

Appendix Three – Back in the Academy

Back in the Academy: Being the Shuttle in My Own Weave (Included In My Own Education)

Prior to commencing on CARPP 7 I had had concerns about re-entering the academy once more. I held reservations about the suitability of higher education for me. Whether I really needed that experience and would I be sufficiently enthused to be able to complete the programme. These concerns had arisen, despite acknowledgment of the positive energies that had guided me to apply to be on the programme. Much to do with these positive energies is encapsulated in the following excerpt taken from the Diploma Paper, entitled “The Makings and Un-makings In the Making of Me – Affirming and Improving the Professional Practices of an African Storyteller” (2005) wherein is stated:

“I really had been predisposed to view involvement at Bath University in a positive light. This had been due, to the encouraging words, shared by my close friend, Eden (Charles). I held his views and continue to hold his views with much respect. I could also trust his judgement. This is important, for although we have had a relationship of some longevity, my respect for and trust in him, is really a qualitative judgement on my part, as a result of the positive personal, professional and political experiences, which undergird our friendship.

“Eden Charles, CARPP 5, had made the recommendation to me. He considered that I could benefit from the experience, given his own experiences and felt too that I could make an important contribution to the programme, given how he had experienced my ideas, thinking, practice and being”.

However, I could not have known prior to commencing on the programme how relevant the programme would be, nor could I have known what I could contribute to the programme. I applied though on the basis that I would appreciate an opportunity to study my professional practice (storyteller and educator) and seek ways of improving that practice through “action research.

I had had some familiarity with action research, as a result of appreciative and collaborative inquiries with Eden Charles at the Sankofa Learning Centre and through working with him on self-management programmes (Reg Revans) that utilised action learning strategies.

I also considered that much of my life and working experiences had involved the utilisation of action oriented participative methods of inquiry and innovation. For example, at the Croydon Council for Community Relations and Peckham Settlement I held positions for Outreach Work and Detached Youth Work respectively. In these positions I used informal education, participant observation, community development and non-directive intervention methods in effecting the work.

Much of this work was considered as innovatory and with regard the work at the Peckham Settlement, the ILEA made a film of the work entitled "Race for Survival" depicting adults (youth and community development workers) working in partnership with young people to develop a 'Furniture Making" project (a self reliance business initiative), set up the Sojourner Truth Youth Association (a cultural/self-esteem initiative) and the introduction of the Karib Project (community housing and personal development initiative) for black homeless young people.

Innovation was also in evidence in the teaching positions that I held. For example, at Balham Secondary School, combining teaching and youth work (informal education) methods I worked collaboratively with colleagues to good effect with pupils in home, school and community. At Peckham Manor Secondary School I introduced an integrated studies programme (English, Geography and History) focused on Africa,

Asia, the Caribbean and the United Kingdom that utilised thematic approaches, encouraged collaboration and afforded “inclusional ways of working” with teaching colleagues and pupils outside traditional patterns and frameworks. Experimentation, making links and encouraging involvement/intervention in school, home and community in the interest of the young people with whom we worked underscored our innovative practices.

Additionally, innovation was in evidence in the work I undertook at Southwark College (effecting the Education that is Multi-cultural, Multiethnic policies); ILEA YST where I held the position of Senior Trainer with the ILEA YST and with colleagues introduced a range of innovative programmes (Race, Power and Youth Work Practice was one of these) and set up networks for black staff to become involved in training; and the London Borough of Haringey where as Borough Adviser for Youth Affairs coordinated a “cross departmental forum” directed at effecting a borough-wide “integrated service strategy for youth.

Alongside these experiences of teaching and youth and community development I had involvement in training and consultancy (apart from the ILEA YST) too. For example, at the National Institute of Black Studies researching into Black/African/World History I worked with colleagues offering training programmes and consultancy related to “Black Perspectives”. With colleagues at Racism Awareness Programmes Unit I collaborated offering training in challenging institutional racism. These were voluntary involvements alongside my formal/traditional work activities (voluntary activities), yet very much part of my own history of involvement of offering a work-based derived consultancy practice.

This to a great extent was drawn from a tradition of involvement in “revolutionary” and community organisations that suggested what you practiced at work and practiced as activists had to be congruent (talk the talk, walk the walk). Living the life that you wanted to see develop. Examples, of involvement in “revolutionary” and community organisations would include (South West Peoples’ Organisations, Black Workers Coordinating Committee, Croydon Brixton Collective, Southwark Black Workers Group and Sankofa).

Furthermore, I had had formal leadership and management experience throughout the development (if you can call it that) of my career. Senior Detached Youth Worker (Peckham Settlement), Youth Officer, Senior Training Adviser, Head of Department for Educational Guidance (Haringey College), Head of Department for Academic Studies (College of North East London), Director (SOS-Jamaica) and Coordinator (Sankofa) were positions held and person centred, collaborative and youth/community development approaches appreciating change were integral to my practice.

Hence, when I thought about CARPP, I wanted an experience that would build and contribute to my prior experiences. The positive energies were flowing, but I held reservations. I did not want to go away from my “home concerns” (at the time contributing to Sankofa’s development) and be sidetracked by studies that would be inviting, even enticing, yet negligent of my needs and my work. I did not want to leave home again, so to speak, and it not be a purposeful journey. I would ask repeatedly of myself: To what end... to what purpose?

My reservations on participating in the academy again were strong and the following

excerpts, again taken from the Diploma Paper, entitled “The Makings and Un-makings In the Making of Me – Affirming and Improving the Professional Practice of an African Storyteller”, highlighted my thinking at that time.

“When I commenced studies at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (Bath University) that I wanted to complete the PhD programme was of importance. Just as important though, for me, was that I did not want to undertake another course of study that would be negligent of the quality of my lived experiences, be remote from current life practices (including professional practices) and be pretentious in its objectives related to informing future life practices.

I considered that past learning events in the academy had contributed critically to what I term in this living theory thesis as my unmaking (the negation of who I am). In the main, the academy seemed to present perspectives that sought to characterise the process of learning as wholly objective, with the subjects integral to that process (learned and learner, the teacher and the taught) were somehow extrapolated from the learning events. This, of course, for me, was never the experience.

On the contrary, for it was the subjects (who they were, the learned and the teacher and who I was, the learner and the taught – and all that purports to mean) in their interaction within that process, at any particular time, who were of critical importance in determining and giving meaning to the quality of those learning experiences, in the context of their (our) relations of power.

For me, any real sense of moving towards objectivity relating to those experiences would have been the result of dialogical experiences emanating out of a collaborative processes of inquiry in search of “common ground”.

Here, I am reminded of Andre Tanker’s explanation of the meaning of the title of his song “I Went Away”. Tanker says:

"I went away
 I leave and I come back home
 Ah come back to stay
 Ah must see mi way"

These words are of much import because attending the academy felt very much like going away to be educated to become someone else. Not building on who you were and where you had come from. It felt like being on foreign territory and was experienced as such.

Much of the experiences were felt as an alien with little being offered in movement towards finding common ground with me or equitable accommodation. I had gone away from my environment, seeking to progress my life, but what was being offered did not take account of life. So like Tanker, I went away. I had to leave and come back home. When I came back, I came back to stay and it is from that place (home) that I resolved that I would find a way to fulfill my dreams. Listen to Tanker's song, "I Went Away"

The search for common ground though, was rarely an accommodation afforded me in the academy or in my relationships with those "knowledge-bearing" representatives of that entity (device, apparatus, contrivance ... contraption).

How else could I have interpreted the almost off-hand dismissal of Walter Rodney (who I acknowledge as contributing to what I am determining that Donna means by my intellectual community) as not being a suitable source for citation in the development of my thesis focused on "The Jamaican Rebellion of 1860 and Its Implication for the Emancipation of Slaves in the Caribbean" whilst at Whitelands College?

Rodney's work, "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" (****), in the context of the academy though, was seen as sub-standard, inferior and without its approval – did not have the stamp of officialdom.

How else could I make sense and give meaning to the silence that masked the hurt and utter devastation that led to the abandonment of my thesis. I felt that my work, like Rodney's work (through utilising it as a resource) would also be seen in the context of the academy as sub-standard, inferior and without its approval – having its official stamp. There was no accommodation.

I would have to take an alternative route (sit an examination for which there would be little time for preparation), in order to complete my studies. This would not be to my advantage and in the context of this self-inquiry is underscored as an event contributing to my unmaking.

There were other events too, where this non-accommodation would be in evidence. On one occasion, I can remember a lecturer in response to the active participation and challenging contributions of two colleagues and I (we were all black) in an education theatre, would remark for his audience consumption "the three wise monkeys have been at play to-day."

Of course, he would be taken to task and would eventually apologise for his action.

However, the stain of the ridicule would not disappear so easily. Nor would the feelings of how easily our fellow white students were compromised into silence,

making the prospect to build “real” trusting relationships, negligible (threatening my predisposed inclusionality).

(I) We would seek a lower level of interaction, and take a long time to build relationships beyond superficiality (threatening my inner spirituality).

More than that though, the lecturer’s action given his position of power within the academy would make a stain on that entity too, from my point of view which would also be lasting (viewed as an institution geared to my unmaking - threatening community catalysing).

However, these events that I depict as contributing to my un-makings, have also contributed to my making.

In the academic challenge to Rodney’s work, though shaken, I remained unmoved about the importance of his works in contributing to my making. I found ways to share the information that I had studied, to share my untoward experiences in relation to the study and worked with others to get a better understanding of the importance of Rodney’s writings and the writings of others focused on self-affirmation and the negation of the negation (Rodney 1972).

Hence, that I completed my studies, in the context of the academy, successfully, did speak of a positive experience.

Furthermore, the ridicule (“three wise monkeys”) would motivate me (us) to be more prepared, to be more responsive in the moment to contend with such challenges.

The inaction of white students where the environment became threatening to me (us) also encouraged me (us) to collaborate with those whose experiences mirrored my (our) own (catalysing our community) in order to develop strategic actions for change within the academy.

I (We) would begin to protect myself (ourselves) better, heal my (our) hurts and learn from these experiences how to create more satisfying forms of existence, ways of being for doing.

Indeed, I (We) learnt a great deal from these experiences. Yes, I had a life and lived life in the academy too. Hence, there was a multiplicity of positive outcomes. I was celebrated for trophies won playing football. I, along with my colleagues in our joint thesis presentation got distinctions for our Certificate in Community, Youth Work and Education (part of a dual qualification together with our Certificate of Education).

However, a bitter taste still remained, particularly as so much of what I can identify as my “official” educational experiences had really been disappointing. I had been left with a feeling that many of those learning experiences could have been different, would have been different, if “who I am” and all what I purport to mean by that had been really taken on board in my education.

My concerns relating to being back in the academy and the relevance of the CARPP programme to my experiences were shared at the course interview and though I am not sure I heard any words to avert my concerns, simply being back in academia had

provided a prospect for change that was exciting. I had also found the journey to Bath most pleasant and picturesque. On arriving at the University the pleasant feel that was held in my consciousness did not diminish and continued through to the completion of the interview. Even, the journey back to London contributed to the positive experience, for I had the opportunity to accompany and be accompanied by a colleague, with whom I had collaborated previously, who was also applying to participate on CARPP 7. The journey back passed quickly.

However, at this juncture, a range of questions comes to mind. For example:

Has the Ph.D. programme been mindful of the quality of my lived experiences, been relevant in current life practices (including professional practices) and of value to future life practices?

Has the supposed “official” learning experiences (learning events in the academy) been fundamentally sound and really geared (intentionally or unintentionally) to my wellbeing?

Has the learning events contributed critically to what I term in this thesis as the making of me (affirming and improving)?

Have my “official” educational experiences left me with a feeling of being valued, in that “who I am” has been taken on board in my education or have they been devaluing?

One could conjecture that as I am on my way towards the goal of completion of my

studies, then the Ph.D. programme has not been negligent of the quality of my lived experiences, remote from current life practices (including professional practices) and pretentious in its objectives related to informing future life practices.

It must also mean that “official” learning experiences (learning events in the academy) have been fundamentally sound and really geared to my wellbeing. In that the learning events have contributed critically to the making of me.

Furthermore, it must mean that “official” educational experiences really have been valuing, in that “who I am” has been taken account of in my education. Additionally, the learning experiences on the programme must have been affirming, relevant and immanent.

The foregoing are the qualities that I would have demanded for the successful underpinning of my experiences within the academy.

On these points of conjecture, though I have an urge to offer my judgements at this moment, there is some resistance to do so. I really want to unpack some aspects of my experiences/actions on the CARPP 7 programme in more detail. I am hoping that this further unpacking will place in better context the character of CARPP 7's impact, particularly on my embodiment of the feeling “that how I am now is qualitatively different from any sense of being for doing that I have held at any other time in my life (soulfully-purposefully”).

I have wondered whether this feeling of being “qualitatively different” would have happened irrespective of experiences/actions on CARPP 7 or whether

experiences/ actions on CARPP 7 are critical to its realisation.

I have already noted my positive disposition towards the CARPP programme, prior to my commencement and informed that I entered the academy having little awareness of what to expect or what I would have to do. However, I knew I wanted to follow the programme that would lead to completion of the PHD, and though the route to how to get there was at that time unclear, I was positively expectant. It appeared as if there was sufficient time to sort this lack of clarity on my part. So though I felt somewhat disorganised, I began the CARPP 7 journey appreciating the opportunity that I presumed would be a study of my professional practice (storyteller and educator) and the seeking of ways for improving that professional practice through “action research”.

Early experiences on CARPP 7 would affirm this positive disposition. I wrote on this early period in my transfer paper that:

“Of importance... were the on-course conditions being created, within which I could share in the way that I share and for others to share in the ways that they share. As a result of these conditions we reached for higher and higher levels of inner conversations and collaborations relating to who am I, the values that I embrace and the influences on self. It is my view that the collaboration of tutors and students on the CARPP 7 programme, is in no small measure, responsible for the positive conditions created for meaningful self-inquiries and the sharing of the content of those inquiries. It is also my view that it is in these conditions that I have been able to blossom. I feel that I have been able to be myself and in doing so share aspects of self, values, experiences, vision and sense of being. I have also been able to share in the way that I share - the things that I have wanted share – and feel that what I have shared has been heard, listened to and received. I have also heard, listened to and received from what others have shared of themselves, their values, their experiences, their visions and their sense of being.”

Included

Of importance here was that the programme commenced with me. It was concerned with my thoughts, words, deeds and more. It was concerned with my lived and living experiences. The content of the programme was not distant from me. It was “I”. I was included in its orientation, and being so included, I participated on the programme with the quality of being included.

I know I wrote in the transfer paper “You know what! Bath had already been sold on you. And you know what! I have to admit that this may well have been true”.

However, as I gave further consideration to what was happening to me at that time, I recognize that it was not simply, Bath being sold on me. What was of much greater significance was that these positive early experiences were engaging me, fuelling my imagination, encouraging purposeful inquiry and more.

I also wrote in the transfer paper:

“As a result of these early on-course experiences I began reconsidering the appropriateness of the focus of my intended studies. Nothing obvious came immediately to mind. However, further on-course experiences presented opportunities for new areas of investigation through the exploration of new concepts or old concepts in new ways. I became familiar with embodied knowledge, embodied values and standards of judgement. I also became familiar with first person inquiry, second person inquiry and third person inquiry. Further to this, I became familiar with living theories, living values and living contradictions.

These were positive, yet challenging experiences. They certainly kept me engaged and raised many questions pertaining to how I prepared for entry to the programme and what was it that I wanted to get out of the programme. In some ways I had started the programme in a way that would not have been different from how I had started many educational programmes, sceptical of its content, unconvinced of its meaning for me, except tangentially. I thought I would once more do the usual walk

through, complete the Ph.D. programme and move on. Of course there might be some hiccups on the way, but I felt I would have been able to manage them. I have managed before. I embrace a notion that “there is a way out of no way”.

In completing my Masters of Arts in Further Education programme the assessor’s comment that appears at the end of my successful thesis is as follows:

Ian

I did enjoy reading this - ‘An Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Provision of the Southwark Unemployed Youth Project, with a Particular Reference to their Stated Aims for Working with Unemployed Young People (SUYP)’. You write fluently and perceptively and well backed up with a theoretical framework.

But – this is a curriculum analysis project and you have no utilized curriculum theory to any great extent.

On page 1 you acknowledge briefly (too briefly) that ‘curriculum’ is a strange word for this project. This should have been developed more and then your decision to utilize the theoretical framework you did may have been conceded or you might have used a curriculum framework and curriculum theory to illuminate the SUYP. But you did neither!

The quality of you work is excellent – no dispute, but the MA course has had no impact on it at all. Can you see our dilemma?

Moderated mark – B+

(This has been chosen for moderation by the external examiner).

You see I have managed my hiccups before. However, I did not want my experience on that Master of Arts programme to be an exemplar of what I would experience on the Ph.D. programme. On the Masters of Arts programme my engagement was fitful. I did not want that character of engagement on the Ph.D. programme and indeed it would not be so. The challenges came thick and fast and engaged me. Writing in the transfer paper I noted:

“Initially I wanted to focus my studies simply on improving my professional practices at the Sankofa Learning Centre, without any

obvious thought about self-inquiry or sharing perspectives. The focus on self-study and sharing though would come into dramatic effect, when at the outset of the CARPP 7 journey, each participant had to present and share collages depicting who they were and what they did. I remember having to look deep inside of self, to conjure up images that would depict something about who I am and would be characteristic of my life involvements. Values relating to self, family and community were central to the visual offering that I shared.

Academy Not Separate

This reconsidering of the appropriateness of my intended studies shows how early my reorientation to the Ph.D. programme occurred. This is of significance, for even within my maintained scepticism I was being challenged to be different. I was being encouraged in the context of the academy to allow my *embodied knowledge, embodied values and standards of judgement* to emerge. Tools for self-inquiry, methodological constructs were made accessible (1st, 2nd and 3rd person inquiry), explored and utilised, enabling familiarity with a range on concepts that facilitated the process of self-inquiry. (Some of these concepts mentioned in the extract above I will explore in more depth as this thesis progresses.)

More importantly though, these early course experiences enabled me to bring together life experiences (lived and living) in a way that I felt that what I was doing in the academy was not separate, was not counter to what I was doing (personally, with family, organisationally or in my community). I had had such feelings of separateness before as shared above. However, the Bath programme did allow such a countenance. The focus on worldviews that was not just about western philosophical thought and the emphasis given on the ways of being of foundational peoples were instructive.

Conclusions - Music To My Ears, A Delight To My Eyes And An Awakening My Senses

In the introduction to this paper I noted "I did not want to undertake another course of study that would neglect the quality of my past experiences, be remote from current practice and meaningless to future practice".

I also noted that I felt I had some familiarity, with the concept of action research, as a result of collaborative inquiries with Eden Charles at the Sankofa Learning Centre and through working with him on management programmes that utilised action learning strategies. Furthermore, I stated that much of my life and working experiences had involved the utilisation of participative methods of inquiry and that the opportunity to give consideration to the theoretical frameworks associated with 'action research' may be of relevance.

So, with my smattering of an understanding of action research and my experience of participative methods of inquiry I commenced the course, positively, but also warily. However, I need not have worried. What I heard, read and experienced was really music to my ears, a delight to my eyes and an awakening of my senses.

I read in Peter Reason's, *Doing Co-operative Inquiry*, to appear in Jonathan Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Methods*. London: Sage Publications that:

"... our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships which we co-author. We participate in our world, so that the 'reality' we experience is a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and

construing. The participative metaphor is particularly apt for action research, because as we participate in creating our world we are already embodied and breathing beings who are necessarily acting—and this draws us to consider how to judge the quality of our acting.

A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their world—both human and more-than-human—embodied in their world, co-creating their world. A participatory perspective asks us to be both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a: 6-7)”

These words of Reason and Bradbury were a delight to my sight. They offered a move away from traditional European dualist thought towards a more holistic worldview. At last, I said to myself, I was on course in which I felt included, not simply for being there, but the content of programme appeared to offer the prospect of encouraging my fullest participation. I was almost sure that it would when I read Heron’s quote below in Peter Reason’s, *Doing Co-operative Inquiry*.

“The methodology of co-operative inquiry draws on a fourfold extended epistemology: experiential knowing is through direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place or thing; it is knowing through empathy and resonance, that kind of in-depth knowing which is almost impossible to put into words; presentational knowing grows out of experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression through story, drawing, sculpture, movement, dance, drawing on aesthetic imagery; propositional knowing draws on concepts and ideas; and practical knowing consummates the other forms of knowing in action in the world. (Heron, 1992, 1996).

These words made me tingle – created an inner excitement for exploration. It was just too, much “experiential knowing, knowing through empathy and resonance, presentational knowing that includes expression through story and propositional knowing. These words, to me, appeared as reflecting the African way of being and seemed to signal that I was in the right place for the character of study that I wanted to undertake.

The words would only get better for I was brought right into the centre stage:

“Participative forms of inquiry start with concerns for power and powerlessness, and aim to confront the way in which the established and power-holding

elements of societies world-wide are favoured because they hold a monopoly on the definition and employment of knowledge:

This political form of participation affirms peoples' right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them. It asserts the importance of liberating the muted voices of those held down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism, and homophobia. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a: 9"

Donna Ladkin in *Action Research in Practice: What the Books Don't Tell You*, To appear in Clive Seale, David Silverman, Jay Gubrium, Giampietro Gobo (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*, Sage Publications informs that "Action Research is grounded in the belief that research with human beings should be participative and democratic. She also informs that researchers working within this frame are charged with being sensitive to issues of power, open to the plurality of meanings and interpretations, and able to take into account the emotional, social, spiritual and political dimensions of those with whom they interact. Furthermore, she states that 'purpose' is also central to these methods and quotes Reason and Bradbury who in their introduction to the *Handbook of Action Research* (2001) writes:

"A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives." (p.2)

I am appreciative of Donna Ladkin for this opening, because though I have had a concern for the development of participative and democratic methods, in this early part of my research, I have given considerable weight to taking into account the emotional, social, spiritual and political dimensions of those with whom I interact.

In this way of working I have been less interested in theoretical clarity and more interested in 'doing' of action research. I am not sure whether I have:

- undertaking of cycles of action and reflection

- practice of collaboration, particularly considering issues of power and politics
- developed a sensitivity to action research as an emergent process

However, I do know that I have found a presentational form to represent my action research inquiries – my own stories. This has been an important development for me. I am also aware too, of the three broad pathways to action research practices. Namely, first-person action research/practice skills and methods which address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. Second-person action research/practice, which addresses our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern. Third-person research/practice which aims to extend these relatively small-scale projects to create a wider community of inquiry involving a whole organization or community (Reason & Bradbury 2001).

It is these thoughts that I embraced as I set out to commence exploration of the makings and un-makings in the making of me.