

Accounting to myself: How do I speak for myself, to myself, as I encourage others to do the same?

J. McNiff

St Mary's University College
United Kingdom
e-mail: jeanmcniff@mac.com

This article is an account of my ongoing action enquiry into how I can understand and improve my practice. It is a continuation of an earlier paper (McNiff 2008a), delivered originally as a keynote presentation at the SAARDHE 2007 Conference, University of Pretoria, where I made the case that the 'I' should be central in educational research; that academics located in higher education should reconceptualise themselves as intellectuals whose job is challenge existing ideas and practices as a means of contributing to the development of an open society (Popper 1945); and for the maintenance of a free academic press to enable them to publish their accounts of how they are doing so. I develop some of these themes here, showing how I act as a living example of ideas to do with the generative transformational nature of living processes, including forms of enquiry, whose existence is facilitated through the capacity of the thinker to problematise and deconstruct his/her own thinking.

I raise questions about how I can account for myself to myself, drawing on Foucault's (2001) discussion of *parrhesia* – frank and truthful talk – as a means of showing how a morally accountable life can be understood as one in which the individual is able to speak the truth to others, and, more importantly, to themselves, thus addressing Foucault's question:

I wish to know how the reflexivity of the subject and the discourse of truth are linked – "How can the subject tell the truth about itself?" (cited in McNicol Jardine 2005).

This kind of understanding is linked with a parallel understanding of how I represent myself (Said 1994) to myself and others, so that I may be seen as a person who is to be trusted in showing how her form of life matches her own ethical commitments. Further, I ask, when individuals find ways of telling the truth about and to themselves, how do they then use this knowledge, and for what purposes? How do they represent themselves, as they tell their truth?

In my previous paper I made a case for why academic practitioners should reposition themselves as intellectuals, whose job is to raise interesting and important questions about established ideas. I continue with those themes here, yet now shift

the spotlight to myself, as an intellectual, to examine whether I am living up to my own rhetoric, or engaging in fancy but inherently misleading talk. I do this because, as I explain below, since my work in professional education is to do with encouraging practitioners to think and speak for themselves, I need constantly to check whether I am justified in doing so. Hence I consistently make my knowledge claims public, and test their validity against an empirical knowledge base in relation to identified criteria and standards of judgement. I then make my accounts available for public critique, as I am doing here. This is especially important in my case, since throughout my work I speak about the need for intellectuals to disturb the epistemological peace as a basis of cultural transformation. This could be seen as transgressive, and get people into trouble when they speak out against dominant regimes. Therefore, because I begin with myself, the article becomes an account of my own action enquiry as I ask, ‘How do I improve my practice?’ (Whitehead 1989), when that practice is increasingly understood as a means of influencing the epistemological base of higher education as a main body for the legitimation of knowledge and the transformation of culture.

My enquiry therefore is about what counts as truth, how truth may be arrived at, and how it may be told. In relation to cultural renewal, it is to do with what counts as the culture, and how people can develop the kinds of discourses that are the epistemological grounds for cultural renewal; how those discourses themselves become the epistemological base and framework for social practices of any culture that may emerge; and how the quality of the discourses can be established, in order to contribute legitimately to cultural renewal.

So let me begin the account of my enquiry. I frame it using a set of questions originally developed by Whitehead (1989); and I first outline my contexts, which is an important aspect of my enquiry.

MY CONTEXTS

I live on the south coast of England. I am independent, and am active in higher education and professional education contexts. I am often not at home for periods of time because I travel, to do professional education work and to give talks, also mainly in higher education. I love my life, and complain regularly that there is not enough of it. I am a nomad, and this form of life suits me, since it seems to reinforce the form of thought I espouse, a perpetual curiosity that leaves no opportunities for learning unexplored.

My work is located, broadly speaking, in higher education, because I support the action enquiries of practitioners who wish to achieve their higher degrees. The work is successful because of our creative collaborations and the talents of the people I work with. They achieve their higher degrees with my support. My practical work is to help people realise their educational goals, and their success reflects my own. My work is also to do with ideas, and I show the realisation of ideas through the living examples of practitioners – hence the emphasis in this article of accounting for myself, given my responsibility for justifying why I try to influence the trajectories

of their lives. Throughout, the main idea is about how practitioners can contribute to a transformation of the existing culture into more sustainable forms, through the development of new forms of epistemology that place the 'I' at the heart of the enquiry. By 'sustainable', I mean a culture that is developed through the contributions of all, freely given, as they find ways of coming together, on an equal footing, to contribute to the wellbeing of all (Chomsky 1996).

Yet this is often easier said than done, because it means challenging dominant epistemologies that say how things are and how they should be. Furthermore, challenging a dominant form could easily lead to replacing one thing with another, and could become also a case of perpetuating the form by which decisions are made. I do not wish simply to replace one cultural form with another, swapping one set of truths for another; I wish to set out how knowledge claims may be arrived at, how their validity may be tested, and how they may be used. So I test the validity of my claims – in this case that I am morally justified in speaking for, and to myself and encouraging others to do so, in spite of the hazards involved – through showing how I theorise what I do in methodologically and epistemologically rigorous terms; and I then go on and show how I use my knowledge for personal and social improvement.

Here is an account of my action enquiry, in which I identify an area of concern, explain why it is a concern, produce data and generate evidence to show the reality of existing and transforming situations, engage in validation procedures, and explain how I modify my practices in light of my evaluation (Whitehead and McNiff 2006).

WHAT IS MY CONCERN?

My concerns are similar to those of others, to do with what counts as knowledge, who is deemed a legitimate knower, how legitimisation processes are themselves given legitimacy, and how they are used. As noted, I am, like Foucault, interested in 'the problem of the truth-teller, or of truth-telling as an activity: ... who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power' (Foucault 2001, v). These issues involve other issues such as controlling minds and voices through the use of disciplinary power, and the use of language as a form of control through the exercise of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1992); and how these are then used as a means of subtle forms of coercion, to persuade people to create themselves as others wish them to be in order to maintain the current social order. I am interested in how these strategies then inform contemporary debates about, for example, peace processes and international relations (McNiff 2008b; McNiff in preparation).

The authors who have also expressed these concerns include Berlin, Whitehead, Said, Chomsky and Foucault. There are of course others, but these are the main ones for this article. I will give a brief account of their work, and say how we share common concerns.

Berlin's (1969) concerns about the nature and exercise of freedom lie in his resistance to monistic ways of thinking (Gray 1995), a view that freedom is always

grounded in choice, a kind of agonistic liberalism that inevitably involves ‘conflict and unavoidable loss among rivalrous goods and evils’ (*ibid*: 6). These ideas are echoed in Mouffe (1993), who speaks of the need for an acknowledged agonistic base for politically-constituted choices. Berlin’s ideas about freedom are that freedom has to be achieved by free people: the imposition of freedom is in fact the greatest form of tyranny (Berlin 2002). Sen (1999) develops this theme to show how freedom is a necessary condition for a sustainable society.

Ideas about the stultifying influences of reified forms of theory are pursued vigorously in the work of Whitehead (2008a), who insists on the need for new conceptualisations of theory, from its current dominant propositional form, to new living forms. Rejecting the idea that the only valid form of logic is a traditional Aristotelian form, with its exclusion of contradiction, and as this manifests in propositional forms of knowledge and monistic forms of intellectual and social practices, Whitehead promotes a dynamic transformational view of theory as in the living practices of practitioners as they ask, ‘How do I improve what I am doing for social and educational benefit?’ (2008b).

Berlin and Whitehead, in Said’s (1994) terms, position themselves as intellectuals who take seriously their responsibilities to challenge, in this case the existing epistemological stasis, not only in its social manifestations but also through the means of thought that underpin social practices. This is what Said himself does. In his view, the work of an intellectual is to challenge, to position her- or himself outside the mainstream, and to offer critique, not opposition for opposition’s sake, but ‘to advance human freedom and knowledge’ (Said 1994, 13). ‘I take critique so seriously,’ he says, ‘that, even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if these are to be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for’ (Said 1991, 28); recognising all the time that, while these are essential services to humanity and the continuity of a sustainable social order, ‘it doesn’t make one particularly popular’ (Said 1994, 17).

The reasons for why it doesn’t make one particularly popular make up the body of the political work of Chomsky, who reveals the hypocrisy of those who speak the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation, yet blatantly deny their own rhetoric through their politically-constituted social practices. He also reveals the kind of practices that are systematically conducted in relation to those who raise awkward questions (1997), explaining how, in non-democratic societies, it is easy to maintain control through violent means, whereas control in democratic countries involves finding ways to control the public mind, to persuade people to monitor themselves. This is achieved through the dissemination of public stories that say, to use a slogan popular in Northern Ireland, ‘that’s the way things are because that’s the way things are’. Foucault’s work focuses here, on how people’s bodies and minds are controlled through strategies such as the exercise of disciplinary power and the naming of difference as deviance: and how terms such as ‘madness’ (Foucault 2006), which are social constructions, enter the lexicon as reified items, and so take on a life of their

own because people are not generally aware that the discourses they engage in are themselves a construction and not a given.

These issues become concerns for me, for the reasons I give now, and they bring me to my next question in my action enquiry.

WHY AM I CONCERNED?

The insistence in many mainstream literatures that there is one correct way of thinking and one correct form of knowledge denies my values as a free, critically thinking human being, who is always already in process of becoming more than I am, and who comes to know in non-linear, intuitive ways of thinking. I understand my life as a gift from my God, and I respond to life with a sense of gratitude that I am here and not dead. My aim is to give back freely to life what life gives me, and to offer explanations for why I do so, out of a sense of my own moral accountability. I share the ways of thinking of Goethe (Bortoft 1996) and Vico (1999), about generative transformational ways of thinking and being. Chomsky (1986), Bohm (1983), and Bergson (1998) thought like this, too, seeing things always in process of becoming, each manifestation of a current transformation containing its future forms already within itself. I see this generative transformational capability in the unfolding flower on my desk, in my own ways of thinking, and in the forms of life of the people whose higher degree studies I support. I am caught, like Tillich (1962), by the power of being as becoming itself, the amazing power of the capability of all living things to recreate themselves in an infinitude of original forms.

I am therefore deeply concerned about how these evolutionary processes, especially in processes of personal and social evolution, are frequently blocked by the same monistic ways of thinking discussed above, that close down opportunities for people to become more than they are, because they are taught not to question and to remain as they are. I am concerned especially about the consequences for education, so that knowledge becomes ‘totally pedagogised’ (Bernstein 2000): it becomes embraced within the structures of control of established epistemologies and the pedagogical forms used to ensure the unquestioned continuation of those same structures. Part of this pedagogisation lies in the pedagogisation of language, as it then becomes a form of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991), brought under regulatory mechanisms of institutional control.

Moving to my contexts of higher education, I am concerned about how these regulatory mechanisms become a key feature of institutional life, and how academic practitioners are persuaded to conform. I have attended meetings where the talk has been of generating income or losing one’s job, within the new managerialist discourses of universities-as-businesses. I see clearly how these discourses are maintained by their underpinning epistemologies of divisiveness and control, an insistence on conformity in the interest of institutional service and a denial of the value of the university as a place where ‘constrained disagreement’ may flourish in the interests of nurturing ‘an educated public’ (MacIntyre 1990).

I am concerned about how the form of language itself is reconfigured to be commensurable with these epistemologies of stasis, and how these influence the development of mental models, and their transformational relationships with social practices, including the practices of academics in higher education settings. I am concerned about how the models find their way into the literatures, so that the culture is self-perpetuated through its own centripetal forms of communication.

HOW DO I SHOW THE SITUATION AS IT IS AND AS IT DEVELOPS?

Here are some of the ways in which the assumptions embedded in normative technical rational epistemologies manifest as forms of language that in turn inform social practices. Because this article is about life in higher education, I take my examples from my experiences of higher education institutional life. These are some quite trivial examples, yet symptomatic of profoundly non-trivial practices; it is possible to see them everywhere, to greater or lesser degree.

My first keyword is 'role'. Role is commonly understood as where and how a person is positioned within a given social or organisational structure (see Harré and van Langenhove's 1999 work on positioning theory). There is nothing new about the idea of a place for everything and everything in its place as the basis of a social order; the Greeks had it, and built their empires on the foundations of stereotypical social practices. In much contemporary organisational life, role is assumed as given, articulated as a job description on an official form. In some literatures, management development is communicated as learning how to manipulate roles for maximum efficiency (Silberger 1994). It is automatically assumed that we all have a role, or multiple roles, in life. In professional practices this is often (mis-)understood as a professional identity: people are expected to create their identities in relation to their given role. Many people spend a lot of time trying to fill the role, without questioning the job description or whether there should be a role in the first place.

This idea, grounded in a technical rational epistemology of 'either this or that', and which denies contradiction or ambivalence, is relevant to the structural analysis of groups and the formulation of models. Bourdieu's (1990) work with traditional groupings shows these kinds of structural relationships. Yet Bourdieu himself commented that, while structural analysis may be valuable for understanding what is going on, it does not contribute to explanations for why people do as they do. This argument was also pursued by others, for example, by Chomsky (1957), who famously challenged the idea that a focus on the structures of language, while offering descriptions and empirical evidence of language use, could not offer explanations for the capacity of children for unlimited acts of language creation; and by Derrida (1997) and others who revealed the socially constructed nature of language, as well as the hegemony of the mental models involved in the legitimation of normative forms. These kinds of studies amounted to an epistemological turn: from an awareness that models of social reality do not necessarily represent the reality in question, while, ironically, actually replacing the reality under study with the new reality of the model itself; to a deeper appreciation

of how creators of knowledge are personally involved in their own creation, and needs to show how they are accountable for what they know and how they come to know it. Hence questions need to be raised about the stasis to be found in some disciplines where the focus remains on conforming to the reality of the model, rather than offering explanations of how and why it should be necessary to do so.

This state of affairs concerns me in relation to my own work in educational research, in that educational research (research that is educational for those involved) has in some quarters been colonised by the social sciences, and is now positioned by some within a re-branded discipline named ‘education research’ (Whitty 2005) (research about education in general), while its ambit is distinguished as contributing to normative discourses about how the epistemological status quo may be reproduced and strengthened. Technical rational forms of epistemology, and the kind of discourses they generate, frequently remain the epistemologies of choice in higher education, which becomes an especially alarming circumstance in relation to the professional education of practitioners, which is my field.

I engage with the stasis, including the view of structural analysis as the most productive way of enabling personal and professional development, focusing instead on encouraging people to offer descriptions and explanations for their own education as they ask, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ (Whitehead 1989).

Let me tell a story to illustrate the kinds of practices I am describing.

I recently expressed interest in applying for the post of co-editor of a refereed journal, and I was invited to meet with the other editors for an informal conversation. When I arrived at the appointed venue, I was greeted by three editors, including a chair, who outlined how the interview would be conducted. I responded that I was not there for an interview. I had come for an informal conversation, as invited. Evidently put out, the chair continued by asking why I had decided to apply for the post. I responded that I was not applying for a post, that I was there for a conversation, but, while we were on the subject, what was it about me that had prompted the invitation for me to visit? The chair responded that I was the one being interviewed ... and so it continued. Our e-mails crossed the following morning, each rejecting the other.

And so it goes, in social interactions everywhere. It is not that one party is right and the other wrong, but that they come at things from different ontological and epistemological perspectives, and neither understands how the other is incapable of seeing their point of view; so they end up talking past each other; and opportunities for encounters, as the basis of social sustainability, are lost, and attitudes become further entrenched.

So, what is to be done, to avoid retrenchment, and transform it into life-affirming experience?

WHAT CAN I DO? WHAT WILL I DO?

The action I take is to encourage people, and myself, to become critical. This means first loosening up stable categories and beginning to think in fluid, dynamic forms.

This can be hard for people who have grown up in an epistemological system that sees everything in terms of stable categories, because it means destabilising the idea of stability, and involves deconstructing the form of thinking that one is using to think with.

Take for example the idea of identity and role, discussed above. Countless individuals throughout the history of thought have resisted identifying themselves in terms of normative categories. Foucault, for example, refused for years to position himself as a homosexual, on the grounds that he did not readily fit into a given category but was working out his idea of the experience of personal identity (Miller 1993). Said (1994) sees the position of exile both as the existential circumstance of being removed from family and home, as well as a creative opportunity to see things through the eyes of someone on the margins. I have been taken to task for not positioning myself as a feminist, and I choose not to, because I am not interested in belonging to a named group, with a badge as my qualifier, but am interested in processes of becoming, and why we choose to be who we become. Similarly with national identity: when people ask me where I come from, I do not know what to say. I am of Scots heritage, born and brought up in England, and have internalised Irish ways. Said (1994) theorises such attitudes as manifesting a commitment to beginnings (see also Said 1997). Drawing on the work of Vico (1999), he emphasises the importance of not seeing things simply as they are, but of looking beneath and behind, interrogating how the thing came to be as it is. This view is similar to Winter's (1989), about the need for dialectical critique, the capacity to understand how individuals in their social encounters are shaped by cultural, historical, economic, political and other forces.

This is what I do, in my professional life. I resist committing to normative assumptions about role, identity and self, or to monistic ways of thinking of any form, and I encourage others also to interrogate their own assumptions about how they are positioned, and how they learn to position themselves. I find that the insights people develop through becoming critical more than vindicate the personal dissonance that choosing to do so inevitably entails. Here are three excerpts from masters dissertations I have supported that show this in action.

Julie Pearson, a senior lecturer in physical education, says:

I have realised through my research that I have been schooled in certain ways of thinking and have reproduced the practices I have come to view as the "norm" and for which I have been rewarded [as a professional educator]... I understand now that my traditional form of pedagogy not only raised the value of the "norm" (Derrida 1981), but also devalued me as a professional educator and as a facilitator of change. I was failing myself alongside those I was supporting (past, present and future). Now, however, since beginning to become more critical of my epistemological stance, and of my practice, I no longer view myself as more knowledgeable than those I teach, or as a member of a "specialised class" (Chomsky 2000). I now position myself alongside the students I teach, becoming part of the teaching and learning process. I have moved from a knowledge-getting process (Bruner 1966, 72) towards knowledge creation,

allowing for the interaction and creative encounters between people (Elliott 1998) in order to progress and improve. In a constructively critical manner, I have begun to challenge the process of learning by challenging my own practice (Schön 1995). (Pearson 2008, 6–7)

Alex Sinclair, a senior lecturer in science, says:

The significance of my research can also be thought of in terms of developing new forms of theory and how I am generating my own living theory of practice. In this way I am contributing to the debates surrounding the nature of education and pedagogies and what constitutes knowledge. By encouraging my students to learn independently I am asking them to make their learning explicit. In turn they will be developing their own living theories around their practice and hopefully developing a critical approach towards reflection and critical thinking. In this way it may break the cycle of socialising teachers as unthinking implementers of normative theories who may be able to pass on these necessary skills to the children they subsequently teach. I hope that it has been possible for my students to have learnt with me as I gain a better understanding of how I can best develop my practice and that I am working towards an epistemology of symbiotic practice. (Sinclair 2008, 17)

Tsepo Majake, a teacher of mathematics and mathematical literacy in Khayelitsha, writes about his experience of becoming critical through the St Mary's University College MA programme:

[In my earlier days of perceiving myself as a victim of apartheid], the most important defining point of my practice was how I complained about the lack of resources, adequate training, developmental support, funding, huge class numbers and social problems. I always shifted the blame for learners' non-performance and lack of production to the state, and my dissatisfaction was motivated by what I could not change... .

Through my studies, I have made myself critical ...

As a group, we educators in Khayelitsha are exploring all opportunities in relation to seeing teaching as a form of scholarship, as our practice of teaching gives rise to new forms of knowledge. The new scholarship has been interpreted by our group as a practice that raises important issues whose investigation may lead to influencing and encouraging new and prospective enquiries of relevance and actionability. It also means generating knowledge for and from knowledge, as Schön (1995) advises. We also consider, as a group, how we concentrate as much on our relationships as on our tasks, and what we need to do to strengthen them. These kinds of relationships are likely to influence the interactions in our schools, and also the department that employs us... . We focus on how we can exercise our educational influence in learners' learning by encouraging them to do things for themselves, as we do, as they chart their paths to responsible and committed citizenship. (Majake 2008, 3–4)

HOW DO I SHOW THAT ANY CONCLUSIONS I COME TO ARE REASONABLY FAIR AND ACCURATE?

By presenting evidence in the form of practitioners' testimonies, as well as my own, I aim to fulfil my moral and methodological obligations to showing how I justify both my form of life, and also my claims to knowledge. My linking of the concepts is deliberate, for I see researchers' capacity to explain the quality of their practice as grounded in their capacity to explain the processes by which they have arrived at that quality. This stance is commensurable with what I have discussed above, about the importance of interrogating the historical underpinnings of truth claims. It is also one of the social criteria that Habermas (1976) recommends for testing the validity of truth claims:

I shall develop the thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated (or redeemed). Insofar as he [*sic*] wants to participate in a process of reaching understanding, he cannot avoid raising the following – and indeed precisely the following – validity claims. He claims to be:

1. Uttering something understandably;
2. Giving (the hearer) something to understand;
3. Making himself thereby understandable; and
4. Coming to an understanding with another person.

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified (Habermas 1976, 2–3).

In relation to this article, I claim that I am demonstrating the fulfilment of each of Habermas's criteria; and, in relation to issues about the problematics of the truth-teller and of truth-telling, the criterion regarding awareness of a normative background takes on special priority. For it is only by explaining how we have arrived at our current position, and seeing the present as historically constituted, that we can think realistically and creatively about how we can improve it, and, specifically, how we do not repeat the same mistakes that led to the situation in the first place.

This has special relevance for the kind of responsible epistemological conduct I am discussing here, which in turn has special relevance for contexts of intense

social evolution, such as South Africa, and the part that higher education can play in ensuring the sustainability of those same processes.

This brings me to the final section of my research account, to do with how I can develop my own ideas and practices in light of my evaluation.

HOW DO I MODIFY MY IDEAS AND PRACTICES IN LIGHT OF MY EVALUATION?

I remain of the view that the academy is still one of the most powerful bodies for the legitimisation for what counts as knowledge and who should be regarded as a knower, and that it therefore still has a powerful influence in processes of social and cultural transformation. Yet I have to recognise that the nature, form and indeed purposes of the academy are changing, and this change is probably irreversible; and I wonder if it is possible to live within these rapid processes of ontological and structural change, while still holding fast to the kind of values that contribute to sustainable societies, and whose perpetuation remains, in my view, the proper business of intellectuals. I agree with Said (1994) who speaks of the intellectual as charged with the responsibility of ‘asking *the* basic question ...: how does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where?’ (Said 1994, 65, emphasis in original); and that intellectuals represent themselves as ‘an unafraid and compassionate intellectual’ (1994, 74), who ‘does not climb a mountain or pulpit and declaim from the heights’, but recognises that their voice ‘is lonely, [and] has resonance only because it associates itself freely with the reality of a movement, the aspirations of a people, the common pursuit of a shared ideal’ (1994, 75). My view is that this vision will remain unrealised as long as higher education practitioners give in to institutional requirements to position themselves as traditional academics within the new managerialist discourses of higher education that require conformity to the norm as a means of achieving appropriate levels of cultural distinction (Bourdieu 1991), and as a marker of economic competitive edge.

Considerable hope, however, rests in the practices of those academics, in South Africa and elsewhere, who have transformed themselves into unafraid and compassionate intellectuals, and whose accounts may be found in the knowledge bases located at www.actionresearch.net and www.jeanmcniff.com. These accounts represent a new culture of a new scholarship of educational knowledge (Whitehead 2008c), on the same understanding of culture as represented by Said (1993, xiii), as including ‘a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1960s.’ Nor is this an exclusive culture of privilege but one that contributes to social evolution, the ‘best selves and best thoughts ...’ that ‘take place for the benefit ... of the whole society’ (Said 1994, 22). The task of intellectuals in this endeavour is to help ‘a national community feel more of a sense of common identity, and a very elevated one at that’.

Here are some of the accounts that show how intellectuals are accounting for their practices, to others and to themselves:

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Jane Spiro's (2008) Ph.D. Thesis: *How I have arrived at a notion of knowledge transformation, through understanding the story of myself as creative writer, creative educator, creative manager, and educational researcher?* Ph.D. thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/janespirophd.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

JeKan Alder-Collins' (2008) Ph.D. Thesis: *Developing an inclusional pedagogy of the unique: How do I clarify, live and explain my educational influences in my learning as I pedagogise my healing nurse curriculum in a Japanese University?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/jekan.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Eden Charles' (2007) Ph.D. Thesis: *How can I bring Ubuntu as a Living Standard of Judgement into The Academy? Moving beyond decolonisation through societal reidentification and guiltless recognition.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/edenphd.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Barry Hymer's (2007) Ed.D. Thesis: *How do I understand and communicate my values and beliefs in my work as an educator in the field of giftedness?* Ed.D. Psych. Thesis, University of Newcastle. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/hymer.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Margaret Farren's (2005) Ph.D. Thesis: *How can I create a pedagogy of the unique through a web of betweenness?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/farren.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Marian Naidoo's (2005) Ph.D. Thesis: *I Am Because We Are (A Never-ending Story). The emergence of a living theory of inclusional and responsive practice.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/naidoo.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Mary Hartog's (2004) Ph.D. Thesis: *A Self Study of a Higher Education Tutor: How can I improve my practice?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/hartog.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Madeline Church's (2004) Ph.D. Thesis: *Creating an Uncompromised Place to Belong: why do I find myself in networks?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/church.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Ram Punia's (2004) Ed.D. Thesis: *My CV is My Curriculum: the Making of an International Educator with Spiritual Values.* Ed.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/punia.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Jack Whitehead's (1999) Ph.D. Thesis: *How do I Improve my Practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Available at: <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/jack.shtml>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

The following accounts are especially noteworthy for their contributions to social justice as the basis for sustainable social transformation.

Margaret Cahill's (2007) Ph.D. thesis: *My Living Educational Theory of Inclusional Practice*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Limerick. Available at: <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/reports.html>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Máirín Glenn's (2006) Ph.D. thesis: *Working with Collaborative Projects: My living theory of a holistic educational practice*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Limerick. Available at: <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/glennabstract.html>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Caitríona McDonagh's (2007) Ph.D. Thesis: *My Living Theory of Learning to Teach for Social Justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realise our learning potentials?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Limerick. Available at: <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/mcdonaghabstract.html>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Mary Roche's (2007) Ph.D. Thesis: *Towards a Living Theory of Caring Pedagogy: Interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just community of enquiry*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Limerick. Available at: <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/reports.html>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

Bernie Sullivan's (2006) Ph.D. thesis: *A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Limerick. Available at: <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/reports.html>. Accessed on 28 June 2008.

The significance of this work is well summed up in the comment by Julie Pearson about her own process of making herself critical, in the interests of social sustainability.

I now realise through my engagement with my Masters studies that I have always been capable of learning and generating new theory, but that I have been previously silenced by the systems in which I engaged and unwittingly served. I have moved from being an academic to being an intellectual (Said 1994); rethinking assumptions and generating new critical knowledge.

I believe that if given opportunities to work in environments where learning can be shared and experiences are valued, colleagues may also be motivated to improve their practices; learning through action and new informed action. By encouraging colleagues within the teaching profession to undertake their action enquiries, I hope to demonstrate the opportunities for research and change within practice. I wish to engage in research which explores and directly informs practice. I view my role as a professional educator to facilitate opportunities for people to use their own voices (Glavey 2008) and to express their experiences and understanding of primary education and help to deconstruct authoritarian voices that speak for or on behalf of others. I hope that, as I have, colleagues may transform themselves from being submissive conformists to

being active change agents in their own lifeworld (Fullan 1993). The more individuals I can assist to increase their self confidence, skills or knowledge alongside my own, the better I believe the quality of educational experience will be for the people we teach. (Pearson 2008, 18–19)

My own commitments continue, through supporting the higher degree enquiries of higher education practitioners who are prepared to show how they hold themselves accountable for their practices, to others and to themselves. I believe, deep in my heart, that we come to where we are for a distinct purpose, and it is the responsibility of each individual to create him-/herself as a person who can fulfil his/her purpose on earth. For time is short, and life will not wait until tomorrow. Whatever needs to be done, needs to be done today. This is the message I give to myself, as I move from writing this article to the next assignment on the desk.

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