence through engagement with *both* cultures is what is needed and that they can feed and enrich each other. The culture of the 'in-power' group exists and it is possible and desirable to engage with it. In fact, competence in that culture, though full of assimilationist dangers, can be invaluable in helping to evolve it.

Conclusion of Consultant section

In Appendix 14 Section Five: I seek to provide further evidence of my influence I give examples of the ways in which I feel that my inquiry has shown:

That the **conclusions I have come to are reasonably fair and accurate** through rich, contextualised, narratives, sometimes supported by propositional research, that provide data and evidence of the ground from which I arrived at the conclusions I have. The reader is invited to see the connections between the conclusions that I have arrived at and the experiences that generated them. I also give examples of how these conclusions have evolved through a process of testing them out and refining them as a result of the data that has emerged out of them.

That the potential **significance of my research** lies in the trajectories of the lives of the people I have sought to create or open learning spaces with, in which I could be an influence on their learning. It also lies in the shifts that I have enabled me to actualise the aspirations that I had for myself and for others. I have shown this in the descriptions of interactions and through the responses that I have had from participants, my research peers and critical friends. I hope to have shown as significant the approach of an enabling and transformational inclusion engagement in generating optimism and direction that enables us to move beyond first order legislative compliance that reproduces existing social inequality.

The **implications of my research** for myself have been the living of a life full of generative purpose and the expansion of my humanity through the embracing of other people in dynamic relational learning relationships of decolonising intent and the effective integration of that into my practice as a management consultant. The wider implications for people of African origin are to do with the fact that it is possible to lead a successful 'professional' life (financially, spiritually, creatively, communally) whilst working to transform the barriers that exclude us *and* to do so with a love of humanity that does not distort our own and which moves away from dichotomised oppositional strategies and those that are infused with cynicism.

How I **evaluate the evidence-based account of my learning** through the criteria of its ability to contribute to processes and understandings that decolonise the life chances of people of African origin. This was my first concern. The stories that I have shared trace the evolution from an 'outsider' position to one in which I work with the interconnections between us as human beings in inclusion relationships that help us all grow. The accounts that I have shared of my learning and the feedback, responses of others and the impact that I have had on the learning of organisations provide sufficient evidence that the conclusions I have arrived at are founded on substantial evidence. I draw upon the comments of those that I have worked with as I have evolved my living theory and the

learning that we have had as this has evolved. Another criterion through which I evaluate this account is to do with its liberational impact upon those that have experienced working with me in an inquiry set-up such as the 'Monday evening' group in the University of Bath. People like Marie Huxtable have commented on the educational influence on her learning of the thoughts that I have shared.

I also evaluate this evidence-based account of my learning on these criteria that I outlined earlier:

1. It has to communicate to the heart as well as the intellect of the reader
2. It has to tell stories that assist the reader to follow the flow of my discoveries inquiry and claims to know
3. It has to be both precise and allowing for the reader to discover their own meanings through engaging with it
4. It has to be of value to people concerned with decolonisation
5. It has to be an inclusive text that offers hopes to people from the variety of social positions

I have sought to meet all of those criteria but, in a sense, the best person to determine whether I have met criteria such as the first one is the reader.

In a sense this thesis is built upon descriptions of how **I have modified my concerns, ideas and practices in the light of my (continuous) evaluations**. I have described an inquiring journey into relationship and the development of inclusional transformational decolonising practice. I have shown how I have arrived at positions and conclusions that I have rejected as I have engaged in action and discovered organic embodied truths emerging from within and from the people I am working with. In the stories about working with men's groups, for example, I show how through hearing their stories I shifted my understanding of their lives and this shifted and expanded my understanding of what it was possible to achieve with them in particular but with White men generally. Through the integrity of their stories and of my listening and watching new possibilities emerged that honoured our common humanity.

In this chapter I seek to make a 'claim to know' something useful about my development as a person who works with other people to assist their ability to increase their effectiveness in work, personal, social and political contexts. Whitehead outlines the standards of judgement he used to judge the validity of such a claim. These include:

- a) Was the enquiry carried out in a systematic way?
- b) Are the values used to distinguish the claim to knowledge as educational knowledge clearly shown and justified?
- c) Does the claim contain evidence of a critical accommodation of propositional contributions from the traditional disciplines of education?
- d) Are the assertions made in the claim clearly justified?
- e) Is there evidence of an enquiring and critical approach to an educational problem?

I believe that this work demonstrates that I have met all of these standards. I believe that I am, in the words of Donald Schön creating 'a new theory of the unique case'.

"when someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case." Schön, D. A. (1983. P. 68)