

## Living Educational Theory Development of a Black African (Zulu) Male Educator

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### Abstract

This paper is a product of my research thesis as I reflected on the influences in my development. It provides a narrative through which my living-educational-theory based on *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (respect) was developed and applied in my management of a rural high school. The questions I wish to answer are: How and when was my living-educational-theory developed? How did I successfully manage a rural high school with meager resources? The questions are answered as I unpack how I managed *Mthusi* High School as the headmaster.

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**Keywords:** Auto-Ethnography; Living Theory' Rural High School' Practitioner-Research.

## Introduction

This paper is a product of my reflections on the influences in my development. What used to be called ‘autobiography’ tends today to be seen as auto-ethnography, that is, reflective writing on our own lives and practice. Caroline Ellis describes it thus:

“Auto-ethnography is qualitative research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyses personal experience in order to understand personal experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing...and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially conscious act. ...auto-ethnography is both a process and a product.” (Ellis *et al.*, 2011)

This naturally involves observing the environment and talking with others. The paper offers a narrative form of enquiry that both engages with cultural issues, as in auto-ethnography, and generates a living-educational-theory of my educational influences in learning in which *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ikuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (respect) are values from my Zulu heritage that I use as explanatory principles of my educational influence in learning.

In other articles, I shared my early years, rural African heritage and oralate culture (Gumede, 2017; Gumede & Mellett, 2019). In this one, I focus on my experiences and my values in my teacher training, teaching and administrative years. I will provide discourse of my narrative as an example of Living Educational Theory practice. The question arises of how I successfully manage a rural high school with meager resources despite my inadequate two-year training as a teacher. I will give an account of my first school visit to the new school, learners’/my attitudes, educators’ attitudes, the Department of Education’s contribution, parental contribution, developments, successes and my farewell function. In this paper I demonstrate how and when my living-educational-theory was developed. I will define what a living-educational-theory is and how my living-educational-theory was developed.

I explain how I successfully managed a rural high school with meager resources notwithstanding my two-years’ training as a teacher. I then reflect on how and when I learned my management-style that was based on my living-educational-theory as an educator. I answer the question about the educational influences I received that shaped my management-style. What conditions prevailed in my life that formed fertile ground for the development of my management? I must state that my success was not an individual effort but a collective endeavour. The accolades were bestowed on me as a headmaster of the school. I represented the educators and the school community. I believe that what the school achieves is not only the result of the effort of educators and learners. It is also influenced by families from whence the learners come and who play a major, often unnoticed, role in shaping the lives of the learners. The school adds on to what the families have already done.

I then reflect on education in general, teaching in rural schools in the Republic of South Africa and Living Educational Theory, and give a word of advice to educators. I thus end up with a conclusion to this paper. In these reflections I draw on my reviewers’ responses in the open review space of EJOLTs, to explain how the validity of my explanations of educational influences in learning could be strengthened by widening the participation of my peers and colleagues in the validation of the claims I make in this paper. I also draw on

these responses to explain how they relate to the sociology of absences, to intercultural translation, to subalternity (de Sousa Santos, 2014), to the 'I in the We' (Honneth, 2016) and to the words of Ben Okri (1996) on values and stories in Africa:

"Africa is a land bristling with too many stories and moods. This over-abundance of stories, this population, is a sort of chaos. A land of too many stories is a land that doesn't necessarily learn from its stories. It should trade some of its stories for clarity. Stories hint both at failure and celebration. Dying lands breed stories in the air like corpses breed worms. A land beginning to define itself, to create beauty and order from its own chaos, moves from having too many moods and stories in the air to having clear structures, silences, clear music, muted and measured celebrations, lucid breezes, freed breathing, tentative joys, the limpid freshness of new dawns over places sighted across the sea for the first time. If suffering breeds stories, then the transformation of suffering into a higher order and beauty and functionality breathes tranquility." (pp. 26-27)

### **Socio-historical Context**

An extensive autobiography is contained in Appendix 1, of the paper I wrote with Peter Mellett (Gumede & Mellett, 2019). This paper is focused on the teaching and administrative years. I started teaching in 1981 after a two-year junior secondary teachers' training at Amanzimtoti Zulu Training School. The training school was one of the Apartheid era training schools that emphasized ethnicity as a means of entrenching the Apartheid Policy of the National Party regime. Towards the completion of the teachers' course, the training school introduced a three-year course. Because I felt that I had not received adequate training, I wanted to enroll for the third year of the course that already had third year students in 1984. I was disappointed when I was told that since the curriculum was not the same as the one I had passed in 1980, I could not enroll. I now realize that my disappointment was actually an illusion born out of the belief that the three-year training was better than my two-year training. My disappointment was short-lived because as I enrolled with the University of South Africa I became fully engaged in open distance learning-undergraduate studies.

### **What is Living Educational Theory research?**

Whitehead (2008) asserts that:

"A living [educational] theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work" (p. 104).

Whitehead's declaration has challenged me to reflect and to demonstrate how and when my living-educational-theory was developed. In the narrative below I use my values of *Ubuntu* and *Ukukhlonipha/inhlonipho* as explanatory principles in my explanation of my educational influence in my own learning. As in all Living Educational Theory research my living-educational-theory methodology emerges as I explore the implications of asking, researching and answering my questions. Given the influence of my responses to Apartheid in my educational development I make explicit these sociocultural and sociohistorical influences in my living-educational-theory.

## **My narrative: How was my living-educational-theory developed?**

In order to give you a full understanding of the source of my values, I will review my early school experiences.

### **Primary and secondary education**

I attribute my values-based development and success to my family, my carer (nanny) my involvement in sport, my school career, my community-involvement and my teaching. These all had huge educational influences in my learning. I learned *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (respect) from my family. My family taught me self-respect and respect for other people. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were served at fixed times: 7:00, 12:00 and 18:00 hours every day. Failure to honour the times was a serious offence and punishable. That discouraged us as children from eating at the neighbour's house or have anything that would make one not eat during lunch or dinner out of respect for my family.

I came to school with minor challenges, though, as I had not been at a crèche (pre-school). However, I had in my small way learnt the concept of time as I had minor chores such as waking up early in the morning in order to feed the fowls, and go to the garden to water my vegetables. I would also accompany my nanny when she went to our main garden to plant or remove weeds. As a male and second-born in the family, I also learnt to respect my two younger sisters that I played with, sometimes very harshly. I was taught to treat them with respect, as they were the princesses of the family. The one that came after me was literally named Makhosazana Princesses. I was also given an idea of what to expect from school as our home was a miniature school in many ways since my father was a teacher. I see we were sometimes treated as his pupils, as I now reflect on how he would give us advice or punishment.

My primary school education occurred in two schools. From Sub-standard A to Standard 2, an equivalent of Grades 1-4, I attended a small primary school that ended in Grade 6 with seven educators including the headmaster. A high level of discipline was exercised by a male headteacher, who I then thought was feared but now realize that he was respected. His respect came from the pedagogical love, understanding and trust that he had. Strict but very approachable, he respected the female teachers and offered them full authority to exercise discipline.

I found the next school I went to for my Standard 3-6 (the equivalent of Grades 5-8) quite different from my previous school. The autocratic headmaster had total disrespect for education and the other twelve educators. The two male and nine female educators were not at liberty to give their suggestions about school management. I soon realized that laxity was prompted by the headmaster who managed the school like his home. For an example, at any time learners would be asked to go and collect wood for the headmaster's family or be asked to sing for the headmaster. A new headmaster arrived who managed the school in a similar way to the one I knew from my previous primary school, making my final year at my primary school very constructive in preparing for secondary education. Extra classes in the morning and on Saturdays instilled in me the knowledge that to achieve better results more time needs to be allocated to schoolwork.



**Image 1.** Jerome at 16 years old (Gumede & Mellett, 2019, p. 35)

My secondary school years, Forms 1-5 (the equivalent of Grades eight to twelve) really shaped me for the future. As a normal practice, all Black learners had to spend thirteen years to complete their school career, which caused Black learners to be a year behind learners of other racial groups even if they had started school in the same year. The headmaster of my secondary school, a loving educator, gifted in music who exhibited *Ubuntu* (humanity), was respected and feared but he seldom laughed. I learned a good lesson from him; that is, success comes through effort. As a choirmaster he would have additional choir practices in the evening or during weekends if his choir was not up to the standard he wanted. He knew that education was created through a good balance between schoolwork and extra mural activities. There was a high level of discipline and time was well managed and used profitably. One common practice that I really appreciated was that if the educator had not turned up to the class, a prefect was allowed to remind the educator about their duty of coming to class and teach. Learners were given the privilege to report any misdemeanor either from other learners or the educators.

As in my previous primary schools, my secondary school had no library but we, as learners, were given the taste of how the library works. The school had a room with books and we learners were to visit the room to collect two books that we were to finish reading in two weeks. For every book completed we had to write a summary as part of private reading. I must confess, for my first year, the practice of private reading was not my favourite activity, but I later enjoyed private reading and came to love reading. At a later stage, my father would send me to a book-exchange for his novels and also give me some to read. The school's practice of private reading and my father's giving me books to read were the foundation of my love for reading and my realization of the importance of education.

### **Postsecondary work and teacher training**

My intuitive observation of primary, secondary school and training school headmasters and magistrates offered me opportunities to observe and compare their management styles and thus develop my own management style. After completing Form 5, Grade twelve, I went to work as a pensions' clerk. I learned my duties in office-management without a mentor and supervisor. I would do my job and report my progress and challenges to the magistrate. Years later, after my training as an educator, I met the magistrate to whom I was reporting and he asked me when the Department of Education was going to give me my school to manage. I was so surprised I could not reply to his question. I simply

smiled and continued with the conversation. Later it dawned on me that as an experienced manager the magistrate identified my management skills from the type of work I produced as a clerk. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations* (1986) wrote that, "... the aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity". Although I experienced great satisfaction from being a clerk because I was helping the destitute and living my value of *Ubuntu*, it never dawned on me that I was actually developing management skills, since the work was simple and familiar to me and I could not see what I was capable of. Upon reflection, I now realise how blessed I was to have had that opportunity of working alone unsupervised as that helped me to live my values of *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (respect) in my teaching and administrative years.

My teacher-training school was well-resourced compared to all my previous schools. The training school combined both secondary and teacher-training learners/students. Even though combining secondary and teacher-training students was unacceptable and teacher-training students were treated like high-school learners, the teacher-training management-team never bothered about complaints. The whole school was governed by the same rules. There was rule number sixteen of the prospectus which read, "Comply and complain later", which in disguise meant there is no need to complain. While the headmaster of the school was an *Afrikaner*, the whole management was composed of White educators with a few Black educators as staff members. Two staffrooms, one for Whites and one for Blacks, was considered normal in the Republic of South Africa before 1994, as even the schools were run on racial lines.

One morning on my second year at the training school I was summoned to the headmaster's office who gave me six good lashes with a cane on my buttocks without explanation about why I was being punished. That evening the head prefect came to my dormitory and asked me to pack my personal effects, since from that day I would be the dormitory prefect. Dormitory Number 3 was known for housing the troublesome, mostly high-school learners, and I successfully managed the dormitory, so I accrued vast experience in human resource management. On reflection, I realised that there was somebody from the prefect body of the previous year who was secretly observing my moves and made recommendations that I was suitable for being a prefect, but I still needed a warning to mend my ways.

I can also attribute my success as an educator and headmaster to the experience I gained as a dormitory prefect at teacher-training school and my two years' experience as a clerk. My management style, based on my values of *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho*, was quite different from that of other prefects, in that, during my tenure as a prefect, not a single student received any punishment. I can attribute that to my weekly meetings that were held in my dormitory during which rules were read and potential delinquents were deterred from their shenanigans. I can also attribute my success of managing my dormitory to my two years' experience as a clerk. Working unsupervised taught me self-discipline, which I believe was noticeable in my conduct. My approach to my dormitory mates was not very much approved of, as it was more corrective than punitive. Any authority during the Apartheid era was punitive authority that saw subordinates as culprits rather than members of good governance. I then suffered the consequences of my approach as I was viewed as a rebel who did not conform to the accepted standards of management that were in tandem

with the agreed norms. At the closing function I was offered a certificate for my duties, but the headmaster refused to sign it because he regarded me as a rebel prefect. I felt badly about having an unsigned certificate but was happy because I did what my heart and values drove me to do.

### **Teacher**

I started teaching in 1981 in a school that was similar to my second primary school in all respects. The school was managed with some laxity that made teaching and learning difficult. The worst part of it was the over-enrolment in classes, with some classes having as many as eighty learners, most of whom were beyond school age. This was caused by, among other factors, the scarcity of secondary schools and the level of education in rural areas. During the 1970s there were three secondary schools in an area of about 70 square kilometers and only one offered matriculation-level education. The principal was a hard worker who was more in the classroom than in his office. He did most of his office work after school or at weekends. I now realize that he was trained as a primary school teacher and owning a class was what he was used to. His working style was disadvantageous in that his subordinates were not following his example of hard work. There was very little supervision and some teachers abused his management style. Within six months as a teacher, I was offered an unofficial deputy headmaster's post. This came as a surprise but on reflection, I now comprehend what the magistrate meant about me managing a school.

After three years in my first school, I was seconded to another school to replace a teacher who was ill, and subsequently received a medical boarding/incapacity. I was transferred in 1984 to a better school, Mshweshwe High School. It is at this school that I met educators who were doing distance-learning through the University of South Africa. The educators would discuss their assignment questions and I would listen and, in some cases, comment if they gave me a chance. Motivated by them, I enrolled for my junior degree the following year, in 1985, after leaving their school and returning to my previous school. After my transfer back to my first school, in which I had learned proper teaching through class visits by the principal, it had been upgraded and had a high-school section.

### **Living my values as a headmaster**

My experiences compared to Viktor Frankl's experiences were minor compared with his, but I wish to borrow his words as he avers that, "What is to give light must endure burning."

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/50275-what-is-to-give-light-must-endure-burning>).

The challenges that I faced ranged from a poor school environment to a student rebellion, to unqualified teachers, to lack of resources and to a school-closure. I think that you will see that these challenges posed a massive test of my values of *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho*.

With the certainty that I had been successful in being appointed as headmaster in 1992, I visited the school before it opened in order to have an idea of what lay ahead of me. My excitement turned to tears of despair. This was caused by the tall grass that the school premises had. I was from a big and well managed school with a lawn that was beautiful and well managed. My mind soon reverted to challenges that I had faced and overcome in my

family and my previous work situations. I had also accumulated or formulated strategies in my mind and knew that I had no choice but take the bull by its horns. I went home, brooding about the challenges that I saw coming, thinking about the tall grass and the weeds and dreamed of the school with neat well managed premises. With no vehicle of my own, I even imagined myself carrying tools and other essentials for maintaining the school. This was the first of many challenges.

### **Learning from the challenges**

My attitude towards the school changed as I was the leader and realized that I had bitten off more than I could chew. I had only seen a tip of an iceberg of what lay ahead of me. I was shocked when the school opened. The picture of what I had from my first teaching school came as a double reality. The school had one hundred and twenty-nine Grade Eight and Nine learners. The learners were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-six. *Mthusi* Secondary School was the first one in the area and the learners were very proud of being secondary school learners. Their pride shocked me as I was amazed at their low level of education. Some knew very little and for some of the learners even writing was a challenge. The reason behind this was that the previous year there were teaching-staff challenges and they did not receive proper tuition.

The biggest challenge was that they were not prepared to be taught by us as new teachers. When I arrived, there were two educators who had only a single year's experience and one of them was my former high school learner. I then recruited two educators, a male and a female; both were formerly primary school teachers and I had not taught Grades Eight and Nine. Therefore, it was presumed that we were "unfit" educators for the learners. I believe somebody poisoned the well upon realizing the strength of the formidable army of educators that we were. I also believe there were people who wanted to see us as educators fail in our duty.

Being regarded as "unsuitable to teach *Mthusi* learners", as was said, I learned to use words very wisely. It was a difficult challenge, but I know how it helped me in my management style. I learned that when I talk to people, I should bear in mind that they might not agree with everything I am saying. I also learned that people have their own expectations and that I must accept that I cannot meet all their expectations. I now comprehend how some language can be abused to achieve ulterior motives. Wittgenstein (1986) believed that, "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language", achieved deliberately using words out of context in order to cause confusion. He then declares that, "philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday". That refers to the idea that the, "meaning of words is taken out of its context and used at a metaphysical level". He compares the metaphysical context or environment to being on frictionless ice that then causes problems that can be resolved if philosophers return to the "rough ground" of everyday language. I also learned that I can only be responsible for expectations that I know about. I learned that being a headmaster needs patience and understanding, that learners as suggestible beings who sometimes fail to evaluate what has been given to them due to their lack of maturity.



### **A crisis resolved: common problem and solution**

The only educators the learners were prepared to accept were their previous year's educators. I convened a staff meeting in which I pointed out the challenge that we were facing. I innately sensed that amongst the group were the people who gave the students the information that we were 'unfit'. I then put the matter to the staff members for open discussion. With no ready solution to the challenge, I opened the conversation with an admission that it was true I had not taught Grades Eight and Nine before, except during my practice teaching, but that I had experience in teaching Grades Ten, Eleven and Twelve, as well as adults at the Adult Centre. I asked each educator to put forward his or her case and it came out that the two new educators had only one year's experience and the other two educators had primary education teaching experience.

I finally said that it was obvious that we were new to the situation, that we all had a challenge and then asked for a change of heart and attitude and that our next move would be to face the learners and convince them that they too had a challenge. Our common obstacles included: Grade Nines were all new in the grade; some repeaters came from other schools; and there were Grade Eight repeaters. I could hear the sighs from the educators as something new came to light. The two options were for us to close the school and wait for appropriate educators as the learners so wished, or continue doing something while a request for suitable educators was tabled with the Department of Education.

The evident response of continuing with teaching was favoured by all with a change in attitude and knowing that as we moved forward challenges were likely. While this was not an easy move, it was the only one to take so as to rescue the situation. The educators returned to their respective classes where the proposal was presented before the final discussion during assembly. The matter was disseminated to the whole school and an agreement on the second choice was reached. We, as the staff, reported the matter to our ward manager who applauded us for the achievement. This was the binding factor for the 'unfit' staff. We then started teaching. It was not smooth sailing because the learners needed more attention as their previous year's learning had not been very successful.

### **System obstacles**

The school had a great shortage of equipment in the form of books and desks, so I went to the neighbouring schools and borrowed some. Though there were not sufficient, we were able to teach with these meagre resources. There were also complaints that I, as the headmaster, was not doing my job properly because some of the learners had to sit on cement blocks that had been left behind when the school was built. I made requisitions from the department, but it took over a year for the desks to be delivered. On the day of their delivery the community was 'over the moon' and I started to see 'the light' after 'the burning'.

The next challenge was that of obtaining books for the learners as only the educators had copies of textbooks to prepare their lessons and teach, which prevented educators from giving assignments and projects. It was also difficult for parents to buy books because the department had announced in the media that books would be supplied, and parents did not know which books would be supplied by the province and which they would have to buy

themselves. As a matter of procedure, only certain grades received books every year. When I arrived, the school budget stood at less than R7000-00 with which I had to operate a school with 129 learners in Grades Eight and Nine.

Many learners were unruly because they were mostly beyond school-going age; for example, we had a learner of twenty-five years in Grade Nine, when the normal age for that Grade was fourteen to fifteen years. The problems were further compounded by the fact that those were times of political violence and most of the learners were part of the activities that were taking place in the community. Most of them saw discipline as 'oppression'. The slogan 'Liberation before Education' was a popular slogan in the 90s. For them, liberation of the country was more important than education, and as educators, we were seen as perpetrators of the oppressive system rather than the people who were there to help them.

### **School discipline: listening and persisting**

As a leader one faces many challenges that one has to tackle directly without fear of criticism or being ridiculed. Some of the issues that arose included disrespect for the environment, unruly student behavior, lack of parental support and school closure.

In 1995, a group of AIDS-awareness campaigners, in collaboration with the Health Department, chose *Mthusi* as a school with which they would work so as to raise HIV and AIDS awareness. At that time little was known about AIDS. Educators, the community and learners took part in assisting the health-workers and the Dram Aide group, as it was called, from the University of Natal. At the closing function of the project, learners as well as the community, were each offered an apple, a banana, a bread-roll, juice and an orange. Before they finished eating, I went into my office so as to do the final touches to my work before leaving.

When I left my office, I was shocked to see the school grounds densely littered with apple cores, banana skins, used toilet tissues, and orange peels. I stood for a few seconds still shocked. After a little while, I shouted "*Wozani la Bakwethu*" ("Come here, fellow people!"), calling everyone to the assembly area. The learners and community responded, and I then asked them whether they were aware that there was something wrong in the school. Silence followed. Then I realized that they saw nothing wrong with the litter that I saw on the ground. I still do not know now why I then spoke as I did. I told them that I was amazed to see that I had such a huge task to perform. Whilst they were shocked, I simply asked all those who wished to leave the school to do so, so as to give me enough time to clean the school ground, and I further said I needed no help. No one left but they all started to collect the litter and they left the school premises spotless. From that day onward, it became the school's principle never to throw even a sweet-wrapper on the ground. As a result, *Mthusi* was among the neatest, tidiest rural schools in the UGu District.

I do not think that what happened on that day was a deliberate action, but the learners and community had never had anyone face them about taking care of their environment before. I still do not understand why the throwing of apple and banana skins, used toilet tissues, and orange peel on the ground was done, and did not ask anyone about it. I now wish I had. As herd-boys we learnt *ukuhlanzeka* (cleanliness) and *ukuhlonipha imvelo* (respect for nature) and my mother's waking us up to sweep the yard at home

engendered the value of a clean environment. Seeing the litter shocked me and made me sensitive to seeing rubbish on the ground. My modelling of picking up rubbish encouraged the learners to pick them up whenever they saw me approaching. The incident narrated above occurred in my third year as the headteacher. My victory on the school premises was short lived.

As the number of learners increased, the nature of disciplinary problems increased. In 1996 with the introduction of a Grade eleven class, learners came from other schools. The newcomers complained about many things such as: “*Mthusi* is like a prison”, “Too much homework is given to learners”, and “There is no time for relaxation”. With regard to the comment about too much homework, a consultative meeting between the learners and educators resulted in an agreement that the school would develop a homework timetable that would stipulate the amount of homework to be given each day. Class monitors would ensure that no less or more homework was given each day. The homework issue later led to other consultative meetings that helped to improve relations among the school management team, the school governing body and the learners. The fact that all the stakeholders were listened to, made a huge difference in human-resource management. Most of the issues that would have led to problems were avoided. This taught me that listening to people as they complain is helpful in improving management in general.

Another thorny issue was that girls were forced to cut their hair short whilst they wanted to grow their hair because they wanted “to look good” at weekends. Learners voiced their complaints by writing them on scraps of cardboard and then hanging these publicly for me to see, as I was mostly the first person to arrive in the morning. On the first day, I did not show other teachers what I had found, but as the week went by, the messages grew stronger, and threats to my life and those of other teachers became part of the writings. I then called a staff meeting and read the messages to them. Some were so amazed and shocked that they applied for sick leave immediately and left. Out of a staff of ten educators, only three, including me, remained at school.

Learners who were willing to learn, especially the Grade Eleven students started accusing the lower grades of being the leaders in all sorts of unruly behaviour. This division, and the inability of the few educators in the staff to control the learners, led to more disruption up to the point that I had to hand over the keys to the school committee chairperson, and the school was closed. As educators we were not prepared to see our learners destroying their future or be party to them doing so, and were only prepared to help them to be better people. At the time of the unrest, we as educators were a solid team. When we were called to the circuit office to explain our position, despite suspicions that we were at fault, we were found not guilty, and asked to reopen the school after a week. In the first meeting we had with the community and learners, the parents plainly admitted their failure to control their children. Because of that statement, we willingly said we were prepared to assist those learners who wanted to come to our school and held no grudge because we believed that the learners’ actions were a sign that they needed our guidance. I politely asked that parents leave the school premises, learners go to their respective classes, teachers go to teach and whichever learner wished to leave the school was welcome to do so. After that, teaching and learning resumed as normal with minor hiccups.

I now see that the litter incidents at the Dram Aide closing function, as well as the unruly behaviour that led to the one-week closure of the school, were necessary ills for the community, learners as well as educators. The following year there was peace and tranquility in the school and most of those who had ulterior motives left the school with minimal fuss. In retrospect I am gratefully aware that my leadership then at *Mthusi* was respected and effective.

### **Experiencing success**

After the riot we enjoyed great support from the parents as well as the students, and because they saw that we educators had their interests at heart, they were willing to share their personal problems and we provided support when we could. When visitors from *Natal Technikon* came to our school in 2001, they asked us what caused our school not to perform to our expectations. Because there was no running water in the Shobeni area, we told them that late comers had to get up early to stand in long queues for water, which they then had to carry long distances before coming to school. From this conversation, we engaged in a research project in order to assist the community to get running water. The project took four days of walking in the community, going from homestead to homestead asking questions. After finishing the research, we approached the *Inkosi* of the area who was amazed at our dedication and concern about the community's and learners' suffering. Our efforts paid off as the community and the school now enjoy fresh and clean water. The community was proud of the school as a source of an improved quality of life. In fact, the school employed more than five members of the community as general assistants, administration officer and educators. In addition to helping with the water project, *Natal Technikon*, now known as *Durban University of Technology*, donated books that were used for the formation of a school library.

The school had considerable academic success in terms of National Senior Certificate presentations: in the first presentation, there were 82% passes, followed by two 100% passes and four 95% passes. After this I was promoted to Governance and Management Coordinator. What is pleasing is that the school has not had any result below 80% and there is a marked improvement in the quality of results than during my tenure.

The school had a popular annual cultural day, that was the highlight of the school year as well as speech and prize-giving day. These days bring joy to the community because they provide free entertainment. The activities have unearthed hidden talent in both the educators and learners in their acquired roles as organisers, poets, songwriters, reciters, dancers, cooks, and program directors. The activities have also enabled learners to travel as they present their activities in research days and other occasions linked with Universities, such as Durban University of Technology.

In addition to the developments the school enjoyed popularity, and learners as far as a thousand kilometers away enrolled at the school as they were guaranteed a pass as long as they worked hard. The school won several trophies in soccer and netball. The school also won a prize for the neatness of its premises, and the headmaster was awarded a certificate for Best Leadership in UGu District in 1997. Distance-learning has become the norm among the educators, and my deputy principal retired after obtaining her Doctor of Technology in Education.

My farewell function was held four months after my promotion to the new post. I still cherish the words of gratitude, reflections on my character (and some humorous ones) such as my willfulness, my sympathy and many aspects of my life and activities. I can honestly say that my farewell function made me understand who I was in the eyes of the people I spent eleven years of my life with as a headmaster. The farewell function made me a better person as I saw some of my bad characteristics as well. My farewell function became a miniature Johari window of my character. It offered me other perspectives of my character that I did not know about.



**Image 2.** Jerome in 2000, aged 42 (left) – A successful headteacher whose school had attained a 100% pass rate (Gumede & Mellett, 2019, p. 35)

Sadly, local control and local successes are no longer always the case, particularly when trade unions and politicians use the schools as their political battlegrounds. Wright sums this situation up:

“Leadership as the moral and value underpinning for the direction of schools is being removed from those who work there. It is now very substantially located at the political level where it is not available for contestation, modification or adjustment of local variations.” (Wright, 2001, p. 280, cited by Gold, 2003, p.130)

My management style, guided by my values of *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* is a combination of attributes that I got from my family, herding, sports, my school years, observing various headmasters as a learner, my work experience, as a student at teacher-training, my teaching and distance-learning. These experiences were the basis for the development of my living-educational-theory practice.

## **My learning in developing my living-educational-theory/ How have I improved my practice?**

My learning and improvement are evident in my doctoral research journey and development of my living-educational-theory based on *Ubuntu* and *ukuhlonipha*. This article deals with reflections on what transpired during and after the doctoral research process which included auto-ethnography, narrative, Living Educational Theory research and self-study as methods employed in my research enquiry: *An Auto-Ethnographic Enquiry: Critical Reflection on the Influences in the Development of a Black African Male Educator* (Gumede,

2011). I draw, also, from my Educational Journal of Living Theories' article, *Living Theory Development of a Black African (Zulu) Male Educator* (Gumede, 2017).

In this article I write about the values that are my explanatory principles and the challenges I faced in the course of my research (Gumede, 2011). I consider the doing of my research within the context of the HIV and AIDs pandemic to be a singular and significant challenge. As I wrote:

“In addition to my belief in *ubuntu* and *inhlonipho*, I see my doctoral research as having played a major role in refining my *ubuntu* and *inhlonipho*. My research has taught me humility in accepting that I need to be relearning a new way of learning and listening. I have grown to know that living theory development is not an activity that has an end, but it is always renewed as I do what is set for me to do.” (Gumede, 2017, p. 2)

In this paper I have written about the challenges in my research. Each challenge has provided an opportunity for change, for learning, for transformation – as contributions to the development of my character as a Black African Male Educator, whilst helping me to develop my living-educational-theory. It is based on *ubuntu* and *inhlonipho* (respect). My *ubuntu* was honed by my experiences as a herd-boy, in which the South African Proverb – *Umntu umuntu ngabantu* (people are people because of other people), was central in all our activities. As a student I spent my primary and school years in areas where poverty was rife and sharing half a loaf of dry bread among eight or more learners was normal practice. As a pensions' clerk serving the destitute, I learnt to appreciate people and their resilience. The destitute people (recipients of disability-grants, and old-age pensioners) shared the little they had and respected each other greatly. I received a lot of respect from them, which built on the respect that I was taught by my family, Sunday school and other schools.

As a student-teacher at training school, I learned about the management of human-resources when I was a dormitory-prefect. The respect I received from my dormitory-mates furthered my respect for other people. I learnt what it was to be a leader and about the mentality of followers, as well as understanding more about their needs. Through my involvement as a teacher and headmaster, and through various governance and management-roles, my *ubuntu* and *inhlonipho* were intensified. I wrote in my doctoral thesis that, “my anthropology gravitates around two poles: respect for life and respect for the individual” (Jousse, 2000, in Gumede, 2011, p. 39).

I consider *Ubuntu* as vital in my life. I understand it as a respect for God, people, self, animals, plants, nature, law and more. It is similar to what Luke, Chapter 6, verse 31, says, ‘do to others as you would have them do to you’, and what Karen Armstrong (2009) calls ‘The Golden Rule’. I believe that an equivalent exists in most, if not all, of the major religions and cultures of the world. My passion for *Ubuntu* is informed by my pain of oppression under the Apartheid Regime in South Africa. I love *Ubuntu* because it does not allow any form of discrimination in terms of race, creed and considerations about being a ‘have’ or a ‘have not’; I value *inhlonipho* (respect) as part of *Ubuntu*. Respect begins with self-respect. If I feel the joy of self-respect, I am able to respect others.

## Reflecting on my learning

Upon reflection I see that as Blacks in Republic of South Africa we were suppressed and the type of education we were given was purposefully made to be inferior. In my thesis (Gumede, 2011) I cite Doctor Hendrik Verwoerd when he introduced Bantu Education in Parliament in 1953:

“I just want to remind the Honourable Members of Parliament that if the native South African is being taught to expect that he will lead his adult life under the hope of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. The native must not be subject to education system which draws him away from his own community and misleads him in showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze” (p. 21).

The Apartheid government provided education that could be described as, “the synchronic panoptical vision of domination” (Bhabha, 1994), an education that kept watch over the development of the Blacks and other racial groups to the government’s standards. Fortunately, in 1996 Bantu Education was replaced with one by the Department of Education that was a uniform type of education and no longer discriminatory. Teaching in rural schools in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) was a challenge that broke my heart almost every day. What I learnt at teacher training school with most facilities available such as all necessary textbooks, made me realise the inferior type of education that I had received from Sub-standard A to Form Five (Grades One to Twelve). As an educator I learned to improvise.

Despite the lack of resources, there were two valuable instances that made my teaching valuable and pleasing. When I had no textbooks to teach English for my Standard Eight, Grade Ten, two hundred learners, they made a financial contribution and I bought copies of a local newspaper The South Coast Herald. The copies of the local newspaper became our grammar and language texts. When the following year I had to teach Grade elevens with no textbooks, I asked the headmaster to make photocopies from a short story book and used the single page that learners had for three months to teach all aspects of the language curriculum. I later realized that I had applied Outcomes Based Education strategies long before its inception. I therefore congratulate myself for my achievements as a learner, an educator and a headmaster. I sometimes ask myself whether I would have been a teacher had my education been in the Republic of South Africa now.

I understand that living-educational-theory development is not an isolated form of learning but happens as one plays and works. Life-experiences and daily performances that an educator or another professional engages in, are the very context in which their living-educational-theory is nurtured. To newly employed educators, my advice would be that like any other performance, teaching is a continuous learning practice. Challenges in teaching are not a curse but they are hurdles that need your commitment and they are surmountable when one focuses on success. I converted my challenges to content for my doctoral thesis and I hope I will continually discover and re-mine the challenges for future use.

Every school day or encounter with learners offers the educator a fertile context for growth and development. I would also encourage all educators to bear in mind that one may not be well paid but is in a wealthy situation in accumulating knowledge that other people

need. I consider every day as a research opportunity that can be turned to valuable knowledge.

This article has also made me to rethink about a General Science lesson that I had at the age of fifteen. The lesson was: To determine whether matter occupies space. This lesson has had a profound influence in my life for numerous reasons:

- It was my first lesson in General Science in English as my whole primary education was in isiZulu.
- It taught me a way of thinking that was never presented to me before:
  - *Aim* – How and when was my management style developed?
  - *Apparatus* – looking at my upbringing, management styles of my principles as a learner and a teacher and my experiences.
  - *Method(s)* – application of Reflection, Narrative Method, and Living Theory research methods.
  - *Observation* – looking at my upbringing, management styles of my principles as a learner and a teacher.
  - *Inference* – putting together incidents to reach my conclusion
  - *Conclusion* – my management style and work were developed through observation of my upbringing, management styles of my principles as a learner and a teacher and my experiences.
- I have noticed that this article is a depiction of the procedures that I learnt from that experiment. Not only have I noted this in my article, but I now realise that the experiment became a way of constructing a way of thinking that is essential in problem solving.
- In all my academic career, professional career, my Master of Arts and Doctoral research, I found the thinking from that experiment very useful and still useful as I rethink about it in this article

I share this as a way of saying that teachers need not look down on their work. A lesson well-presented can be a blessing to a learner; therefore, teachers should be proud of what they do. I offer thanks to my teacher Mrs. Peteni who was an educator dedicated to the well-being of her students. As well as being concerned for the well-being of students, I hold a view of professionalism in education that requires the educator continuously to seek to improve their practice and to contribute to the knowledge-base of education. In contributing to this knowledge-base, I will now engage with ideas that distinguish my contribution to educational knowledge. Because of my living value of *Ubuntu* of 'I am because we are', I shall emphasize the importance of including my authentic 'I' in my living-educational-theory narrative, rather than using 'I' in an abstract way. In other words, I do want to be open to Adorno's critique of Heidegger where he points out that the aura of authenticity in Heidegger is that:

"... it names "nothing"; the "I" remains formal and yet pretends that the word contains content in-itself. For Adorno, Heidegger's existentialism is a new Platonism which implies



that authenticity comes in the complete disposal of the person over himself – as if there were no determination emerging from the objectivity of history.” (Schroyer, 1973, p. viii)

I think that my focus on ‘I’ in the above narrative places it beyond the criticism that my ‘I’ remains formal whilst pretending that it contains content in itself. In living *Ubuntu*, I want to ensure that the ‘we’ in ‘I am because we are’ does not remain formal whilst pretending that it contains content in itself. I think that this criticism can be made against Honneth’s (2014) ideas in ‘The I in the We’. Honneth’s purpose is to prove the claim at the centre of his argumentation that the ‘I’ seeks the ‘We’ of shared group experience. He believes that even after maturity, we are dependent on forms of social recognition imbued with direct encouragement and affirmation. (p. 214). Honneth argues that the ‘I’ is dependent on forms of social recognition embodied in groups. His argument is based on his view that neither self-respect nor self-esteem can be maintained without the supportive experience of practising shared values in the group. Whilst I agree that in ‘I am because we are’, and the ‘I’ is dependent on forms of social recognition, I am arguing that the ‘I in the We’ is not derived, as with Honneth, in theories of recognition. The ‘I in the We’ in living *Ubuntu* is a generative process grounded in dialogues in which individuals are practising shared values in an EJOLTS community that is committed to supporting individuals in the generation and sharing of their own living-educational-theories.

## Further Dimensions

I shall now relate ideas of *postabyssal* thinking, subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism and intercultural translation (de Sousa Santos, 2014) to the reviewers’ responses and my responses in the Virtual Space of Cooperation of EJOLTS (access from <https://ejolts.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=5>). De Sousa Santos (2014) presents many of the dilemmas that have confronted and continue to confront me. The objective of the sociology of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects. It does so by focusing on the social experience that has not been fully colonized by metonymic reason. What is there in the South that escapes the North/South dichotomy? What is there in traditional medicine that escapes the modern medicine/traditional medicine dichotomy? Is it possible to see the subaltern regardless of the relation of subalternity? Could it be possible that the countries considered less developed are more developed in fields that escape the hegemonic terms of the dichotomy? To summarise, is the conceiving in an empowering way only possible on the other side of the line (Santos, 2014, p.172)? In answering these questions, I justify my claim to be contributing to readings in *Africana Philosophy* (Hord & Lee, 2016) by holding to the tenets of a relational humanism (p. 3) of ‘I am because we are?’ in *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonispha*.

*Postabyssal* thinking can be summarized as learning from the South through an epistemology of the South. On this basis, it is possible to struggle for a ‘subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism’ based on a subaltern cosmopolitan reason. The phrase, “subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism,” refers to the aspiration of oppressed groups to organize their resistance and consolidate political coalitions on the same scale as the one used by the oppressors to victimize them, that is, the global scale. Through publishing in EJOLTS I am

seeking to make subaltern knowledges visible and legitimate in a neo-liberal context (see Rowell, Edwards-Groves & Ramos, 2017, p. 2):

“I shall start by identifying the most fundamental problem confronting us, in my view, in the first decades of the twenty-first century. This problem is the failure to acknowledge the permanence of an abyssal line dividing metropolitan from colonial societies decades after the end of historical colonialism. Such a line divides social reality in such a profound way that whatever lies on the other side of the line remains invisible or utterly irrelevant. All the generalizations of the Western social sciences, Fourier’s theories included, are flawed to the extent that they take into account only the social reality of metropolitan societies, that is, the social reality on this side of the line. The European universalism so celebrated by the Frankfurt School is based on this truncated view that leaves out the social reality of the other side of the line, which in the 1920s happened to cover the majority of the world’s population. In later chapters I address this issue in greater detail. Here I focus on the problems that such an abyssal line today creates for the social conditions prevailing on this side of the line. The most important problem is the collapse of social emancipation into social regulation.” (De Sousa Santos, 2014, pp. 70-71)

The work of intercultural translation in my living-theory development, as a Black African (Zulu) Male Educator, includes my Zulu meanings of *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonipha* into English meanings for publication in EJOLTS. I agree with de Sousa Santos that:

“The aim of translation between knowledges is to create cognitive justice. The aim of translation between practices and their agents is to create the conditions for global social justice from the standpoint of the democratic imagination. The work of translation creates the conditions for concrete social emancipations of concrete social groups in a present whose injustice is legitimated on the basis of a massive waste of experience...The new constellations of meaning made possible by the work of translation would be in themselves a waste of experience if they were not converted into new constellations of transformative practices.” (pp. 234-235)

The ‘I in the We’ in this paper is grounded in the ‘We’ of the EJOLTS community:

“The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) is committed to publishing [living-educational-theory](#) (often shortened to living-theory) accounts of practitioner-researchers from a wide range of global, social, cultural and professional contexts. We welcome submissions from all Living Educational Theory (often shortened to Living Theory) researchers who wish to contribute rigorous and valid accounts of their [living-theories](#) to improving educational knowledge. EJOLTS offers distinctive, stimulating opportunities for creativity, learning and spreading knowledge of educational influences in learning; learning which carries hope for the flourishing of our individual and collective humanity.

“The journal focuses on the living-theories of practitioner-researchers. Researchers generate their living-theories as their values-based ‘explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations’ (Whitehead, 1989) in the process of researching questions such as, ‘How do I improve what I am doing’. The values at the heart of Living Educational Theory research (often shortened to Living Theory research) are the life-enhancing values that are relational and ontological, in the sense that they give meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals and groups. They are

values that carry hope for the future of humanity, such as love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, care and democracy." (<https://ejolts.net/>)

## Last thoughts

Rather than seeking to define the 'I in the We' from Theories of Recognition (Honneth, 2014) my meaning of the 'I in the We' has been generated in this paper through the qualities of receptive responsiveness in the open review space, in particular with my reviewers Stephen Bigger, Brian Jennings, and with editors Jackie DeLong and Jack Whitehead (<https://ejolts.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=233>). The importance of this 'I in the We' is focused on enhancing the influence of Living Educational Theory research as a global social movement with values that carry hope for human flourishing.

In this article I have outlined how I started teaching after a two-year junior secondary teachers training at Amanzimtoti Zulu training School and how the training school was as a reflection of the Apartheid era that emphasised ethnicity as a means of entrenching the Apartheid policy of the National Party regime. I also gave an account of what my ambitions were towards the completion of the teachers' course as the training school introduced a three-year course. When I was refused admission to the third year, I outlined the reasons for my disappointment.

In this paper I have dispelled my illusions and demonstrated how and when my living-educational-theory was developed. I have recounted how I successfully managed a rural high school with meagre resources despite my two-years of training as a teacher. I did this through personal reflection, by defining what a living-educational-theory is, and how my living-educational-theory was developed. I have provided a discourse of my narrative as an example of a living-educational-theory practice. I have given an account of my first school visit to the new school, learners' attitude, my attitude, educators' attitude and the Department of Education's contribution, parental contribution, developments, successes and my farewell function. I have reflected on education in general, teaching in rural schools in the Republic of South Africa, living-theory and advice to educators.

My responses to my reviewers' insights have strengthened my scholarship through engagements with the ideas of de Sousa Santos, (2014), Honneth (2012), Hord & Lee (2016) and Schroyer (1973) as I explain the global significance of the living theory development of Black African (Zulu) male educator. I conclude with the words of Desmond Tutu (2000):

"Ubuntu ... speaks of the very essence of being human. [We] say ... "Hey, so-and-so has Ubuntu." Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons."

Tutu has also challenged me: "For me to be the best that I can be, I need you to be the best that you can be."

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I am indebted to Stephen Bigger, Jack Whitehead and Jackie Delong for the way they have helped me:

“You have engineered, finagled and doctored the article like a ‘jealous housekeeper’ that likes milk and preserves it as butter, cheese, condensed milk... unlike baby powder that does not make a baby.” (Gumede & Mellett, 2019, p. 31)

Jack Whitehead and Jacqueline Delong see themselves as having helped me as ‘respectful editors’, an idea Peter Mellett developed when writing a review for BERA (British Education Research Association) (Mellett, 2000).

Evidence of the qualities of relational humanism expressed in the preparation of this paper is provided through the educational conversations I had with my reviewers in the open review space of EJOLTS; for example, how I engaged with Brian Jennings’ (2019) response to one of the many redrafts of my paper, when he wrote, ‘For the moment I do not feel that there is sufficient scholarly commentary to warrant publication in an EJOLTS which is an academic journal’, and Brian Jennings’ responses to my subsequent iterations.

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