

SECTION ONE

COSMOLOGICAL, ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES.

I understand cosmology, epistemology and methodology to be interconnected. My cosmological perspective influences my ontological perspective. Cosmology is about one's worldview and ontology is a theory of being, particularly in relation to our environment (this includes other people). It is about what one takes to be true; hence its connection to epistemology and methodology in seeking to establish a justification for what one takes to be true.

My ontological perspective, my worldview, is heavily influenced by my understanding and embodiment of African cosmology. As I embrace it I feel that I am reclaiming my ontological self as I navigate the colonial terrain I inhabit. I embrace African cosmology because, in a sense, it is embracing myself. It is embracing a part of myself that I was taught was inferior and 'less than' the scientific approach of what Capra (1982) calls the 'modern European world view'. I embrace that which has been denied about me so that I can create an identity capable of thriving in this postcolonial landscape as I seek to be a transforming influence upon it. I want this for myself and for other people of African origin. I want this for both because I cannot understand my 'I' existing in separation from the collective 'we'. It is this sense that is captured in the inclusional phrase, "I am because you are" often quoted as being from Ubuntu, but common across sub-Saharan Africa. I am an interconnected part of sub-sections of an indivisible whole. It is for reasons like this that in my work with people of African origin I encourage people to reconnect with this source of decolonising influence. In my ongoing dialogue with Paulus Murray (Appendix 1 Section 1) I tried to articulate the reasons why I think it is so important for me, and for us, to reclaim positive stories and patterns of living from African cosmology and history. I do not do this in an essentialist (Gilroy, 1992) way and recognise that my identity is constructed of multiple influences:

Who I understand myself to be is complex and made up of multiple identities. I embrace this in the explanations I give to myself and when working with others as I explain that my focus is on assisting them to embrace those parts of themselves whose value has been denied. Without embracing (literally – and positively) their 'dark sides' they are too often operating from a position of self-devaluation with the consequent implications this has for their psychological wellbeing and the chances of success of the life strategies they adopt. I use the idea that we have many selves' and to allow only one to define us is dishonest and unhelpful.

I am of African origin and it is the African dimensions of my being that have been denied socially and politically.

In seeking to draw from African cosmology I stray into contentious grounds. What is African? Is it possible to say that there is such a thing as *an* African perspective or *an* African cosmology when there are so many different peoples – cultures, languages, ethnicities, nationalities, etc.?

The interrelationship of African cosmology to my ontological assumptions

I believe that it is tenable to say that there is an African Cosmology in the sense that there are sets of belief about humanity's place in the universe and how that place is constituted, experienced and enacted. I advance the notion that the real differences that exist among sub-Saharan Africans are also complemented by very real connections and historical antecedents. I am supported in this by the hugely significant work of Cheikh Anta Diop, particularly his 'The Cultural Unity of Black Africa'. In his work (Diop, 1989b, Clarke, 1974a, Diop, 1989a) he traces the similarities that exist between African family and social forms across the entire African continent prior to the Muslim and later European invasions and colonisation. He describes ways in which these family forms had characteristics that differed in their time from others that existed in other parts of the world. The critical point of significance here is that he has identified a) one of a number of ways (Matriarchy) in which Africans' common heritage was manifested historically and b) ways in which the vestiges of that common heritage manifest themselves, in much modified forms, in cultural forms today.

I think of cosmology as lying intertwined with and beneath culture. Culture is specific to place and experience and is for this reason relatively transitory whereas cosmology, once established in the myths, stories lives and instincts of people lives on for much longer, often even after people move from the location and conditions that gave birth to the cosmology. Said (1993) speaking of culture says

As I use the word, 'culture' means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history.....

Second, and almost imperceptible, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. As Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s.... In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation of the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. (Said, 1993, pp. xii-xiv)

Cosmology is beneath culture and, I think, gives hope as it can be thought of as "each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought" rather than as a combative cultural weapon. It is deep knowledge that is lived, embodied and often not articulated in linguistic form accessible to the Academy.

In seeking to identify, embrace and advance the existence of an African cosmology I have been hampered by the fact that most writings on the subject are about cultural and religious manifestations and forms. Most of the texts that I have come across in my research have been about specific religions, regions or peoples and have not made connections between them in a search for commonality. I think that that is significant. There are probably those who are more comfortable with a divided understanding in which there are a number of African worldviews than they are with that of unity and connection between them. That acceptance of a unity could be seen as destabilising a number of hegemonic historical untruths and colonial relationships. Diop, for example is aware of this and is very clear that he has political and decolonising reasons for foregrounding the unity amongst Africans as well as his anthropological interests and concerns for historical veracity. He sees this as part of a process of reclamation from colonisation of the African self as part of the process of political and social decolonisation. This is a view I have also found strongly supported by Sofala (Sofala, 1973) who speaks of an “African personality” that has similar characteristics across Africa. .

I believe that it is tenable to argue that religion and other social forms emerge out of humanity’s embodied existence in dialectical relation with their environment, and not before it in the Hegelian sense. I am firmly of the opinion that ideas arise from experience and do not exist, a priori, to embodiment. Religious forms are in a sense mapped onto other understandings that predate it, influence its form and continue (often in denied or hidden forms). (This is also of course true for Western religions and many of the dates for critical events in their calendar were appropriated from pre-Christian pagan ones).

I am not a religious man and this may well influence the fact that I do not accept that the ways of relating to the universe that I am referring to as cosmology came out of the religious forms that have emerged in Africa. In a sense, I am arguing that it is probably the other way around.

People like Baum (1999) describe the qualities that I call African Cosmology. They show the ways in which African cosmology is fundamentally holistic and understands the world as being interconnected:

What I considered to be a "religious" dimension to human existence proved to be inseparable from other aspects of community life, not only for the Diola of Esulalu but also, outside the Academy, in the Western experience of religion. (Baum, 1999)

Through my study of African history and cosmology I have been able to collate the following, wholly inadequate, summary descriptions of some of the characteristics of African cosmology:

- Both / and approach to life. A ‘thing’ is inherently its other and contradictory of itself. There is no absolute ‘good’ or ‘bad’ existing separately from each other. They are both in us and we have the responsibility for making decisions about how we live with these. There is no ‘one right way’ to do a thing and something is not this *or* something else – it is usually both of them together in.
- Holistic: everything is understood as interconnected and indivisible. There are no spaces of nothingness but the gap between is a gap of perception rather than evidence of nothingness. The human organism is a totality spiritual, intellectual,

emotional and physical and the different dimensions of the individual are not possible without the other. African cosmology does not neatly delineate and separate, as does modernist European thought. The 'wider' world outside of the immediate 'endings' of our physical bodies is still intertwined with it and the bodies with it. African art forms attest to this in the 'fuzziness' and blending of notes and the polyrhythmic musical forms that characterise African music in the west and abroad. Amiri Baraka (ex Leroi Jones) wrote of this in his book *Blues People* (Jones, 1999 First published in 1963)

- In African Cosmology there is an integration of the spiritual into the everyday & the everyday into the spiritual. This is different to the Western dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. In African cosmology it is understood as a synchronous co existence rather than as conceptually different. To this day in Africa spirituality is routinely expressed in everyday life in areas that European religions had abrogated to the carnal and physical. The work of Leopold Senghor on Negritude attests to this.
- Striving for balance. In African Cosmology there is an understanding of the need to coexist in harmony with nature – in fact, 'nature' is not understood as different (i.e. disconnected) from 'human' nature and with other people. This is expressed today in forms like Ubuntu and also in the African notions of the 'self' and individuality. In African cosmology the 'self' is not the disconnected self of the West. It is an interconnected self that is strongly interconnected with that of other people. This does not mitigate against expression of individuality so much as of individualism; the distinction being between individuality being achieved with and through others rather than despite others. The power of the family and the responsibilities of individuals to it in African societies today is continuing evidence of this.
- African cosmology is characterised by both intense energy and what appears to be a greater acceptance of uncertainty than in European cosmologies.
- Involvement and engagement is the means by which we achieve knowledge. We only know and only become (grow, learn, etc) through engagement and participation with other parts of existence/the world 'around' (and within) us in which the existence of contradiction is not seen as a 'problem' in need of reconciling. What there is, is difference which is accepted into a schema of knowing that, rather than categorising and making distinctions between it and other knowledge forms and claims simply accepts it as part of the dynamic of knowing.
- Time is relationship and quality focussed more than numerically; that is, there is a greater emphasis of the quality of outcomes than on the speed with which an outcome may be achieved. The 'past' is as present as the present and the future exists only to the extent that what we do today creates that future.

The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present, and infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place,

they have not been realized, and cannot, therefore, constitute time. (Mbiti, 1970) quoted in (Pennington, 1985, p 130)

It is often assumed that the African approach to time has fatalism as one of its characteristics. Ethel argues that actually it does not advocate people to sit back and do nothing but teaches

“...dignity in the face of adversity and humility in the event of prosperity. Intellectual resources are not expended on the natural world but are reserved for the serious business of navigating the individual's destiny in a world characterized by risk and uncertainty. Regularities--the stock and trade of science--are not interesting” (Ethel, 1970) quoted in (Pennington, 1985, p, 128.)

There is a circular, rhythmic quality to African notions of time that some have attributed to having been conditioned by the agriculturally based societies in which they emerged.

- There is a great valuing of the past, age & experience as well as of the new. Ancestors are remembered and invoked frequently and the past and those who have ‘gone’ are still seen as present. Old age is valued in traditional African cosmology.
- Life's purpose is seen as being about the acquisition of wisdom and inner peace and serving others. There is an emphasis on these being tested in the real world interactions. Learning is seen as an activity emerging out of ‘real’ life circumstances and is of value to the extent that it meets the needs of humans within those circumstances. Learning is then seen as a grounded activity being about developing the ability to operate effectively in the world
- Greater valuing of right brain left brain synthesis than that privileged in Western societies
- Style is inseparable from function in that *how* you do something (the spirit with which you engage in it) is as important as *what* you do. There are similarities here with the Buddhist notion of the ‘way’ or the ‘path’ being as important as the destination.

I am not trying to say that all Africans have these as core beliefs that condition their daily behaviour today, as clearly, this is not the case. I am saying that historically these approaches to being in the world evolved out of African societies and influenced their forms. In identifying them as of African origin I am also not saying that other groups of humans have not developed identical and similar cosmological positions. I am doing so because Africa's contribution to the world has so often been denied or belittled and I am seeking to help place that contribution more firmly on the landscape of what is considered important knowledge and who are considered important people. I am also not trying to define African cosmology. Definition is a form of labelling and can be impositional; cosmology can be described, as I have tried to do above but (should) not be defined I believe because to do so is to move away from its living quality.

I find descriptions of African cosmology in a number of places and have seen it applied by academic writers from a number of disciplines. In the following quote, for example, a description is given of African cosmology in a review of a book by Terry McMillan, an African American novelist.

In traditional African cosmology, everything in nature is endowed with spirit. Spirit is an energy which might be used positively or negatively but is neither good nor evil in and of itself. What is "good" for one person might harm another. Further, "evil" might actually end up producing positive results. Since evil is not a totalizing force, it can coexist with good in the same universe. ...

This system of thought was also foreign to traditional African cosmology. Africans did not regard the body as a vessel of sin. Therefore, they did not see sexuality as inherently evil the way Puritan-influenced Whites did. Africans certainly did not regard their skin color as the mark of the devil the way many Europeans did. In fact, in his study *Slave Religion*, Albert J. Raboteau demonstrates that while many slaves accepted Christianity, they did not give up traditional African cosmology. As a result, in African American folk culture, the traditional African belief system has been divided between sacred and secular paradigms. Rather than existing in opposition to each other, these two traditions are experienced as complementary parts of a metaphysical whole.

Further, as Smitherman points out in her description of testifyin', the formal elements of sacred and secular performance are often interchangeable. Indeed, performers themselves can switch between the secular and sacred paradigms. For example, Thomas Dorsey, author of such lascivious blues songs as "It's Tight Like That", also composed the most famous African American gospel song, Precious Lord. Many soul and rhythm and blues (R&B) singers, from Sam Cooke and Aretha Franklin to Whitney Houston and Toni Braxton, grew up singing in church. The Black church regularly calls secular performers like Al Green back into the fold to continue their careers in the sacred tradition. African American communities may frown on performers like Little Richard who move from secular to sacred music and then "backslide" into the secular world again. Still, the "saints" getting "happy" in church on Sunday morning respond to the same forms that moved the "sinners" on Saturday night. The Saturday night sinners and the Sunday morning saints may even be the same people. (Richards, 1999, pp 36 - 37)

And in the next quote we see it being understood and applied in therapeutic group mentoring with African American male adolescents:

Several scholars (Bynum, 1999; James-Myers, 1987; Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1991) have noted the importance and necessity of incorporating the African worldview as the basis for understanding the psychological functioning and behavior of African Americans. Notwithstanding the marked differentiations in time and space, African Americans share a commonality in ethos with other people of African descent in the Diaspora (Bynum; Nobles). According to Nobles, traditional West African belief systems survived the Middle Passage (i.e., transport of African captives to the West) and hundreds of years of enslavement, and continues to persist among contemporary African Americans. Certainly the slave experience profoundly influenced the characteristics of African American culture; however, the deep

structure of African culture remained intact (Nobles). Throughout the generations, people of African descent in America have held on to their cultural traditions via informal and formal communal institutions such as family, churches, clubs, local communities, and schools. Therefore, to better understand and treat African Americans, one must revisit traditional African cultural beliefs and practices. The basic philosophical assumption underlying the African cosmology is guided by the ideology of "human-nature unity" or "oneness with nature" (Baldwin, 1991; Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1991). According to this worldview, the human-nature relationship is interrelated, interdependent, and interconnected. The African ethos also maintains that the basic thrust of human life is living in harmony and balance with nature. Consequently, human beings seek to establish a complementary coexistence with the natural order (Kambon). Moreover, in the African worldview, the interest of the group is elevated above individual interests (Nobles, 1991). (Howard et al., 2003. p 127)

I have outlined the characteristics of African cosmology above to point out that I am ontologically influenced by these understandings and this is manifested in my understanding of epistemology and in my subsequent approaches to method and methodology.

My engagement with African cosmology to engage in an act of reclamation of that which has been denied. This is not to say that African cosmology is better than any other worldview. Much that I embrace in African cosmology is found in the work of people from different cultural, ethnic and national groupings. For example, the work of Alan Rayner on inclusionality has significant parallels to my understanding of African cosmology. When I mentioned this to him in conversation he said that he was an African, having been born and spent his early childhood there and that this might well have influenced his thinking.

I have sought a transformational engagement with African cosmology as a source of beliefs and information that enable me to evolve an identity that has corrected the racist myths and stereotypes that have so damaged my own psyche and that of others. African cosmology is also a critical basis through which I draw upon ideas that both sustain me and enable me to offer alternative perspectives and standards of judgement. I have focussed on it as a source on inspiration and a form of (counter) information that supports living life more fully as I/extend the range of possibilities for people of African origin.

Some of the most significant ontological influences that I bring to my epistemological, methodological and theoretical concerns are:

- I believe that I am interconnected part of the whole. That there are no spaces or voids; we are one with each other and with our visible and invisible environment.
- Knowledge is embodied and emerges out of interaction and action. It is time and context specific
- People, all people, have a right to be free of colonialisms and allied injustice and people have the capacity to create a world free of colonialism and the kinds of divisions and contradictions that lead to wars and oppression. This freedom can be achieved by intersubjective focussed and emergent collaboration between individuals and social formations committed to honouring their humanity and that of others.

- People have the right and responsibility to define their condition for themselves and the strategies that they take to affect it. People have the ability to transform their condition especially when others do not work to prevent that transformation.
- I am of value in the world as a human being and as somebody of African origin and my present and historical selves have a significant contribution to make to the world as we engage in decolonising ourselves and the contexts that we share. African peoples are beautiful and an equal part of humanity that feels pain and suffering as much as any other human.

I now move on to explain the ways in which my cosmological and ontological constitutivity is reflected in the ways in which I engage with epistemology.

Epistemology

Epistemology is to do with what is considered valid knowledge, that is, what knowledge is, and with how it is acquired. Epistemology concerns itself with parameters of knowledge. By this I mean some things are included and regarded as valid knowledge and some are not. The Academy has ‘standards of judgement’ that it uses to assess what is valid and what is not. Historically the social sciences have drawn their credibility from aligning their methodology with that of the physical sciences. Features of this are the conception of knowledge as certain, fixed, measurable and reproducible, propositional methodology. Methodology that is based upon this notion of knowledge reflects this in practice through privileging approaches such as detachment and objectivity in order to produce ‘rigorous’ processes that can be tested and reproduced by others. The theory that the research methodology produces needs to be capable of measurement and this is often quantifiable. “What gets measured gets done” is a frequent justification for this approach.

Propositional methodology and ‘scientific’ approaches arose out of particular historical circumstances. The ‘scientific project’ emerged out of what has been called the modernist project. It is probably justifiable to say that the view of epistemology that predominates, i.e. what is valid knowledge and how it is gained and tested, draws largely upon the scientific tradition.

This tradition includes belief in the scientific method as the only valid approach to knowledge; the view of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary material building blocks; the view of life in society as a competitive struggle for existence; and the belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through economic and technological growth. During the past decades all these ideas and values have been found severely limited and in need of radical revision. Interrogation of the term ‘modernity’ reveals it to be a value laden term that reflects particular ideological positions that, in turn reflect particular economic and political interests (Gilroy, 1992) etc. The scientific project is credited for bringing us into the age of ‘modernity’ but the idea of modernity was actually the product of historical circumstances linked to the growth of military, economic and psychological domination of most of the rest of the world.

The argument has been strongly put by many writers and historians that ‘Modernism’ arose out of capitalism, which itself arose out of the surplus capital produced by slavery, imperialism and colonialism. In many ways it, can be seen as the ideology that justified the colonial project and the need to ‘bring people into modernity’ which was in reality about bringing peoples into the realm of control of the colonising powers. The ‘scientific’ approach’ was more than a description of methodology. It was also a system of categorising people according to the degree with which they were similar or otherwise to the Europe of the colonising classes. Its epistemological perspectives were simultaneously ideological ones and what it considered to be valid knowledge was that which concerned the furtherance of the interests of the in power groupings in Western Europe. We need to bear in mind what Eisner brought to the attention of the Academy in 1988 that “Issues of epistemology have political ramifications as well as intellectual ones” (Eisner, 1988) quoted in (Eisner, 1997).

Epistemology also refers to how we acquire knowledge. The modernist approaches to the acquisition of knowledge were detached, objective, rational, reproducible, known through

reason, privileging that which is known by the brain emerging out of the dichotomy inherent in the a notion of a 'self' detached from the body.

The work of Elliot Eisner has been of great help to me as I struggled to clarify and understand my own epistemological position through my inquiry. The connection between who and what I considered myself to be, my understanding of what should be included as part of the sphere of knowledge that I believed needed to be validated, how I sought to discover that knowledge and how I seek to represent it to the reader revealed themselves as dialectically intertwined. They do not exist in linear clearly delineated order but in a state of constant determining interaction. If I believe that research into particular dimensions of the African experience, emerging out of that experience and conducted *by* that community and not *on* them, constitute a valid and legitimate site and subject of inquiry then I need to consider carefully how I engage in that research. This should be determined by the purpose of the research, which is in turn conditioned by the form in which knowledge claims are presented. This is the case partially because the form can *be* the content and partially because the form needs to be interpretable by those whose learning it seeks to influence and those it seeks to represent.

Eisner explains his view that research methods are 'socialised' and that socialisation of method shapes what we can discover and what we see as valuable to inquire into. It is largely for this reason that I chose to be influenced in my thinking about method by those who questioned the dominant habits of inquiry. Their influence is reflected not so much in the methods that I chose as in the ways that I spurned established methods as much as I could. I sought to discover truths through engagement in real-time action as distinct from action solely designed for 'research' purposes. For example, I was inspired by Judi Marshall's attentional disciplines and chose to use them as inspiration for my ability to develop appropriate form for myself - much as she did.

I am motivated by a desire to foreground and work that which has been denied and occluded by the modernist project both in terms of what is considered valid knowledge and how it comes to be known. In so doing I am attracted to those approaches that seek to represent different interests and develop different epistemological approaches. In engaging with epistemological concerns I have sought epistemological perspectives that reflect my ontological values. My epistemological concern seeks to redress an unjust imbalance and become aware of wider epistemological perspectives and embrace that which helps give meaning and purpose to my life.

For example, the historical contributions that people of African origin have made to human civilisation have been denied and excluded from much that is included as valid knowledge. Also excluded, until very recently, have been the knowledge creation processes of people of African origin as they both seek strategies to maintain their humanity and survive in adverse conditions and as they engage in grounded strategies to transform their condition. So part of my position in regard to epistemology is to help decolonise epistemology, that which is seen as valid knowledge, in the Academy in the sense of bringing the life experiences, insights and wider knowledge of the excluded in. It is similar in intention to what George J. Sefa Dei calls "counter-hegemonic knowledge". Dei declares that his interest lies in "the examination of African cultural resource knowledge as a form of epistemological recuperation for local peoples" (Safa Dei, 1996). I like the phrase "epistemological recuperation" and I reminded by Dei that what I am seeking to achieve in

my work is part of a wider African movement for decolonisation. I draw strength from knowledge that I am not alone and I not unique in my concerns.

Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996) speak about the issue of what we include when we inquire. Their concern is that the context in which research takes place, the ‘knowledge of teachers’ emerging from inquiry is influenced by the “professional knowledge context”, the dominant discourse. One result of this is that what is produced as knowledge and made publicly available as theory is based on only part of the story. They speak of ‘Secret’, ‘cover’ and ‘sacred’ stories.

Sacred stories are a “theory driven view of practice shared by practitioners, policy makers and theoreticians”. This is really interesting in terms of the professional landscape for discussing issues to do with the education of Black children. In this landscape the ‘sacred’ story is about the ‘better’ teaching that is required to improve the education of children of African origin. It is the official description of what is good practice and what is not. It validates some theoretical and policy driven behaviours and invalidates others.

Cover stories are what teachers share with each within an acceptable range. That is it is determined by what the prevailing sacred stories are and the place where other teachers are in relation to them. They describe their practice within the conceptual and permissional boundaries of ‘sacred’ stories. So people use the sacred parameters and standards to describe what they are doing even though this is often only a very partial description and at worst a distortion to gain sufficient credibility to allow the teacher to continue doing what they prefer to do in their private ‘secret’ space.

Secret stories are what actually takes place in the classroom. They are often only told to other teachers in ‘safe’ places free from the restrictions of the sacred stories and, as such, may not even be valued by those who recount them. It is in these stories that people are often at their most honest in that their perceptions and descriptions of their own practice are experientially based and relatively free from the conceptual power of the sacred stories.

Secret stories are the richest source of undiscovered knowledge and that this source is not easily entered into partially because teachers themselves may not be aware of what their secret stories are. They may also not have the language or sense of permission to give voice to some of their experience within the classroom. This might be because the sacred stories can, in effect, create perceptual and conceptual parameters boundaries and experiences and insights that do not fit within these can be missed, denied, or devalued as relevant valid ‘data’. A critical consequence of this is that that which occurs outside of it is not even regarded as sacrilegious, or wrong, its just not regarded or noticed.

This is similar to what is often referred to as the ‘dominant discourse’ and notions of hegemonic ideology that constrains perceptual possibility.

Of relevance to me as I apply this categorisation more widely is the questioning of the stories that people tell when they are researched on, and when they are researched with. The participatory mode may not produce any more honesty or valid data and a factor conditioning that is the paradigm which people enter into whether they are researched on or with, their responses will be conditioned by whatever their sense is of what experiences and stories are valid and valuable to share with the researchers (or colleagues). I would offer the thought that information of a secret kind is obtained when the participant believes

that they are in a 'secret' or private space. The very use of the term 'research' might militate against participants in inquiry believing that the space is sufficiently secret for difficult imaginings, speculations and truths to be told. I certainly found that when I tried to call the work we were doing with parents at the Sankofa Learning centre 'research' that I was underwhelmed by the parents' response. They were happy to work at creating change in their conditions and reflect and learn from their actions. They were not interested with conducting 'research', which they saw as something different to the living theories that they were generating.

Another example of the significance of identifying the value of the notion of 'secret stories' that I will briefly mention here is to do with the story of Black managers whom their organisation told me did not want a Black only course. They wanted an integrated, space a 'mixed', management development programme. This was presented to me as their preference and yet when I spoke to the managers themselves, having established a 'safe' place to dialogue, most of them said that it was only expressed as a preference because of the way that Black only courses had been devalued historically in their organisation. They had little credibility in the organisation and the Black managers did not perceive that they could assist their careers *because they would be ignored*. If White people were on the course – despite the fact that they would not be able to have the kinds of discussions that they would have in Black only groups at least the credibility of the programmes should help them advance their careers.

The people who conducted the research only got peoples' sacred and cover stories. They were not given access to the 'secret' stories that people told amongst themselves. Consequently, the organisation organised a programme for all managers which Black managers complained to me about in discussion but which they still thought would be of help to their careers because the organisation would pay more attention to the careers of people who had been on a 'proper' management development programme.

In my experience Black only courses have been a space for people to tell their secret stories and get affirmation for the denied dimensions of who they are from others. I speak of this in the section on me as a consultant when I explore my Roffey Park experience. Recently whilst running an intense management development programme for Black and Ethnic Minority staff I wore some African clothes. A woman from the South of India asked me where my clothes came from. She asked if I was from Africa. I tell her I am historically but I was born in the Caribbean. She tells me that the clothes are very similar to Asian clothes. We started to talk about connections between African and Asia. She is from the south of India and when I mentioned the Dravidians her eyes opened visibly and a smile lit up her face. Our conversation became more animated and intimate – in the sense that she spoke about things that she was not even prepared to share in the larger group. Then she said, "I think that we are one. Africans and Indians". I started to tell her of the historical connections between Africans and early South Indian civilisations but she interrupts me before I have got very far. "I have a friend from Ghana who came to South India and she was recognised and approached by people who tried to communicate with her in their language because they thought that she was one of them". In this conversation, which we had almost literally secretly she was sharing observations that she had made that she was scared to talk about in public. I think that that is an example of a secret story that we would not normally have had or which would not have been seen as important to note from many of the dominant perspectives. From my perspective it was evidence of historical connections destroyed and denied by the colonial project.

As I approached the area of how I was going to inquire I was strongly influenced by a desire to tell truths and to search in dimensions that were as free of colonising sacred and cover stories as possible. In doing so I have worked with what Marian Dadds and Susan Hart in their book *Doing Practitioner Research Differently* describe as “methodological inventiveness”

Practitioner research methodologies are with us to serve professional practices. So what genuinely matters are the purposes of practice which the research seeks to serve, and the integrity with which the practitioner researcher makes methodological choices about ways of achieving those purposes. No methodology is, or should, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques.”
(Dadds et al., 2001, p. 169)

I strongly empathise with their insight that methodological choice is fundamental to my motivation, my identity and the outcomes of the research. My choice of methodology was motivated by the intentions for the research and not by an obsession with doing things differently. I agree with Dadds and Hart that “innovation is not a virtue to be valued for its own sake.” (p. 169)

How do I come to know? How does the inquirer come to know?

I have sought to make mine an inquiry that is founded upon an epistemological position emerging from perspectives and experiences from within the African Diaspora. It seeks to bring its claims to know into the Academy as part of the process of evolution not just of the Academy but also of our societies as a whole.

It is also founded upon an understanding, influenced by African cosmology, decolonising epistemology writers like Martin, and Mirraoopa (Martin and Mirraoopa, 2003); Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu knowledge creation approaches; the works of philosophers like Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970), Scharmer (Scharmer, 2000a), Skolimowski (Skolimowski, 1994), Tarnas (Tarnas, 1996), Zohar (Zohar, 1991), Lewin, Argyris and Schön (Argyris and Schön, 1978), Rayner; African American feminists and womanists like bell hooks (hooks, 1982, hooks, 1989, hooks, 1993, hooks, 1994c, Hooks, 1994b), Bell (Bell, 1990, Bell, 1992, Bell and Nkomo, 2001), Stella M. Nkomo; Action Researchers like, Heron (Heron and Reason, 1997b, Reason and Heron, 1995, Heron, 1996, Heron, 1971), Peter Reason (Reason, 1999, Reason, 1998., Reason, 1998, Reason, 1997, Reason and Heron, 1996, Reason, 1996), Jack Whitehead (Whitehead, 1989b, Whitehead, 2005a, Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), Marshall (Marshall, 1999, Marshall, 1993, Marshall, 1994, Marshall, 2004), Eisner (Eisner, 1993, Eisner, 1997, Eisner, 1988); Carter (Carter, 1992), Clandinin and Connelly (1996), and many others that the tradition of what is valid knowledge, how it is created that focuses on it as a logical, rational, intellectual activity excludes many other approaches that are rich in human wisdom despite not following a classic propositional approach to the activity. I am aware that this list of influences can appear to be what Michael Bassey called ‘Sandbagging’ in his Presidential Address to BERA 1991 (Bassey, 1992). However, I have included them because of their relevance and I will be showing the influence of some ideas of these writers on my own as the thesis evolves.

In this work, part of the contribution that I seek to make to knowledge is through the foregrounding of the living theory of one who is seeking to conduct a holistic, decolonising practice in key spheres of his life. I have inquired using approaches that are based on an experiential search for knowledge in action. What has been important is to seek ways of being and (therefore) ways of knowing that are as indigenous to my identity and purpose as possible.

Describing the conducting of co-operative inquiry John Heron and Peter Reason offer the following thoughts on epistemology:

There is 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. These forms of knowing are brought to bear upon each other, through the use of inquiry cycles, to enhance their mutual congruence, both within each inquirer and the inquiry group as a whole. (Heron and Reason, 2001. p, 180)

In this work I have sought to inquire by engaging in ways that integrate “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.” It has been research based upon myself mindfully taking action, which I have reflected upon. I have ‘noticed’ through my own internal bodily processes as well as through processes of engagement and recording and recalling that are more readily available to me.

I entered this study determined to work from an epistemological perspective that could define the subject of my inquiry as of value to inquire into and define my approach to inquiry as valid.

My overarching epistemological position is that it has to be a theory of knowledge that validates knowledge created and acquired in action that can transform my colonised mentality and habits of behaviour. In doing this it is simultaneously concerned with assisting me in influencing the learning of social formations in ways that positively decolonise and move towards sustainable and equitable human relationships.

It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves we will be defined by others for their use and to our detriment. (Lorde, 1984, p. 94)

My approach to inquiry and epistemology is informed by a determination to be the person who defines myself, the situation I find myself in and the nature of possibility open to me. I have sought to inquire in such a way as to enable authentic ‘endogenous’ (Onyelaran-Oyeyinka and Barclay, 2004) explanations to emerge from my experience. Henry speaks of this when she writes:

Many scholars in the African diaspora have written about the necessity and even urgency for endogenous scholarship grounded in popular tensions and realities

(Cruse, 1967; Gordon, 1990; V. Harding, 1974; Ladner, 1973; Malson, Mudimbe-Boyd, O'Barr, & Wyer, 1988; Saakana & Pearse, 1986; Woodson, 1931/1990; Yekwai, 1988). (Henry, 1993, p 208)

I want to know my own truths as free as possible from the tracks that particular notions of epistemology and methodology might take me down and away from my purpose. Therefore in this thesis I have sought to write from an endogenous perspective. That is from within the African experience in the United Kingdom within a wider, near global, colonial context. I have tried to do so in ways that are as undistorted as possible by the influence of hegemonising, dominating thought and discourse and as true as I can to the interests of myself, of African peoples generally and therefore, paradoxically and positively, of the wider society.

I therefore draw from the work of others who have already challenged and extended the (Western) academics' understanding of epistemology both in terms of conception of what valid knowledge is and of how we can come to 'know' it; how we can inquire into it or how it can be attained.

I have been seeking to gain and contribute knowledge, through my praxis, that is of value in the transformation of iniquitous relationships and racist ideologies and epistemologies. One of the ways that I have sought to do this is by foregrounding the value of knowledge created in the process of transformation by peoples of African origin. In so doing I am also seeking to characterise that as more than a "struggle against racism". To work from that perspective is to imply that the present social formations are, at worse, infected by an alien ideology or disease that, if we could be sufficiently 'anti' (racist) we could cleanse, cure and create "a more inclusive society". I am putting forward the position that it is the social formations themselves that need to change or to be changed, replaced or evolve into ones whose very identities reflect an understanding of the forces that lead to the debasing of humans due to race, relationships to property and power, colonialism, neo-colonialism, gender inequality and environmental abuse and which consciously strives to evolve patterns of relating with each other as humans and with the planet/universe we occupy that is generative of peace and sustainability. This perspective is not new. Fanon for example recognised that a struggle against racism has to be at the same time a struggle for human emancipation.

Fanon's text was a violent indictment of French racism and of its effects upon the Antilleans' psyche. It was also a manifesto for a Sartrean emancipation. Fanon did not fight for racial reconciliation. He wanted to go beyond racial determination in order to join those who struggled for human emancipation. (Vergès, 1999)

I now occupy a position in my research cycling in which I believe that the re-emergence of the African can only happen with the reidentification, (the evolution of new identities) of the dominant ideologies, power structures and the ways in which they manifest in the world. This new identity or identities would be ones in which equality; justice and thriving diversity of ethnicities, colours, cultures and nationalities accompany a global order in which gender equity and environmental sustainability are inseparable constituent dimensions. I have come to the position that in order for 'us' to change, 'we' have to change. That is, because of the interconnected reality of peoples on the planet, change in one area always has an impact upon another. I have to take responsibility for changing

myself but I can only go so far without engaging in trying to influence and or work with others.

It is this wider gaze that has led to me developing the notion of ‘societal reidentification’. Simply put it is that strategies that only focus on the re-mergence of one section of society (the individual, a relatively small group or even a large grouping) will fail if this is not participated in as part of a strategy for overall social change in which we move beyond rearranging who has the power and move to a state where we re-conceptualise what is possible for us to be as a society and take action towards evolving an identity that enables and reflects that.

Embodied knowing

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodied knowledge is critical to supporting my epistemological stance in which ‘knowledge’ exists in the whole body and not just in a disjointed ‘mind’. My supervisor Jack Whitehead also speaks on embodied knowledge and has urged me to pay attention to my embodied knowledge and values as part of my scope as I inquire.

I’d just add that I’ve experienced you clarifying your embodied values of humanity, to yourself in the course of their emergence in practice (very powerfully shown in the video-clip of you explaining how you experienced the humanity of the women in Sierra Leone). So, I was hoping that in responding to the writings, you would feel the significance of making public your embodied values as you clarified these in the course of your (action research) enquiry and understood that in the process of clarification and communication they were forming living epistemological standards of judgement that could help to transform the knowledge-base of the Academy. (Whitehead, 2005b)

My embodied knowledge and values are evidence of the processes of action and reflection I have engaged with. Making these explicit is not always easy, as they do not always exist, at least in the first instance, in the conscious mind. Through the use of video, as well as other forms of feedback, I am able to engage, explore and be influenced by that knowledge in ways that I cannot always find words that can communicate meaning sufficiently to the reader. Not all knowing has equivalent words, the existence of video recording therefore allows me to share the experience with the reader/viewer and invite them to engage in the exploration and making of meaning that may be of value to them.

Merleau-Ponty moves us away from Cartesian separations between mind and body and the sense that the intellect rules the body. He appears to define understanding as a harmony between “what we intend and what is given, between intention and performance” (Dreyfus, 1996). When he says that consciousness is primarily not a matter of "I think that", but of "I can" He is locating our ability to achieve as being conditioned by internal (embodied) and external conditions. I think he is saying that who we are is conditioned by what we can do. Our selfness exists in a dialectical relationship between our bodies, our environment and our intentions. Our ‘will’ is located within this reality and cannot transcend it in a kind of Nietzschean sense.

I agree with Merleau-Ponty’s notion that our relation with the world is transformed as we acquire a skill (in relation to it). I think that much of what I hope my thesis offers is to do with transforming relationships with the world through showing how I have done so.

I also see connections between knowledge that is embodied and not known to the conscious mind and what Peter Reason, John Heron and others are referring to in their notions of ‘extended epistemology’. I cannot directly map in on to their four types of epistemology but, in a sense, I am left wondering whether it underlays all of them. I wonder whether it is close to Practical knowledge: Knowing how to do; how to act in such a way as to achieve your objectives, how to exercise a skill. People often know a lot about something, but do not know they know. Or Presentational knowledge: the intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art forms. The knowledge you acquire through sight and touch, i.e. through the body. Similarly Experiential knowledge: the knowledge you acquire through feel, through experience, also has some similarity.

I am then strongly influenced also by notions of ‘extended epistemology’ and the understanding that knowledge and knowing goes beyond the propositional.

Reason and Heron speak of an extended epistemology that underpins cooperative inquiry. (Heron and Reason, 1997a) they speak of four interdependent forms of knowing: Experiential, Presentational, Propositional and Practical. Experiential knowing involves:

... direct encounter, face-to-face meeting: feeling and imaging the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing. It is knowing through participative, empathic resonance with a being, so that as knower I feel both attuned with it and distinct from it. It is also the creative shaping of a world through the transaction of imaging it, perceptually and in other ways. Experiential knowing thus articulates reality through felt resonance with the inner being of what is there, and through perceptually enacting (Varela et al, 1993) its forms of appearing. (Heron, 2001, p. 195)

Heron and Reason also draw upon the work of Merleau-Ponty to show how perception itself is participatory. The way that you engage with a person, situation or process affects what you perceive as ‘true’ or ‘valid’, or valuable. I experience this in my work as being that what I perceive is as a direct result of the nature of participation that I engage in with a person, experience, nature or a variety of other possibilities. For example, I have been seeking to find ways of being a successful consultant who can influence my learning and practice and that of individuals and social formations such that I can earn a living, provide for my family. I seek to do so whilst I contribute both to my community and to decolonising and reidentifying processes that help reconfigure the destructive qualities and structures of this society and assist them evolve into ways of being that are characterised by a greater ‘extended’ sense of justice and equality amongst all peoples. In my inquiry process I recognised from the beginning that I needed to be involved in action if I was to gain the quality of information that I wanted to. As I have engaged in cycles of inquiry and reflection I have understood that the outcomes of my inquiry are, at least in part, determined by the nature of my participation in that inquiry. As I have shifted the nature of my participation so I have shifted what it is that I open myself to perceive and that perception in turn feeds a changed participation.

I give examples in this work of how I have engaged in “direct encounter, face-to-face meeting: feeling and imaging the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing.” (Heron and Reason, 1997b) I explore how possibility has emerged when I inquire

with that as my intention. That is, I have not, for example, wanted to write about how bad racism is. I take that for granted. I was raised with sufficient levels of brutal and blatant racism directed towards me, my family and people who looked like us for me to ever consider that it need further proving. I am more interested in what works? What has a hope of building different types of relationships and possibilities for us? How can we build different futures for humanity?

I make connections between the notion of bodily knowing and the sense of not-at-homeness that many Black people in this society feel in their bodies, even though they may be third generation 'Black British'. There is something in their bodies that tells them that despite messages from their rational mind and from rational third parties, that all is not well; that there is a lack of equilibrium. I wonder if the denial of this by the rational mind (while being felt by the relational mind) might help account for the disproportionate amount of Black people in the UK who have been diagnosed with mental illness, particularly schizophrenia. Notions of illness that are to do with a disjuncture between self and self as in schizophrenia, might be explained as a denial of what the body knows and seeks to move towards in its 'intentional arc' and what the rational mind proscribes. I have shared in the pages that follow how I have sought to 'decolonise' my mind in the sense of moving away from explanations of my reality that do not leave me with a sense of equilibrium.

I am also struck as I read the logs I have written over the years just how much of the 'theory' that I work with has emerged. On so many instances I am in a situation in which I need to answer a question, uphold a value or put forward an explanation. When the stimuli I am responding to are identical to one I have faced in the past I can draw upon banks of thinking and experience stored in my memory. Often however, I need something new. There is something I have not thought about before and yet it comes out and is usually articulate and congruent with the values I seek to uphold. Later I reflect upon it and integrate it into my previous thinking. This sometimes requires me to change what I had thought I thought before. I ask myself, "Where does this (knowing) come from? Is this an example of my 'embodied knowledge' moving into awareness through practice?"

It might be to do with the notion of the self that I choose to work with/consider as I write, for in a self-study, the notion of the 'self' that one works with is crucial. If I am studying through seeking answers to questions of the kind how I can improve my practice of living my values then who or what that 'I' is becomes crucial. If a critical contribution of Merleau-Ponty's is that our body is our 'I' then it contains accumulated knowledge from our life experiences and from our cultures. Merleau-Ponty believes that we extend ourselves into creating a cultural world in order to achieve things that our singular body cannot. So, in a sense, culture is seen as embodied. I like this notion as I think that notions of culture that reify it and define it as something that is fixed over time and external to individuals is problematic.

Merleau-Ponty argues that we do not always move through the world in order to achieve particular ends. We do not move in the world because we have a representation, "the final gestalt", of the outcome we would like. We move when our bodies are out of equilibrium, (a state in which our bodies are able to cope successfully with our environment), and takes action in order to achieve it again. Our bodies' 'intentional arc' provides momentum to our lives without any decisions having been consciously taken. My movement in life generally is not just a product of my conscious decisions; it is (also) a product of my body

(and sometimes influenced by the culture within which we live). My body is motivated by a desire to achieve what Merleau-ponty calls "maximum grip". Dreyfus (Dreyfus, 1996) describes how, when seeking to get a hold of something we tend to do so in ways that give us the most secure grip on it.

Motivation for my inquiry then can also be explained in these terms; I have been motivated to inquire into how I can achieve maximum grip by the incongruence or contradictions between the emotions I wish to experience and the perceptions that I seek to have and the embodied experience I have of something that is different from what I desire and the refusal to put up with it.

One of the breakthroughs for me in writing this thesis was the realisation that my body was moving me towards engagements and actions that I could not explain reductively. Through reflection, observation and help from my critical friends and others I slowly began to realise I was living and embodying values that were a significant educational influence on others. It was as much my embodied presence as the words that I articulated that were being that influence. It was the way that people experienced me as giving love, praising their beauty and power, believing in their ability to achieve their dreams and inspiring them with possibility. These were essentially non-linguistic communications. I then realised (eventually) that these were the very values and the educational influence and the contribution to knowledge that I wanted to make. I had been looking for it in propositional form while it was already there in living form! Reading Merleau-ponty helped me to recognise and validate the power and validity of my Ubuntu way of being.

Using video helps me to see what some of this embodied me is as it is manifested through my living/ beingness (as I seek to cope successfully with my environment) in ways that I cannot otherwise know. By reflecting upon, making sense of and recording this in my thesis I help produce explanations of my actions that are my own unique living theory. By communicating the content of my embodied knowledge I can transform it into public knowledge and into a contribution into the philosophical theory of knowledge in a way that extends epistemological validity in the Academy.

My inquiry takes the forms that it has in spaces liberated by aspects of postmodern thought. To quote Lyotard:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. (Lyotard, 1984, p.81)

In my inquiry I have been heavily influenced by the thoughts that appear in the preceding pages. I have also been "working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done". There is an eclectic and existentialist quality to the way in which I have engaged in inquiring that is, at least in part, motivated by a desire to not be colonised by any one methodology and to evolve my own 'living methodology' of inquiry. This desire is partly based upon a propositional logic that goes something like "The learning can be of highest value if it is learning from the experience of trying-to-do-it-for-real and discovering as I go along what it is that will work best in helping me learn how to improve

my practice. The approaches I have followed have been based upon essentially ontological, spiritual and ideological instincts that move me towards discovering our own paths.

I also needed an approach to knowledge that was future oriented. I wanted more than first order knowledge. I wanted to find out how I could learn from that which had yet to happen.

Knowing through deep reflection

Otto Scharmer moves away from Kolb's learning cycle and other approaches that essentially seek to reflect and learn from the past, towards an approach that seeks to learn from the future as it emerges. He calls this 'presencing' (as in 'pre' and 'sensing') and defines it thus:

The term presencing means to use your highest Self as a vehicle for sensing, embodying, and enacting emerging futures. ...

Classical methods and concepts of organizational learning are all variations of the same Kolb (1984) based learning cycle: learning based on reflecting on the experiences of the past. However, several currently significant leadership challenges cannot be successfully approached this way because the experience base of a team often is not relevant for the issue at hand. In order to do well in the emerging new business environments, organizations and their leaders have to develop a new cognitive capability, the capability for sensing and seizing emerging business opportunities (Arthur 1996, 2000).

Organizations and their leaders can develop this capability by engaging in a different kind of learning cycle, one that allows them to learn from the future as it emerges, rather than from reflecting on past experiences. I suggest calling this evolving new learning capacity "presencing." The term refers to the capacity for sensing, embodying, and enacting emerging futures. (Scharmer, 2000b)

I have a belief that it is by avoiding prescribed methodology and engaging in action and reflection in the ways that I have that I have found the paths to hope that I have. These paths have led me to sense another version of the future than the ones of the dominant paradigm.

Sources of support for a decolonising, transformational, inclusive approach to epistemology

In seeking other epistemological approaches my concerns are similar to that which Lather refers to when she speaks of the concern of some approaches to feminists research being to both contribute to emancipatory theory –building (Lather, 1991) and to empowering the researched.

I have been influenced by epistemological approaches and tendencies that challenge presently predominant theories of knowing and seek to validate and contribute others that lead to greater social equality and justice. I am drawn to those approaches that validate the importance of the embodied perspectives, activity and voices of the excluded in liberating knowledge creating processes.

As I have engaged with this inquiry I have found people from all over the world who are working to create a ‘post-colonial’ world at least partly through appropriating and extending the epistemological scope and purpose of research in order to develop knowledge that can lead to changes in configurations of power. People like Linda Tuhiwai Smith for example, working in the context of New Zealand, speaks of the need for researchers to “Decolonize Methodologies” (Parra, 2001, Smith, 1999). In a powerfully argued case she demonstrates the ways in which imperialism deprived indigenous peoples of their political power and puts forward the importance of indigenous peoples including a reclaiming of research, as part of a strategy of empowerment for survival. She argues that the aims and methods of Western research cannot be separated from the purposes of imperialism She links the development of self-determination of indigenous peoples with the development of a knowledge base through research. As I read her work I feel a powerful sense of mutual purpose and I understand that though our contexts are different, the liberational intention is the same as is the forces that we are working to reconfigure.

I distance myself from full allegiance with post-colonialism not only because it can be thought of as suggesting that colonialism is over, ‘post’, but because it contains the word ‘colonialism’ in it and I want to inscribe hope onto the linguistic with which I seek to describe the state I wish to work towards and am wary of re-inscription of colonialism through the use of the term post-colonialism.

The African American ‘womanist’ epistemological contribution

I have also found huge inspiration from the work of African American feminists and ‘womanist’ inquirers who also perceive themselves as engaged in decolonising the Academy. This movement is significant politically and epistemologically as it identifies other locations of knowledge as valid (e.g. Black women’s living practice). It also seeks to identify different *types* of knowledge and different forms in which that knowledge is manifested in order to remove the exclusion and devaluing of African American women’s lives and the knowledge they gain and create.

In engaging with epistemological and methodological concerns African American Women, womanists and feminists have inspired me by the quality and the scope of their work and their desire to include within the Academy the perspectives, strategies and struggles; knowing and feelings of African American women (and, in many instances, the wider African Diaspora). Writings from people like bell hooks, Audrey Lorde, Angela Davis and

Patricia Hill Collins engage me as they deconstruct the cloak of legitimacy of the existing status quo and reveal patterns of oppression and paths of transformation in coexistence. Of note is their shared desire to de-problematise the African subject and place her/him in the context of a contemporary racialised reality structured by the colonial genesis of modern Western societies.

I think we need a much more sophisticated vision of what it means to have a radical political consciousness. That is why I stress so much the need for African Americans to take on a political language of colonialism. We owe such a great debt to people like CLR James and the great thinkers in the African Diaspora who have encouraged us to frame our issues in a larger political context that looks at imperialism and colonialism and our place as Africans in the Diaspora so that class becomes a central factor. (hooks, 1995)

The African American womanist/feminist literary/academic tradition places the personal firmly within the realm of political and academic inquiry. I have sought to embrace and not be separated from their work because of their (not exclusive) focus on women. I want to acknowledge the achievement that they have made in academic terms and in practical terms to the situatedness of African peoples of all nationalities and of both genders. I have learned much from them that has contributed to my self study focus on evolving a post colonial notion of what it means to be an African man working in liberational ways to develop an identity of success through working within communities with a concern to positively affect thinking and enable change.

I have therefore considered my role as a father in this inquiry as I seek answers to questions to do with how, in a colonised historical reality, I can seek to be a good father to my son and help him evolve ways of being that can support his success in the context he finds himself in (and which he co-creates). The work of people like Joyce Elaine King (1998) supports the legitimacy of including this within the scope of my inquiry.

My research is both a form of leadership and praxis — action and reflection — for social change. What I am trying to do is redefine the role of a Black academic and the nature of Black scholarship so that scholarship, community/public service, and parenting (another aspect of the Black liberation struggle) are compatible and interdependent. (King, 1988, cited in Henry A 1993, p.211)

King opens up a dimension of Black resistance and scholarship: Black motherhood. I am inspired by this and encouraged in my quest to inquire into liberational ways of being a Black man generally and a Black father particularly that contradicts the stereotypes of Black men as fathers and contribute thinking that can help remove some of the factual basis for that disempowering stereotyping. (The boy's camp) I am then, in this inquiry, seeking to make a modest claim to a particular contribution to thinking about Black fatherhood as part of the scope of this thesis.

My structuring sense of scope, epistemology/methodology then draws upon traditions that I am only initially (strongly but dimly) aware of in my body yet which encouraged me to resist predefined methodological approaches or neatly cordoned off areas of inquiry for my inquiry. As I reflect upon how I have inquired, in particular the importance of dialogue, I am struck at the similarities between my approach and what Hill-Collins describes below:

“Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination,” asserts bell hooks (1989, 131). For Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community. A primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process (Belenky et al. 1986, p18).

This belief in connectedness and the use of dialogue as one of its criteria for methodological adequacy has African roots. (Hill-Collins, 1990. p 260)

Every time that I have made one of the hundreds of talks or presentations that I have over the life time of this inquiry I have been aware that I am engaged in a learning dialogue; in an inquiry that is collaborative exactly and implicitly without always needing to be spoken about as such. The relationship between the ‘audience’ and me is never passive and what I say and how I say it and how I change my thinking and how *we* change our thinking and our actions emerges out of “a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination”.

Apart from seeking to extend my relationship with epistemology and methodology through drawing upon the contributions of African women academics and feminists, I have also drawn upon a number of other traditions and sources. Central to these is the powerful work of feminist writers like Patti Lather (1988). Lather argues that for research to be truly feminist it has to be action and change focused because it exists within a status quo that requires that change. This change is inseparably social *and* individual change and for the researcher it involves a mutually informing and transforming relationship with the researched. She argues that the conscious intention of the researcher be to assist participants to change their situations through their increased understanding.

In my work in the Sankofa Learning centre, and other places I have sought to do exactly this. That is, I have tried to engage in research with and for others to “to help participants understand and change their situations”. Feminist perspectives have made a major contribution in shifting and expanding notions of epistemological and methodological validity.

The recent literature on feminist epistemology revealed that the word "epistemology" has been "reconstructed" by feminists to include the broadest possible sense of the term. This has been done by drawing attention to areas previously left untouched by traditional epistemologies and research (Duran, 1991, p. 73). Additionally, by creating "gynocentric epistemics," knowledge centered around women's realities, a new knowledge is brought forth. The reason for these actions is the feminist desire to have women's experiences finally recognized and legitimated. (Ardovini-Brooker, 2000)

I seek to learn from that and use it to give validity to my own exploration of the space I have inquired into and the knowledge I embody, gain and seek to influence and be influenced by There is also a desire to identify that which is particular about the nature of inquiry that emerges from an African perspective.

Feminist approaches to epistemology have significantly increased the scope of what can be included as knowledge. It has done so, for example, in locating the individual within the inquiry; in extending notions of what knowledge is and how one comes to know; in constructing deconstructing knowledge and much more. All of these approaches are significant contributions to creating a wider scholarship of inquiry and to decentering the Eurocentrism implicit in modernist approaches to knowledge. There are obvious connections between ‘Gynocentric’ and ‘Afrocentric’ challenges to the narrower (traditional) epistemological parameters of the Academy.

Epistemological challenges from other cultural and national influences

The positivist traditions that dominate the Academy have been challenged, extended and made less dominant by influences from a number of other sources than the post-modernist ones, these include some that are of different cultural origins. One of these influences that have had an influence is the Buddhist understanding of how we inquire, how we find valuable knowledge.

In the Indian tradition, philosophy never became a purely abstract occupation. It was tied (“yoked,” as is traditionally said) to specific disciplined methods for knowing- different methods of meditation. In particular, within the Buddhist tradition, the method of mindfulness was considered fundamental. Mindfulness means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience. Mindfulness techniques are designed to lead the mind back from its theories and preoccupations, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one’s experience itself. Furthermore, and equally of interest in the modern context, the descriptions and commentaries on mind that grew out of this tradition never became divorced from living pragmatics: they were intended to inform an individual as to how to handle his mind in personal and interpersonal situations, and they both informed and became embodied in the structure of communities. (Varela et al., 1991. p. 22)

That is, valid knowledge is not just acquired through reasoning, intuition or perception. There are other disciplined approaches that can extend those which predominate in the West. This opens up the possibilities for an approach to epistemology that, in addition to being extended by the concerns of subjugated groups and their knowledge creation processes, is open to those of different cultures with very different concepts of what knowledge itself is, what is of value and valid methods to acquire it.

In making the claim that there are other valid epistemological perspectives I am not claiming that I necessarily agree with them all, but to help open up the possibility of the validity of different approaches to knowledge. For example:

Islamic epistemology is premised on Divine Unity as the source of all knowledge. From this premise are derived flows of worldly knowledge. The emanating knowledge-flows in relation to all world-systems are shown to give form and meaning to cognitive and material constructs. (Choudhury, 2004)

Though the Islamic view of knowledge holds Divine Unity as the source of all knowledge it does not do so in a fixed and rigid way. There are some interesting parallels between the process of arriving at a notion of ‘truth’ from an Islamic epistemological point of view and

that of participatory Action research. 'Truth' is not taken off the shelf as existing in a fixed and permanent form. It is seen as constantly evolving through a process of democratic dialogue and debate.

Interactions thus lead to integration among the material and cognitive entities of the knowledge-induced domains. Finally, from the interactions and integration comes about post-evaluation of the performance of the rules, laws, guidance, policies and programs set in motion by the existing set of *Shari'ah* instruments and knowledge-flows and followed by the corresponding organization of the Islamic political economy. Such a creative evolution is termed here as the evolutionary stage of the process of unification. The complete process is formed by interactions leading to integration and these two are followed by creative evolution towards more of the same kind in continuum. We thus derive the interactive, integrative and evolutionary (IIE) process-oriented worldview of unity of knowledge. (Choudhury, 2004)

Though its idea of 'unification' of knowledge appears at first sight to contradict the post modern position of multiple truths, close study reveals that actually it is a position in which all truths are held together, including contradictory ones as part of the one truth. This view, I would suggest, is a valid one epistemologically and could reward further study. Its inclusional perspective offers an interesting other to the meta-narratives of modernism and the dichotomised multiple realities of post-modernism. It has a human dialogic rigour that I think is recognisable to those who operate within an action research tradition.

Other contributions to the decolonising of knowledge

Knowledge creation that builds unity: reconstructing the divisions of colonialism

On a more practical level I am also evolving theory and understanding about how we need to transform some of the ways we relate to each other as people of African origin. Colonialism and the ways in which we have integrated that within our being have led to a self-perpetuating divisiveness that compounds our oppression. Suzanne Lipsky speaks of this:

The isolation which results from internalized oppression can become so severe that a Black person may feel safer with and more trustful of White people than of Blacks. This is an illusion, a confusion, created by the pattern, but an individual may accept living inside this pattern because it feels "comfortable" and therefore "workable." Clear thinking tells us, however, that this is not a good enough solution. No Black person's re-emergence will be achieved unless he or she faces and dissolves the isolation from her or his own people.

I can be sure that any time I feel intolerant of, irritated by, impatient with, embarrassed by, ashamed of, "not as Black as," "Blacker than," better than, not as good as, fearful of, not safe with, isolated from, mistrustful of, not cared about by, unable to support, or not supported by another Black person, some pattern of internalized racism is at work. Any time I take action or do not take action on the basis of any of these feelings, I am giving in to a pattern of internalized oppression, racism, and powerlessness. For example, if I do not ask for, demand, and organize support for myself from my Black brothers and sisters, I am strengthening the stranglehold of oppression on us all. Similarly, if I do not forcefully persist in offering and giving my support (even risking my own feelings) to another Black person in the grip of some distress pattern, I am buying into my own powerlessness and oppression. (Lipsky, 1987)

What Lipsky is speaking of here is what I think of as liberating practice. She has identified the need for us, people of African origin, as individuals to examine our own personal behaviours and consider the impact they have on our ability to come together with other African peoples in order to collaborate in changing our condition. Hers is a decolonising practice that I feel considerable synergy with. In my practice within which my inquiry is integral, I have tried to find ways of working with other people of African origin and work with the almost instinctive divisions that are endemic amongst us so as to build networks and strategies for change that makes a change.

Having worked with groups of others who strive to make a positive collective response to this and having experienced the beautifully positive and the destructively negative behaviours that they have exhibited towards me (as an example) I am clear that, in the process of collective development, there needs to be personal reclamation of (my)self. There needs to be intense re-evaluation of self that, though it may be inspired by collective experiences, goals and membership, is at times a singular personal journey.

Colonialism, neo-colonialism, post-colonialism

The dialogic interchange with Paulus Murray, a fellow student at Bath University, has helped stimulate me to re-familiarise and reground myself with an understanding of colonialism as explanatory to the conditions I experienced and wanted to change. It has also helped me to move away from what I have called (above) diversionary 'race' based strategies (that is, strategies that privilege race as the explaining factor in the oppression of peoples of African origin over colonial policies and the ideological justifications required to consolidate the levels of economic exploitations of African peoples and lands).

In seeking alternatives perspectives I have engaged with postcolonial theory. For me a post-colonial vision has to be about redistribution of wealth and power and an embracing of our global common humanity in practical terms. Luke Strongman of the University of Canterbury is one who asks fundamental questions of this sort in his article Post-Colonialism or Post-Imperialism? (Strongman, 1996).

What I have resisted about the term "postcolonialism" is the linguistic construction in which 'post' and 'colonialism' are joined. This sounds as if colonialism is over. I have problems with this because though its form has changed, its destructive effect on the economic, political and psychic lives of much of the world and, in particular, Africa, is if anything, greater now than it was in the so called heyday of colonialism.

I see a lot of parallels between postcolonialism and postmodernism in that postmodernism has a similar relationship with modernism – which could well be seen as the product of, the apology for and the ideological reinforcer of colonialism.

... it is useful in understanding the relationship of the Enlightenment to imperialism as a justification for the West's domination of entire populations of native people in the name of progress. Many colonial narratives (Conrad, Kipling, Dinesen) associate native populations with images of nature. These narratives in turn reflect the creation of a more extensive political, even anthropological characterization of the "native" as natural, ie uncivilized. This opens up the whole system of binary opposition coming out of the separation of man and nature: culture/ nature, civilized/ primitive, rational/ irrational, light/ dark, good/ evil, providing further rationalization for colonialization (at times effacing political and economic motivations). Western rationalism would actually "liberate" the dark, chaotic "natural" worlds. (DeHay, Accessed 18.05.06)

DeHay is clear that postcolonialism, "like other post-isms", is not about saying that colonialism or modernism is dead and continues to offer the following definition of postcolonialism: "the social, political, economic, and cultural practices which arise in response and resistance to colonialism." This "resistance to colonialism" is an obvious acceptance that colonialism still exists and I welcome this. However, I have struggled to find a form of words that captures the sense that we are positively working to create another state of being in which all of humanity can flourish and in which the structural and psychological disadvantages imposed by colonialism are systematically resolved. 'Societal Reidentification' is the closest that I have come at this time.

I have also been influenced, as I considered how to structure and what to include within the scope and purpose of my inquiry, anti-colonial writing that focus on the macro socio political. To this end I draw upon the spirit and works of people like Rodney (Rodney, 1972, Rodney, 1970), Cabral, Nkrumah (Nkrumah, 1965, Nkrumah, 1967) and others as

well as the work of people like Malcolm X (Malcolm X, 1964, 1990, Malcolm X and Haley, 1987), Martin Luther King and the Mahatma Ghandi.

In the preceding pages I have tried to outline some of the influences on me as I have enquired. Though there is not always a clear linear connection between these influences and how I have inquired, they have clearly been a significant, inspirational, permissional and conceptual influence on me as I inquire into my practice.

Action Research and Epistemology

This ontological, cosmological, epistemological and practical inquiry is located within the frame of the philosophical and methodological disciplines that collectively are known as action research. I chose this approach because I was particularly keen on the notion that I could study myself trying to achieve what I felt was really important with a primary view to increase the effectiveness of my practice and a secondary one to be an educational influence on the learning of the Academy.

... 'action research' suggests a single activity which is simultaneously a form of inquiry and a form of practical action. Clearly, any 'research' process involves some form of 'action' (interviewing, distributing questionnaires, etc.), but 'action research' refers to something rather different. It suggests the possibility of a form of social research which involves people in a process of change, which is based in professional, organisational or community action, and which is thus no longer beset by the age-old problem of the gap between 'theory' and 'practice'. ... At the same time, it proclaims an ideal of practical work which is also a form of learning for those involved (action as research). Hence its appeal. (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001, p, 5)

In my work I have been constantly seeking answers to questions of the kind "how can I improve my practice..." Whilst engaging in action my primary concern was to do with achieving particular goals, more than in the generation of generalisable information for the sake of it. I worked with the belief that knowledge of the kind I was seeking could only come out of action that is not a practice or conducted in a laboratory or within sanitized conditions. To obtain the kind of data I wanted to find I have to be involved in taking action towards achieving my objectives. Some approaches of Action Research share this perspective and emphasis:

Action research is the study of a social situation carried out by those involved in that situation in order to improve both their practice and the quality of their understanding. (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001, p, 8)

Action research actually encompasses a number of research traditions. For example, Paulo Freire is a critical figure that works with an Action Research approach labelled Participatory Action Research (PAR). He argues against gathering research on oppressed peoples. He describes ways in which this research is often used in ways that are not in the interests of the researched. The researchers are the experts and the researched have little definitional power. I have witnessed, for example, how much educational research is carried out on the causes of failure of 'Black' children in schools as if this were the primary problem for the pupils and their families. The problem is located in the family, in fathering practices or in the school. In the work that I have done with Black families, most of them are concerned with the number of exam passes their children obtaining. They are also concerned with the sort of young person that their children are growing up to be; they are concerned about where they live, fear of gang membership or gang violence, lack of identity, alienation from family, employability, family tensions caused by inappropriate policing or other dimensions of the criminal justice system; self esteem, belief in possibility; the cultural 'pimping' of young Black women by the media and a host of other factors. Seen through these eyes the concerns that research would address might focus more on "how can we increase unity amongst ourselves as people of African origin to

ensure that our young people have fairer life chances than they presently do”? or “What do we have to do to overcome the impact of slavery, colonialism and racism on our family patterns – what would really work”? “How can I have a happy and successful career in a work environment in which I have to constantly be playing by another set of rules”? “What do we need to do to remove the cause and effect of gang culture on our young people”?

Outsiders identify problems that have an impact upon outsiders while insiders understand their world in (sometimes) different ways and would consequently approach research subject and methodology differently – from their own needs and experiences.

"participatory research is a means of putting research capabilities in the hands of the deprived and disenfranchised people so that they can transform their lives for themselves." (Park et al., 1993. p. 1)

I was drawn to the fact that Participatory Action Research (PAR) contains the requirement for political analysis. This includes developing shared understanding of power relationships. This leads me to Critical Theory, which is a big influence on PAR's political focus. It has its roots in Marxist social analysis and the work of members of the Frankfurt school such as Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer. It is sometimes described as a melding of psychoanalysis and Marxism and draws upon European and American social theorists with an interest in understanding how social inequalities are perpetuated through social structures and institution. It is theory that is committed to social change, often radical, and is positioned as opposed to traditional positivistic scientific theory..

The concept of hegemony formulated by Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971) and contributing to PAR thought, is important to this text because of its focus on the need for the oppressed to engage in understanding the ways in which they contribute to their own domination. This has connection with the notion of ‘internalised oppression’ (Lipsky, 1987). Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, unlike the classic Marxist notion of domination, focuses on the ways in which ideology is contained and projected in popular cultural forms. He argues that mechanisms of domination can be found in ‘everyday’ routine structures and ‘common sense’ values. (Gramsci, 1971)

This finds powerful echoes in the work of Amilcar Cabral

"History teaches us that certain circumstances make it very easy for foreign people to impose their dominion. But history also teaches us that no matter what the material aspects of that domination, it can only be preserved by a permanent and organized control of the dominated people's cultural life; otherwise it cannot be definitively implanted without killing a significant part of the population" (Cabral, 1970)

Another key concept is that of ‘demystification’ this is about a search for the ‘truth’ that is denied or hidden by those in power. In my inquiry an example of this is the truth of African historical achievements and contributions to world civilizations. This has been denied by many academics for centuries and has served to impose and reinforce beliefs in inferiority and acceptance of forms of dominance. I have engaged with demystifying my understanding of African history and of Africans as part of a process of reclamation of my identity. Foucault, another critical writer from the Frankfurt school, makes the link

between the European academic writing of history and colonisation. The very academic discipline itself is dialectically evolved alongside of and endorsing of colonisation:

History writing in its modern form can be dated from the early nineteenth century. Not coincidentally, this period also experienced the dramatic increase in European colonisation. This is one of the principal criticisms Foucault has of the traditional method of writing history. Foucault sees it as playing an instrumental role in the colonising process itself and is therefore unable to provide a perspective that offers a useful critique of this colonisation. ...

From this perspective, rather than being considered as an act of violent aggression by the colonising force, colonialism is regarded as an aspect of the evolutionary development of history into higher forms of society. (Danaher et al., 2000. p, 99)

Foucault's position is that knowledge *is* power. Discourse; what is included and what is excluded within what we speak of and consider as relevant and valid, is the way in which we negotiate knowledge/power. It is by placing oneself within these knowledge/power relations reflexively that power relations become clarified.

Similar to the concept of 'demystification' is 'conscientization. Fundamental to this is the idea that people learn how to liberate themselves by engaging in the process of doing so or, as Freire puts it "learning to do it by doing it". Freire (Freire, 1970) argues that we have the 'freedom' to change social relations if we make the conscious decision to do so.

PAR also understands research as being subjective and biased towards serving particular interests – much of this work is founded upon the value of my engaging in research to serve my own interests and that of my primary community. My practice has mirrored the PAR notion that engaging in research towards a particular end provides benefits within the process of research as well as achieving particular ends. I have found the process of inquiring into my practice has developed my self-confidence, my understanding of institutions and the people who work in them, their motivations and their influences. It has also developed my effectiveness and my ability to make the type of impact I wish to in the world. The more I learn the more I understand what I wish to achieve and strategies for achieving it differently than I did when I started inquiring. I have not had to wait until I produce "the results" before I have experienced the benefits of my inquiring.

PAR is explicitly about being concerned with issues of social justice, equity, restitution and procedural justice Rebecca Hagey writes:

Equity embodies ideas that are qualitatively different from those of multiculturalism. The latter promotes equality but does not recognize that there is systemic disadvantage that requires counteraction and compensation. Restitution acknowledges institutional responsibility in creating conditions that must now be rectified. The concept of procedural justice values how relationships are lived, how interactions exclude or refrain from including, how particular elite individuals holding office practise dominance and perpetuate systemic disadvantage, how racism hurts and humiliates and is denied, how its perpetrators are unwilling to examine their own practices and how resistance to change is manifested, for

example, when institutions have righteous sounding policies that they do not put into daily practice. (Hagey, 1997)

It is this recognition of 'systematic disadvantage' that appeals to me in this paradigm because of its relevance to my desire to challenge orthodoxies of explanation of the situation of Black people and because of its recognition of the need for restititional action.

I 'know' in different ways, maybe even more than the ones that Heron and Reason (1997a) identifies and I seek to bring awareness or knowledge of that knowing into the epistemological frame of my inquiry as I seek to observe myself in different ways, in the reactions of those I am interacting with; in the emotions I am experiencing; in the words I hear come from my mouth. The use of video has given me perspectives on how I may be perceived by others and an emotional set of reactions to how I perceive myself.

I speak of the approaches that CARPP has 'liberated', because I have entered into spaces that their work has made possible rather than following a template of how to do action research. I was drawn to their position that "action research must seek a way to create a wider influence, and that one way to do this is to 'create and support social movements';"

So I entirely agree with Gustavsen that action research must seek a way to create a wider influence, and that one way to do this is to 'create and support social movements'; I can see that it is important for individual action research activities to become 'part of a broader stream'. But I don't think this means that we must avoid the intimate, in depth, sometimes life-changing work of the personal and small group inquiry; these may be crucial to the development of social movements which bring about real differences. (Reason, 2003)

I have utilised a number of methods of capturing memories, pictures, emotions, tastes, sensations of the situation I am in. The drawing is more than a capturing though; it is also a means of inquiry and personal transformation. I sit down and I draw a person in the room or the 'feel' of the relationships within the room/location and in the process of doing so the quality of disciplined observation I am engaged in gives me data that both contains elements of the moment and affects the quality of my being and the relationship I have with the 'subject' of my attention. I have always found drawing something or someone a dialectical process in that my engagement affects my presence with the person or persons in the room and therefore leads to different (unpredictable) outcomes.

The Influence of Jack Whitehead and the Centre for Action Research in Professional practice

Methodologically and philosophically I have based this inquiry upon approaches, insights and permissions liberated most particularly by the Action Research positions at Bath University. Once starting at Bath I felt embraced by the varied commitments to social change and to the expressed values of humanity. I encountered a richness of thought that I had not really expected. I found my views challenged not so much by the ideas that people espoused, though that did have a big influence on my thinking, but by the relationships and the embodied form that preceded them.

I had a conversation a number of years ago with a Black man who had gained a PhD. He was bitter about the ways he had been made to contort his sense of who he was and the integrity of his research by the demands of his academic institution. At the time I resolved that I would not allow this to happen to me and would find a way of ensuring that I researched in ways that embodied the outcomes I wanted for myself and for social formations. I wondered about the practical value of his research if it had been so distorted that it left him with such strong negative feelings towards the whole academic world. The approach of CARPP at Bath has, I feel, allowed me to inquire in a liberated way and seek answers to questions that are of real value to myself rather than the PhD process being instrumental it has been a rich and transforming journey in its own right.

I have also drawn significantly upon Judi Marshall's notion of 'living life as inquiry' and her methodological application of the notions of inner and outer arcs of attention. She speaks of making inquiring into an 'everyday practice'. I have sought to inform what feels like a fairly natural preference with the disciplines of attention she identifies, particularly working with her notion of 'Inquiring through inner and outer arcs of attention'. I conduct this constant searching for meaning and answers through noticing myself noticing. I ask questions; why am I focussing on that? What am I not seeing? Do I know why I do not feel good about that even though everybody around me is praising me? What do I need to do to know what I need to know? Why do I see the world in that way? Is there not another explanation? Do I need to change what I believe? Am I really living my values here? How would I like to be behaving in this situation? How do I get to that state? What will help? What do I need to know in order to be the influence I want to be in this situation? It is the asking of questions of this kind that Marshall refers to as 'inner arcs of attention'.

The biggest influence has been Jack Whitehead, largely because he became my research supervisor and largely because he is just such a warm, demonstrative human being it took a while before I started to engage with the sophistication of his thinking. What attracted me the most initially was his ability to model a love for humanity in his energy that I always felt went beyond his written articulation.

This action research thesis draws upon the work of Jack Whitehead to create an inclusive framework in which the variety of approaches that I have used combine towards the creation of my own living theory.

I have inquired using the frame of "how do I improve what I am doing?" from Whitehead (Whitehead, 2005a). In using this I have explored myself as a living contradiction. That is I have sought to discover and address the ways in which the values I wish to live by are contradicted by the actions I take in the world. I have sought to be as cognisant of

experiences around and within me as I do so and use this information to refine my approach. In so doing I have been working with an action enquiry cycle which begins with articulating a concern, then imagining a solution, getting involved in trying to address that concern - acting, noticing what happens as a result of that – observing, and then evaluating and modifying what I have done influenced by the conclusions and questions that I have arrived at as a result of the processes I have been involved in.

Living educational theories are, for me, the descriptions and explanations which individuals offer for their own professional learning as they ask, answer and research questions of the kind, ‘how do I improve what I am doing?’. Living theories are different from the traditional kind of theory in which the explanations are presented in terms of general concepts. Living theories are part of the way individuals create their own form of life. They are living because of the way they explain a present practice in terms of an evaluation of the past and in terms of an intention to create something better in the future in one’s own practice. The fundamental explanatory principles are not presented in abstract, linguistic concepts, they are presented as values, embodied in one’s practice and embedded in a particular social contexts. Their meanings emerge through practice and require, for their communication both ostensive and linguistic definition. In other words we both ‘show’ and ‘tell’ when we try to communicate the meanings of the values which constitute our relationships as ‘educative’. (Whitehead, 1998)

Whitehead has made a number of other contributions that have had an influence on the structuring of this thesis. Particularly in areas such as ‘living theory’, the individual as a ‘living contradiction’, ‘living standards of judgement’, ‘embodied knowledge’ and “the inclusion of ‘I’ as a living contradiction within the presentation of a claim to educational knowledge.” (Whitehead, 1988)

Whitehead identifies the following key contributions that he has made:

1. The experience and idea of ‘I’ as a living contradiction can be included in claims to educational knowledge.
2. Individuals can create their own living educational theories as descriptions and explanations for their own learning in enquiries of the kind, ‘how do I improve what I am doing?’
3. Clarifying the meanings of the embodied values in educational practice in the course of their emergence in the practice of educational enquiry can transform the values into living and communicable educational standards of judgement.
4. Pedagogising the generation and testing of living educational theories can contribute to the education of social formations and inclusional forms of life

In my work I have engaged with all of these ideas. In relation to the ‘I’ as a living contradiction, I have experienced myself behaving in ways that contradict the values that I claimed to myself and others to hold. I have initially sought to make my actions fit the values I claimed to hold. I have learned however that this is an imposition of theory that denies that which I know without theory or clear explanation. I have therefore allowed myself to experience the values that emerge through my practice and examine them. Through this action I have learned of the ways that my own theories can help me deny aspects of my humanity and perception. By staying with these values as they clarify themselves to me through my practice I have shifted the stories I tell myself about what it

is that I believe that I believe. In so doing I am also reconstructing my sense of identity and my ability to operate effectively in the world.

This experiential discovery has a 'living' form in that it only becomes apparent in movement and action and in that it is knowledge that emerges over time and is never 'fixed'. The 'theory' that emerges from it are the explanations that emerge out of the understanding that comes out of the reflection and description of the self engaged in seeking answers to questions that begin with "How can I..." This approach to theory stands outside of the approaches to theory and inquiry emerging out of the Enlightenment (! – what an imperialist term) and the whole European modernist tradition in which knowledge is fixed and replicable. If a 'law' is discovered *out there* somewhere, in much the same way that Africa was 'discovered', then it has to be both explained by that law and is therefore also inevitably constrained by it.