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Being True to What we Profess: Management Education and Inquiry - A Black British Perspective

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Conference Theme:
What Matters Most

“You will warrant the title ‘professor’ when you have discovered what you are willing to profess.”

TOWARDS BICULTURAL COMPETENCE:
BEING TRUE TO WHAT WE PROFESS

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INTRODUCTION
The term ‘towards bicultural competence’ in the title of my doctoral thesis: Towards Bicultural Competence: Researching for Personal and Professional Transformations refers to my desire to become competent in negotiating the two cultures (British and African Caribbean) of my dual heritage. The lack of competence which is implied in the title has been a major problem in my personal and professional life and was therefore an important insight thrown up by my research efforts. As a result of this insight I formulated the following hypothesis:

For contemporary Black (African Caribbean) men and women in the UK to be able to claim ‘authenticity’ (i.e. congruence between internal and external realities) and therefore be effective managers of self and others they need to engage in the process of gaining ‘bicultural competence’.

This hypothesis was based on the understanding that African Caribbeans in the UK are experiencing a range of problems (Cashmore, 1988; Ogbu, 1991) as a group largely because, especially those of us who have chosen (or have been chosen) to achieve in the mainstream, we are not bicultural. We have, rather, denied and/or failed to value our culture of origin (especially as it is devalued by wider society), notwithstanding the fact that slavery and colonisation deprived us of the continuity of our culture as Africans, all in order to achieve and gain acceptance into mainstream white society. As a result many African Caribbeans, in the UK in the 1990’s, are both culturally dislocated and confused. My doctoral thesis represent my journey towards gaining this understanding as well as how I researched to develop this ‘bicultural competence’ that I had identified as being so important.

AN INVITATION TO CO-INQUIRE
The presentational style which I chose for my PhD dissertation was to engage with you, the reader/listener direct. In the same style, in this paper, I invite you to co-inquire with me as I share with you why and how human inquiry in the form of experiential and collaborative forms of Action Research and Action Inquiry have become important means of life inquiry for me. I invite you to co-inquire because I talk and write about you and me in our world, but I do so from a Black (African) British perspective. This perspective that I bring is important because it provides an important lens of experience from which to understand race in the British context.

In my dissertation I noted that:

“This is not a neutral document. Because I am a Black woman of African Caribbean descent viewing the world from that perspective it becomes apparent that this document will, as a consequence, be both personal and political. For you not to co-inquire with me is, I would suggest, to be an intruder into my life experiences, and to avoid this I extend this invitation.” (p.1)
As I attempted to put this paper together for the Academy of Management (AOM) Meeting I found myself in a similar dilemma. This dilemma has arisen because I am, yet again, facing a new audience and so I realise that I must again extend this invitation as I continue the process of confronting my fears, working with my personal process and committing myself to engaging with you subject to subject! No longer am I merely the dehumanised and depersonalised descendent of slaves. No longer do I need to just merely exchange the physical shackles of my ancestors for the mental shackles of the twentieth century. Rather the human being, the subject, whose origins lies within the womb of Africa. The human being who has come to realise herself as subject and agent in her world and who has committed herself to relating to you from that position of equal status. And so I acknowledge immediately one of the most important and yet sensitive and emotive social issues, (and as yet unresolved), of the twentieth century: that of EQUALITY, especially as it pertains to race.

Much is professed about the social issue of equality within the profession of management: we hear it discussed superficially at conferences and read conceptual papers about the management of differences, anti-discrimination legislation, equal opportunities, affirmative action and more recently cultural diversity. Through this paper and drawing on the Meeting theme I invite each one of us to explore what it is that we profess around this issue both within the private and public spheres. Let us bring up to the pure light of day our taken-for-granted assumptions, values and belief systems and assess whether we are being true to what we profess as managers and management educators or whether our words are merely rhetoric, lip-service to equality. This is especially important as we increasingly become part of a multicultural and global marketplace.

As I commit myself to being courageous, I recognise that I am also acknowledging fear in order to put it aside so that I can break out of the silence identified as the culture of the oppressed (Freire, 1970) and into which I have been trapped for many years. This commitment challenges me to actively distance myself from the objectifying ‘othering’ process which typifies traditional positivist research methodologies. I am thinking about the objectification process which would enable me to step outside of this document and merely write about the ‘other’, the ‘object’ (i.e. blacks and whites) claiming neutrality as if the issues do not impact on my life in any meaningful way. The same objectification process which allows me to talk about ‘them’, but not ‘you’ and ‘me’ and the personal responsibilities that we have in our world.

In the same breath I am not, however, uncritical of our past and present relationship in a ‘raced’ world and so even as I invite you to co-inquire with me I am, nevertheless, mindful of not preaching to you nor expending too much of my valuable energies and resources in one way communication. Why so? Armah (1973) speaks to me with compassionate concern:

“Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction.”
Armah continues, his words heavy in their implications:

“No spring changes the desert. The desert remains; the spring runs dry. Not one spring, not thirty, not a thousand springs will change the desert ... Receiving, giving, giving, receiving, all that lives is twin ... Woe the race that is too generous in the giving of itself.” (pxii)

My invitation to co-inquire, with you acknowledging and working with your own personal processes as they are affected by what I have to say, enables us to engage in a process of mutual exchange: “Receiving, giving, giving, receiving, all that lives is twin ...”. And so I speak and write not to persuade and coax (history shows that this strategy is ineffective (Williams, 1987)) but rather to heal: “healing takes place as we speak the truths of our lives” (hooks, 1993). I invite you to co-inquire with me because I am convinced of the truth of the very powerful argument put forward by Torbert (1991) that ‘inquiry’ is a political principle which invites the potential transformation of each of our perspectives as we inquire together. What is your response to my invitation? Torbert (1991:235) additionally makes the very important point that

“There is no genuine community of inquiry that does not include the entire species because no one’s imagination can encompass another’s reality - can encompass the full meaning of human being.”

It is important for me to also speak to my Black colleagues who are not excluded from this invitation. As Black people we too have to look to ourselves to reconcile the contradictions of being Black in a ‘raced’ world where in order to gain acceptance and fit (Cashmore, 1992) compromise and a subsequent loss of integrity can become a way of life.

As I write about racial experiences you may well question how it is that I know that it is race at work in my experiences? Kalia (1991:282) makes the following point:

“The “reasons” for the reactions of others will never be known. It is irrelevant, even if it could be proven, that all negative reactions I encounter are personal, not race-related - what is relevant is that I am in the particular position of having to consider the possibility that how others treat me personally may be motivated by race politics.”

**STRUCTURE OF THIS PAPER**

Firstly I provide the background to my research as well as outlining my PhD aims and objectives. Secondly, I discuss the characteristics of human inquiry as a methodology and highlight the Action Research and Action Inquiry methods highlighting their importance to me as a professional of African Caribbean descent. Thirdly, I move on to share the Community Approach to Bicultural Competence Model which evolved during the course of my research to meet my particular research needs. Throughout these discussions examples from my
practice and life are interspersed. I conclude by considering how ‘human inquiry’ has become for me a means of ‘life inquiry’.

BACKGROUND TO MY RESEARCH
What promulgated my journey into research as human life inquiry? Thirty-eight years into life in the UK and I had arrived at a point where I found myself in ‘crisis’, confused and not knowing where to turn. My ‘crisis experience’ (Outlaw, 1983) occurred around the time in my working life that I had come to understand my social reality within the context of a Western value system, based as it is on the notion of white supremacy and black inferiority, clearly as a Black woman of African Caribbean descent living in the UK (Bhavnani, 1994). However this understanding, personal knowing, was muddied by my own confusion, the result of my failure to engage with my lived realities rather preferring to buy into the rhetoric of a just, fair and meritocratic society. Socialisation into British culture had also ensured a ‘double consciousness’ (DuBois, 1903) at war between themselves: a Black consciousness and a White ‘internalised/introjected’ consciousness. I believe that this ‘crisis experience’ was further aggravated by what could be described as my involuntary involvement in a process which Hale (1992; p66) describes as the ‘dark night of the self’:

“... an upheaval of the ego or ‘self of everydayness’ reorienting inner awareness to the possibility of a shift from an old to a new worldview ... metaphorically, the event can be compared to an earthquake that splits the earth, revealing the riches of an ancient culture beneath the surface.”

While I was beginning to see beyond the official rhetoric (i.e. of a meritocratic, just and equal society) to which I had been ascribing things were by no means so clear-cut even as I recognised the complexity of issues for myself. Constant denial of my personal knowing in the University where I worked and wider society was to further heighten this cultural and existential sense of confusion and dislocation. I had, however, to confront the fact that, in general, a chasm exists between what is espoused in British society and what is actually done whether at a national, organisational or personal level.

This realisation along with the humiliation of finally facing up to what it means to be Black in White society (i.e. inferior and devalued) placed me in crisis: my hopes were completely dashed, dreams shattered, coping strategies collapsed and all on account of my race it seemed, my blackness and its implications in a ‘raced’ world. I lived in a world where being ‘raced’ means that one is black and, therefore, inferior and to be devalued. What should I do? On the one hand, it seemed tempting and inviting to hide away forever, stop striving and give up. But another voice in my psyche struggled against this solution: “You cannot give up, you have got to surf this thing even if only for the children’s sake!” This was, indeed, a limit situation to be transcended (Outlaw, 1984). It was important to me to be able to show these “Black British” children another way, another choice. What was the real situation? How could I gain the necessary understanding, enabling me to take informed action in my world? Thus I found myself engaged in experiential and collaborative action researching and action inquiring as a
means of making sense of my own life-world experiences, enabling me to identify and share strategies that were informed by the lived realities of the African Caribbean experience in the UK in the 1990’s.

AIMS OF PHD RESEARCH
The aim of my research was, therefore, to adopt a whole life approach to my personal and professional life extending to the systems that ‘couple’ together to make up my life-world and included: myself, my family, my practice and my community. I sought ‘bicultural competence’ as a means of enabling me to integrate my dual cultural heritages, my divided ‘double consciousness’. In my dissertation I noted:

“As Black British people of African Caribbean descent what do we need to do/be in order to become biculturally competent?

“Applying the concept of ‘biculturality’ to Howell’s (1982) framework for awareness and competence, which is presented as a four step process, demonstrates how an individual may progress from a position of unconscious bicultural incompetence through conscious bicultural incompetence to conscious bicultural competence as action is taken culminating in un/conscious bicultural competence as the process of conscientization takes place and learning is internalised. This process is being advocated as essential for Black managers in order for their full potential to be attained while maintaining their integrity as Black people.” (p.67)

I was seeking three important outcomes:

• To achieve personal change through action researching/inquiring into my life and practice. It was of critical importance to me to move out of the personal crisis in which I had found myself and to achieve authentic change/transformation.

• To be able to name the processes in which I had engaged so that I could become a ‘healed helper/educator’ in my professional practice as well as within the African Caribbean community.

• To make a contribution to the limited body of knowledge on the experiences of black managers/professionals as well as providing information for young ‘Black British’ people aspiring to these positions in UK organisations.

From the above it is clear that I wanted to engage in some form of effective sense-making process, the result of critical engagement with my world in order to understand what it actually meant for me to be a Black, a woman, and an educator/academic in my world. I needed to be able to understand why I constantly experienced myself as being ineffectual professionally and personally; how to overcome experiences of powerlessness and the victim status which seemed to assail me. I needed to understand and develop skills to bring about effective change, if not transformation, not only in my own life but also in the
systems which I managed and influenced, i.e. my family and professional practice. This was a complex managerial situation, evidenced by chaos, confusion and uncertainty. I could simply have pounced on one issue (i.e. race) and become engaged in a dysfunctional problem-solving process in which I failed to identify the varying tangled threads which were responsible for the confused and seemingly ugly tapestry which was my life. Alternatively I could identify a means of transcending my day to day lived experiences, achieve another level of consciousness, enabling me to identify the different strands of that experience through adopting a dialectical and critical approach; taking time to study the different threads, to understand them and their unique qualities and in a considered way to rethread where necessary and appropriate in order to create a better understood, even personally designed, tapestry to my own liking. It was in this context I was to become aware of the necessity for me to become ‘biculturally competent’. Engaging in the process of ‘problem-setting’ (Schon, 1991) enabled me to become aware of my embeddedness in British culture and the extent to which I had become mono-cultural and no doubt ethnocentric, and in denial of the culture which was a reflection of my Blackness, i.e. Africa. The key, I realised, to my crisis state was encased within the complexities of culture and my challenge was in identifying a research methodology which had the scope to enable me to achieve the above aims even as I simultaneously developed in understanding and knowledge about the two cultures which are my dual heritage. The exploration of these fundamental issues were to be important aspects of my overall research process and are fully addressed in the first four chapters of my dissertation.

HUMAN LIFE INQUIRY - ACTION RESEARCHING AND ACTION INQUIRING
Rowan & Reason (1981) describe ‘human inquiry’ as being about people exploring and making sense of human action and experience. My own engagement with human inquiry was the result of initially seeking to achieve congruence between my internal and external realities of being Black in the UK. As a result of this form of engagement I was to, however, gain a much greater awareness of myself in my world and my multiple selves and realities, thus moving away from a unitary conception of self, and so out of a prison of society’s and my own making (i.e. my ‘blackness’). As a result I was to gain a greater awareness of human action and experience in the world which was to greatly benefit and underpin my professional practice as an OB/HRM educator and academic. Engaging in human inquiry pushed me to focus on issues such as my values (espoused and actual values in use), my belief systems and so to considering the philosophical foundation of my life (metaphysics, epistemology, ontology, cosmology, axiology and so forth). I began to ask myself questions such as: What is my life purpose? What about issues of accountability? I had a lot of what Rowan & Reason term ‘naive’ knowing which would not be usable in traditional ‘objective’ research but which I could bring to bear in their conception of human inquiry, i.e. New Paradigm Research and the concept of the ‘objectively subjective’: the bringing together of orthodox scientific methods and my own ‘naive’ knowing!

It was as a result of my engagement in real human inquiry that I came to realise that I was not living out the values which I was espousing as being important to
me; of the reality of my lived experiences as a *Black woman* of African Caribbean descent in the UK in the 1990’s; of my actions and experiences in the world; of my own internal organisation and processes and how they impacted on my day to day experiences; of the inauthenticity, ineffectiveness and dissonance within myself. I began to see how I had erroneously internalised the western perception and knowing of what it means to be Black and was, as a result, divided against myself within my own psyche (the double consciousness referred to above). Additionally I came to see how my ways of knowing were denied and devalued in British society (which I had also internalised).

As a result of the complexities identified above it was important to me that my research should be systematic, purposeful, deliberate, visionary and transformatory and very importantly critical of self and others (Perry & Zuber-Skerrit, 1991). This was not only in order to satisfy the external critics that I anticipated but also my own internalised critic. Action Research and Action Inquiry presented themselves as appropriate means of achieving this goal. Both methods focussed on *me* as ‘agent’ and directed *me* to paying attention to *myself* and *my* actions in the world enabling me to see how *I* had the power to actually influence outcomes. This was important because I had been the recipient of a schooling/socialisation process which had positioned me as one of the ‘acted on’ of history, an ‘other’ without agency in the world, both as a woman and a Black person. It is true, however, that of the two forms of oppression, racism and sexism, I experienced the weight of my Blackness the strongest, initially not even recognising the intimate relationship between the two forms.

**THE EXTENDED EPISTEMOLOGY OF ACTION RESEARCH/INQUIRY**

Before exploring in more depth Action Research and Action Inquiry as research methods, considering some of the characteristics of human inquiry, or what I consider to be Reason’s ‘extended epistemology’, is important. Characteristics of human inquiry which were of significant importance to me were, for example, the emphasis on *values* and the identification of the gap which existed between what I espoused and what I actually did on a daily basis. At the very least I found myself having to acknowledge and being responsible for the fact that so often I am a ‘living contradiction’ (Whitehead, 1993) and being cognisant of the impact of these contradictions on our world. Differentiating between the values of the two aspects of my dual heritage led me into an in-depth exploration of the philosophical, epistemological, ontological, cosmological and other differences. The acknowledgement of different and alternative ways of ‘knowing’ was also very important. The adoption of an *holistic* approach to human inquiry was of significant importance to me as I found myself able to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of my experiences which so often in the mainstream organisational context I had denied/belittled in order to avoid being ‘othered’ because of my difference. Engaging in critical reflection on experience both individual and collectively was to enable me to use what Rowan & Reason (1981: xiii) describe as my ‘naive’ inquiry which although

“... prone to error, prone to biases and prejudices, of our anxieties, the error which arises from the pressure of group conformity ... also has a lot of very
good qualities, because it is involved, committed, relevant, intuitive; above all it is alive.”

Sharing my experiences, thinking and theories with others who had a common interest in the area of inquiry and opening them up to their critical but also subjective response or what Reason (1988) refers to as critical subjectivity was very important as was the collaboration the result of engaging in co-researching and co-inquiry. The emphasis on praxis, the essential requirement of cycling between theory and practice as I acted in my world to bring about change (i.e. action orientation) and the scope for the hearing of traditionally marginalised voices and the sharing of multiple realities were additional characteristics which were to make human inquiry as a methodology relevant to my needs.

Reason and Rowan (1981;xxii) also promised that in human inquiry

“... you don’t have to settle for second best. You don’t have to accept projects you don’t believe in and really don’t want to do ... You can do research which is worth while for you yourself and for the other people involved in it. You can do research on questions which are genuinely important.”

The extended epistemology, discussed above, which is a feature of human inquiry was of immense importance has I found myself able to engage with my own unique ways of ‘knowing’ realising for the first time that knowledge is no more than the external face of subjective reality and that what is in fact accepted as ‘knowledge’, and the people accepted as ‘knowledge-makers’ in any setting, is a contested and highly political terrain. It was also attested that the human inquiry approach encapsulating experiential and collaborative action research methods could deal with the problems of culture in that researchers from different cultures should be able to ‘reshape’, ‘remake’ and ‘reconstitute’ action research methods as appropriate to their cultural requirements (Altrichter et al, 1991). In addition new paradigm research strongly resonated with the characteristics listed by Akbar (1991) for a new Black paradigm which would enable Black researchers, like myself, to carry out research which did not of necessity invalidate and dehumanise us as we inadvertently applied racist western standards to our experiences.

I was setting out to create ‘new and emancipatory knowledge’ because I had recognised the deficit, as a management educator and a recipient of the services of British Business Schools, where our experiences as Black people in management and the professions were concerned. I knew that the subject area that I was planning to research into was controversial, emotive and I acknowledge that it was threatening for me as researcher as well as those who worked in close proximity to me. Indeed, based on traditional research methodologies, it would be considered impossible for me to carry out objective research on the issue because I was “too closely involved emotionally” with it. I was able to challenge this criticism, however, as it seemed to suggest that Black researchers could never research on issues related to race because of the
emotional involvement which would inevitably make their research biased and self-interested (Cox, 1990).

The two main research methods which I used systematically throughout my research were action research and action inquiry.

**Action Research**

Action Research has been a fundamental means by which I have researched. Action research as a method was first conceptualised by Kurt Lewin as a means to improve practice (McTaggart, 1991) and over the years has been redefined by Argyris et al (1990) as the process of the creation of usable knowledge: “knowledge that can be used to produce action, while at the same time contributing to a theory of action”, i.e. producing knowledge. The method consists of a spiral of cycles of action and research. Each cycle consists of four major stages: plan - act - observe - reflect, leading to repeated cycles of inquiry providing me with a systematic means of engaging with my practice and life. An important feature of action research is the requirement to engage with double loop learning. The first loop of this double-loop learning is the involvement with actual activities and experiences while the second (meta-loop) is the real challenge. In the second loop I began the process of engaging with the relevance of the way in which I was going about gathering information as it relates to the situation and to ask myself if the questions I was asking were actually relevant to the issues at hand. I also began to question my own belief systems and values as they were being brought to bear on the situation and in the process identified considerable incongruencies. I found myself being pushed to think about the way that I was thinking, my conceptual patterning, my construing and my thoughts on thinking while accessing bodies of public knowledge. It was in this process that I was to become keenly aware of the different voices in my psyche and very importantly to differentiate between the White and Black consciousnesses. Because engagement in this double-loop process required me to take account of me - I found it a very liberating aspect of the research process for me and in variance with my lived experience to date:

“My socialisation both as a woman and a Black person of African descent who’s reality was constantly being denied, as well as a member of the Christian church, had ensured that I was also in denial of self ... It was a process in which I was to work towards becoming transparent to myself as an African Caribbean woman in terms of my history, my responsibilities and my possibilities as a member of a given group of people.

Using the action research cycle I deliberately engaged with issues such as my ‘silence’ in the workplace. For example, having explored the subject in the Participatory Action Research group of Black women managers (Bravette, 1993), we individually went out into our respective workplaces to explore and make incremental challenges to our silence in the workplace particularly as these silences pertained to race.

**Action Inquiry**
Torbert (1991) in conceptualising his theory of Action Inquiry suggests that our knowledge of what is occurring at any given moment of our lives - within us, around us and beyond us - must be inadequate to what is actually happening. We also have the problem of being culturally bounded, for example, our language, philosophy and psychology determine our thinking and behaviour (actions). The important point that Torbert makes is that we are largely unaware of important aspects of our lives and how they affect our interactions with other people as well as the responses we receive in return. He identifies four territories of experience requiring our awareness:

- The territory of one’s own behaviour
- The territory of one’s own thinking/feeling
- The territory of one’s attention (awareness)
- The territory of outside influence

While action researching I have simultaneously attempted to engage in the four territories of experience in order to raise my self-awareness. This method was instrumental in my process of becoming self-determining, ‘agent’ in my world as I defined my purpose and the underlying strategies (philosophising), sought to live out these values and so actively engaged with my own behavioural skills while noticing my impact on the world and therefore monitoring the extent to which I was living in congruence with my purpose. This ‘on-line’, ‘dynamic’ approach to my life and practice required me to let go of ‘truth’ as I had understood it in Christianity. Instead I began to learn how to hold my ‘knowing’ more lightly as I engaged with my world and my own personal processes in that world.

MY PRACTICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH ACTION RESEARCH/INQUIRY

Reflecting on how I used the two research methods crystallises the significant differences I identified between the two methods. The action research learning cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect-re-plan was simple albeit it challenging in its requirement. In the initial stages of my research I engaged in repeated cycles of action researching as I sought to move myself out of crisis by seeking to understand and change different experiences in my life. For example, wanting to understand why I experienced myself as being marginal to my workgroup enabled me to plan for the next staff meeting where I entered the group with the deliberate purpose of ‘reading’ the group behaviour in order to identify what was feeding into my experience of marginality. I did have a ‘naive’ understanding/feeling of what was taking place in my workgroup but any evidence that I could provide to back-up these understandings and feelings were so intangible that I recognised the need to identify more tangible evidence. The action, the observation and the reflection on that planned action was to direct me to the need for further knowledge and skills on my part enabling me to better understand the situation and led to my enrolment on a psychodynamic counselling course in multi-ethnic counselling. So I was to move from one cycle of action research to another gradually but very deliberately advancing in understanding, awareness, self and other knowledge.
The intervention in the above example was my planned action of deliberate reading of the situation, engaging with my own personal processes and the recognition that I needed additional skills, my subsequent enrolment on a course of study which knowledge/analytical tools I then carried back into different workgroup situations in order to better understand the dynamics enabling me to take informed action in my world.

Action inquiry was not to become significant to me until I had arrived at a certain level of human/spiritual consciousness (Vaughan, 1986), also what is commonly termed ‘ego strength’ but which in my own case I would describe as ‘inner self strength’. Achieving a certain stage of racial consciousness (Helms, 1991) the result of my on-going action researching was also important. This recognition in itself supports Torbert’s (1991) assertion that to effectively action inquire requires advanced levels of human consciousness. This acknowledgement is important because it highlights the proclivity within action research/inquiry to facilitate and accelerate human development. Theories of human development such as Kegan’s (1982) stages detailed in The Evolving Self; Bateson’s (1972) notion of different levels of learning: Levels I, II and III and Torbert’s developmental stages, have been important in terms of my own understanding my personal growth and development and the significant contribution that these forms of experiential and collaborative human inquiry methods have made to accelerating this process. Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith was also important in helping me understand the confusion which surrounded my faith during the early stages of my research and the changes which were taking place in my own psyche and how I was relating to the world. I have undoubtedly achieved very significant development in this regard, not least a level of consciousness which has enabled me to transcend the lived experiences of being ‘Black’ in a raced world.

Torbert (1991) also describes the vision of action inquiry as being:

“... an attention that spans and integrates the four territories of human experience. The experience is what sees, embraces and corrects incongruities among mission, strategy, operations and outcomes. It is the source of the ‘true sanity of natural awareness of the whole’.”

Torbert’s vision had very conveniently coincided for me with strategies I had been learning for my on-going spiritual evolvement, the purpose I had identified. Meditation and African cosmology classes were key instruments in this regard pointing me to my own inner power and thus generating ‘transforming power and the power of balance’. Torbert (1991) points out that these in turn “generate continual quality improvement and increasingly just action”. This was my personal exercise. I continue to work towards achieving the ultimate aim and the primary research instrument in action inquiry: “Consciousness” in the midst of action. Action inquiry challenges me to simultaneously study the present and transform it as well as challenging me to set up peer cultures (communities of inquiries) and liberating structures which empower the users within the context (i.e. family and classroom) of my research endeavours.
Experiential action researching and inquiring, therefore, involved me in researching actively to bring about change in my life, practice and environment. This invariably required me to engage with others (co-researchers and co-inquirers) if I was to achieve the extent and quality of awareness, change and knowledge that I was seeking.

**ENGAGEMENT WITH PERSONAL PROCESS AND SENSEMAKING**

Action research and Action Inquiry and their demand on engagement with double-loop learning were to allow me to understand the extent to which I was out of step with myself and my lived experiences as a Black woman. Figure 1. (detailed extensively in Bravette, 1997) provides an overview of the total research process in which I was engaged with myself as researcher positioned at the centre engaged in a systemic process of sense-making in order to decolonise my mind and become self determining as I engaged in Freire’s (1970) conscientisation process. The model highlights the holistic and collaborative nature of the research model (hence my use of the term ‘community’) as I deliberately focussed on four aspects of my lived experiences (self, family, practice and community) using a range of different research methods which fed into my research a range of different experiences and perspectives. I was also expecting tangible outcomes as detailed at the bottom of the model. The research methods (detailed at the top of the model) also effectively enabled me not only to inquire into my own life-world but to also invite a range of people from the African Caribbean community to become co-researchers and inquirers researching and inquiring together to bring about changes in our own lives and community (i.e. Participatory Action Research Group, Collaborative Action Research Group as well as critical friends, workshops and a range of discussion groups).

The qualities of engaging in human inquiry which were of critical importance to me were the demands for engagement with personal process, deliberate sense-making and a focus on praxis. Silence, shame and fear were key themes which systematic research was to bring to the surface for me the result of my engaging with my own personal processes. The following example of engaging with personal process will provide you with an example of how I came to experience liberation, defined by Wallace (1979) as taking responsibility for one’s own life.

Using Torbert’s (1991) Action Inquiry framework had enabled me to determine that a fundamental aspect of my purpose was self-acceptance and authenticity as regards my Blackness. Carrying out in-depth organisational psychodynamic analysis (Bravette, 1995) on my experience in the workplace had identified for me my own, both conscious and unconscious, collusive behaviour in perpetuating my own racial oppression. There was also the recognition that my solo and likely token organisational positions had been the result of my obvious lack of racial consciousness the result of my determination to ‘fit’ and to ‘gain acceptance’ in white mainstream organisations. I was, however, at a point where I needed to stop denying myself, in the many subtle forms in which I did so on a daily basis, in order to gain acceptance in White society. Action researching in order to understand and change this aspect of myself in practical situations, to watch what I did as opposed to what I espoused was enlightening. For example I
was to become keenly aware of the sense of threat and panic I experienced merely to think about acknowledging myself as a Black woman at the front of a classroom, let alone actually doing so. As I engaged in critical reflection I could see how on one hand that this fear seemed to be ridiculous because everyone could see that I was Black and I knew that I was Black! It seemed as if I was actively engaged in some form of collusive involvement with the institution and wider society!? Laing (1961: 111) makes the following point:

“Collusion is always clinched when self finds in other that other who will ‘confirm’ self in the false self that it trying to make real, and vice versa. The ground is then set for prolonged mutual evasion of truth and true fulfilment. Each has found another to endorse her own false notion of herself and to give this appearance a semblance of reality.”

I came to understand that my lived experience in the UK had informed my tacit knowing that my acceptance was based on my not being perceived as ‘other’, so if I adopted the British ‘way of being’ and diminished my colour by never referring to it and aligning myself with those who claimed ‘colour-blindness’ then things would be fine. I was to further understand that this was not merely a one-way behaviour on my part. It was not merely just my strategy for survival: it was the two-way collusive behaviour which Laing has identified above. White colleagues and peers depended on my not acknowledging my Blackness in relation to their Whiteness! Blackwell (1994) makes this point well in his illuminating discussion of how race can affect group dynamics:

“... Not only does she know that her experience of life in general and racism in particular is significantly, if not enormously, different from that of white group members, but she is also faced with a situation where the white members clearly do not want to hear about that aspect of her life ... Provided she goes along with this she is offered warmth, acceptance, affection and an absence of intolerance, denigration and hostility that is often the response to her colour in other settings.”

Hence my fear, sense of panic, as I contemplated acknowledging my Blackness, I would be breaking a two-way collusive agreement in which I had been engaged for most of my life; breaking it without the other's agreement! Blackwell (1994) notes that the result of ending this form of collusion is to risk

“... jeopardising all the proffered goodwill and acceptance. She risks meeting with hostility, with accusations that she has a chip on her shoulder or a persecution complex, or that she refuses acceptance when it is offered.”

I was to further come to understand how my own internalised fear of my ‘Blackness’ and my lack of racial consciousness were like a badge of fear which I wore and which made me a target for racial devaluation and abuse whether from students and/or colleagues. The result of this recognition, coming as it did at a time when I have acknowledged that I was caught up in what Hale (1992) has termed the ‘dark night of the self’ was to have an all permeating effect on my life as I sought to find the ‘true fulfilment’ that Laing refers to above.
Action Science
& Action Inquiry
Purposive &
systematic inquiry
into own life and practice

Participative Action Research
Black Women Managers
into own life and practice

Competence Model

Collaborative
Action Research
critical subjectivity
Inquiry Group
critical friends

leading to development of:
critical consciousness
conscientisation
decolonialisation
self-knowledge
&
self-awareness

working with personal process
sensemaking

ME AS SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCHER
sensemaking
working with personal process

Self
(Personal)
“Healed”
Extended
family
Immediate family

Professional Practice
(HRM/OB lecturer in
higher education).

African Caribbean
Community

Systems

some outcomes:
personal growth and development of the researcher, changes in systems being impacted on, plus
dissemination of findings through conference papers, journal articles, workshops/seminars, etc.

Figure 1: A Community Oriented Approach for Developing Bicultural Competence

As a result of this realisation and my increasing commitment to action inquiring as a means of transformation I was to become engaged in the setting up of peer cultures (communities of inquiries) and the development of liberating structures. An example of these was my invitation to my family to join the inquiry with me - chapter 11 of my dissertation provides an account of this inquiry. Over a period of time my ways of engagement with my family had been changing as I had become increasingly in touch with myself, and an awareness of all that I didn’t know which I had previously thought I knew. An awareness of the culture of fear, shame, dependency, anxiety, conformity and rigidity which had been my inheritance and was in danger of being the legacy I was passing on to my own children. Extending an invitation to them to join the inquiry as they
studied their school and social environment in order to understand some of the experiences which were a part of their daily experiences was an acknowledgement of the mutuality which I had come to recognise as being essential to our relationship, to their learning to take on responsibility and how to be accountable in the world. We continue to co-inquire together within increasingly liberated structures as we continue to develop together in the knowledge of who we are as a people in space and time. In articulating a vision for the African Caribbean community I noted the following in my dissertation:

“It is a vision wherein our children are educated for critical consciousness with the ability to read the world, the global world, and their place as African peoples within that context. In essence, it is a vision of developed potentialities realisable through human agency to act consciously in our world.” (p.205)

I have seen this vision being recognised in the life experiences of my own children. In my dissertation I noted the following important pay-offs:

- Our sons abilities to reflect and act on their reflections on their own behalf has undoubtedly improved.
- Their historical and cultural awareness has been raised significantly.
- Our involvement in the school system (both schools) has enabled them to become aware of espoused values as opposed to values in use.
- They are more aware of their realities and have received affirmation for that reality ...

Process issues such as those detailed above and how I worked with them formed an integral part of my research process and are explored in depth in my doctoral thesis where I provide examples from all aspects of my life. Writing up the actual thesis was in itself a significant part of the developmental process which I have undergone and in the last section of the dissertation: “Writing as Inquiry”: Facing up to the Bonds that Bind” I noted:

“I wanted to write up this thesis but found that I couldn’t. My mind felt as if it were incarcerated. Bound ... I am attempting to break the chains of my incarceration in order to complete the process that I’ve undergone ... At last my weakened Black consciousness is finding the courage to face up to the white consciousness which has been in the ascendancy for so long.” (p.224)

**RESEARCH AS LIFE INQUIRY**

With my PhD research and dissertation I have reclaimed my right to ‘be’. I have become engaged in a process of ‘re-knowing’, ‘reclaiming’, ‘remembering’ and ‘reconceptualising’. I have become personally responsible (liberated) in my world. I have become a visionary, healing force for good in my world. I have become change and action oriented and I continually engage in praxis as I cycle between theory and practice seeking to develop the ultimate goal of action inquiry, what Torbert has called, ‘consciousness in the midst of action’ hence my closing remarks:
“Finally I am beginning to be released. Finally I can begin to feel the chains falling away as I acknowledge my right to anger, and my fear, and learn to use these powerful forces, rather than allowing them to incapacitate me, constructively for the rehumanisation of myself, my family and my world.

Beingness is not I know, however, from my own day to day experiences, a right which is recognised by all for me as a Black woman of African Caribbean descent in an as yet unequal society and world. I have to continually inquire into my day to day life world experiences working towards developing the necessary skills and knowledge to enable me to learn how to work with them on a day to day basis. The accounts of experiences and processes highlighted above aren’t simple ones to work with. Many have been painful experiences and processes. Inquiry as a way of life has provided and continues to provide me with the tools and the awareness to work with these experiences in a life-enhancing and sustaining way. Systematic inquiry also belies the frequent response that anecdotal evidence is not proof of anything when experiences are shared but rather highlights the incongruities between values espoused and values in actual use; taken for granted assumptions which never see the light of day; the dissonance between the public and the private, the close links between the personal and the political as well as issues which have been made into social taboos, locked away in the organisational and collective societal ‘shadow’ (Jacobi, 1962) providing us with the means to a more fulfilling and humane way of living.

Within HE I have learnt to accept my marginality because as Park (1950) has identified my marginality is not altogether negative. In fact he argues the reverse:

“... inevitably she becomes, relative to her cultural milieu, the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint. The marginal woman is always relatively the more civilised human being.”

The marginality I refer to is also not only because of my Blackness but very significantly because I am no longer merely a follower but as a result of my research efforts have become critical, dialectical and purposive in my actions. I now recognise my agency in the world and now, as a management educator, have a heightened awareness of what is required to develop transformatory leadership skills in others.

CONCLUSIONS

In concluding, as management educators and as a profession we have an important role to play in a world waiting to be born, a world where equality is no longer an unresolved social issue. We need, however, to work on ourselves first, in order to equip ourselves with the insights, self-knowledge and awareness, knowledge, skills and competencies enabling us to be effective role models, change agents and transformatory leader/educators in our world. As an OB/HRM educator/academic I realise that I am far better equipped for my role as a result of the understanding gained of the adult developmental process I’ve undergone and so necessary to making our institutions more humane while
reducing individual suffering. Research as life inquiry has enabled me to identify what matters most to me as an individual, a member of a community and wider society. I have clarified what it is that I am willing to profess and can provide a reasoned argument to defend my position. I recommend research as life inquiry as the only sustainable way forward.

Having armoured myself with these competencies, knowledge, insights, skills, etc what do I have to share with members of the British African Caribbean community?

REFERENCES


