Being the Change I Want to See in the World: Learning and Teaching from the Heart

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Brief Biography:
I was born in Jamaica and immigrated to the UK in 1959 where I have lived since the age of 5. I am currently employed in the Human Resource Division of the Business School in London South Bank University. I have been employed at the University (previously Polytechnic) since 1988 where I had previously studied as a student in their National Bakery School. I had returned to study for self-employment as a means of avoiding ‘race’ as an issue in organisational life. My experiences in the University both as a student and in the early years of my employment resulted in an existential crisis for me as a black woman resulting in a complete change of focus as I came into the realisation that I could no longer run from who I am as an African. I have spent the years since 1991 researching the black experience in order to transform my own life and professional practice, developing healing helper skills as well as a body of knowledge on the ‘African British’ lived experiences in contemporary society. This focus has placed me at odds in the University where the tradition has been to engage objectively and distantly with research rather than the ‘engaged’ research stance I have adopted especially on the sensitive issue of race/ethnicity/culture as it relates to my life experiences as a woman of African descent.
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Abstract
The author draws on her professional practice as an educator/academic in a UK higher education institution to share her journey, as an African British woman, of becoming the change she wants to see in the world. She shares the process of the radical appropriation of her own unique and creative spiritual ‘I’ and the challenges she is presented with of identifying her particular path of meaning and purpose; of transcending the social construction of black and white identities; of definitive movement towards self realisation and spiritual freedom. The central thrust of the paper is the emphasis on how every individual can become a powerful force for not only personal but also social/global change in their individual sphere of influence through a deeper engagement with their own unique spiritual ‘I’. Challenges of following the path of the spiritual ‘I’ are shared and important success pointers are offered. The reader is inspired to consider how they too can liberate their own individual consciousness via the empowering educational process shared of using knowledge rather than merely acquiring knowledge to be the change they want to see in the world.

Introduction
As I reflect on what it means for me to be the change I want to see in the world through teaching and learning from the heart I become aware of the integral link between my identity as a woman of African descent and my purpose, the change I want to see, given the inseparable nature of the two. The underlying reasons for the significant life problems I have had to work with as a woman of African descent becomes clarified given the requirement I have experienced being placed on me to deny my African ancestry as being important to who I am in British society. Being aware of the serious implications this has had for me over my life I became concerned about how I was likely to be unwittingly contributing to problems of miseducation (Woodson, 1933) where people of African descent are concerned as an educator in HE and as a parent with my own children. Being also unable to get colleagues or management to take my researched concerns about race seriously pushed me to make the significant decision that I would be the change I wanted to see in the world. The decision was not just one of those decisions we make to ourselves about how we will be in the future but became the focus of my PhD research (Bravette, 1997) as I consciously, systematically and deliberately engaged with my life-world including self, professional practice, family and community in order to bring about transformational change in my consciousness and actions as a woman of African descent. The chief outcome of this decision was to see me begin the process of living consciously as I became aware that every act of mine could now be considered to be an act of self-definition. I used the action research cycle of planning, acting, observing, reflecting (individually and collectively) and re-planning at the micro-level to bring about the changes I wanted to see in myself. As my skills increased and the evidence of incremental change was becoming apparent I moved on to engage with Torbert’s (1991) Action Inquiry model of developing awareness in the four territories of human experience: purpose, strategy, behavioural choice and influence on external
world. It was in this process that I gradually moved into a keen awareness of the significance of an ‘I’ in me that I had not been previously aware of and the power of that ‘I’ to bring about lasting transformational change. It is this ‘I’ that is the main theme of this paper and how its recognition and nurturing have facilitated my movement from a place of relative powerlessness and ambivalence to one of personal and social responsibility as a parent and educator of African ancestry.

I begin my reflection by considering the importance of developing a sound philosophical perspective so that this can be transmitted authentically and with integrity in my own life-world and professional practice as I diversify the University curriculum to include Afrocentric perspectives creating a unique classroom ethos. Mead’s model of selfhood is used to illustrate the workings of the novel and creative ‘I’ and the conformist and traditional ‘Me’ in the individual as a foundational part of social process. I share my understanding of how ‘race’ acts as a veil covering our spiritual consciousness and how engaging with ‘race’ in the way I have done moves it out of the way to allow a deeper awareness of the spiritual inner world, the spiritual ‘I’. I conclude my reflections by bullet-pointing challenges to be faced and resulting success factors.

My philosophical view of existence

“You are a human being. And so you have a philosophical view of existence – whether you realise it or not. About this you have no choice. But there is a choice to be made about your philosophy, and it can be put in these terms: is your philosophy based on conscious, thoughtful and well-informed reflection? Is it sensitive to, but not chained by, the need for logical consistency? Or have you let your subconscious amass an ugly pile of unexamined prejudices, unjustified intolerances, hidden fears, doubts and implicit contradictions, thrown together by chance but integrated by your subconscious into a kind of mongrel philosophy and fused into a single, solid weight, like a ball and chain in the place where your mind’s wings should have grown?

It is not the answer that enlightens but the question.” (Eugene Ionesco)

Your philosophy determines your thought pattern;
Your thought pattern determines your attitude;
Your attitude determines your behaviour patterns; and
Your behaviour patterns determines your actions. (Browder, 1988)

Prior to engaging consciously with my life through research my philosophical view of existence was indeed a mishmash of various viewpoints I’d taken on over the years held together by espoused Christian principles which did not seem to have any real meaning in the context of a multicultural society as far as I could see. I have since ensured that all three of my sons study philosophy in order to gain a deeper understanding and inclination towards questioning the meaning of human existence and therefore develop an awareness of their place in the world. I took this step intuitively as I came to realise the ‘mongrel philosophy’ I had developed over the years but was largely unconscious of and the effect it had had and was having on my life as well as the poor legacy I was inevitably passing on to my own children. It is most apt, therefore, that it has been in a higher education institution in Britain that I have done the philosophical work to restore myself to the innate understanding of
who I am and to identify a sense of purpose and meaning about what it might mean for me to be African in the world today. Living in Britain the question was not for me about what it means to be human but what it means to be African? Indeed, Solomon (1994:304) acknowledges that:

“The most pressing question asked by black philosophers today, as they transcend the culture of colonialism, is what it means – and what it has meant – to be African. Philosophy is a search for selfhood, sometimes against as well as by means of the contexts and cultures in which we find ourselves.”

As difficult as it has been and continues to be for me to assert myself as African in the world, and indeed to experience myself as African in the Academy, the fundamental question I have grappled with is whether I have a right to a particularised identity or not. I have concluded that my national identity is as crucial to my position in the world as is that of the national identities of other groups. The change I want to see in the world is that of the importance and significance of the African identity being restored in the minds of black Africans the world over in order to move us beyond the experiences of enslavement and colonisation and the external and internalised oppression that has survived the centuries. The change I want to see is people of African descent remembering who they are in reality and living up to that spiritual reality. I must be the change I want to see in the world in this regard. The rest of this paper reflects on my journey of becoming the change I want to see.

**Being the change I want to see – teaching and learning from the heart**

Being the change I want to see in the world was about beginning the process of living truly to the highest vision my spiritual “I” has of myself in the world as an African woman. This is opposed to what my own ‘black’ socialised ‘I’ was telling me was possible for me. This is important to me as a parent, educator and academic who has been positioned as a role model to many people of African descent. I am very mindful of the message I am transmitting desirous of such messages transmitting authenticity and integrity. I did not want to continue, consciously or unconsciously, transmitting the sense of powerlessness, apathy, ambivalence, ignorance, low self-worth and so forth that seemed to be my lot in life as a result of my perceived and socially ascribed/prescribed identity as a ‘black woman’ of African ancestry who’s descendents had been enslaved and brought to the Caribbean in the middle passage. I had gotten tired of the normalisation of my position in the minds of others as if it was inevitable – whether ‘whites’, Africans from the continent and individuals from the Caribbean like myself. Everyone was buying into the dominant thought of who and what we are supposed to be like as people! I did not want to continue to be the blind leading the blind. Neither would could I continue to subscribe to the sense of inevitableness it seemed I was expected to accept as being the truth of my experiences in the world, especially as this was being confirmed all around me.

Over the years my efforts in the external world had not brought me the outcomes I desired, which was not to fit into ‘white’ society because I had become ‘whitenised’, I’d moved through that stage of my evolvement in the western world, but the freedom to be myself authentically in the academy/world as a woman of African descent. In desperation I followed the leading of my heart and turned within seeking the power of release that was clearly not going to be given to me as a reward for being African. I had become caught up in the process of breaking out of ignorance of self and the deep
indoctrination which had left me unable to separate myth from reality and unable to read the world critically (Macedo, 1993) as a descendant of Africa. I had arrived at a point where if education is the method by which a society hands down from one generation to the next its knowledge, culture and values specifically selected and transmitted for their survival as a people then I must, as a professional educator of African ancestry, have a conscious awareness of what I am doing in the European academy given the political nature of the process in which I am involved as a service-provider, stakeholder and user. Not least of which was because I was increasingly becoming aware of the damage being done to people of African descent via the education process. A deep force inside me was challenging me to be the change I wanted to see in the world as far as my teaching and learning practice was concerned, instead of being a fake. It is to this motive force that I refer when I write of teaching and learning from the heart. What has this meant for me in terms of my practice?

Teaching and Learning with Integrity and Authenticity

In his book ‘Two Thousand Seasons’ Armah (1973) prophesies the experiences of Africans as they chase after the mirage of success as witnessed in the western world without the authenticity and awareness of ‘the way’. I was one of those who had lost any awareness of ‘the way’. As a child I had had no one to direct me to ‘the way’. Being a parent and an educator I now desired to familiarise myself with ‘the way’ and to move in the direction of becoming one of the “remade”, recognising this to be a process as opposed to a destination. Armah (1973) describes the remade as:

“The destroyed who retain the desire to remake themselves and act upon that desire remake themselves. The remade are pointers to the way, the way of remembrance, the way of knowing purpose.”

This idea of the remade resonates with my deeply felt desire back in the early 1990’s of being a ‘healing helper’ in my own community (Bravette, 1997) enabling me to carry the perceived risk of researching ‘race’ as an issue as well as engaging with the fear and sensitivity that existed around any kind of discussion of the issue at all in the world of education and work and which only worked to the detriment of people of African ancestry like myself. I had arrived at a point where, if breaking the racial taboo would actually lead to my death, physical or otherwise, I was nevertheless willing to take the risk in order to learn and share lessons gained with others coming behind me.

As an educator of African descent my own ‘I’ share the view of Sivanandan (1974) when he says that:

“Knowledge is not a goal in itself, but a path to wisdom: it bestows not privilege so much as duty, not power so much as responsibility. It brings with it a desire to learn even as one teaches, to teach even as one learns. It is used not to compete with one’s fellow beings for some unending standard of life, but to achieve for them as for oneself, a higher quality of life.”

I realise that I am not an educator and academic for the glory of that world, rather I am a seeker after truth and the world of education has been my path to truth. In relating to knowledge I look always for the utility and strength of bodies of knowledge. I seek to find the means by which knowledge can help me to achieve for
myself a higher quality of life that I can share with others? Detailed accounts of how
I action research are recorded in other written documents (Bravette, 1996; 1997;
2001) in which I share detailed accounts of how I use knowledge to ensure practice
and life wisdom using the Action Research cycle of planning, acting, observing,
reflecting and replanning.

Armah’s (1978) idea of ‘healers’ resonates with my own research aim of engaging
with human inquiry enabling me to become a ‘healing helper’ in the world as an
educator. To heal ourselves is to contribute to the healing of the world. Listen to the
conversation

‘Can everyone become a healer?’
‘Few ever want to be healers.’
‘But could everyone be a healer?’
‘No.’
‘Why not?’
‘The healer must first have a healer’s nature.’
‘What is that?’
‘I can’t tell you what it is, just so, said Damfo. But for a beginning he who
would be a healer must set great value on seeing truly, hearing truly,
understanding truly and acting truly ... you see why healing can’t be a
popular vocation? The healer would rather see and hear and understand than
have power over men. Most people would rather have power over men than
see and hear ...It is not enough for the one who would be a healer to have a
healer’s nature. Beyond that he needs training, preparation ...For one thing,
the healer devotes himself to inspiration. He also lives against manipulation
... (Healing) the whole of it concerns wholeness.’

Healers it would seem are individuals who have been ‘called’ to a purpose: to restore
wholeness to their community, unity being the strength of that healing work. Vanzant
(1996) notes:

“Healing is not like fixing. Fixing is doing whatever we can to cover up,
disguise, or eliminate the problem ... temporarily. Healing cuts to the core,
goes to the bones, as a means of eliminating the cause of the problem ... forever.

In cutting to the core of the healing work I do for myself and as an educator I have
been led to draw on and apply ancient wisdom such as seen in the worldview and
religion of ancient Egypt. Hilliard (1984) reminds me that the ultimate aim of
education in Egypt was for a person to become ‘one with God’ or to ‘become like
God’ – an idea that one could be crucified for in later times. A person was seen as
being essentially spiritual whose essence was housed in a finite body, with the spirit
having an eternal existence. In ancient Egypt, the capacity of a person to become
god-like was determined by the degree to which the person was able to overcome
certain natural impediments of the body, identified as character flaws. It is said that
virtue (the antidote to character flaws) could only be achieved through special study
and effort. According to George G M James, the ten virtues sought by students in the
ancient Egyptian Mystery System are:
1. Control of thought
2. Control of action
3. Devotion of purpose
4. Faith in the Master’s ability to teach the truth
5. Faith in one’s ability to assimilate the truth
6. Faith in our self to wield the truth
7. Freedom from resentment under persecution
8. Freedom from resentment under wrong
9. Ability to distinguish right from wrong
10. Ability to distinguish the real from the unreal

Even a fleeting study of this list reveals the significant chasm that exists between the above educational system when compared with the type of educational processes we are exposed to today. In contemporary education systems people are ‘trained’ (Akbar, 1984) as opposed to ‘educated’, resulting in miseducation; taught to believe as opposed to taught to think critically (Madhubuti, 1994). It has been through inspirational study that I have learnt the importance of the ten virtues for myself and which form the basis of the home education programme I have been intuitively evolving for my son without the conscious awareness that they were the basis of education in Ancient Egypt. Indeed, a study of African initiation systems, also show them to be comprehensive education systems. Hilliard (1984) has identified four underlying goals or higher aims which drove the educational process:

- Unity of the person, unity of the tribe, and unity with nature
- The development of social responsibility
- The development of character
- The development of spiritual power

In being the change I want to see in the world I have chosen to reorient myself to this worldview in order to enhance my own life and to be a positive influence for others. As an educator – defined by Akbar (1984) as one who’s duty it is not only to impart knowledge to others, but also she has the task of developing the knowledge, skill and the mind of the student and to bring out the latent qualities which the student already possesses – my ‘I’ also recognises the truth of Amos Wilson’s (1993) view that:

“The psychology, consciousness and behavioural tendencies of individuals and societies are to a very significant extent the products of their personal and collective histories. Both personal and collective psychology are constructed from those experiences which can be consciously retrieved from memory as well as those experiences which have been forgotten or repressed but which still represent themselves in individual and collective habits, tendencies, traditions, emotional responsibilities, perspectives, ways of processing information, attitudes and reflex-like reactions to certain stimuli and situations ... The psychology of individuals and groups may also, in part, be constructed from ’historical and experiential amnesia’. That is, when an individual or group is compelled by various circumstances to repress important segments of his or its formative history he or it at the same time loses access to crucially important social, intellectual and technical skills associated with that history which could be used to resolve current problems. Consequently, to some lesser or greater degree the individual or group may be
handicapped or disadvantaged by the resulting amnesia. Finally, individual and group psychology are in part constructed from the perception he or it has of his or its history, the inferences drawn from that history about the kind of person or group he or it may be, what other persons or groups think of him or it, and the destiny that awaits him or it.”

This compelling argument presented by Wilson resonates with my own experiences as an educator engaged in first and second person action research (Reason, 2002) as a means of identifying and working to rid myself of the blockages (or internalised coloniser/enslaver archetype) I have, unwittingly, internalised in order to survive as an African in the western world. This unblocking process has been instrumental in beginning the release of my natural creativity which had become blocked as a result of the ‘conceptual incarceration’ Nobles (1976) acknowledges happens to black children as a result of the miseducation process. This release enables me to become more effective as an educator in facilitating similar change in others. In being the change I want to see in world I have had not only to work at overcoming my fears but also developing courage to do the deep inner work that this process demands.

Woodson’s (1933) views expressed in his classic ‘The Miseducation of the Negro’ also acts as another motive for being the change I want to see in the world given the relevance of what he has to say to my own experiences as an African educated in the western world. Woodson identifies that the African in America have been educated away from their culture and traditions and attached to the fringes of European culture, effectively dislocating them from themselves. Also noted is the fact that Afrikans have a tendency to valorise western culture to the detriment of their own heritage. He also acknowledges that if education is ever to be substantive and meaningful within the context of Western society, it must first address the African’s historical experiences in both Africa and the Western world. Very significantly he identifies miseducation as the fundamental problem. All of this is directly relevant to the experiences of Africans in the UK. Nowhere is it seen more than in our mad rush as a people to gain the qualifications of the European academy irrespective of the costs to our minds. Torbert (1991) acknowledges the modern university as the church of modernity and it would seem to be true in the African experience in my own university at least where I witness on a daily basis the ‘rushing multitude’ whom Armah (1973) identifies as:

_Rushing just because that is the present road – rushing not out of devotion but because they are of a nature to take their internal order from the present season’s surroundings. It is a waste of the seer’s thought, the hearer’s breath, a waste of the utterer’s spirit to pour blame on such natures. Were the surrounding order the order of the way, these also would again be people of the way. It is their nature to flow along channels already deepened by recent flow. It is not in their nature to wonder, threatening their easy peace with thinking if channels already found run true. Finders they are, not makers._

As a remaker and recreator of ‘the way’ I am being the change I want to see in the world as I walk and teach and learn in the order of ‘the way’ within the academy so that ‘the way’ can be found for those who will to find it. As a way forward from the fundamental problem of miseducation I adopt as an essential dimension of being the change I want to see in the world Molefi Kete Asante argument for ‘centricity’ in
education (synonymous with Akbar’s (1984) call for educational reality). Centricity is defined as

“...a perspective that involves locating students within the context of their own cultural references so that they can relate socially and psychologically to other cultural perspectives. It is a concept that can be related to any culture.”

To live centricity I have had to place myself at the centre of my world as an African. The challenge I have faced is how to transform myself in my current context in order to be the change I want to see in that context. How do I assert myself in the world as an African and not go backwards and/or run away because of the powerful social forces that work to prevent this happening? How do I do more than merely standing still to hold the ground I already have, given the task I’ve had in doing just that? How do I advance as an African in the world with my authenticity and integrity intact?

Understanding Selfhood and Community
What prevents me from living as fully to the above ideals as I would like? What acts on me as obstacles to the fulfilment of my desire to be the change I want to see in the world? Mead offers a model of selfhood that is helpful in understanding the self in relation to society. Selfhood is presented as consisting of two dimensions: the novel creative ‘I’ and the traditional conformist ‘Me’. Mead identifies self as being something that develops in relationship to others, i.e. as a social process. We can understand this when we think of the different roles we play out in different contexts depending on the relationship we perceive ourselves to have with others. As a ‘black’ child my role in ‘white’ society is ordered in much the same way that the various roles of players in a football team are ordered. Everyone is such a team is aware of their own and each other’s roles and fully expect each role to be played out according to plan if success is to be ensured. The team member who does not act according to her role can expect to be brought into line one way or another. Because of my need to fit as a ‘black’ child the ‘me’ dimension of my selfhood was to become over developed whilst my ‘I’ became repressed and stifled to ensure my acceptance in larger society. This is not surprising since we live in an age of conformity and where we are actively encouraged to conform. The imbalance that developed between my ‘I’ and my ‘Me’ eventually led, however, to serious dissonance in my internal world where I began to experience my ‘I’ seeking self-expression, refusing to let me live forever in the betrayal of myself as an African.

A significant message I take from Mead’s model is that both dimensions of selfhood are important in any community. The ‘Me’ acts as a point of commonality and continuity whereas the ‘I’ acts as an agent of change and innovation working to keep community vital and dynamic and thus preventing stagnation and decay. For the individual not to express the authentically experienced ‘I’ then becomes an act of personal and social irresponsibility and a betrayal of self and community. My realisation of this responsibility I had to myself and my world for the benefit of all was to further fire my motivation to continue along the path I had already began to advance. I was able to recognise yet another soul (Mead) confirming my own understanding of how our individual ‘I’ works in our life all the time advancing us towards a greater realisation of self. The model helped me to recognise the ‘divinity’ in all of us and to really see it in each person I come into contact with. As an educator I am aware of seeking actively to express my own I even as I engage with the ‘I’ of
learner-teachers in my classrooms in order to reveal it also to each person. Ultimately it depends on each of us what we do with the leading of our unique and novel ‘I’. I came to a point where I realised I could not keep on repressing my unique ‘I’ as an African woman because I was colluding in subordinating my own ‘I’ to the ‘I’ of others. Day by day I have been given renewed courage to live my ‘I’ with integrity.

An example of this can be seen in relation to my own university where over the last couple of years our emphasis as an individual institution has been refocused to that of widening participation to those groups typically and traditionally socially excluded from partaking of HE services. The classroom focus is it now said must be on individual student experience. In Britain one of the areas of concern in education is that of the underachievement of ‘Afro-Caribbean’ males in particular. Given that a high percentage of our students are of African/Caribbean heritage one would assume that there would be an established body of knowledge/resources within the University addressing the teaching, learning and achievement needs of these specific learners and from which one can draw as an educator to inform one’s own classroom practice. As an educator of African descent I continue however to experience constraints on drawing from my own personal and researched knowledge because this knowledge is so opposed to the ‘me’ of the institution. Is this perceived constraint largely a matter of my psychology and thinking as opposed to reality? What do I do with the response that I have to this issue? Do I think I can’t and therefore don’t or do I will that I can and do? My unique ‘I’ tells me that the conception of African Caribbean underachievement in British schools must be turned on its head not by working within the paradigm of traditional thinking but stepping outside it completely to suggest another interpretation of the problems being experienced by ‘Afro-Caribbean children in British schools’. Do I however continue to go along with the conformist ‘Me’ dimension of my selfhood to ensure an easy life for myself or do I stand in the authority of my ‘I’ and act as an agent of much needed change even if this causes me to be unpopular with colleagues and students alike for speaking from within my experiences as an educator of African ancestry? Do I challenge my own thinking about who I am and what I am capable of?

Honouring my ‘I’ as my path to being the change I want to see
The challenge of being the change I want to see in the world is to honour community by honouring my own authentic ‘I’ in a way I have not previously done before. I was able to understand my ‘I’ to be my inner self, that invisible dimension of myself that was nevertheless very real and which constituted my own unique individuality. The denial of my ‘I’ seemed always related to the denial of myself as a ‘black’ woman indicating pointedly to the fact that the expression of my unique ‘I’ would mean the fuller expression of myself in the world as a woman of African descent. In following the leading of my ‘I’ I developed the SENSE model (Bravette, 1996) as the strategy I follow for ensuring authenticity of self:

| Self-knowledge | I realise it is necessary for me to gain self-knowledge in all respects: culturally, historically, physically, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, mentally etc. if I am to retrieve and maintain the control and management of my own life. It is not appropriate for me to always have other people telling me about myself. The Ancients tell us that self-knowledge is the beginning of all knowledge. As I |

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learn about myself I also come into a deeper knowledge and understanding of all things not least of which is to gain a critical awareness of self in relation to others and the world of which I am a part and so I find myself educating myself for critical awareness.

### Education for Critical Consciousness

I have had to redefine the word ‘education’ for myself to mean ‘drawing out from latent potential’ as I choose to live in balance with my inner and outer realities. I have learned to use my objective brain as the filter and doorkeeper to my subjective brain as it monitors and filters information being received critically deciding what to accept and what to reject. In this way I live consciously avoiding the unwitting creation of a mongrel philosophy determining my life outcomes. I no longer depend on others to educate either my children or me as I am able to draw on my own knowing and inner wisdom in making decisions for myself.

### Nurturing the Internal World

This was my most important decision which involved dethroning the ‘me’ dimension of myself and enthroning my ‘I’ instead. The internal world is the ‘kingdom of God’ within that Jesus identified. This was a decision for and a commitment to individuality whether I realised it or not at the time of making the decision. This was about becoming self-determining and original instead of conforming at any cost as I had been doing in the past.

### Seeking Support Through Networking/Study Groups

The path of individuality and self-determination can be a lonely path. Seeking support is therefore about linking up with like-minded people, where they can be found (sometimes in books) and gaining strength from shared experiences.

### Embedding Process in My Life

Realising the uncertainty of human knowledge and wisdom I commit myself to being open and receptive to change using the deeply-held spiritual values I have built as my chief anchors and guide to the direction in which I aim to move.

Following the leading of my ‘I’ and taking up the challenge of unlearning in order to relearn as a means of taking up my authentic place and heritage in the world as a woman of African descent has seen me move from strength to strength. In 2002 I gained an award for excellence in teaching and learning alongside a research fellowship to the value of £50,000 to carry out research to disseminate my work. The proposal for which I gained my award was to introduce Academically-Based Community Service into the research portfolio of the university with a strategic focus on African/Caribbean communities. This achievement I acknowledge to be the outcome of following the leading of my ‘I’.

### Race as a Veil Covering/Blocking Spiritual Consciousness

Working consciously with the various phases of the SENSE model ensures I remain authentic to my ‘I’ which is then able to increasingly find fuller expression in the world. I used my PhD research (Bravette, 1997) to begin the initial phases of identifying my ‘I’ and have since that time continued to follow the trail of my own
unique ‘I’. In following this path I have come to realise the deeper significance of race to the fuller expression of the higher powers in us as human beings. The social construction of race and the normalised belief in it as something that is real acts as a veil behind which is hidden the spiritual consciousness of the human race. It is my experience that only as we are able to transcend ‘race’ as an issue whether as oppressed or oppressor that we are able to rent the veil of race and to see truly. My own heart’s desire is the realisation of my own spiritual freedom. This path was, however, blocked to me until I faced ‘race’ as an issue instead of seeking to avoid it or deny it – something I felt forced to do because of the taboo/silence placed around acknowledging race as an issue. The undiscussability of the issue made it a major blockage to my creativity as a woman of African descent. My uncritical belief in ‘race’ as real (because of the social taboo), as something I had to fight and struggle against or else repress and avoid was to make it the most significant issue in my life unwittingly denying me the fuller realisation of my spiritual heritage. Langston Hughes writes eloquently about the mountain of race that must be transcended before we as a people can really come into our own. The fundamental issue, as I understand it now, is not about ‘race’ but is about me finding the courage to stand tall in the spiritual consciousness of my ‘I’ as an African woman in the world. As long as I allow my novel, unique and creative ‘I’ to remain repressed and subordinated in the world, so long will I as an African be subordinated in the world. As long as my unique ‘I’ remains hidden behind the socially constructed veil of ‘race’ (a product of the ‘me’ of selfhood) which effectively works to keep me incarcerated in my mind, as all my energies are expended on maintaining a role and a place that seems to have been predetermined for me as a woman of African descent over the generations, so long will I remain as a subordinated and disempowered African in the world.

In the spiritual consciousness of my own novel, unique and creative ‘I’ I am a child of the universe with a rich heritage as a woman of African descent. Because of choosing to be the change I want to see in the world and living up to the challenges this position entails I have come into the realisation that I am here at this time in the history of the world for a purpose and that my life has meaning. It is not an accident why I reside in Britain. Nor is it an accident that I am an academic and educator. It is not an accident that I am writing this paper for this conference in Uganda. My purpose is being both more fully unfolded and fulfilled even as I write. This assurance is possible because my ‘I’ has become my identification point with the universal life principle – the invisible presence. I have made the significant move from being outer oriented to being inner oriented person and in this way have accessed my point of power. I am single-eyed, focussed and purposeful as I go about my purpose of liberating the human consciousness through being the change I want to see in the world as an educator.

Living the ‘I’ - some challenges and success factors
I have engaged in teaching and learning ‘against the grain’ through the expression of my unique ‘I’ which has meant taking on important challenges but which ultimately became significant success factors:

- Believing in, seeking out and living according to my own individuality based on the guiding wisdom of the power within me (the spiritual) and acting on that power. I live to experience the spiritual as natural rather than ‘supernatural’.
• In giving my ‘I’ the ascendancy I now focus on ‘the kingdom of God within’ (i.e. being the change I want to see in the world) – as opposed to trying to change other people, situations, contexts, etc. in the understanding that my life, thoughts, actions are important and impact on our world in myriad ways I had not realised when I lacked a knowledge of self.
• I use knowledge, as opposed to merely studying to demonstrate intellectual prowess, in order to improve the quality of human life.
• I now seek to align myself at all times with universal law – as ye sow so shall ye reap; as a man thinketh so he is;
• I now seek to living up to what I know to be true – anything else is living a lie – Living through my ‘I’ gives me courage to speak and live ‘truth’ even when this means I will have to stand alone, in the knowledge that I am never alone.
• One important aspect of living truth for me as been that of violating the ‘race’ taboo/breaking silence (recognising silence as a tool of the powerful) and naming ‘race’ as a lie in word and deed – and the negative impact it has on the oppressed and silent.
• In order to be true to everything I’ve said so far I have had to confront fear in all the different ways it manifests in my life. My discipline is to root fear out of my life: ‘perfect love casteth out fear’; I have not given you a spirit of fear but of power, of love and a sound mind’.
• In trusting my ‘I’ I have found self-love, I now recognise the importance and uniqueness of my self – I enthroned the self in me – self-validation!
• I have identified a strong sense of purpose and I witness it unfolding as I walk in faith, in love and in right thinking following the leading of my ‘I’.
• I have learnt the power of love and of impersonalisation. I no longer focus my attention on racism and/or whites, nor do I adopt a blaming approach – I chose instead to be the change I want to see in the world.

Conclusions: Letting our lives be our message
Pablo Picasso has been quoted as saying ‘Among humans there are far more fakes than originals’. The fake is the person who is in denial of self and the betterment of self because of the need to conform and imitate in order to gain acceptance and fit. For the greater part of my life I was a fake. This continued to the point that I surrendered to the demands of my ‘I’ and chose to become original. It is said that to be an individual requires courage and strength whereas conformity requires nothing but a nodding and easy assent to whatever everybody else thinks. What if across the globe whether as African-Caribbeans, African-British, African Americans, African Brazilians, African Canadians we individually choose to become the change we want to see in the world as we followed the leading of our unique and creative spiritual ‘I’, the inner self, and lived true to this? Can you begin to imagine what a healing force for change we would be across the world? Our suffering as a people cannot be without purpose, can it? We must begin to apply the lessons of our separation and dispersal as a people for our own greater good and that of the world. We can restore ourselves to our original sense of self through identification with the spiritual ‘I’ as opposed to the globalising, colonising ‘me’ of the western world. We need to engage appreciatively with ourselves in whatever our field of endeavour is and stand renewed in our strength and in right thinking as people of African descent free within ourselves to be that which we were born to be. Being the change I want to see in the world is, I have come to realise, ultimately about the choice I make about what I do with the individuality I have been given as my heritage as a woman of African descent. I can
(and have) chosen, wittingly and unwittingly, to live in forgetfulness of my individuality/heritage and live an inferior downtrodden and oppressed life the result of the ‘racialisation’ of my skin-colour or I can choose, through an act of will, to rise up to the full stature of my individuality claiming my spiritual heritage and walk tall in the world as a unique expression of divine individuality.
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