

## Weave Two: Acting to Know 'I' in My Cloth: Engaging with Living Theory Methodology Included With My Own Narrative

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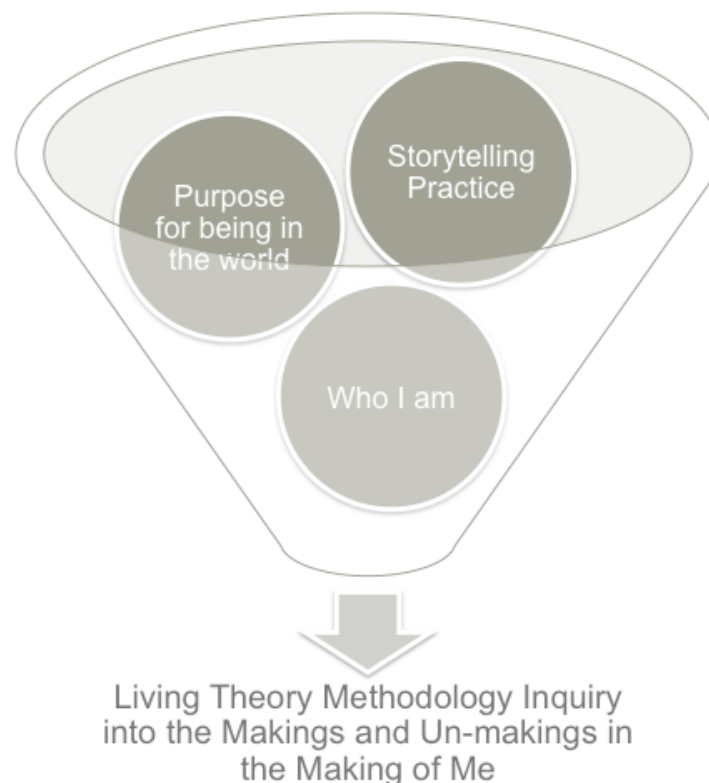
### Home Education Included with Africentric Idea and Patterns of Secret, Sacred and Cover Stories the Co-creators of Cloth

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People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.

(Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

**Figure 9: Makings and Un-makings in the Making of me**



### **Introduction**

In this weave I act to know Who I am in my Cloth as I construct my living theory methodology toolkit, applying Whitehead's (1989) frame of what constitutes a unit of

appraisal, inquiring into the knowing of my own influence in my own learning, that of others and social formations.

In this way I seek to gather evidence of when I am at my best, affirm high quality and the African Voice in my professional practice and seek improvement in that practice.

In this knowledge creation, quality affirmation and improvement project I demonstrate value in Polanyi's (1958, 1998) personal knowledge in interpreting, presenting and validating my knowing with universal. I also utilised Cooperrider's (2005) appreciative inquiry proffering a valuing and powerful perspective to build from strengths and with Whitehead's "living I as a contradiction, though I am challenged initially with this idea, I am compelled to engage with how I live my values in my professional practice. Further, Marshall's living life as inquiry offers a way for really awakening an insightful self as I position myself with my originating focus to the fore. I am inquiring into the makings and un-makings in the making of me, an educator in whom the African Voice has surfaced as a live commitment in my learning, living and professional practice.

Self-inquiry would not be new. However, it felt as if somehow I was raising the level of my inquiries, as I delved into my own perception of self through answering the provocative question: Who am I? However, almost instantaneously I reframe to "Who I am" asserting and valuing my own my self-knowledge.

In the process of exploring "Who I am" I delved into my own perception of self and discerned the surfacing of the important building blocks of self-identity, my values,

lived experiences, attitude, ways of working and my claims to know the nature of my success. I share meaning of being black, being African-Caribbean and some of the significant influences in my early years as I evidence some foundational warps (of love and neighbourliness, accountability, responsibility and mindfulness) extant in family and community.

I also reflected, looking deep inside of self, to explore and discover what was my purpose for being and doing in the world. I would interrogate my living narrative to find my purpose and begin appraisal of how I am with my purpose and conjecture about what I am doing to help others find their purposes. My purpose is to do good, to teach and be active in my community.

Further, in the form of story, a kind of 'double stitch' across my Unique Cloth, I both evidence and explicate valued meanings extant in my lived experiences, for the narrative method has this purpose. In the short story, 'Create Your Own' Dance, I give evidence my storytelling influence and the quality of my presence in my own research (my living theory thesis). Additionally, I consider whether my shell (the African Voice) is still intact and I affirm that my storytelling still has its "housing," its integrity. My storytelling is included on the loom.

In thinking about integrity I return to "Who I am in my cloth and commence engagement with Whitehead's living contradictions. It is a stretch. Still I can appreciate its value, and in applying my learning, I revise "Who I am" (contradictory, multi-layered and multi-phased) and create the poem, "I am and I am not" (Phillips 2000). I had commenced a redefining of myself.

I complete the Weave reviewing the centrality of self-identity, being African and living theory methodology to my studies, as “An Intrusive Thought” (Appendix Four), as if out of nowhere surfaces in my imagination, I follow the thought recalling the story of Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby and the nature of its storage in my memories. This is a story recalled from childhood and simultaneously, I recast the story in my identification with the Tar Baby and also explores my lived experiences of discrimination and fighting back. “I Explode for the Tar Baby” (Phillips 2001) is a poem demonstrating my commitment to the plight of the Tar Baby and the challenge of injustice.

Marshall’s (1999) living life as inquiry is added to my loom as I attend to another emotional rising. This time focused on “Makings of You” (Appendix Four), as Curtis Mayfield’s punctuates my thinking as I recall the words and make association with my of the “makings and un-makings of the making of me.” Mayfield song is about love and I share my thoughts on its meaning for me as I acknowledge Marshall’s influence on me in awakening an insightful self.

### **A Unit of Appraisal as My Claim to Know**

In my ‘claim to know’ the makings and un-makings in the making of me and to improve the quality of how I do, what I do, as I live, work and learn as an educator in whom the African Voice surfaced as a live commitment, Whitehead’s (1989) notion of “what to use as a unit of appraisal” and to consider as “standards of judgement” in order to test a claim to educational knowledge in this living theory thesis is foundational.

Whitehead (1989) notes that:

‘Whilst most researchers may find it strange to take a unit of appraisal as their claim to know their educational development I think the unit is clearly comprehensible’ (Whitehead 1989, pp. 41-52).

Whitehead has been developing his ideas in this sphere since the 1970s. At that time, he rejected a view of educational theory as a system of propositions and embraced in his living educational theory approach to action research, the notion that individuals produce accounts or explanations of their educational influence by ‘placing the ‘I’ at the centre of their own learning in inquiries of the kind, How do I improve my work?

Whitehead’s idea of theory as a living form of practice, something that people do, as they offer descriptions and explanations for the way they work, live and learn has been influential in how I have inquired into the makings and un-makings in the making of me, the nature of my action and knowledge creation through placing ‘I’ at the centre of my research and inquiries of the kind that now frames my living theory thesis as follows:

What am I doing to improve how I communicate the African Voice in ways that are authentic, African and at the same time understandable to non-Africans and to academy?

This has not always been the frame of my thesis. In Appendix One, Ready and Inspired to Create My Cloth, My Emergent African Great Story – Look for Me In The Whirlwind, I show how I have journeyed to this place, which has been critical in my study. It is I, with the knowing of my influence and my dynamic relational standards of judgement as a unit of appraisal, which is foundational in this living theory thesis.

It represents the content extant in my living narratives that are appraised in the creation of My Emergent African Great Story.

It is my claim that I know my own influence in my learning, living and working, and that of others and in social formations. In this living theory thesis I give evidence of how I discerned my embodied values, ontological commitments and my dynamic relational epistemological standards of judgement.

### **Acting to Know**

However, Polanyi's (1958) 'personal knowledge' has been of critical value in my "act to know." His conception of 'knowing' informing on a focal awareness (what we focus on) and subsidiary awareness (what we rely on in order to focus) is undergirded with three main theses. The first is that true discovery cannot be accounted for by a set of articulated rules or algorithms. The second is that knowledge is public and to a very great extent personal. The third is that the knowledge that underlies explicit knowledge is critical, and all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge (Sveiby 1997). Tacit knowledge is subconsciously understood, difficult to articulate and is developed from direct action and experience and shared through, for example conversation, storytelling and dialogue.

Sveiby (1997) says when we are tacitly involved in a process-of-knowing we act without distance. Indeed, he suggests that Polanyi's bi-polar 'from/to' structure makes it impossible to accept the detached objectivism of critical epistemology as a certain path to final Truth and that when the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity in knowing is dissolved, a quite different conception of what is true and real emerges (pp 34-36).

Hence, in My Emergent African Great Story where I codify, document, share and communicate aspects of my lived experiences in this living theory thesis, this is evidence of explicit knowledge. However, epistemically relevant unspecified, implicit and tacit knowledge is in evidence (Sanders 1988, p2) when I proffer meaning in my embodied expressions of values that are consistent with my African Voice and discern my own inner-working in multi-media presentations of my listening, conversations, dialogue, storytelling and social relationships.

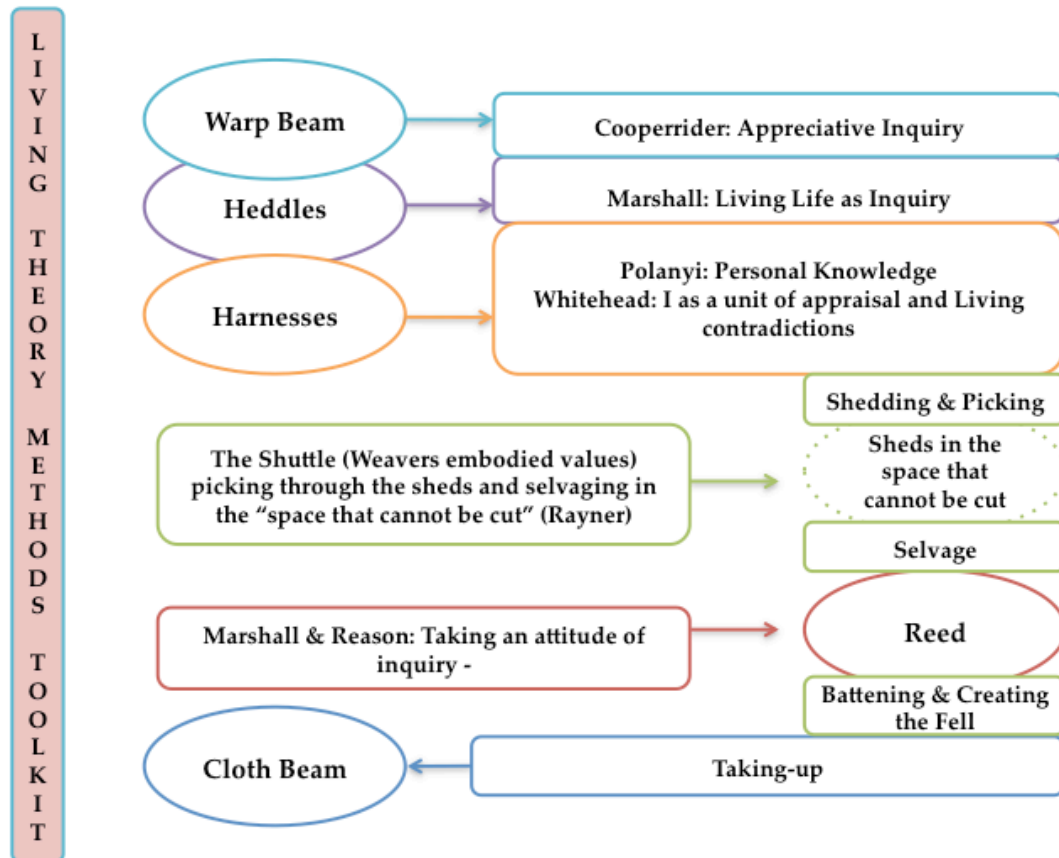
For Polanyi (1958) personal knowledge is grounded in the decision that:

*“I must understand the world from my point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgement responsibly with universal intent...” (p.327).*

It is in this way that Polanyi’s notion of personal knowledge have been foundational in my studies, as I have inquired into the nature of influence of the African Voice, in my learning, living and working, and that of others and social formations. In engagement with Polanyi’s personal knowledge I have been enabled to place in context my inquiries and have been afforded a premise for how I give evidence of the surfacing of the African Voice as a “live commitment in my learning, living and working”. It is this evidence, the processes used to gather this evidence and how this evidence is being communicated that I am seeking to make public. It is for the engagement and critical appraisal of Africans, non-Africans and the academy. I certainly feel that what I am communicating about the African Voice is original and that over the course of my studies I have had to exercise personal judgement responsibly. Hence, valuing Polanyi, my contribution to knowledge creation extant in My Emergent African Great Story is made with 'universal intent.'

In the following section, I inform on a moment of discovery using appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider 2005). “Who I Am” is on the warp beam of my loom.

**Figure 10: Who I Am is on the Warp Beam**



### Being Appreciative of Who I Am - Moments of Discovery

Cooperrider considered organisations were more concerned with “what is wrong” and tended to ignore “what is working “and “has gone well.” In developing Appreciative Inquiry, Cooperrider refocused on more optimistic behaviors, untapped creative energies, and stories of success and of what is possible (Cooperrider & Dutton, 1999; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Cooperrider et. al. 2000). It is suggested that Cooperrider’s’ (1989) Appreciative Inquiry works, because it is true to human nature, integrating diverse ways of knowing, responding and the use of imagination as well as rational thought. Five principles underscore the approach. The first is the constructionist principle that articulates the importance of being



skilled in understanding, reading and analysing communities as living, human constructions.

The second is simultaneity, which upholds that inquiry and change occur together and are not separate moments. The third is the poetic principle that says human organisations, communities and ourselves are open books and are co-authored. The fourth is the anticipatory principle, which suggests that current behaviour is guided by images of the future. The fifth is the positive principle, which tells that the use of positive questions afford development and change that is effective long-lasting. These are a powerful set of principles and undergird the four phases of the appreciative inquiry approach, although increasingly a fifth is added giving emphasis to defining the improvement sought.

The discovery phase is first and is directed to appreciating the best of "what is." This is when one is in your most alive and effective state. It is your peak moments of excellence and the encouragement is to learn from the smallest victories. Appreciate inquiry builds from strengths and in the discovery phase, exceptional accomplishments, core life-giving conditions, aspects of history most valued and areas to be enhanced in the future are shared, discussed and considered.

The dream phase use positive stories to think great thoughts, create great possibilities and to develop provocative propositions. It is focused on one's history, and is generative, in seeking expand potential. The future emerges from positives of the past as compelling possibilities as the status quo is challenged by envisioning valued and vital futures,

In the design phase strategies are created to honour provocative propositions that incorporate the qualities of life sought and to be protected. This is a foundation for infusing a social architecture for change and improvement and the articulation of the relationships to get the results.

The final phase is that of destiny, which is sustained by nurturing an individual and collective sense of commitment to the future. It is a time of action, continuous learning, adjustment and innovation in the co-creation of the positive future ideals. Appreciative inquiry is a continual cycle and the destiny phase leads to new discovery phase starting from new strengths, and the process begins anew.

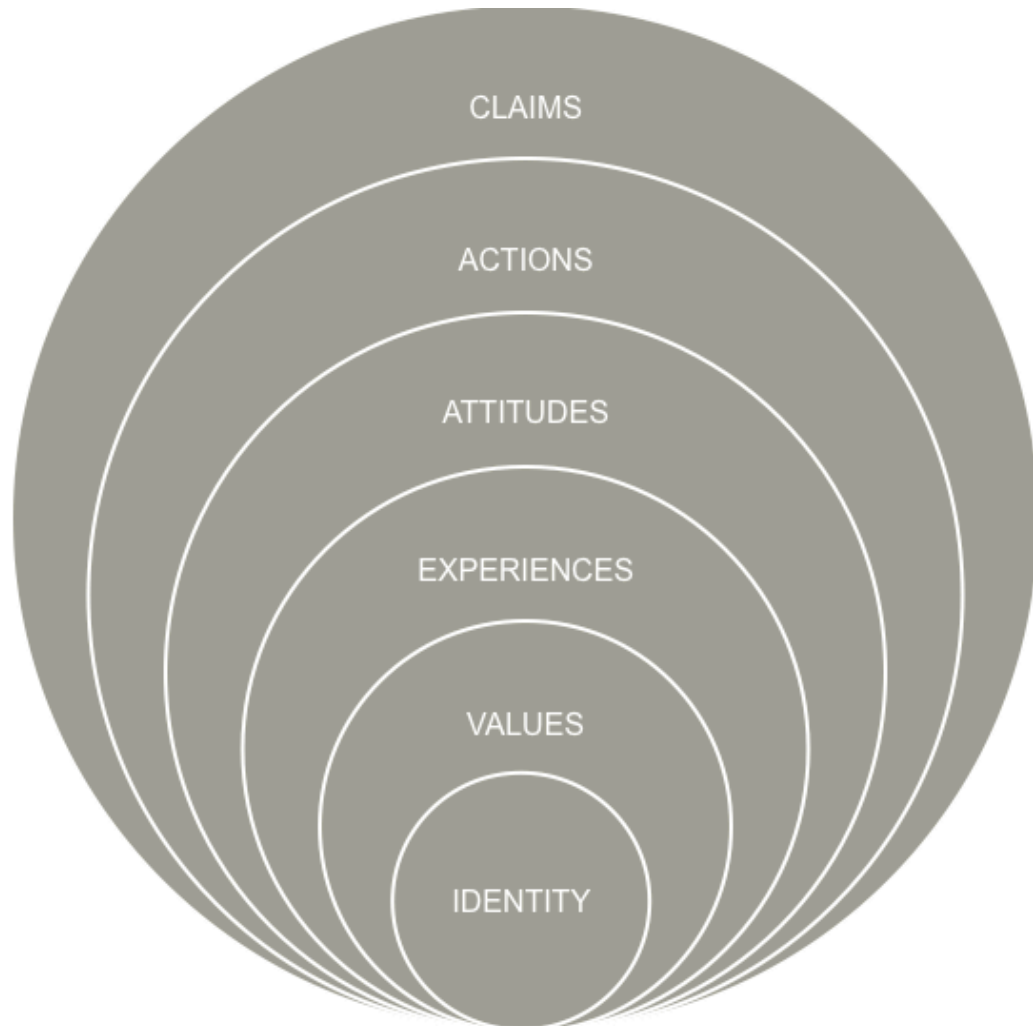
Throughout my living theory thesis I utilise the appreciative approach to self-inquire and for collaborative inquiry. It is an important part of my loom. I use appreciative methods in this Weave to imagine when I am in my "best cloth." Later in the study, I collaborate with my son to engage with family, peers at work and in the community focused on "What Manner of Man is my Father/Ian Phillips." In this way, appreciative inquiry is valued in action as a powerful methodology.

It is in making use of one's understanding of "the best of what is" to construct a vision of what one might be based on strengths, stemming from provocative propositions that the challenge to self to move ahead is inspired. Provocative propositions are realistic dreams: they empower a person to reach for something better, but base that empowerment on an understanding of what gives them life now.

Here, I show how through utilising appreciative inquiry, I acted to know the influences in my own learning, living and working. Inquiries were focused on who I

am and surfaced understandings relating to my identity, values, experiences, attitude, ways of working and my claims for success.

**Figure 11: Who I Am Spiral**



The provocative question that came to mind was: Who Am I?

I changed this almost instantaneously as a wayward thought invaded my consciousness and I reframed the question Who Am I to a statement as Who I Am to give my focus a more positive/assertive frame on which to reflect. I knew that I had knowledge of self.

The wayward thought is of the conversation that Moses had with God when he asked God in Exodus 3:13-15: "What is his name?"

The verse is as follows:

*Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."*

This wayward thought is not proffered with sacrilegious intent, but more a lightness of feeling in preparation for in-depth thought. This was characteristic of much of the early period of my act to evidence through utilisation of action/reflection cycles my knowing "Who I am", giving meaning to my purpose for being in the world and exploration of the nature of my storytelling practice. I was in search of:

- Finding the 'best way of describing me'.
- Understanding the nature of my being when this 'best way of describing me' is found.
- Appraising my strengths in the found best description of me' and also discerning my development needs so I would be best positioned going forward.
- Strategising for the best way of improving 'me' in ways that honour my ontological commitments (perspective/worldview) to the African Voice and that are congruent with my epistemological living standards of judgement (living values and ways of being).
- Commencing on my path towards improving my professional practice knowing how I would be best supported and aware that my active engagement in my own development is the greatest influence in change.

It is in moving towards the future that the evidence gathered from my initial inquiry

was put to good use. Those initial inquiries were foundational, in that they provided insight into my being, gave an insight into my thinking at that time and evidence of what was important for me. I have tried as far as is possible to keep the script that I used at that time to signal my thinking then, rather than use my present gaze to make sense of what was happening at this earlier period of my study.

I dreamt the best that I could be, discerned when I was at my compelling best, honoured my provocative proposition and acted for success on a path to my destiny. This is how the appreciative inquiry methods were applied as I inquired into the Who I Am, My Purpose for being in the world and the nature of my storytelling impact as I sought to improve my professional practice. In an act of empowerment I imagined a better future based on my current and potential capacities, and then moving toward that future. In the context of my studies I say this in the first action reflection cycle. There would be many more, and indeed I see my living theory thesis as both an action reflection cycle in itself, and at the same time a series of diverse action reflection cycles.

**The First Appreciative Cycle: Who I Am (Identity, Values, Experiences, Attitude, Actions and Claims)**

Figure 10, Who I Am, is evidence of exploring what I considered was significant in the making of me (Who I am). It is in this way that the content in the boxes are to be understood. Of course, the process of arriving here, would never be as neat as represented in Figure 10, but I surprised my own self at how easy some of the content came to the fore and the places where I felt angst. Generally, the headings came easily, where there was the greatest deliberation is with the naming my attitude and the act of writing my claim to know my success. The headings identity, values, experiences, attitudes, actions and claims are important in my inquiry.

However, there are innumerable aspects of self that one can give focus. Thus, my categories are neither exhaustive nor do they have or are intended to have universal application. I have found them to be useful and significant frames in my self-inquiry into 'Who I am'. The information in Figure 10 is reconfigured in Table 1 below to personalise in statements what the words in the boxes mean to me. What is communicated in both Figure 10 and Table 1, to me, feels very much like how I viewed myself as I entered the academy.

**Figure 12: Who I Am**



This view of self had evolved over time and as I look at the qualities now, I am thinking that this is not very scientific. I remind myself that at the time, my own direction was to an embrace of an affective process to get the best sense of who I am. It is that motivation that had brought me to Figure 10 and Table 1. It then felt like a

good platform from which to move and that is how the data was utilised. The process assisted in sharpening my focus.

**Table 1: Who I Am**

○ Identity	I am a Black/ African/ Caribbean, Caring and Professional Man.
○ Values	My living values are influenced by Catholicism and African humanist worldview.
○ Experiences	I have lived in a caring family and in caring communities, existing in oppressive conditions. I have challenged those oppressive conditions in defiance, through inquiring, learning and acting on my own and with others.
○ Attitude	I am professional, passionate, experimental and community oriented.
○ Actions	I have involvement in strategic, inquiring organisations that works democratically with children, parents, community members and professionals.
○ Claims	I have a purpose for being in the world; I share loving experiences; I affirm my Africanness; I am professional; I am democratic.

On identity, I chose to focus on black/ African/ Caribbean. All of these terms I have used over the course of my life in positive ways. I have also used descriptions such as Trini, Trinidadian or Trinbagonian positively, and still do when the occasion calls. However, I have increasingly become distance from black as a self-naming descriptor, in its use in present day society. The reason being that one always seems to be qualifying its use. In my own living it felt like it had had run its course. When I first embraced the term 'black' it was a political, seemingly a subversive act and an inclusive term of solidarity for the 'oppressed'. Stuart Hall qualifies his use of the term black in his delivery to students as follows:

'Black' is used ... with a deliberate imprecision deriving from the '70s, when the term encompassed all the minority migrant communities without the careful discrimination of ethnic, racial, regional, national and religious distinctions which has since emerged. It is used here not as the sign of an ineradicable genetic imprint but as a signifier of difference: a difference which, being historical, is therefore always changing, always located, always

articulated with other signifying elements: but which, nevertheless, continues – persistently – to register its disturbing effects. (Hall 2006, p. 3)

Increasingly, I have felt ill at ease with the term. This is so, not because it no longer has meaning for me, but more to do with its seeming lack of power in its embrace for me. This may not always remain so, but that is how it feels to me now.

I am mindful though that in the moment that my issues with the term ‘black’ may have portent, however. I pause here on this discourse with an urge to explore my use of the term African and Caribbean together. I feel that this is the most dynamic embrace/embodiment of who I am, in how I presented my self-identity on entering the academy.

I am mindful of challenge and controversy in my focus on my African and/or Caribbean self-identity. I reflected knowing that I was into a troubled, yet foundational seam in my cloth. The weaver as inquirer and creator was in need of an inspired insight as the African and/or Caribbean seam in my cloth surfaced in diverse forms as cross-threads, in integration, in contradiction, in separation, in union and in their uniqueness.

### **Foundational Warps**

I began reflection into my foundational experiences for insight and sense-making. A trilogy of calypsos<sup>7</sup> by Slinger Francisco’s (The Mighty Sparrow<sup>8</sup>) awakened my

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<sup>7</sup>Calypso music, although defined as native to Trinidad, actually is closely related to the West African “call-and-response pattern” (Liverpool, 1998, p. 31). Its roots derived from the arrival of African slaves, who, not being allowed to speak with each other, communicated and forged a sense of community through song. Songs are often improvised and humorous and appreciated for political and social commentary, and picing, a style of lyricism that caricatures people and events incisively, yet in light-hearted ways. In this way calypsonians used their lyrics to push the boundaries of free speech despite attempts at censorship. While most authorities stress the African roots of calypso, veteran calypsonian The Roaring Lion (Rafael de Leon) asserted that calypso descends from the music of the medieval French troubadoursh in his book, “Calypso from France to Trinidad, 800 Years of History (1986)”. However, its African shaping is not denied and calypsonians are akin to those West African poets, praise singers and wandering musicians (considered to be the repository of oral tradition) called griots.



imagination after much self-searching relating to my self-identifying as African and/or Caribbean. The first calypso of the trilogy was 'Slave' (Slinger 1963), which I appreciate has informed and shaped foundationally my understanding of being a Trinbagonian and African in the Caribbean from my early years in colonial Trinidad and Tobago.

Sparrow's (1963) "Slave" is an inspired creation, as it takes the listener on a transatlantic journey of horror, resistance and the prospect of rebirth for the African in the Caribbean (The lyrics are in Appendix Two).

If any calypso in my early years made me feel that being African was central to who I am it was Sparrow's (1962) "Slave." It would accompany me on my life journeys and I have a particular exciting recall of the children of SOS Children's Village (Barrett Town) achieving the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission's Gold Award for their superb and authentic rendition of Sparrow's "The Slave" that I had arranged as choral poetry. The children would also be afforded the opportunity to perform at the Jamaica Emancipation and Independence Celebrations in the company of the Governor General and Prime Minister.

Sparrow's (Francisco 1963) "Dan Is The Man In The Van" is the second calypso and it challenged me to see look beyond the surface of things (to search for truth). It inspired me to be curious at a time when upheaval/change (societal, communal, familial and personal) was attendant in my living experiences and certainly influential in my child's gaze as I sought to determine my identity. Furthermore, "Dan Is The Man In The Van" (Sparrow, 1962) is one of those calypsos that (for me)

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<sup>8</sup>Slinger Francisco (Mighty Sparrow): Often described as the "Calypso King of the World" has been a dominant force in calypso since the 1950s. He has recorded over 70 albums, won Trinidad's Calypso King (Monarch) title 11 times, won the Carnival Road March title 8 times and has received many other national and international honours.

provided a vivid demonstration both of the Mighty Sparrow's expertise of this communicative communal art form (influenced by an African pedagogy) and how this medium/genre combines history and politics to proffer lyrical content in a novel way that makes impact through storytelling in song.

Sparrow's (1963) "Dan Is The Man In The Van" (lyrics in Appendix Two) satirises colonial education in the form of James Oliver Cutteridge, Assistant Director of Education in Trinidad in 1923, who wrote a series of reading primers, the *West Indian Readers: Book 1*, (1957) that many regarded were to instil continued subjugation rather than encourage personal growth. As a ten year old at the time of its introduction, I know the calypso certainly held my interest. In Appendix Four in the story "An Intrusive Thought", I focus on the story of Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby and its powerful and lasting impact. Yet, it is a story derived from early educational events (it is one of the stories in the *West Indian Reader*), which only re-emerged in my consciousness, as I conducted my self-inquiries into the makings and un-makings in the making of me.

In "An Intrusive Thought" (a disturbing memory recalled from my childhood) I consider the implications of the incidents that story focuses and how I identify with the Tar Baby and make links with my own learning, living and working. "I explode", is a poem I wrote for the Tar Baby, which speaks to the injustice extant in story and my giving voice the silence of the Tar Baby. Comments from a co-creator in the Sankofa Learning Centre are included, proffering a supportive and inquiring voice in my living theory thesis at an early stage, motivated by the story of Barer Rabbit and the Tar Baby. I explore the significance of this intrusive thought,

As I consider “Dan is the Man in the Van” (Francisco 1963) now though, I know it most certainly contributed foundationally to the making of me (affirming my critical sense of being, my curiosity).

The third song of the trilogy is Sparrow’s (1962) “Model Nation”, Sparrow sang as part of a competition for Trinidad and Tobago’s Independence celebrations in 1962. I can remember listening to that calypso competition on Radio. The Mighty Sparrow did not win. It was won by Lord Brynner. However, it was Sparrow’s (1962) “Model Nation” that made a lasting impact on me with his rendition. The lyrics are below as follows:

The whole population of our little nation is not a lot  
 But over a mixture of races and culture a mixture we’ve got  
 Still no major indifference  
 Of race, colour, religion or finance \ it’s amazing to you I’m sure  
 We didn’t get independence before... which means  
 Trinidad and Tobago will always live on  
 Colonialism gone Our Nation is formed  
 We go follow our leaders they always do their best  
 We want to achieve so we’re going to aspire  
 And we bound to be a success.

It is a miracle all these different people  
 Can dwell so well  
 You see we are educated to love  
 And forget hatred  
 You see tis so  
 You people who are foreign  
 I’ve got a message to give you when you’re going  
 Spread the word anywhere you pass  
 Tell the world there’s a Model Nation at last

What I took from this calypso was a sense of confidence, a sense of achievement (success) and a real sense of optimism that with Independence Trinidad and Tobago had become a “Model Nation” – often described at the time as being the most cosmopolitan nation in the world.

It was from Model nation that I got my first sense of national identity in a Caribbean/West Indian context. I also recalled and researched what home and community meant in my childhood years in Trinidad and Tobago.

I offer some headlines here of foundational warps in my early childhood. (In Weave Seven the video clips focus on my early years through the loving eyes of family are shared). These warps tell of how in family and community I grew up with a sense of love and neighbourliness. Important also in my recall of my early living experiences are feelings of being accountable, responsible, mindful and full of adventure.

Further, I conjecture on religion and spirituality with reference to how I celebrated my Catholicism and the Baptists at home and in the community celebrated their faith. On spirituality I inform on how an aspect of Africans celebrating their faith seemed hidden. This was the Shango, which was shrouded in mystery. These points are made to show the early influence of the African Voice in my learning, living and ways of being. Indeed the African genus is writ large in Trinidad and Tobago and as I consider how I now embrace the African Voice other thoughts surface.

### **Being African – Akin to the Mythical Qualities of the Drum**

I now embrace the African Voice soulfully with purposeful intent, yet lightly and confidently. This appreciation though has not always been so attendant to “who I am”, for there have been times when such a way of being would have been held tentatively (being unsure of who I am) and other times where distancing myself from such a way of being would have been evident (deprecating being African). I have memories of doubting being African because of being born in Trinidad and Tobago (notions of disconnectedness). I have many memories of doubting being African because of how centrally miscegenation in the Caribbean compromised heritage

("race", ethnicity and complexion – poor self identification). I have memories of doubting being African because of never having travelled to Africa, until recently (notions of dislocation and compromised authenticity). I have memories of doubting being African because I believed (even fleetingly, but often much more than that) the propaganda in a range of media (books, newspapers, comics, radio, films, TV and cartoons – self doubt – internalised oppression) that depicted Africans ways of being as inferior. I have memories of conversations that deprecated Africans depicting them as primitive and challenging the authenticity of their glorious achievements (always having to prove and reprove).

I have memories of positioning being African to some lower order of importance in working towards the liberation of the "working classes". I have memories of not letting my Africanness shine through because of not wanting to reveal myself, offend or stir (formed) relations and relations yet to be formed.

You see the strong sense of being African that I now hold confidently though lightly has developed and grown not with linearity, but through variegated peaks and troughs (and seemingly without consistency). Yet I have come to appreciate being African as a dynamic way of being that makes links with Africentric traditions and finds meaning with those traditions for soulful/purposeful living in the present and future. Indeed, I have a sense of being African that resonates with the mythical qualities of the drum (its central instrument). I know how the drum's beat communicates beyond the realms of the material world and extends invitations to the ancestral spirits to protect the places within which our lived experiences unfold. I know too how those drumbeats inspire, yet creatively hold us to account in its challenge to be soulful and purposeful in our individual and communal actions.

Being African has these qualities too, for such a way of being embraces my spirituality (soulfulness), creativity (purposefulness) and holds me to account (a performance standard). Additionally, I know being African, like the drums, beats to personal rhythms and that of communities, and is akin to the heartbeat's responsiveness to our bodies (individually and collectively), finds the right pace to inform on communion and discord, laughter and sadness, birth and death, to warn and celebrate, to assemble and disperse and to make connection with nature's physicality and its wonderment and more. These are some of the factors that I appreciate in the dynamic way of being African that I hold. There is more.

### **Being African – a Visceral Connection**

For even as I ponder now, I have a sense that being African seems to have always been there. There seems a visceral connection, for it appears as part of me and extra to me (more than me), in that it seems to have been forged in my consciousness from my formative years of lived experiences (possibly even before that too) minimally influenced by me. It seems to have had its own destiny (its own way) and in those formative years I had little control over how being African entered my thoughts or guided my actions.

It is in this sense being African seems to have always been there. It was not optional. Yet, I have felt that I have been active in affirming (knowingly and unknowingly) this connection (choosing to be African). There were choices as to how I engaged or did not engage with such a way of being. There were choices too with how I appreciated its importance in determining who I am in varied environments and in different circumstances. I say this now, because I know the positive feelings that

were attendant when I saw Desperadoes play 'Zulu mas' as a child in Trinidad. I can recall the pride that emoted/evoked when memories of Haile Selassie's image (alongside Jesus') holding central place on the wall of my early home emerged in my consciousness. I knew the sense of connectedness I felt with Africa in the knowledge that my great grand aunts (Bibit and Onut) had a direct African connection (real or imagined). I knew too when Sparrow sang 'I am a Slave' that that connection with Africa was real.

My imagination wondered, and I thought with an almost oozing pride that being brought up behind the bridge<sup>9</sup>, in Lodge Place, Port-of-Spain, there was so much in my early-lived experiences in Trinidad that affirmed positiveness in being African for me.

### **Looking for purpose in the African Voice**

However, I also looked for purpose in my lived experiences and the nature of influence of the African Voice. Figure Eleven gives evidence of how I commenced this exploration offending my "purpose for being in the world." Posing the question: What is my purpose? Table Two provides some answers.

### **To do good, to teach and be active in my community**

My purposes to do "good", to "teach" and to be "active in my community" were important finds. However, the surfacing of a treasured individuality, radical spirituality and sense of community occasioned much deliberation and focused thinking. I embraced both purposes and qualities, as I found meaning promoting fairness and challenging injustice; seeing education as my vocation valuing Booker T.

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<sup>9</sup> Behind the Bridge – a nomenclature for poor areas of the capital

Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute and viewing my engagement in purposeful activities as if in service to my community.

**Figure 13: Purpose for Being in the World**



**Table 2: Purpose for being in the World**

I have a purpose for being in the world	My purpose is derived from my Treasured Individuality, Sense of Community and Radical Spirituality.
How did I find it	Life offers me challenging experiences and presents opportunities for finding one’s purpose, for relevant actions and collaborations.
How did I know I had found it	Through reflection I can name my purpose, affirm values, reconcile with my spirit and be at peace with a fragmented self.
What is the purpose	To do good; To teach; To be Active In my Community



How have I been with my found purpose	I am defiant in service; hold no truck with injustice. I am Strategic, Experimental, Professional and Caring in attitude and actions.
How do I assist others to find their purposes	I encourage self-directed learning, self-empowerment and collaborate with others to share stories and model new ways of being.
How will I know others have found their purposes	They will be self-inquiring, have their own sense of being in world, able to name their purpose and collaborate with others to tell stories and model.

Treasured individuality tells of the qualities I bring to the table (derived from my way of being, personal history, skills and talents). Sense of community appreciates my part in valuing the collective and co-creating social living forms. Radical spirituality frames my motivation that I can make a difference – I can be a catalyst for change.

It is these same qualities that inspired me to name my purpose, to be defiant in service and model transformatory ways of being. It is in modelling new ways of being that gave attention to my storytelling influence (that I now see as engaging dialogical praxis) and began to consider its importance for who I am, my professional practice and the nature of my African Voice. It is in this way that I focused on my own stories.

### **My Own Stories**

“Create My own Dance” (Phillips 2000) (see below) gives an account of an incident in the early years of my schooling in Mother England. The incident caused me great concern and is evidence of one of the signal events in the makings and un-makings in

the making of me, an educator in whom the African Voice surfaced as a “live” commitment.



**Figure 14: My Mother Dancing**

In this incident I inform on the classroom environment, the behaviour of pupils and the teacher, and how my Mother proved to be resource. I certainly felt, at the time, that without the support of my Mother, who challenged me to ‘Create My Own Dance’, I would not have been inspired to act in my own interests in the difficult circumstances. In the story I give purposeful recognition to my Mother, evidence the nature of our relationship (mutuality) and show in the telling of my story that ‘I can create my own dance’. It describes a moment/event in my schooling that has had lasting influence on what education in strange Mother England meant for me. The story was as follows:

## Create Your Own Dance

*"I know the answer"! "I really, really do know the answer"! I shouted excitedly in my mind, as my left cheek crimped, in the producing of an anxious smile. Yet, no other movement I could make. My whole body had stiffened. I could not raise my hand, in response to the teacher's question, directed at the class. Thirty-one and a half pupils were present. The half was Michael Robinson, sound asleep, two desks away, to the right of me.*

*It was a Mathematics class and the teacher had been explaining fractions. She had asked the class, "what is a one third times one eight". It was not a difficult question, not for me at least and I knew the answer. I knew my three times tables and for that matter my eight times tables. Yet, I could make no move to demonstrate my knowledge, or to attract the teacher's attention to me. I did manage though, to shift my head somewhat rigidly, and saw that no other pupil had raised their hand. I felt self-assured momentarily, but that moment was soon lost, as assuredness gave way to a solicitous demeanour. I became wary of my surroundings, distrustful of my environment and lost in my thoughts.*

*However my absorption with my thoughts was severely ruptured, when the teacher, intent on scolding the whole class exploded. "What have I been doing with you for the past three weeks"? She then deliberately, pushed herself and chair backwards, and then stood up slowly. She smoothed the crumpled pleats on the front of her dress, stretched her arms and rested them to her side, as if in completion of an aerobic exercise.*

*Then, in full voice, she blasted, "My efforts are wasted on you lot. This is the top class in Grade 7. My God! Pity the rest in the other forms. "Joseph", she shouted, she did not say another word, but the whole class knew, from her stern questioning look that she wanted an answer from him. Joseph bowed his head embarrassingly, he had made his response. "Stephanie", the teacher bawled, this time sounding even sterner, than when she had called Joseph. Stephanie too bowed and with her almost the whole of the class, as if in sympathy with her, offered a half bow. This half bow, however, was attempt by pupils to become invisible. They did not want to be called.*

*However, in rapid succession the teacher shouted the names of Alexander and Alexandra, the twins, their half bow were immediately transformed into full bows. Then even more quickly, she called Ingrid Semester, Pauline Michaelis, Everard Everington, Anthony Clarke, Perceval Singleton, Sheila Templeton, Michael Robinson, then paused angrily and sat brusquely. Not a word was uttered from any of them, but the teacher in her seeming heightened anger, evidenced by her calling of pupils by both firstname and surname, did not want to be answered. The question that she had earlier posed, in her mind, had become a distant memory. Her objective now, was in amplifying the embarrassment of the class. She certainly did this. The disgust with which she peered over her spectacles and the sneer that permeated the intonation of her voice was heard and felt by all pupils.*

*This included Michael Robinson who had been aroused out of his slumber, when his name had been called. The teacher reserved some of her most choice words for Michael as he sat at his desk bemused, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. "Look at him", she said, as if inviting the other pupils of the class to undertake some special investigation. "Look at his face ... is there a hint of intelligence there? He comes to*

*my class, deposits himself at the rear and promptly and most disrespectfully determines that in my Mathematics class that he should go to bed". Here, the teacher's invitation to investigate Michael stopped, as she proffered her findings in most strident terms, lambasting him with "You indolent, slothful, supine, lackadaisical, pathetic, good-for-nothing, listless, feeble excuse for a human being. How dare you come to my class and sleep? This is an ed ... ed... educational institution, not your f.. f.. flaming bedroom, she stuttered. She was now rocking passionately, but steadied through re-seating herself in the chair at her desk. As she sat, she took a deep breath and sighed resignedly.*

*My name had not been called, but in no way did I feel exonerated. I felt with the other pupils the embarrassment, the shame. At first my head was not bowed, now it was, particularly after the teacher's tirade against Michael, and him being only two seats away to my right. I felt exposed and open to attack, as the teacher appeared to be marshalling her resources anew, as she sat tapping her fingers with determination, readying herself, to recommence her annihilation of 7J.*

*I knew the answer. I really, really knew the answer. Yet, even after all that had gone on I still could not move. I wanted to raise my hand, but the hand would not move. I wanted to shout the answer, but my lips were frozen and my tongue tied. I just could not move. Something was holding me back. I was not sure what this "something" was, but as I became somewhat lost in myself once more, I began to have a sense of being afraid. Of being frightened. Uncertainty had gripped my imagination and forced an inner conversation that led along many paths.*

*Why am I afraid? Why could I not raise my hand? Why my tentativeness? Is it to do with a lack of confidence? Did I really know the answer? Was I afraid of being wrong? Why had my whole body been immobilised, except for furtive glances around the classroom? Why had I not been able to open my mouth and utter the words that would offer a release, not only for me, but the whole class, from the embarrassing situation into which we had been placed? Why? Why? Why?*

*Then I thought, probably it was because I was the new boy? After all, I had been in England only six weeks and this was just my second week in my new school. I had arrived from Trinidad, very disappointed in having to leave, but not too unhappy, in being in England, now that I was here. I was again with my Mother and elder brother, an association that had been broken for nearly seven years. The passing years, however, had not impaired our family relationship. The re-association rekindled the warm glow, so evident in families, where interactions are positive. I did however leave many friends behind in Trinidad, among whom Dexter and Loretta were most special. Dexter was a true soul mate. There was hardly anything that we did not do together. Every story he knew, I knew. Every story I knew, he knew. We talked to each other about everything. Loretta was my girlfriend, so called, because she gave me my first and second kiss. I missed her and yearned to be in conversation with Dexter. I thought too about my school friends, especially Carlyle Sheppard and Wayne Ferreira. We were intense rivals when it came to tests, but we had a healthy friendship and always shared and helped each other with our school work.*

*In Trinidad, I thought I would have no problem answering teachers' questions. I had always been considered and recognised as being bright and invariably was able to proffer right answers. However, I would not have been the only one. Carlyle,*

Wayne and I would race to stand and raise our hand to inform the teacher that we had an answer to offer. Experiences of school in Trinidad were certainly different, than had been my early school experiences in England.

In school in England, I most certainly remained bright. I had no doubt about that. At my interview for entering the school, the headmaster had remarked just that, after my completion of the English and Math tests in quick time and getting very high scores. Furthermore, on commencing school, I found that the content of many lessons amounted to nothing much more, than revision. The only class which had posed problems was Art. Still life drawings, proportional representations and imaginative painting were alien concepts. I had had problems too with relating to my new peers in school. The only words that did not need repetition were the usual salutations of "Good Morning" and "Good Bye" and the term "Pardon", which when said with furrowed eyebrows, was an indication that one had not understood, what had been said and what had been said, had to be repeated. Communicating, I thought, at most times was frustrating.

However, as I continued musing, about how frustrating had been my experiences with verbal communication, it dawned on me, as to the possible source of my immobilisation. The more I thought, the clearer the picture became. I was then able to visualise the very moment. Then, as now beads of perspiration eased through the pores on my forehead and ran down my cheeks. However, what I had then, but not now, was the freshness, the confidence, the courage to answer teachers' question. I remembered the moment. Then as now, I knew the answer. I really, really knew the answer to the question posed by the teacher to the class. It was an English class and he had asked, "How many parts of speech are there"? I as if I was in a race with Carlyle and Wayne, jumped up, and as I raised my hand, politely stated, "Good Morning, Mr. Brown, will you accept an answer from me"?

There was an eerie stillness in the class.

I looked away from Mr. Brown and surveyed my peers in the classroom. Each one seemed in a state of shock, with their glazed eyes turned on me and their mouths gaping. I returned my attention to Mr. Brown, only to see that he too appeared as if in a state of shock.

But even before I could glean a sense of what was happening, a cacophony of laughter pierced the stillness of the classroom. I am sure I heard the irritating chuckle of the hyena. The shrill kee, kee, kee of the chimpanzee. The dangerous howling of wolves, the cackling of turkeys, the hissing of snakes, the hee-haw of the ass, the grunting of a pig, the hooting of owls and a wide variety of noises and sounds, that was evident of Pandemonium amongst the animals breaking loose in a zoo.

Then books were flying, hands were clapping, desks and chairs being shuffled. There was a general mayhem accompanied by the most raucous laughter. All this directed at me. I did not initially know the reason, but it did not take me long, particularly when the whole class stood up, with hands raised, in a seemingly practised unison, saying "Good Morning, Mr. Brown, will you accept an answer from me"? Then the laughter continued. I sat down wanting to cry, but no tears came. I felt minute. I could only look at the marks on my used desk. Etched in the right hand corner and filled in with ink was "Eric Woz Here". I thought, good for

*Eric, I wish I was not here. I felt empty. I felt distant. I did not want to be here. I had been ridiculed, treated as a joke, a figure of mockery, a stranger, an alien, not accepted.*

*It was the school bell that saved me. It marked both the end of the lesson and the end of the day. I waited long enough for the teacher to say class dismissed, still with a grin on his face, before I headed through the door which was at the back of the class, into the school yard and out of the school gate, to the bus stop. As luck would have it, a bus I could take was just leaving and I managed to alight it before it could pick up speed. I was most pleased, that only a few children from my school would be on the bus and certainly none from my English class.*

*At home that evening I had no intention of telling neither my mother nor my brother what had happened earlier that day. My mother, however, has an uncanny knack of knowing when something is not quite right. As we sat down to eat she enquired politely, Ian what's up. You are most quiet today. My reply was almost inaudible, not really wanting to say anymore than I had to. I'm okay. "Okay" she counselled, "Okay" she said once more and continued, "You're as okay as eating an unripened orange". "What is the matter with you dear", she questioned again. I responded, somewhat testily, "I just said I was Okay". She challenged immediately with "and I just said, what is the matter with you?"*

*Anthony, also seated at the table, simply looked back and forth to my mother and me as we spoke, as if observing a tennis match. He had a puzzled look on his face unsure of what was happening. He knew though that mother was in her questioning mode and that in that mode she wanted answers. I knew that too and felt unable to resist her challenge. In our home our mother had an ascendancy that was not simply derived from motherhood. She was an intelligent woman, hard working, full of spirit and life. She was also a fighter, a woman of substance, who cared very much for her children. She commanded and deserved unreserved respect.*

*Stuttering, in high and low tones, I spluttered, "M...mom, I...I had a t...tough day at school.*

*"What happened son" was her gentle reply? I hissed my teeth and continued, "Mom they were laughing at me. They were jeering, howling, hissing and hooting. There was Pandemonium in the class".*

*"Why my son, why"?*

*"Books were flying, they were clapping, desks and chairs were being shuffled and they were mocking me". They ridiculed me. I felt so alone.*

*"Why my son why"?*

*Why? Huh! Well Mom, the teacher, Mr. Brown had asked a question to the class to which I really, really knew the answer. He had asked, "How many parts of speech are there"? So, I jumped up, and as I raised my hand, said, "Good Morning, Mr. Brown, will you accept an answer from me"? The class at first was still, before all hell broke loose in fits of laughter, mocking and ridiculing me. Mr. Brown was no help. I felt ashamed, out of place. I don't want to go back there. I really don't. The*

*bell saved me. When we were dismissed I ran out of the class with the children's laughter ringing in my ears". I don't want to go back there. I don't Mother".*

*My mother straightened herself in the chair. My brother shuffled in his, staring vacantly at his meal, in which he had stirred his fork, but not began to eat. "Son", my mother began. "I know to-day could not have been easy. What you have described is a most terrible experience. I really feel for you. It must have been hard to-day. It could not have been easy. But you need to understand ... appreciate what really happened and look beyond the laughter. You're the new boy. Your classmates are going to be looking for what they see as little faults in you. You have to be patient with them. They will come around to see your special qualities. Of course they are going to find you strange, now. But you will see, they are going to be glad to be in your company. You are going to have to be brave. You have to show courage. Believe and have confidence in yourself. You won't get everything correct at first, because the school is new to you. But you will learn. Things in school are going to be different than they were in Trinidad. It will seem like if new rules are in operation and you will have to learn these new rules and adjust to them. You will learn them. I have no doubt about that".*

*"But ... but Mom what I experienced today was more than that just about being new. How I see it, is that they laughed at me because I had manners. The teacher did too".*

*"Son", my mother interjected, "I am sure that they did not laugh at you because you had manners. They may have laughed at how you displayed your manners. But not because you had manners". The subtlety of my mother's remark was lost on me. It was lost on my brother too, as I noticed the frown on his face evidencing puzzlement. I knew that they had laughed at me because of my manners.*

*My mother then, as if ending our discourse, stated with some finality, "Son listen to me. You will learn. You will learn how to deal with ridicule. You are a bright boy. You have to give yourself a chance. You can't run away from things. You have to stand up and face the music. Create your own dance. Now eat up... You too Anthony." We did.*

*Later that evening, as I lay in bed, recapitulating the events of the day, for the umpteenth time, my mind kept running on the words of my mother. And as I recounted her words, I smiled to myself, knowing what a wonderful Mother that I had. She had given me strength to face the next day and as I continued musing on how wonderful she was, I laughed aloud when I remembered that she told me "create your own dance". "Create my own dance", I said to myself, giggling silently. "Create my own dance. What ... the twist, the calypso rock, the ska ... what? This jocular conversation with myself was soon put to an end when Anthony, roused from his sleep on the top bunk, whispered, "Jason, you're OK.*

*"I'm all right", was my whispered reply. As Anthony fell back into his sleep, I could not help myself from not thinking about him. He was my elder brother, and had not seen him for seven years, until six weeks ago. He was not as I imagined him to be. He was much bigger, more muscular than I, but appeared somewhat softer, more refined, especially at play. He did not have my Caribbean impudence and spontaneity, or at least, I had not seen it. This, of course, does not mean that I did not have this softer, more refined quality, so evident in my brother's character,*

but this quality was there, to be brought out on special occasions. "Like in answering questions in school", I brooded to myself. I liked my elder brother though and would not have wanted him to be any other way.

As I fell off to sleep, the thought that lingered most, was my mother's words, "Create your own dance".

As I left for school the following morning, with a warm hug from my mother, and steeled with her words of "have a good-day", said with much sincerity, I felt prepared to face the music. As I entered the school gates, somewhat warily, I sensed many eyes on me. Yet very few pupils ventured to say anything to me, except "Hi". I nonchalantly replied "Hi".

Stephanie was the only person, who ventured to go beyond "Hi". She in friendly tones greeted me with, "Hi Ian ... You're OK. Yesterday was tough on yer ... wasn't it"?

I replied with words, at first unsure of where I had unearth them from, and still in a nonchalant mode, "I can deal with that ... I can face the music ... I'll create my own dance. You watch".

Stephanie looked at me, somewhat puzzled, and said, "Yeah ... I'll see you later", as she moved deeper into the playground.

Soon after this, the school bell rang, signalling the commencement of the day. We lined up in forms and in an orderly fashion made our way to the assembly hall. Assembly on Tuesdays were rarely interesting, consisting mainly of notices and information on coming evens being read out by the Vice Principal. Once this was completed, we sang a hymn, said a prayer, and were out of the Assembly hall and in our classrooms for registration in quick time.

Being back in the classroom, where the previous day I had had such a "tough time", proved to be a numbing experience. During registration, I did not even hear my name called, and when nudged and informed that I should answer with regard to my presence. I remarked, "Yes sir", when it should have been "Yes miss". There was a gentle ripple of laughter around the class and Miss Buckton's pensive gaze encouraged me that I should correct my reply. "Yes Miss", I said brightly.

On completing registration, Miss Buckton, went straight into Mathematics. She requested that we opened our textbooks at Chapter Three, which focused on Fractions, then proceeded to explain some of the worked examples. Miss Buckton spent about 15 minutes on the worked examples and in her effort to see whether we had comprehended what was being taught, she posed the question "What is one-third times one -eight". And I knew the answer. I really, really knew the answer.

Then, as if, coming out of a dream, I thought I heard my name being called. Then more distinctly, and unquestionably, I heard Miss Buckton's angry invocation to me. "Ian Phillips, for the third time, "What is one-third times one -eight". I raised my head slowly, realising that I had been truly lost in my thoughts. For most certainly I had not heard her two earlier requests. I stood up, looked around the class of bowed heads, and then to Miss Buckton, in her manifest anger. "Well Miss Buckton", I said confidently, not even remembering my former anxious state, "It may please you to know, that I know the answer. I really, really do know the



*answer." Smiling broadly, I confirmed what I knew. "Miss Buckton, the sum of one-third times one-eight is one twenty-fourth. Every bowed head cocked a glance at me. I searched for Stephanie and when our eyes met I gave her a wink, spread-eagled my hands, palms upwards, and sauntered, swaying back into my chair, as if to say, "I told you, I'll create my own dance". She smiled shyly, but did not look away from me.*

### **Record of Experience**

Create Your Own Dance was an important story for me to write. I considered that it spoke to my purpose in the world and demonstrated my storytelling influence. It was also a significant story to share with members of my tutorial group, the wider CARPP 7 group and the CARPP network. In the writing of the story I wanted to record an experience that occurred in school, soon after arriving in England from Trinidad. I also wanted it to be recorded that I was in no way disadvantaged, in an academic sense, as a result of my educational upbringing in Trinidad. In fact, I would have contended that in relation to the academic standards that I met in the school I attended on arrival in England, those standards would have been outdistanced by the standards upheld at Bethlehem Boys, Besson Street, Port of Spain. Furthermore, I wanted it written down that the character of relationships that I had with the friends, family and significant others in Trinidad were important associations and that travel to England in the simplest form for self-betterment, was at a price. Yet, there was never any guarantee that self-betterment would take place.

Indeed, without my mother and the loving relationships that she shared with her siblings and more, self-betterment would probably have never even got off the ground. It certainly would not have, if I had been left just to internalise the untoward experiences that had occurred whilst in school and not been able to explore alternative strategies. Thus, even though I could not have fully comprehended my mother's facilitation to be self-directed, what she had said was sufficient to empower

and free-up my intuitiveness so that I could act to reclaim my vantage position of my self-knowing - that I really, really knew the answer the question posed by the teacher which had silenced the whole class.

I wanted to share this story to show how in school being ridiculed was part of the order of things. I also wanted to share how fear had worked to prevent me from demonstrating the knowledge that I had. Furthermore, I wanted share how the ridicule of self and others had stimulated fears. I wanted to convey to my tutorial group members how early experiences in my English school impacted adversely on my way of being. How I felt out of place and strange. My tutor group was most responsive for they considered Create Your Own dance to be a powerful story and they shared their views and insights.

The sharing of Create Your Own Dance held importance at a number of other levels too, not least, because I felt it situated me on the course. This was so, especially as I had been able to share an important life experience with members of my tutor group and explore with them the content of that experience. Members of the tutor group considered "Create Your Own Dance" a powerful story and in the exchanges I came to see more in the story than I had first realised. I felt in a real way that I gained a new understanding of how powerful a method is the story. I saw how positive experiences created self-confidence and affirmed one's ability to create one's own dance. I also saw the importance of my mother in the shaping of my values, and indeed her strength, her love and her powerful presence in my life.

The sharing of Create Your Own Dance also encouraged me to give further consideration into which I am. In doing so, revealed were aspects of self and a range

of events and connections that needed exploration. As a result of this further exploration I produced a PowerPoint presentation for sharing, entitled “Affirming the Oral Traditions –The Dynamism of Dialogue – the African in me.” This was a definite change of emphasis in my studies with regard my original intentions. However, the new emphasis did not negate the focus of my original areas of investigations - improving my professional practices at the Sankofa Learning Centre.

In focusing on my own stories I gave consideration as to whether they related to my purpose for being in the world and whether the influence of others could be identified in their content. In “Create Your Own Dance” I could affirm that both these qualities were in evidence. I was sure too, that “Create Your Own Dance” had demonstrated me acting in the world and my making an impact to change the world – if only my world. Being in the world co-creating democratic structures was in evidence in the story most obviously with the relationship with my mother. However, it is also there in relationships prior to coming to England (the United Kingdom) and near the end of the story there is the hopeful promise of new alliances for new actions.

This focus on my own stories also assisted me in making connections with my African Voice, particularly as I had considered that storytelling was at the heart of the oral traditions of Africa. This was affirmed when I found the following quote:

*“...it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior.  
It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters.  
It is the story...that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars  
into the spikes of the cactus fence.  
The story is our escort; without it, we are blind.  
Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story;  
rather it is the story that owns us and directs us.”*  
--Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)

Figure 15: My Own Stories



I drew inspiration from Achebe's 'Anthills of the Savannah' as I appreciated my storytelling talent within African "orature" (to use Kenyan novelist and critic Ngugiwa Thiong's phrase). This means orally composed and transmitted, and created to be verbally and communally performed as an integral part of dance and music. It is a rich and varied tradition that informs African "orature", which continues to survive and adapt to the challenges of the modernisation facing Africa and the Diaspora.

In diverse African communities the storytellers are skilled practitioners (griots), and have important roles to play in many ceremonies. A strong spiritual and ethical dimension undergirds their practice and it is believed that there is power in the spoken word, as evidenced in the Bambara praise poem as follows:

**Praise of the Word**

*The word is total:  
it cuts, excoriates  
forms, modulates  
perturbs, maddens  
cures or directly kills  
amplifies or reduces  
According to intention  
It excites or calms souls.*

Leslie Marmon says:

*"I will tell you something about stories.... They aren't just entertainment...  
They are all we have...to fight off illness and death.  
You don't have anything if you don't have the stories."  
Leslie Marmon Silko, epigraph to Ceremony (1977)*

However, an important direction for me was Solomon Iyasere's (1975) view:

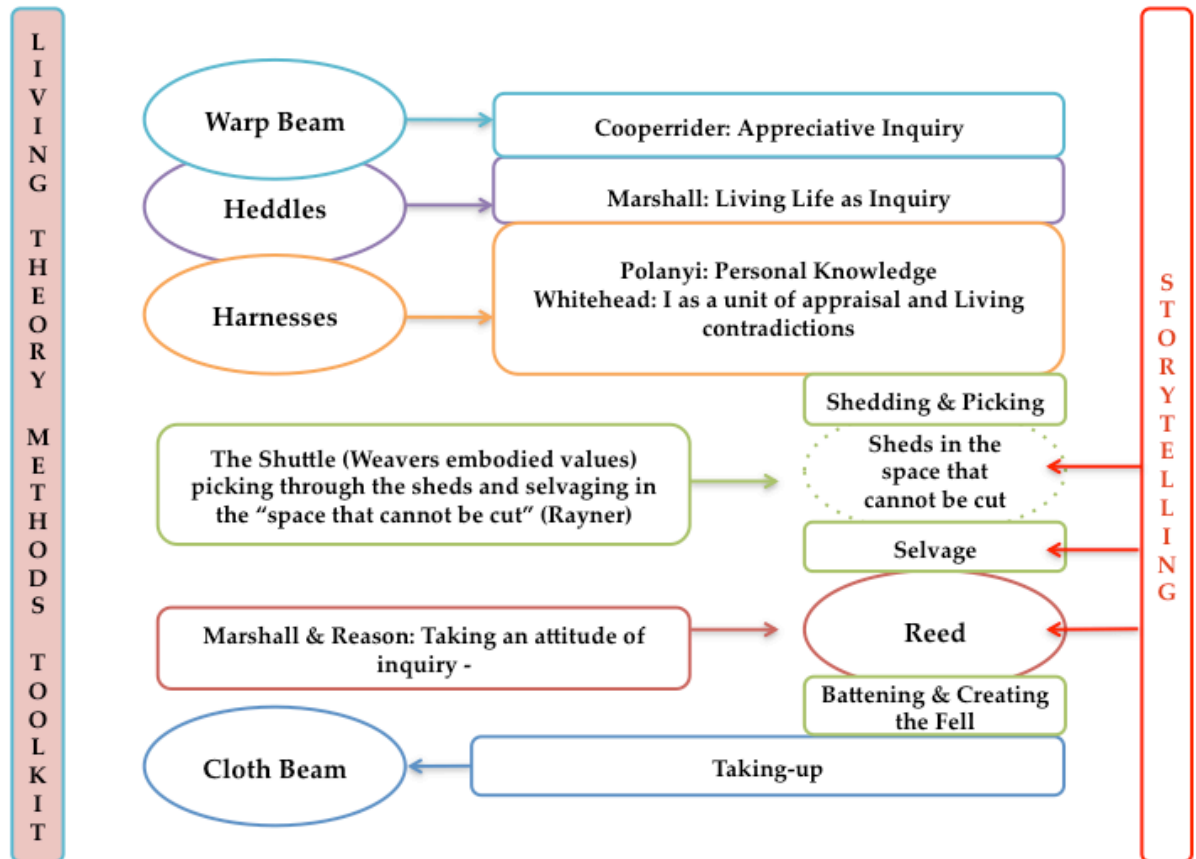
*"...the modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell.  
Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind" (pp. 107-119).*

It is Iyasere's point that encouraged me to inquire into whether my shell was still intact. I self enquired as to whether the story was my escort? Are my stories orally composed and to be communally performed as part of dance and music? Have my stories strong ethical and spiritual content? Do they celebrate the power of the spoken word? Do my stories convey culture, experience, and values as a way transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes?

These were important benchmarks to consider as I thought about whether I had left my shell behind or not. Inquiry into my stories encouraged belief that these benchmarks were achieved. It also affirmed, for me, how the sharing of stories offers

the prospect for inquiry, building positive dialogue/ relationships between individuals, with members of families, people in organisations and in the widest community and for acting for change. It is in this way that my storytelling is included on the loom.

**Figure 16: Storytelling Included on My Loom**



There are opportunities for storytelling at every stage in the creation of My Cloth. There are opportunities before the journey begins, whilst the journey is occurring and on completion of the journey. Earlier in the Weave One, I referred to the Weaver’s places of presence in the creation of Weaves. Namely, in the space that cannot be cut, in selvaging (ornamenting) whilst securing the weave and with the reed quality assuring the integrity of the Weave. Well, I am in that space that cannot be cut at the beginning, throughout and at the end of my journey, my selvaging and

partnering with the reed are activities on the journey. Storytelling is included on my loom.

However, thinking about the integrity of my story reminded me of my first encounter with living contradictions. I recalled how Whitehead's notion though a stretch, I persisted with engagement for I sensed in my own learning development occurring. I utilised the concept of "living contradictions" to afford deeper inquiry into self and developed Figure Fifteen below to represent advance in my own thinking on Who I am.

**Figure 17: Who I Am - Living Contradictions**



### **Engaging with Living contradictions**

In Figure Seventeen I viewed myself as contradictory, multi-layered and multi-phased with wide-ranging contrary quantitative and qualitative experiences, from which I had derived beliefs that had been synthesised through those experiences and through reflection over time. These synthesised beliefs underpinned my values and informed my attitude and actions, which were strategic, experimental, professional and creative. Furthermore, I claimed I shared and presented aspects of myself, my experiences, beliefs, attitudes and actions for modeling; assisted in creating inquiring, relevant organisations and encouraging self-empowerment amongst young people and adults. I felt as if I had begun a redefining of myself.

Living contradictions importance to my early inquiries is undoubted. It was an early driver (and continues to be so) towards more in-depth inquiry into living experiences and a complex self. By a complex self, I am (following Whitehead and Rayner, 2009) meaning a fully contextualised understanding of self-identity as being formed with the reciprocal coupling of inner and outer spatial domains through an intermediary self-boundary (Whitehead and Rayner, 2009).

It is in this context that the inner recall of events and life stories emerged. It is in this context too, that the story, "Create Your Own Dance", which was shared initially in my tutorial group, emerged and has to be understood. The story was the first step in modifying the thrust of my studies and gave further insights into the values that I embraced through focusing on a life event. That life event was critical in the making of me. However, contradictorily it also held portent for my un-making – a living contradiction? Hence, the story emerged within me as a direct response to my inner



conversations, on-course experiences and interestingly the concept, “living contradictions”.

Living contradictions, a concept introduced by Whitehead, in an early tutorial session on CARPP 7, in 2001, and held much importance for me. This was so, because I had felt at the time that I understood what Jack was talking about when relating on strategies for living your values as fully as you can in your life and work. Jack shared his meaning of the term, “living contradictions”, and I found some affinity with how the concept had been shared. This was particularly so, as in the past I had often made statements, such as, there are contradictions in everything, there can be no change without contradiction and that in order to find true peace - wholeness, humankind had to attend to the contradictory relationship that we have with nature. Each of these statements rang true for the notion that had been presented.

“Living contradictions” though, was a difficult embrace, particularly as it reminded me of “original sin” and the continuing, “schism/dualism, that so characterises Western European thought” (Rory 1999). I also considered that it was yet another description towards contrariness in self, rather than complementarity in self. Hence, in initial considerations I set about exploring how it could assist in offering explanation and authentic communication of my living experiences.

I had familiarity with the term contradiction, from having an awareness of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions characterising class relations (Introduction to Dialectical Materialism, Cornforth, 1954; On Contradiction, Mao, 1937; Materialism and Empiriocriticism, Lenin, 1908). I was also familiar with terms

like hypocrite and being two-faced that referred to incongruity between one's words and deeds. Additionally, I was aware of descriptions that depicted individuals of "not walking their talk". I explored all of these areas as I focused on living contradictions, its use in self-inquiry and its ability to offer explanations of my experiences.

However, as I explored living contradictions I heard other inner voices that contended the concept of 'I' being a living contradiction. My thoughts cascaded to a number of my heroes and heroines who were recalled to memory for superficial examination as to whether they too could be depicted as living contradictions.

I thought of Martin Luther King Junior and the good that he did. Yet there were stories of infidelity associated with him. I thought about Malcolm X and my chest heaved as his importance was remembered. Yet his early life contrasts vividly with how he was to leave his footsteps in the sand.

Then, I began thinking about Nelson Mandela and suddenly 'living contradictions' seemed not to rest easily with me at all. I remember further questioning myself as to whether I was really a living contradiction". At that time, although I felt uneasy with the term, all inquiries seemed not able to contend such a finding. I remained resistant though and postponed any conclusive answer. I self inquired further and sought other explanations for the contrariness in persons, indeed contrariness in me and penned the following poem that gave evidence of the character of my focus.

**I am and I am not<sup>10</sup>**

*Origin, originalness, originality  
Out of nothingness I came to be  
Spirit, spiritualness, spirituality  
I had, I lost, now its time to reclaim thee*

*Essence, essentialness, essentiality  
That is so central to me  
Yet its hidden – made dark  
Where the bright shining light should be*

*Nature, naturalness, naturality  
In me and part of thee  
Yet there is separateness  
Every time that I trample the grass*

*I am and I am not  
I claim and reclaim  
I connect  
Disconnecting my non-connection*

*I engage with the I am  
I accept my being  
For I cannot be  
What I am not*

*I am original, spiritual  
In essence a natural individual  
But connected to others who have these qualities  
And those who have not  
I am – Am I,  
I see – See I*

The poem spoke to the living contradiction which was at the heart of my concern in the challenge to be different, to do different and to change self. I had said as much when I had countenanced that I was redefining myself.

Other thoughts then ran through my head, which posed other questions. Questions like:

- “Why is the term “living contradictions” feeling so personally uncomfortable?”
- “Is there some contrariness in me that I need to explore and I am resisting?”

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<sup>10</sup> Created by Ian Phillips 2002

- “ Why does living contradictions, for me, feel so much like a concept for explaining original sin?”
- “Does not living contradictions replay the dualism so central in European thought?”
- “Would not African thought present less of a schism, a more holistic view”

These questions were of concern. However, I did not follow through with them at this time, as my attention was drawn to reviewing my appreciation of self-identity, African and my purpose for being in the world.

### **Appreciating Self: Identity**

I close this Weave with the recall of an appreciative moment as I remember the first time that I proffered a self-description of myself when challenged on a training programme to think about myself in terms of “race”/ethnicity. The challenge was twofold, in that, the first question posed was as follows: Find five words that best describe you. On completion of this task, participants were then asked to find five words that best describe you in terms of “race”/ethnicity. (Black African Caribbean) Radical Working Class Professional Man were my words for both parts of the exercise. This signalled for me the close association between who I am in personal and “race”/ethnic terms. There seemed no luxury to extract oneself out of the context of “race”/ethnicity and focus on personal qualities and attributes.

A continuing part of this exercise would focus on what were the advantages and disadvantages of being the person that had been described in communities, black/white/multicultural. It is to this place that I went back to make sense of where I was now (then) in the context of my self-inquiry, in the context of my studies, in the context of my life (connecting the past with the present). The result of these inquiries

characterised by in-depth self-exploration of lived experiences evidenced wide-ranging thoughts that sought to understand past events and make connections with living presently. It is in this way that I began to really appreciate Marshall's (1999) "living life as inquiry."

### **Living Life As Inquiry**

I say this aware that although living life as inquiry is not necessarily a new way of being for me, in that, it has been an attendant quality necessary to challenge those unsatisfying circumstances derived from "living with oppression", whilst simultaneously moving towards embrace of a dynamic way of being African and the mainstreaming of the African Voice. I can however appreciate how Marshall (1999) work given my extended focus on noticing what is going on in my living narrative is encouraging me towards increasing qualitative impact in my learning, living and working.

You see, when Marshall (1999) says of living life as inquiry that she has "an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question"(pp.156-157), I think I have a sense of what she means. This is derived from having an awareness of how I have lived with oppression. By this I mean living experiences that evidence a continuous "awakeness", a constant alertness, a readiness to respond, a spontaneity that enables changing course in the moment and a challenging propensity towards growing self and deconstructing unsatisfying environments (decolonising).

I think too, again derived from living with oppression, that I have an understanding of what Marshall (1999) means when she says that living life as inquiry "involves

seeking to maintain curiosity, through inner and outer arcs of attention, about what is happening and what part I am playing in creating and sustaining patterns of action, interaction and non-action" (p. 157). For being curious about who I am, noticing relationships and awareness of self impact and social living impact have been an insistent way of being in my development towards self definitions that have moved away from how others defined me and to the increasing fascination that I now have with my soulful being for purposeful doing and the co-creating of valuing social living environments.

Furthermore, I think I have a sense of what Marshall (1999) is saying when she says that living life as inquiry "involves seeking to pay attention to the 'stories' I tell about myself and the world and recognising that these are all constructions, influenced by my purposes and perspectives and by social discourses which shape meanings and values" (p.157).

I am hoping that this study, focused on My Emergent Great Story will do just as Marshall says and evidence how I tell stories of self and world, is dynamically influenced and sustained by a life affirming African Voice. This is how living life as inquiry has assisted me in inquiries within which, change, transformation, and movement in self is explored. I am also able to identify that self, interpret professional challenges, make sense of relationships and the determine life actions in varied contexts, but most importantly in relation to making impact on (in) my (the) changing world - making my way in the world. On making impact in the world, the work marks a departure point, a new point of departure, a platform (for me) from which engagement and dialogue, sharing/communication and action can be engendered with purposeful intent to improve living in the world, through the

continuing changing/transforming of self, building loving relationships, forging relevant organisations and establishing caring communities.

Yes, I am “living life as inquiry” positively and increasingly naturally informed from inclusional and dynamic ways of being African, which attest a (life affirming) loving spirituality as I inquire into the makings and un-makings in the making of me.

I anticipate that ‘Who I Am’, ‘Being African’ and ‘My Purpose for being in the world and engagement with living theory methodology included with my own narrative’, would be engaging pivots as I continued my enquiries. They are of significance as individual areas (concepts), but also have import critically, in their interfacing within the wider dynamic of the content of my studies, my ways of being and the inquiry into my professional practices.

In all of this “Who I Am” is essential, of importance, and early course experiences encouraged such a consideration. This consideration was not, as such, a new consideration, but the Ph.D. programme gave the opportunity for consideration of self in greater depth, and self more purposefully. This was the early direction in my living theory thesis.

I conjecture an emotional rising (see Appendix Four), which is really a long learning journal note reflecting on my study and my standards of judgement. I inform on how my love for humankind motivates me to act for my family, my community, my world and me. I also show appreciation of companionship for those whom I have journeyed with and are journeying with me. Further, I give focus to a song by Curtis Mayfield, entitled, “The Makings of You”, and how I made the words in the song my

words paying particular attention to the ingredients in the “makings of you”. There is also a deeper connection in the focus on love as Ritz notes on Mayfield’s ability to infuse divine energy into his songs and informs on the African-American experience relating to the secular and spiritual in music. I am inspired to deeper inquiry focusing on the African Voice.

In the following Weave I focus on my experiences in the Sankofa Learning Centre. It was my place of work when I commenced the CARPP programme and significant in my thinking as I sought improvement in my professional practice, and affirmation of the African Voice in that practice. It was an important decision for me to choose to return to the academy and in Appendix Six, “If I had been included in my education”, I share my prior experiences of being in the academy, influencing factors on my return and the impact of early experiences on the CARPP programme.

On the Sankofa Learning Centre in the following Weave I proffer briefly how I got involved, inform on the background educational conditions that led to Sankofa’s introduction (including the meaning of the name) and locate the courageous act of its co-creators, who I describe as Maroons, in the history of African resistance in the UK.