

INTRODUCTION

Structure

The structure of this introduction section is influenced by the questions in Action Research: Living Theory (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I have modified them slightly

- What are my concerns?
- Why am I concerned?
- What experiences can I describe to show why I am concerned?
- What kind of data will I gather to show the situation as it unfolds?
- How do I explain my educational influences in learning?
- How do I show that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?
- How do I show the potential significance of my research?
- How do I show the implications of my research?
- How do I evaluate the evidence-based account of my learning?
- How do I modify our concerns, ideas and practices in the light of my evaluations?

In this section I begin with the first three questions: What are my concerns? Why am I concerned? What experiences can I describe to show why I am concerned? I will then go on to address the fourth question “What kind of data will I gather to show the situation as it unfolds?” In the body of the thesis I give accounts of my practice and inquiry. These accounts provide the data that I present in answer to the preceding question. They are also structured so as to enable the reader to understand how I explain my educational influences in learning and how I show that those conclusions I come to are “reasonably fair and accurate”.

In the final section of this thesis I draw learning and conclusions that address the remaining questions. I begin with my concerns.

Note

I am aware of a tension in the way I am communicating my meanings that might be experienced by a reader as an inconsistency between the intentions I embody and the language I use to describe them. I am thinking of the language I use to communicate meanings of 'interconnectedness', 'holism', 'independence' and 'definition'. This language is inconsistent with inclusional/Ubuntu meanings when it implies complete definition/definability. I am also aware of tension between my desire to describe an Ubuntu way of being, enquiring and knowing in a way that is consistent with inclusionality without abandoning established terminologies. This tension exists because of my desire to relate with and communicate meaning to the reader familiar with the present usage while transforming the existing meanings so that they are consistent with inclusionality. I do though recognise the power of language to ‘reinscribe’ prevalent meanings and power relationships and the consequent importance of using language in ways that supports the emergence of other possibilities. I therefore move towards ways of conveying meaning that transcend the limitations of the linguistic. In doing so I have embraced the use of visual narratives. In these, I use the video-data to extend the communicative ability of the thesis and to emphasise that I am seeking to communicate my meanings in a way that is consistent with inclusionality.

My concerns and why

Put simply my concerns are to do with the continuing oppression of people of African origin around the world. I am concerned because I am of African origin. I experience oppressive and racist treatment because of that dimension of my identity. I want to live a life free of racism and colonial impositions on others and on myself. For that reason I am seeking to live my life in ways that help facilitate the emergence and growth of personal and societal ways of relating with each other and with our planet which are more sustaining of justice, equality and peace as well as life enhancing qualities of love and fun. This is both a personal inquiry into living my life well within a colonial and racist context as well as an inquiry into collective transformation of that context into something in which all people can experience their humanity more fully.

I have a history of engagement with organisations that sought to achieve change and, though they won many heroic battles along the way, I believe, that they failed to make the ultimate changes that they sought to make. I believe that one of the reasons that they failed is that they mirrored too closely the thought processes of the dominant order. For example though their intention was radical change and though they had sophisticated critiques of the existing order, the form of their processes led to them working in ways that mirrored the dominant ways of working with power. They were in their own ways, patriarchal, hierarchal, and propositional. I wanted to work with the principles and values of humanity and justice that they espoused and find organisational and relational form for that in ways of working that enabled individual growth and modelled, in process, the outcomes that we sought to achieve. That is I wanted to be working in different ways with gender. I wanted us to explore ways of organisational effectiveness with position being based upon ability, purpose, motivation and not a hierarchy based on privilege. I wanted us to develop ways of working that were honest and emergent and not to try to project certainty in order to convince people that we had the 'right' answers, the correct 'line'.

In addition I am concerned because I believe that many of the strategies that we are using have been based on explanations of 'our' situation that have come from outside of our condition. This means that many of the strategies that many put so much effort into are, in many ways, diversionary in that they address symptoms of the problem and dare not speak the name of the causes. The energy put into Equal Opportunities work is an example. Intelligent people agonise about how to increase representation in organisations in a strangely apolitical and ahistorical manner. We do not speak about colonialism in these circles; we are 'over' that. What we are interested in is demonstrating or 'proving' that having greater diversity and equality in organisations is a 'good' thing that can have business benefits. I do believe this but I locate it within a wider span of concern. I do want to help change these organisations such that they contribute to greater social justice domestically. I also want these organisations to work in ways that support international justice, specifically with regards to the controlling and manipulating of the economies of African countries not to mention the minds of people of African origin internationally. I want them to open themselves up to other possibilities in terms of the kinds of assumptions that they can operate with and from.

Why am I concerned?

I am concerned because I do not want to waste my energy or my dreams on action that is doomed to failure. For this reason I inquire into how I can take action that can be of foundational influence.

Why do I want to take the actions that I do? At one level it feels supremely obvious why I should be concerned about the plight of peoples of African origin and want to do something about it but how do I communicate that to the reader? In life we make choices in terms of how we respond to experiences in our lives. The particular response that I have both found myself taking and have chosen to take is, I believe, to do with who I am. That constellation of genetics, bodily intention, experiences, reflections, relationships and agency that help form my identity. It emerges out of the choices I have made for what I want from my life, my existence. It is, I believe, largely to do with my cosmological, ontological and epistemological values, emerging from my engagement with 'reality', and informing my sense of who I am.

I hope to share in this thesis enough about that identity to create a picture rich enough to help you the reader to understand what it is about my constitutivity that gives a home to my concerns. What follows are some reasons for my concerns. It is a partial list and I do not want to give the impression that this listing explains my concerns in full. It may appear to be a far more complete explanation than it actually is. I am aware that there are reasons that I am not aware of. With those caveats stated, I am concerned because: -

- Of the sheer injustices that I see and experience being perpetuated against African peoples. I see people who look like me dying and being exploited
- Of the insidious nature of the dominant discourse that locates the blame for much of this on the victims themselves and, by so doing allows for its perpetuation.
- Of the hypocrisy I experience between words of support for things like fair trade and debt relief in Africa and the reality of increased impoverishment and increased political and military control over African economic, political and social affairs; in other words, of the continuing influence of colonialism.
- I do not believe that we can have peace as a species (humanity) until we find ways of relating that are more equitable, value our differences more and which consciously and collaboratively seek to redress imbalances in power and wealth
- The impact that colonising processes still have upon my sense of who I am, what is possible for me and upon what I can be. I also desire to live as a proud man and I feel that I cannot do so whilst aware of what is happening to others without taking action to influence that. I have personally embodied colonial messages about myself and want to be able to live a life with greater freedom from the self-destructive messages I have imbibed. The following excerpt from the opening paragraphs of *The Drama of the Gifted Child* and *the Search for the True Self* catches something of the purpose that motivates my inquiry:

In order to become whole we must try, in a long process, to discover our own personal truth, a truth that may cause pain before giving us a new sphere of freedom. If we choose instead to content ourselves with intellectual "wisdom," we will remain in the sphere of illusion and self-deception. ... The damage done to us during childhood cannot be undone, since we cannot change anything in our past. We can, however, change ourselves. We can repair ourselves and gain lost integrity by choosing to look more closely at the knowledge that is stored inside our bodies and bringing that knowledge closer to our awareness." (Miller, 1983, p.1)

I am seeking to do just this, to discover my own personal truth, to repair the damage done to my psyche. I engage in doing so with a belief that I can only repair that damage through activity that is de-colonizing in intent.

- I am also concerned because I think that I can make a positive contribution to the living strategies and practices of others that can influence evolution towards the outcomes that I seek and not to do so would, in some ways, be denying my identity, humanity and sense of purpose or mission; my reason for existing.
- I also have significant ontological and epistemological reasons for my concern. I cannot be who I want to be without taking action to influence the condition I find myself in. In taking action, I am also engaged in assisting the redefinition of what is considered to be valid and valuable knowledge. Through the flow of my action and inquiry in order to acquire the knowledge that I need to be the influence that I want to be in the world I have chosen approaches to action and inquiry that I hope are congruent with the outcomes that I seek.

What experiences can I describe to show why I am concerned?

There are many experiences that I could draw upon to explain why I am concerned. Some are personal and some are collective. I outline elsewhere an incident in church, in South London, when I was about eight years old. A Black man, new to the church, had wanted to sit next to me. Even at this age, I computed that this was about him equating himself with me as a Black person. Given that I did not associate myself with being Black (bad, sub-standard, inferior, ugly) as it had been portrayed to me, I did not want him sitting next to me and broadcasting the mistaken fact we were the same or making my Blackness more apparent to others. I wanted to be good and pure, these were White qualities. I desired to fit into White society and this man's presence endangered that. I reflect upon this uncomfortably now and share it with the reader as an example of the dangerous psychological state of self-hate that Fanon (Fanon, 1967) informs us about existing within me. It is, in some ways to provide a marker of where I have been in order to show the distance between then and now. It is the experience of being a Black man in a world still dominated by 'White' values and interests that explain why I am concerned to address issues of personal and social transformation. In this study I will seek to show how I have attempted to conceptualise a notion of myself that has accepted the reality of his colonised mentality and has actively engaged in transforming that through engaging in the activities that I have.

I also have experience of involvement in supporting African liberation movements and an understanding of the horrors and complexities that bedevil the life chances of people of African origin globally.

I used to be a school teacher and my work in education has led me to a position in which I believe that education is one of a number of critical spheres in which colonialism is at play and which needs to be addressed if we are to meet the specific needs of children of African origin in our approaches to education. I am a father of a Black young man and have been decimated by the ways in which a racism that I trace as originating in colonialism has impacted upon him.

I work as an organisational development consultant and work on broad issues of organisational change and development as well as on issues to do with equal opportunities, positive action and diversity. I have both experienced issues to do with racism and been a witness to others' lives being devastated by what they meet when and as they join organisations. I also have worked for development' organisations throughout Asia, South America and, most significantly, Africa. My experiences there have informed and confirmed my understanding of the evils that African lands and peoples are being subjected to in the interests of profits, most of which end up owned by Europeans in Europe.

In seeking "strategies that work for us" I have made myself the interconnected 'subject' of my study. In the creation of my own living theory of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations, I am engaged in a self-study from within my community, as I seek to make public the educational journey of a successful Black man with living epistemological standards of judgment that can hopefully inform and inspire others and contribute to the knowledge-base of education.

I do not separate my scientific inquiry from my life and that for me it is really a quest for life and to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge and it is knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself.

(Marja-Liisa Swantz, quoted in Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p, 1)

Knowledge is always gained through action and for action. From this starting point, to question the validity of social knowledge is to question, not how to develop a *reflective science about* action, but how to develop genuinely well-informed action—how to conduct an *action science* (Torbert, 1981)

The above quotations carry within them values that are a critical importance to me and which I have reflected in my approach to my inquiry. I wish to align my inquiries' purpose and approach with that of Swantz's inclusional, non-dichotomous approach in which inquiry is "a quest for life" and in which the study is both for (my)self and for the people I live and work for and with.

The second quote contains two points that are also of structural importance to my inquiry. I know through action. I become aware of the distance and contradictions between theories I claim to hold, the identity I seek for myself, and the practice I seek to actualise and my actions in reality through engaging in action.

In my work I am seeking to use my life as a colonised (but not subjugated) African male subject who is engaging with and seeking strategies for succeeding in the colonial reality as the subject of inquiry through engaging in a process of actualising change.

Many have written about the ways in which the oppressed internalise their oppression and develop patterns of belief and behaviour that reinforce and enable their continuing oppression. This is an area of focus for (Freire, 1970) and Fanon (Fanon, 1968, Gendzier and Fanon, 1976). Some talk of "false consciousness", e.g. Black Rage (Grier and Cobbs, 1992) who speak of how African Americans have to become paranoid in order to protect themselves from the viciousness of the racism that they face and Marxists (Marx, 1964) of a consciousness that comes from a ruling class whose interests are opposed to those of the working classes. Others of "internalised oppression", (Hickling and Hutchinson, 2000)

and (Lipsky, 1987) who speaks of the ways in which this internalised view of self operates negatively in relationships with other African origin people. The consequence of this internalisation is that the oppressed, having made this a consciousness part of their being, make it a part of their culture and their individual and collective behaviours maintain their oppression in a self reinforcing vicious cycle.

So one powerful reason that I wanted to 'do' this inquiry is because I have a desire to live life fully. I want to decolonise my mind so that I can discover possibilities that I had previously occluded or denied. This inquiry is about my individual journey to operating authentically with joy and strength and my desire to share my journey with others in the hope that it will assist their journeys into greater power (for sustaining humanity?)

What kind of data have I gathered to show the situation as it unfolds?

Most of the data I have gathered is clustered around the narratives of me living my life as inquiry as I sought to be a positive decolonizing influence in the world. It takes the form of three main story areas and is supported by the voices of colleagues, witnesses, co-participants, authors and others who have journeyed in this area. The data includes quantitative information from sources generally regarded as valid such as academic and governmental publications. The data also includes the reflections that I have made on my practice. The stories delineate the journeys my researching in action has taken. The three main areas mentioned above are:

1. My experiences as an organizational development consultant working nationally and internationally
2. My experiences working with adults in the Black community to create and sustain a distinct educational space for children of African origin. (Originally I saw it as creating an *independent* educational space. As my theory and practice has been challenged and transformed through my action I have moved to a position in which I see it as being both distinct and interdependent.) This story is told alongside that of me working with children as an educator and the learning that I have gained as a result of questioning, refining and redefining my practice as an educator as a result of my inquiry
3. My experiences as a father

Interweaved in these areas of exploration are stories to do with my engaging with and seeking to work with African history and cosmology and to do with my own personal re-identification as I move towards exercising greater power and agency in my reclaimed self as I take personally and socially decolonising action in the world.

Through the stories my explanations for my practice have emerged as clearer living theories. The standards of judgement that I wish to subject these living theories to have evolved and emerged through the experiences that the narratives seek to give description and life to. I use the data contained in the narratives to trace the growth in my learning. Within these narratives are voices of others who are included partially because they affirm and confirm that growth in my learning and also because they are often critical parts of the story. They are the partners with whom my thinking and practice has evolved.

The growth in my learning is inextricably linked with the influence I have been on the learning of others. I explain my educational influences in learning through descriptions contained in the stories and through the voices of others.

How do I explain my educational influences in learning?

It is through the narrative of my life over the last few years that I explain my educational influences in my learning and in the learning of others.

I explain my influence on my learning by relating my inquiring practice. I explain my values and the original research questions that emerged from them. I then explain the cosmological, ontological and epistemological positions that I went into the inquiry with. I detail how I engaged in action in response to my inquiring questions to do with improving my practice. My educational influence in my own learning is demonstrated through the ways in which I change my mind through engaging in cycles of action and reflection, through the situations I engage with, through the quality of my reflective practice. It is also demonstrated through narratives of the evolution of my embodied practice and the theorising of my practice. It is also explained, or demonstrated through the use of video narratives that evidence the influence I have been on my own learning as I engage in being an influence on the learning of others.

My educational influence on others is shown through narratives of my work in the Sankofa Learning centre and as a management consultant. The stories I relate evidence that influence which is augmented and validated by the accounts of participants and observers and co-facilitators as well as by photographs, drawings and video narratives which help enrich the evidential base and establish the veracity and reliability of the knowledge claims that I make.

And finally my educational influence on social formations is demonstrated by stories of me working with educators, policy formers and senior leaders of organisations. The narratives I give of this engagement is supplemented by their voices and that of informed others present as I work with them.

How do I show that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?

- The conclusions that I have made are provisional and evolving as they are *living* conclusions. The world is constantly changing and knowledge strategy and tactics needs to evolve with it. They are all conclusions that I have arrived at through working with them in my practice. Their 'fairness' lies in the extent to which they contribute to fairness. Their accuracy is shown through the narratives that detail their evolution and effect in practice. They are not *a priori* conclusions but ones, which I think, have been rigorously tested.