

# *How my multiple border crossings in higher education have contributed to my living theory<sup>1</sup>*

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## **Introduction**

I am Irish by birth and upbringing. I studied and taught Philosophy and Theology in Italy (1994-2004), where I experienced and used traditional lecturing methods. Currently I teach Philosophy to undergraduates from various disciplines at Strathmore University in Nairobi. My multiple border crossings to respond proactively to diversity and the need for transformational learning in higher education really began upon my arrival in Kenya in 2004, when I faced challenges which I had to overcome to be effective in my teaching practice.

In this paper I show how I am using living theory action research to develop a “living” methodology based on in-depth reflection on my teaching experience and student feedback over time, to adjust various aspects of my teaching practice to foster transformative learning in my students. This process has enabled me to identify the educational values which motivate my work and which are now the standards of judgement against which I evaluate the effectiveness of my practice. As I narrate my response to some of the more relevant challenges faced, using specifically designed learning projects, I will show how my personal living educational theory has developed.

I hope to show that true effectiveness in “crossing borders for change in higher education” can only be achieved if we are willing to change ourselves in practice in the

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at HELTASA 2011: Crossing Borders For Change In Southern African Higher Education. 30th November - 2nd December 2011. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Port Elizabeth, South Africa).

first place, and so be in a position to help our students want to change themselves and contribute to improving our society.

## My context

I teach philosophy at Strathmore University ([www.strathmore.edu](http://www.strathmore.edu)), a private university located in Nairobi (Kenya). We offer a variety of diploma, undergraduate, and Master's programmes in the areas of Information Technology, Hospitality and Tourism, Commerce, Management, Education, Finance and Applied Economics. We have approximately 4,000 students in our undergraduate courses and 2-3,000 students in our postgraduate courses. Our students are from all over Kenya and some neighbouring countries, although the majority come from Nairobi itself.

In order to facilitate the implementation of our mission<sup>2</sup>, which may be summarized in respect for the dignity of each person, one of the strategies we use is that a series of philosophy and other related units are taught as core courses across all our undergraduate degree programmes<sup>3</sup>. Our aim is to help our students to understand and respect themselves and other people as human beings, and to learn to use their freedom in ways which reflect this awareness in all aspects of their daily lives<sup>4</sup>.

When I arrived in Kenya to work at Strathmore, I was very enthused with transmitting these ideals to my students, having an impact on their lives and helping them to

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<sup>2</sup> **Strathmore University: Mission** - To provide all round quality education in an atmosphere of freedom and responsibility; excellence in teaching, research and scholarship; ethical and social development; and service to Society. **Vision** - To become a leading out-come driven entrepreneurial research university by translating our excellence into a major contribution to culture, economic well-being, and quality of life. **Values** - Excellence through the sanctification of work; freedom and responsibility; ethical practice; personalized attention; subsidiarity; collegiality; life-long learning; service to society.

<sup>3</sup> These are as follows: First year: Introduction to Critical Thinking; Philosophical Anthropology. Second year: Principles of Ethics; Development Studies. Third year: Social and Political Philosophy. Fourth year: Business Ethics.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Strathmore was the first university in Kenya to establish a dress code for students. The code offers guidance on the type of clothing and accessories which are considered acceptable for male and female students while on campus. The most important underlying consideration behind the dress code is to foster in students a sense of respect for their own dignity and that of others, manifested in the way they dress and carry themselves. At times it may be a cause of conflict for some students, however when they have left the university many recognise that the dress code helped them to develop a sense of personal dignity as well as prepare for professional life.

become good citizens who could contribute to improving our country and make it a better place to live for everyone. I began teaching Principles of Ethics in November 2004 to two groups of second year Commerce students, each group consisting of around 100 students. We were using a large lecture theatre with semicircular benches in ascending rows up to the back of the room. I certainly had to exercise all my capacity for voice projection, and even then, I think that at times I could not be heard very well by the students seated at the back, as in some later feedback (March 2006), some commented *come with a speaker and be more audible*<sup>5</sup>!

After a few weeks of class using the traditional lecturing method, I began to realize that my students were not following my explanations; generally there was a lot of background murmuring, and very few people ever responded when I asked questions in class. I thought that I had been trying to connect the ethical concepts to real life experience, make the classes interesting and explain the ideas as well as I could. However, I still sensed that I was not “connecting” with my students. Some feedback I received from similar groups of students which I received in March 2006, although referring to a different unit, probably expressed at least partially, what these first two groups were thinking: The topics were *boring and irrelevant*, said one student. Another commented, *I have not learned any new ideas that I would apply to my life because I don't understand*.

During that first semester of teaching, from November 2004 to March 2005, I realized that I needed to try to establish better relations with my students. In fact, in the March 2006 feedback, some were still saying: *The lecturer should make good interaction with students, should involve students...* In December 2004, during the 10 minute break allowed in a double session, I approached one of the students who was sitting in the front bench. I tried to adopt a friendly attitude in my gestures and smile, and attempted to ask the girl her name and if she had a nice weekend. To my surprise, there was no answer, so I tried a few more apparently innocent questions to get a conversation going. However, the girl sat in silence with her head down throughout the few minutes I spent

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<sup>5</sup> Subsequently I have started using a microphone in the bigger lecture rooms where it may be more difficult for everyone to hear me.

at her side. Eventually I realized that I was not making headway, and I noticed that a few students sitting behind her were observing the scene, so I abandoned that attempt!

This experience catapulted me into reflecting on how I was teaching the unit, and in particular, what might be the perception that the students had of me, in spite of my open attitude towards them, at least in my own mind. As I thought about it and discussed the experience with fellow colleagues, I began to learn a lot about the education system in Kenya. I discovered that many students arrive to university with a lot of negative baggage in terms of their attitude towards lecturers, because of their experiences in high school. Many have been ridiculed in class because of giving a wrong answer; others have not been allowed to speak in class or ask questions; the teacher was not to be challenged by the student as s/he is the authority figure who should be respected above all else. Many students had experienced corporal and other forms of punishment for minimal infringement of school regulations, etc. As a result, most students fear their teachers or, at least, are very wary of them, not knowing what type of reaction to expect from them next. In some cases, they may not have had “white” teachers, and so their attitude towards me was one of wariness and curiosity. I began to realize that many of my students probably considered me to be very different to themselves in terms of nationality, age, skin colour, experience, etc. This diversity, along with our diverse experience of education and the classroom was possibly part of the difficulty I was having in engaging them through my lecturing<sup>6</sup>. Both the students and I were facing a “border crossing” which had to be made in order to enhance the teaching and learning experience for us all.

At the same time, while I was passionate about my subject, I realized that it was very difficult to enthuse my students with issues regarding the nature of Ethics, the effect our free acts have on us as persons, the natural law and the rightness and wrongness of our actions, etc., in spite of my efforts to give examples from the little I knew of life in Kenya. As suggested in the March 2006 feedback from students, some found it hard to

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<sup>6</sup> On 27<sup>th</sup> October 2011 I presented a paper touching on these issues during the annual Ethics Conference which we organize at Strathmore University. The paper was titled *Understanding diversity and seeking unity in the Kenyan educational context*. I am still seeking feedback on this paper from friends and colleagues and I hope to publish it in Kenya next year, to encourage further feedback and comments on my observations and reflections.

concentrate in class due to the depth of the topics, others thought that the class should *include more interesting practical illustrations*; some wanted *the course to be made more practical and less theoretical*. Finally, one student hit an interesting nail on the head: *You need to explain to students exactly why we learn Ethics. Most of us feel dragged to this class yet we fail to understand exactly how it will help me as the end of my four years. Sincerely, I don't see why I should do it, that is, I lack motivation.*

This is in fact one of the biggest challenges that I face each time I teach a philosophy unit. The students cannot see the relevance of these subjects to their degree courses in Commerce, Information Technology, Finance, etc. so, they can tend to be indifferent towards my units, attend the minimum number of lessons to do the exam, aim at just passing, etc. In a sense the difficulty for them in “crossing this border” is very understandable; they have come to the university to get a degree in non-philosophical fields such as Commerce, Tourism, Informatics, etc., and so, they do not see why they are being asked to study philosophy, which simply adds to their unit hours, costs, and workload, and does not seem to add much “value” in terms of their future jobs, income, etc. Personally, I am convinced of the relevance of studying some philosophy when carrying out a degree in another field, however, I too needed to “cross the border” of knowing how to transmit my convictions using reasons and experiences which they can understand and connect with.

Another challenge which I realized I was facing came to the fore when students began to ask, towards the end of the semester, what would come up in the exam? I found this disconcerting as I sensed that the students were aiming to study for the exam, and probably forget whatever they may have learned afterwards. This has been confirmed afterwards in my interaction with students during academic mentoring sessions where it has come out clearly that the majority of students only “read” when the exam is close. At the same time, they want to get a good grade so that, at the end of their studies, they graduate with a good degree. I have had students come to me after Continuous Assessment Tests, not just pointing out where they may have been able to earn an extra mark or two, which I had missed in their opinion, but also trying to convince me that erroneous answers which they had given were correct and that I should give them

marks for those answers! So, the interest in the unit often shows when it comes to tests, exams, and grades. Reflecting on these experiences and conversing with friends and colleagues, I have discovered that this is a very common attitude in Kenyan students. It seems that it may, at least partially, be caused by the education system in primary and high school.

We currently follow the 8-4-4 system in education: 8 years in primary school, 4 years in high school and 4 years at university. This system was designed and implemented in the 1980s, with the following aim: “The new education system is designed to provide life-long education to make individuals self-sufficient and productive in agriculture, industries, commerce and in any other service. It is regarded as education with production because it involved all learning activities that result in producing goods and services to satisfy societal needs. It is offered as a means of rearing a necessary and healthy balance between practical and academic learning” (Eshiwani, 1993). Such an education system seemed to make sense at a time when the Kenyan economy was suffering a downturn and university graduates were finding it difficult to get jobs. However, unfortunately it seems that the project was implemented in a hurry and in an inefficient manner, at least in many cases if not all.

The education system in existence previously, since independence in 1963, had focused more on academic learning and developing literacy skills among others<sup>7</sup>. In fact, the quality of English spoken by those who studied under the system in existence before the 1980s is notably better than that spoken by those who have studied under the 8-4-4 system, to give just one practical example. Many people are of the opinion that the current 8-4-4 system is overloaded with subjects and curriculum content, which

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<sup>7</sup> The history of the changes and evolution of the Kenyan education system from before independence, up to the present is somewhat complex. For further information see: Bogonko, S.N. (1994). *A History of Modern Education in Kenya (1895 – 1991)*. Nairobi. Evan’s Brothers Ltd. Keriga, L. & Bujra, A. (2009). *Social policy, development and governance in Kenya. An Evaluation and Profile of Education in Kenya. Research Report*. Nairobi. Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF). [Accessible at [http:// www.dpmf.org](http://www.dpmf.org).]

forces teachers and students into a race against time to cover the required material before the national exams. A student's grades in the exams at the end of primary school and high school determine the institution in which they may be able to study at the next level of education. So the pressure is high to perform well, get a place in a good school or at a public university, and also contribute to higher rankings of individual schools, as has been carried out by the government, up until two years ago.

These circumstances explain, at least in part, why students reach university with the desire to get good grades and a good degree. However, the education system also seems to have contributed to the tendency to rote learning and "cramming", to pass the exam, because of the constraints mentioned above, and the nature of the course contents in each subject. There is little room for critical thinking, reflection, development of the imagination and personal creativity, etc. Hence, students reach university without the necessary intellectual skills required to advance successfully in higher education. All this seems to contribute to the "certificate mentality" reflected in the desire to know the contents that will be covered in the exam!

As I reflected on these circumstances, I understood that it would be more challenging for my students to handle philosophy units which, by nature, tend to require more abstract thinking, deeper levels of reflection and critical analysis, etc. The student feedback from March 2006 confirms this to a certain extent. While some students do indicate that the philosophy subject did help them to think more critically and more broadly, other stated that the academic skills they had learned were a *mix of understanding and cramming; none learnt; cramming*. Another said that *memorizing is important to pass*. Finally, *the course should be made more interesting and not something that students cram in order to pass the examination*.

Here again I was facing another "border crossing". I needed to find a way of teaching that would help my students to move from cramming the theory in my units, to assimilating the ideas, learning to think and move on to actually applying those ideas in practice.

At this point I can summarise the borders which my students and I needed to cross as follows:

<b>Summary of borders I needed to cross with my students</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Border challenge</b>	<b>Towards overcoming the challenge and crossing the border</b>
1.	My diversity with regard to my students	Improve our educational relationships to facilitate effective teaching and learning
2.	Lack of interest in the philosophy units which I teach	Show the relevance, interest and importance of studying these philosophy units
3.	Student learning style and focus on grades	Facilitate intrinsic motivation and interest in learning these units

### **My main concern**

By March 2006, I was concerned that my effort to teach my units (Philosophical Anthropology and Principles of Ethics) well were unsuccessful. In my opinion, the teaching and learning taking place seemed to be ineffective, partly due to the “borders” that needed to be crossed with each group of students:

1. Create good interpersonal relationships between my students and I to facilitate learning.
2. Help the students to discover the relevance of Philosophical Anthropology and Principles of Ethics to their lives at the personal, academic and professional levels.
3. Help my students to move from cramming the course contents to understanding, and assimilating the ideas, and to allow those ideas to help them bring change into their lives.

As one student wrote in March 2006, *since the course is mostly theoretical I cannot identify an idea that I can practically apply to my life.*

## **Why was I concerned**

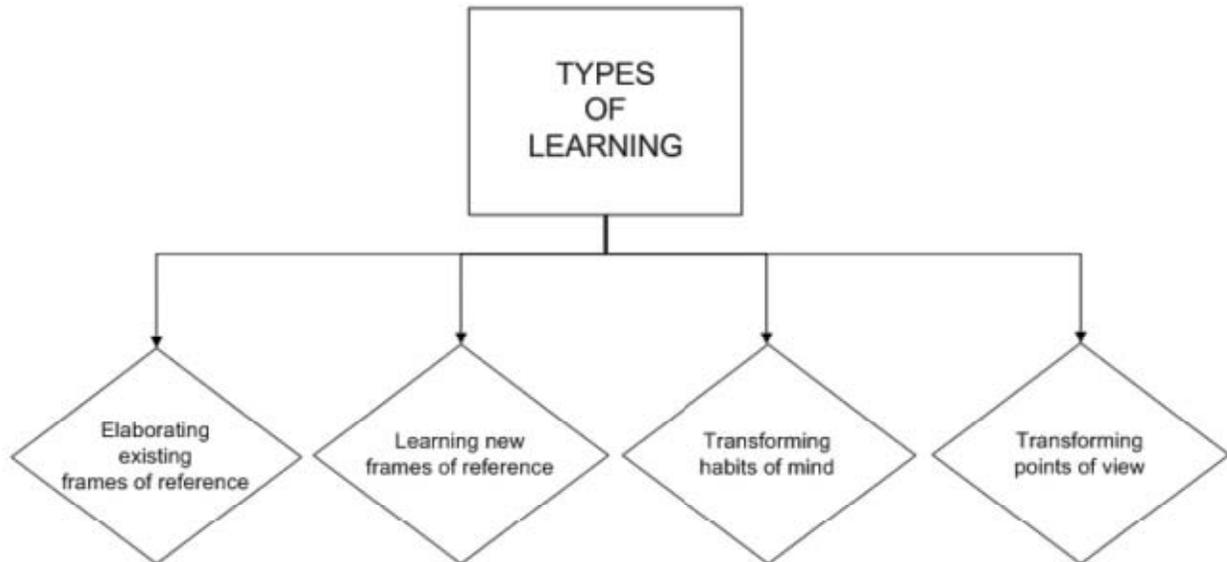
In all honesty, part of my concern about my teaching was caused by a sense of personal frustration and ineffectiveness. I felt that I had been trying hard for nearly two years to teach effectively, and yet, a lot of the feedback (although not all of it), seemed to indicate that this was not happening. Initially I resisted the thought of changing my way of teaching as it meant moving out of my comfort zone, learning new things, and taking risks. As I reflect on it now, I realize that this is probably a normal reaction for many people when faced with the need to “cross a border”, which usually involves moving into the unknown. At the same time, such a challenge can also be viewed as an adventure worth trying.

In my case, I think that I was eventually able to start crossing those borders because of two related ideas, which are personal convictions for me:

1. Life has taught me in various ways, that in the learning process, theory alone is not enough to achieve personal fulfillment; theory without implementation or application in some form of practice or action is useless!
2. My goal as a teacher is not simply to transfer knowledge from my head to the heads of my students. My personal aim is to help them learn in a holistic manner, so that they can change themselves as persons through their learning. I strive to help them attain transformational learning!

## **Transformative learning**

The term “transformative (or transformational) learning” was coined by Mezirow in the 1970s in the context of his research and development of his theory regarding adult learning. He has developed this theory over time, through interaction with various thinkers, researchers, further investigation, etc. His revised theory of transformative learning (2000) has been represented by Kitchenham as follows (2008):



Regarding the diagram above the terms employed mean the following:

**Elaborating existing frames of reference (meaning perspective):** this occurs when a person reflects back on actions already carried out and reflects on how those actions could be improved; this may give rise to further development in their understanding of what they are already doing, and so the existing frames of reference in their work may be further elaborated, giving rise to a transformation in their knowledge.

**Learning new frames of reference (meaning perspective):** this occurs when a person considers the causes of actions and whether there are other factors yet to be unveiled which may enhance their activity; this form of reflection might also transform their meaning perspective and so contribute to improving their learning.

According to Mezirow, a meaning perspective refers “to the structure of cultural and psychological assumptions within which our past experience assimilates and transforms new experience” (Mezirow, 1985, p. 21). It is a general frame of reference comprising habits of mind and points of view, that is, a series of specific meaning schemes. A meaning scheme is “the constellation of concept, belief, judgment, and feeling which shapes a particular interpretation” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223).

**Transforming habits of mind:** these refer to an individual's perspective on a variety of issues such as sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic concerns. Habits of mind may change when the learner encounters a problem or anomaly that cannot be resolved through present meaning schemes or through learning new meaning schemes; the resolution comes through a redefinition of the problem. Transformation occurs by critical self-reflection of the assumptions that supported the meaning scheme or perspective in use<sup>8</sup>, leading to changes in one's habits of mind.

**Transforming points of view:** a person's meaning perspective or frame of reference for knowing and learning also includes points of view (clusters of meaning schemes). These are "sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18), which shape a particular interpretation and explain cause and effect relationships, sequences of events, or characterisations of colleagues or of the individual. Points of view tend to influence learning in a relatively automatic, unconscious manner. However, they may also be transformed through critical self-reflection, thus giving rise to new learning.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been critiqued, tested and revised over three decades, to arrive at a definitive framework for describing how adults learn best. It has also been tested in other disciplines, such as educational technology, and has given rise to a lot of research and many publications addressing the theoretical and practical implications of the theory (Kitchenham, 2008)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> This requires "becoming aware of specific assumptions (schemata, criteria, rules, or repressions) on which a distorted or incomplete meaning scheme is based and, through a reorganization of meaning, transforming it" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 23).

<sup>9</sup> Interest in Mezirow's transformative learning theory has resulted in seven international conferences, each devoted to a different aspect of the theory and producing numerous peer-reviewed papers; more than a dozen books; hundreds of scholarly papers and presentations, and more than 150 doctoral dissertations addressing the theoretical and practical implications of the theory. Transformative learning theory has undergone modifications and incorporated new constructs as they

While Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is highly developed and tested, I find that it does not correspond to my understanding of transformative learning in that

1. It is aimed at understanding the learning of adults, understood as individuals who have moved beyond the usual age at which most people enter higher education.
2. Although there are references to action, the main focus of this theory seems to be on learning as intellectual transformation in terms of extension and at different levels of depth, with some references to the practical implications of this new knowledge.
3. The link between learning theory and practice is not highlighted, neither is it clear that a link does exist between each type of learning as identified by Mezirow and practice, in terms of real life activity.
4. There also seems to be little interest in the person who learns; the emphasis is more on the possibilities any given individual may have, of transforming the extension and levels of their knowledge, without considering the impact this may have on the person as such.

John Dirkx has also developed a theory of transformative learning, which, in contrast to that of Mezirow, highlights the role of imagination, affectivity, and the human spirit in the adult learning process. His work is of greater interest to me to the extent that there is more focus on the subjective being, the person who learns, with their inner, complex world of consciousness and subconscious. However, as his research focuses on the adult learner, it does not fall completely within my frame of reference, as I work largely with undergraduate students who are coping with their first encounter with academic work in higher education.

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are debated and tested and will, undoubtedly, continue to influence adult learning praxis across many disciplines (Kitchenham, 2008).

In an interesting discussion between the two, facilitated by Patricia Cranton and published in the *Journal of Transformative Education*, Mezirow described a rational process of learning that transforms an acquired frame of reference. Dirkx focused on the nature of the self—a sense of identify and subjectivity—which he sees as soul work or inner work. Cranton summarized and concluded the debate as follows: “Dirkx is not denying the existence of a rational process of transformative learning within awareness; he is simply more interested in understanding the subjective world and the shadowy inner world that has such power in leading us to deep shifts in how we see ourselves and the outer world. Mezirow acknowledges the significance of this dimension of transformative learning, adding only that the outcome must involve a critical assessment of assumptions to ensure that it is not based on faith, prejudice, vision, or desire” (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006).

### **How is transformative learning understood in action research living theory?**

Jack Whitehead has described living educational theory as “an explanation that individuals generate for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations” (Whitehead, 2009a). Within living theory, the concept of “educational influences” is used to express the idea of an improvement in learning (Whitehead, 2008). The way in which these educational influences bring about an improvement in learning is explained using the ontological values which give meaning and purpose to the lives of educators. These values often become clearer and evolve in the course of using action research to improve one’s teaching practice. Through this process the meaning of these values can be expressed in a communicable manner as standards of judgement, or explanatory principles, which can be used to evaluate the validity of the contributions to knowledge brought about by the living educational theories which emerge from the research (Whitehead, 2009a). “My focus in this presentation is on the epistemological significance of explicating and clarifying the meanings of flows of energy with values. These values form explanatory principles in explanations of my educational influences in learning. In my understanding it is possible to distinguish an epistemology in terms of its logic, its units of appraisal

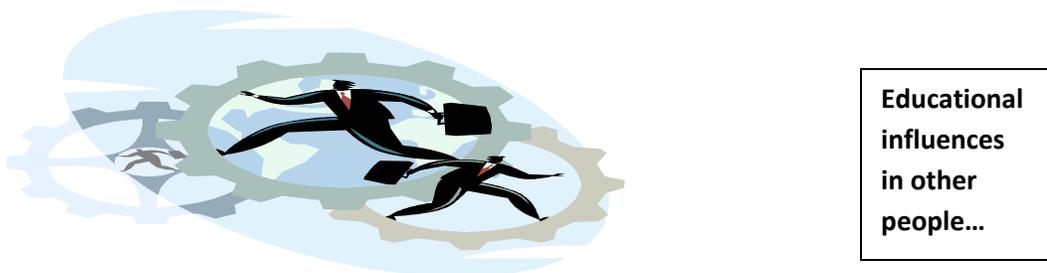
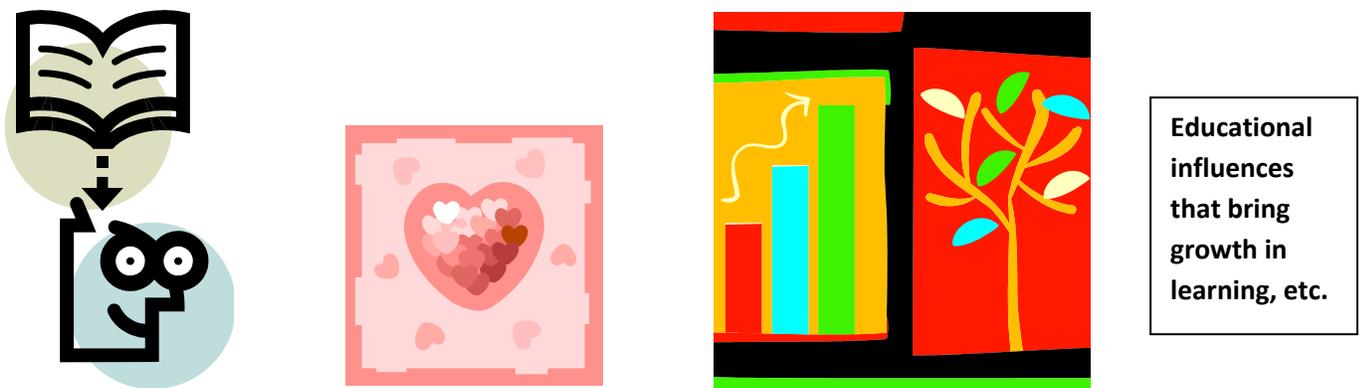
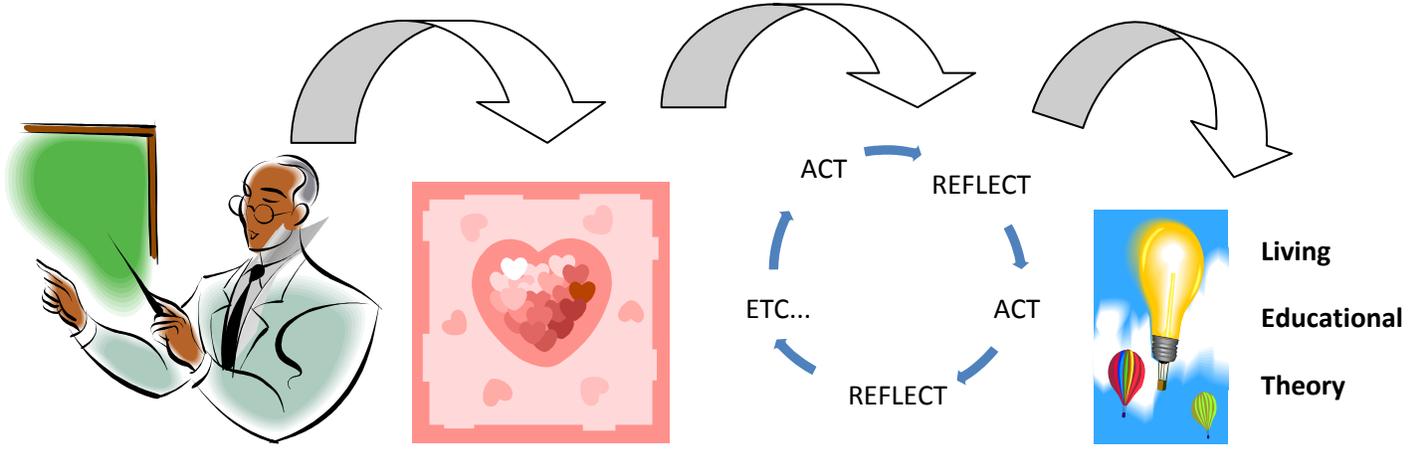
and its standards of judgment. My focus is framed by a desire to explain educational influences in learning” (Whitehead, 2011).

Other than the focus on adult learners vs. learners in any context, another clear distinction between Mezirow and Whitehead in the context of educational learning is the attitude towards the educator and the learner. For Mezirow, these seem to be somewhat objectified and the focus is on the intellectual dimension of the person: one brings about learning and the other simply learns. For Whitehead, both educator and learner are subjects, living beings, persons capable of facilitating learning and experiencing learning because they are capable of holding to motivating values which, for the educator, explains the meaning of their life and work, and for the learner, opens up a new world of knowledge acquisition which may well change the person not just intellectually, but at other levels too in their personal being. “I focus on educational influence to stress that the influence by one person in another’s learning is not a matter of causal determinism. I cannot claim a determining effect in an educational influence in another’s learning through whatever I do. Whatever I do must have been mediated by the other’s creative engagement with what I do, in their learning, for me to understand the influence as educational” (Whitehead, 2011). As we can see, for Whitehead, educational influences in learning depend not only on the effort of the educator to live out their values as standards of judgement, but also on the creative response of the learner. Finally, as he stated in an earlier article, referring to the mission of the Institute for research in education and society at Liverpool Hope University: “For me, educational learning includes the humanizing of society and facilitating the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 2010).

While Whitehead does not usually refer to educational influences in terms of transformation, living theory does seem to support the possible transformative nature of education, and other professional practices. This has been brought out recently by some researchers who use living theory action research (Woods, 2009) and Van Tuyl (2009), whose doctoral dissertation has the following title: *From Engineer To Co-Creative Catalyst: An Inclusional And Transformational Journey*. I find the inclusion of the term “transformational” in the title to be highly significant. If I am not mistaken, this is

the first time the concept appears explicitly in the title of a living theory thesis, which I feel is important as, in my opinion living theory action research essentially implies transformation or change in the researcher and others. As van Tuyl states in his dissertation: “The journey that this thesis describes is an intertwining of personal growth and growth at work. It is a creative spiral that has allowed me to be a more fulfilled human being” (2009).

Perhaps Whitehead’s understanding of educational influences in one’s own learning, that of others and that of social formations could be illustrated in the following manner:



## How do I understand transformative learning?

Over the years, a lot of research has been carried out in the field of transformative learning, as indicated in the Transformational Learning Theory article in Wikipedia, which focuses on the work done by Mezirow, Boyd, and Freire (2006, 2010); the Wikipedia article on Transformative Learning Theory which focuses on the same authors, with some interesting critique by Taylor (1998) and Torosyan (2007); the article in the ERIC Digest on *Transformative Learning in Adulthood* (Imel, 1998). Patricia Cranton has also offered some interesting analysis of transformative learning over the years (1994, 1997, 2000, 2003). There are also a number of Centres and Institutes dedicated to this field such as the Transformative Learning Centre (University of Toronto) and The Transformative Studies Institute. Finally, the *Journal of Transformative Education* deals with issues related to transformative learning<sup>10</sup>.

Over the years, without having studied the research in this field, I became more interested in facilitating transformational learning in my students, as I realized that for education to be effective, it needed to foster personal change in the individual learner. With my background in Philosophical Anthropology, I understood that this change needed to be holistic, involving the whole person, heart, intellect, will, body, soul, etc. I was also aware that I could only facilitate such change, I could not force it upon my students, by guiding them in the use of their personal freedom to take ownership of their learning and their lives. Basically, as I discovered later, I was motivated by my personal values, which are love, respect for my students' freedom and the desire to help them to develop themselves as persons.

When I came into contact with living theory action research, I was attracted by its open defense of personal values in one's professional practice along with the flexible manner in which it advocates for improving one's practice, based on personal values. I also

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<sup>10</sup> For a challenging article on studies in the field of transformative learning which was published in the first edition of this journal, see McWhinney, W. & Markos, L. (2003). "Transformative Education: Across the Threshold". *Journal of Transformative Education* 2003 1: 16.

realized that as an approach to improving practice, and to educational research, it essentially fosters transformation, change, improvement in one's own learning, the learning of my students and the learning of other social formations. As I began to use this approach in my teaching, I realised that living theory action research could help me to change my practice in order to achieve my goal of helping my students to change themselves as persons, in a holistic manner, depending on how I design my courses and coursework, and that, in turn this could facilitate change in our society.

Here we come to another distinctive feature of the transformative potential of living theory in my opinion. It does not simply aim at the educator facilitating change in the person being educated, but rather, the educator is also implicitly and / or explicitly involved in the transformation process brought about through the learning. That is, the educator needs to be willing to transform themselves as they strive to improve their practice for the benefit of their students. Experience has shown me that there can be no change in my teaching practice, without my effort to change my own mind set, and attitudes towards others, my willingness to try out different ways of doing things in the classroom, etc. I think that this is what Whitehead means when he refers to influencing one's own learning as a practitioner, thus educating oneself, as well as influencing others; the willingness to change oneself based on what one learns about oneself through the process of self enquiry in practice (Whitehead, 2009b).

Perhaps I could say that I express or understand as "transformational learning" what Whitehead expresses with the term "educational influences" (Whitehead 2008, 2009a, 2011). I aim at achieving this "influence" by facilitating transformational learning at different levels in my students: theoretical, theoretical-practical (knowledge application), and behavioural (of the will, and the emotions). My teaching Philosophical Anthropology and Principles of Ethics greatly helps in moving towards my goal, as both units essentially deal with the human person and human actions, and so, can bring students to focus directly on understanding themselves as persons, along with their actions, and apply this knowledge to their own lives. As I will describe, in my experience, when the students assimilate this knowledge in their lives and experience its benefits, it produces

a spiral effect which leads the students spontaneously to try to transmit this knowledge to other people so that they too may assimilate and benefit from this knowledge.

The concern I experienced in my first two years of teaching at Strathmore University may now be understood better. As explained above, I wanted to help my students assimilate the contents of my units in a practical manner, which would help them to change themselves. However, I felt that I was not achieving this goal due to the various challenges or “border crossings” which I was experiencing in my early teaching in Kenya.

Now I will explain how I tried to overcome these challenges, initially in an unplanned manner, and later, in a more systematic way.

### How did I try to cross these borders<sup>11</sup>?

Basically, I tried to overcome these challenges using a two-pronged approach:

1. The effort to improve our educational relationships in different ways, as I describe below, in order to overcome any negative impact of my diversity with regard to my students.
  
2. To foster interest in the units I teach and to enhance the learning styles of my students, I have tried to help them link philosophical theory to real life situations and practice, with the aim of helping them to change themselves as persons:

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<sup>11</sup> I insert the figure previously shown in the main text to facilitate memory:

<b>Summary of borders I needed to cross with my students</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Border challenge</b>	<b>Towards overcoming the challenge and crossing the border</b>
1.	My diversity with regard to my students	Improve our educational relationships to facilitate effective teaching and learning
2.	Lack of interest in the philosophy units which I teach	Show the relevance, interest and importance of studying these philosophy units
3.	Student learning style and focus on grades	Facilitate intrinsic motivation and interest in learning these units

- a. By improved learning of theoretical concepts which I tried to facilitate in various ways.
- b. Fostering intellectual assimilation of these concepts and development of a deeper understanding of the concepts, including how they apply to real life.
- c. Designing projects which help students to apply and implement the ideas which they have learned in their own lives, often bringing about personal behavioural change.

My attempts to overcome the challenges described above involve one on-going cycle from March 2006 to date, which is intertwined with shorter cycles moving from one academic semester to the next.

### **Cycle one: on-going self enquiry from one semester to the next**

This on-going cycle involves constant self reflection on my teaching practice in which I ask myself what could I do better? How can I teach better, in a more effective manner?

From March 2006 onwards, this thought process had given rise to various ideas which I try to implement in practice. I began to act in ways which could improve my teaching, such as trying to understand my context better and adjust to it. I would speak with colleagues and friends about the education system in Kenya, to understand my students' educational background. I tried to listen as friends and young people I knew discussed their experiences at school, at work, at home in their families. I read the newspapers to become more familiar with political and other issues affecting Kenya. I listened to the radio and found out more about the music, and other interests of my students. I read books by a variety of authors to understand Kenya's development in various sectors over time.

I also tried to change my approach to my students in class and outside the classroom. I discovered that they like stories, so I started using more stories to illustrate the contents I had to cover in class. I also realized that they particularly like stories about myself, so I began to tell them more things about my own background, education, etc. This really helped to “break the ice” and build good relationships with my students. For example, in August 2011, I was teaching two groups of students about Philosophical Anthropology. One day before going to class, I received a text message from my sister in Ireland to say that my first nephew, Max, had been born. I was excited and I knew that my students would respond well to the news. So when I entered both classes that day, I told my students about the good news which I had received. In both cases, the students clapped, and I could sense they were sharing my joy, although they do not even know my family! This is because we had already established some kind of rapport in the classroom, whereby they were willing to share something that mattered to me.

I also try to facilitate a comfortable learning environment for my students by explaining to a new group of students, at the start of a new unit, who I am, where I come from, what I have studied, how I came to Kenya, the fact that I am trying to do my doctoral studies as I teach, etc. Even now, when I no longer teach them, some students still ask about my studies when they see me. I also explain that I am bad at recognizing the new faces, especially in the case of the ladies due to their changing hair styles, and remembering the names. So I tell them not to be surprised if I don’t greet them in the corridors; it is not that I am angry or indifferent, it is just that I don’t remember. Rather, I encourage them to feel free to smile and greet me when we meet, and in this way, I will know that this is one of my current students, and little by little, I will get to know the faces and names more easily. They usually enjoy this explanation, and many do greet me in the corridors and it does help me to become more familiar with their faces and names. Little things like these, seem to help to make the students feel comfortable with me both in class and outside the classroom. In class, I try to keep smiling and to be patient, in spite of interruptions, and the other usual difficulties that one may face when teaching. Christopher commented on this in student feedback obtained in July 2008: *The lecturer always smiled even when things seemed disgusting. When students annoyed her, she didn’t easily get agitated. She tried to hold her peace. This helped me*

even in other situations to remain calm. In the same feedback session, Muema commented: *Ms. Dean was ethical during the delivery of the lecture. She did not shout at people when they are seen murmuring or having diverted attention. A look from her would send a message without the need of yelling, which emphasizes ethics and effective communication.* Finally, referring to methods which facilitated learning in class, Victor said: *The lecturer's ability to establish an environment with some sort of 'ease' in class, making students feel free to communicate questions and answers to her. She just establishes a friendly interaction with her class*<sup>12</sup>.

I have also tried to change my teaching methods little by little. Originally, I largely relied on traditional lecturing in class. However, over time I combined lecturing with other methods. I began to incorporate the use of movies followed by discussion, to help students reflect on and connect course contents with real life situations. While studying Philosophical Anthropology, which covers the topic of life and death among other, we watched *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Cliff commented afterwards: *The course in general was superb. What really inspired me is the movie "Tuesdays with Morrie". I hope we watch it again... I learnt the value of people when they are still alive; when they die you will regret why you did not have time for them.* Referring to the same movie, Mary said: *The movie was great. It was interesting and informative. We got to learn so much about feelings from the movie. Discussing the movie was also helpful since we got to know how various people interpreted it.* Carol commented *It helped me realize that we have got only one life to live and its very short. So we have to appreciate the little things we have like good health, friends and family always because you do not know what might happen the next minute. Like Morrie said in the movie, when you learn how to die, you learn how to live.*

I have also tried to foster discussion in class on the topics being covered, either at the level of the whole class, or letting the students discuss in small groups to facilitate those who find it harder to speak in front of many people. Maryanne explained that *the lecturer involving us during the discussion helped me to think a lot about the area being taught.*

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<sup>12</sup> All these comments come from student feedback which I collected in July 2008, after teaching these students Philosophical Anthropology for one semester.

Another student commented *she gave us the chance to fully express our thoughts and feelings during discussions in lectures*. A third student said *Open class discussion method i.e. she would ask questions to be answered openly by any willing party. This helped me to be able to express myself and embrace some peoples' opinions*.

Many students also commented on the effectiveness of group work, either discussions or preparation of class presentations, for improving their learning. Daniel commented: *Through group work I was able to broaden my scope of thinking since I got ideas from other people*. Sarah said: *The group discussions that we had during the lectures helped a lot, because different opinions are raised and you learn from others. We may think we know a lot when we read alone, but it gets surprising when others tip in with new ideas that one had not thought of*. Some students also highlighted the fact that this system helped those who may not otherwise participate in discussion with the whole class. As Joan put it, *through these groups, students are able to open up more than they would to a whole class*.

Another method which I tried to improve on, although I had thought that I was doing it alright, was the type of examples I would use to illustrate the course contents, in practical ways. A number of students commented in July 2008, that this has helped them to acquire knowledge and apply it to life. Caroline commented that *the use of real case examples helped to put things in context and understand the topics faster*. One student wrote *I enjoyed the course because it was about real things, not just books to be read, but rather, it can be applied*. Another student said that what had helped acquire knowledge and apply it was *constantly relating what happens in our lives to the theory we are learning*.

Finally, I tried to offer my students the opportunity to stop and reflect on various experiences, so that they would learn to think about them in a deeper manner, and come to understand those experiences better; at the same time, the aim is to help them to learn from their own experiences and implement that new knowledge in the future. The student feedback questionnaire which was answered in July 2008 is an example of how I try to facilitate the process of reflection, and many of the responses show that the

students were learning to think more deeply about life, and connect their experiences with the knowledge acquired in a previous unit on Philosophical Anthropology.

When asked to give a real situation which she has reflected on, indicating what she understood and learnt from her reflection, Sabina said: *During my holidays, I helped my parents in our shop and discovered that the workers weren't straight as they were mis-conducting themselves at work by not performing as expected. It is through clear and deep reflections on what was happening that I learnt the reasons and methods to counter this. This then helped me learn that rushing out on someone, or firing someone would not help character, but counseling and nurture would.* Another student commented: *I once reflected on the experience of a neighbor of ours who was HIV positive. He was a lecturer at the Western University College and he acquired HIV from school. He got home and hanged himself leaving a suicide note asking his wife for forgiveness. I reflected on the experience and learnt that human life is very important and that everyone has to respect his own dignity and life.*

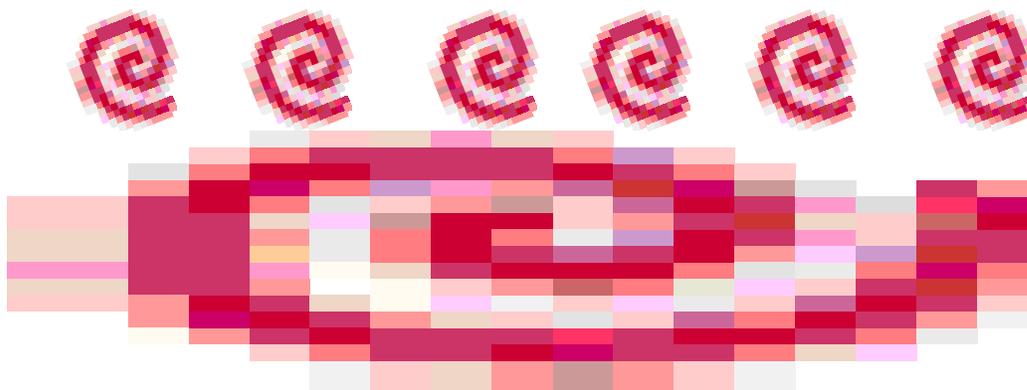
At times I ask my students to reflect on the Community Based Attachment which they do during the long break between first and second year, so they try to connect it with what they studied in Philosophical Anthropology during first year. Here again I have come across interesting learning experiences which have moved the students forward as persons. One of my students explained the following: *When I went for the Community Based Attachment in a children's' home, at first I felt frustrated upon being told to wash bed sheets which had a great number of bed bugs. Later I Felt pity for the kids and asked myself that if a human being could sleep on the bedding and still survive, washing them would not take away my life, but still mould my strong character and reveal the true love I ever long to show to others.* On a different note, Hellen commented: *The thought of not having parents made me think that it would be the end of the world. When I was working in a children's' home, I interacted with children who were abandoned when they were young and they are still strong and determined to be prosperous in the future. This made me learn and understand that no matter the challenges one faces in life, you can be successful in future, as long as you are determined to face the challenges.*

These few comments illustrate how the students are capable of reflecting on experience and learning from it, especially during their Community Based Attachment. However, going through all the feedback I have noticed that it is important to offer students the chance to reflect on specific experience. I have discovered that, while some seem to do so more easily, others only manage it when prodded, and some hardly reflect at all, in spite of having done Philosophical Anthropology previously, which should help them to think a little more deeply about their life and experience.

As is evident in this narrative, I have been striving to change my approach to my teaching practice little by little over the years, for the benefit of my students. However, this has also meant that I have had to change myself as I change my way of doing things in the classroom, as well as trying to help them to improve in various ways. This will become clearer as I proceed.

**New cycles every semester:**

As mentioned above, within my on-going self-enquiry cycle, each semester I try to identify some new way of engaging my students more with my units, to facilitate effective learning. Perhaps this process could be illustrated as follows:



From early 2008 onwards, I began to create more systematic projects designed to get my students actively involved in a practical learning process. Some of the projects were more interpersonal in nature. For example, in the *Creating a spiration of love in freedom* project, I asked my students to work in groups throughout the semester with people who are different to themselves, while preparing a class presentation together. The underlying aim was to encourage them to find ways of creating “a spiration of love in freedom among themselves”; by this I meant that they should try to get to know, understand and respect one another within their differences and foster mutual friendship. Many groups took the project to heart and worked hard to achieve the goal<sup>13</sup>. Jani commented after the project *I learnt how to work with my group “Tomodachi”<sup>14</sup>; we learnt how to work with each other, help each other and become great friends. (...) It has helped me to understand my fellow classmates who exhibit different temperaments and learn to work with them.*

Recently I concluded another project which involved encouraging my students to use their freedom to create positive interpersonal relationships while carrying out intercultural research. Here the aim was that students from different cultural backgrounds would work together on a research paper, investigating certain traditional elements within their diverse cultures. They tried to identify and analyse similarities and differences and make recommendations that could facilitate nation-building by fostering harmony and unity among Kenyans, while respecting and building on our diversities, considering them to be a source of enrichment in our society<sup>15</sup>.

Other projects were focused on helping the individual students to improve themselves. The personal development projects have focused on skills acquisition, virtue acquisition, and growth in self-awareness. Here again there are many stories to tell about how individual students such as Annelsie, Carol Betty, Carol K., Elizabeth, Bob, Annie and a

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<sup>13</sup> I presented a paper at the Strathmore University 2010 Ethics Conference about this project, in which one of the groups of students headed by an Indian girl named Jani, made a brief presentation on their experience while carrying out the project and the impact which it had on them.

<sup>14</sup> *Tomodachi* means “friends” in Japanese; the name they chose for their group already reflected their interest in achieving the goal of improved relationships among themselves.

<sup>15</sup> Four groups of students presented their papers to the 2011 Strathmore Ethics Conference and had their papers accepted. They presented them in a specially designed youth panel, during the conference, held on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2011.

fervent follower of Arsenal, among others, have transformed themselves as persons through these projects<sup>16</sup>.

The various projects which I design for my students usually involve quite a lot of work for myself; initial design, assisting the students in the implementation, follow up of students especially in the case of the individual projects, grading, feedback to and from students, etc. All this is very challenging and it involves on-going self-transformation as I need to continually invent new projects for personal growth, start again in maintaining a patient and loving attitude towards my students, keep smiling, listening to them, adjusting to and motivating more passive groups of students, respect their freedom, etc. But I think that the effort is worthwhile because it helps me to strengthen my character and other aspects of my personality, just as I try to help my students to do themselves. In reality, I am discovering that the story of my personal self-transformation, in the effort to improve my teaching practice, gives rise to similar stories among my students; together we are producing stories within a story. There seems to be a spiraling effect moving from my story to their stories and beyond, in some cases.

### **Catherine's Story: from One to Many**

I will now describe some of the spirals of influence moving from me to a student and from the student to other students or / and to other people linked to the student.

#### **The story of Davis**

I first discovered that I was having an influence on at least some of my students when Davis came to see me, possibly in early 2006, shortly before he began the three month break before starting the third year of his degree programme. He came to ask if he could borrow some of the material I had used to teach Principles of Ethics to his class as he wanted to try to use it in his village, up-country, with the youth. I agreed and

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<sup>16</sup> The self-awareness project, with feedback from various students, is referred to in a paper entitled *Bringing Philosophy to Life* which I presented in Croatia in 2009 at a conference on "A Creative Approach to Teachers' Education".

asked him to come back when I had gathered the material. However, he did not return before the holidays.

Later in the year, he came to see me again and told me his personal story. In summary, he had struggled to get through Primary school because of financial difficulties, but he managed to finish and get a good grade in the national exams. As a result, he was offered a place in a good high school, however, he could not take it because of finances. His mother, who was raising Davis and his brother alone, decided to sell the only cow she had, to pay his school fees for the first few terms at school. She said it was worth the sacrifice if it would give him the opportunity to sleep in a decent bed at boarding school and learn new things, although they did not know if he would be able to continue his studies. Fortunately, at the high school, his teachers realized that Davis was a good student and so between them, they managed to continue paying his fees so that he could finish the four years of high school. He got a good grade in the national exams, and applied to Strathmore University for a scholarship, when he saw it advertised in the newspaper. He won a scholarship and started his degree in Commerce.

I had already taught him Principles of Ethics when he came to see me at the end of his second year in early 2006. Now, later in the year, as he told me his story, he described the effect which studying at Strathmore was having on him. He said that it was as if his mind was opening up to a much broader and deeper knowledge and understanding of the world in so many aspects. He had been particularly influenced by the Ethics unit which I had taught and had asked for the material because he wanted to use it to help the young people in his village. He described how these young people were dropping out of the education system after primary school, because of problems with fees, etc. and that this was leading them into idleness, and all sorts of problems such as substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies, etc. He felt for them because he knew that he could have been in the same situation if it hadn't been for his mother's sacrifice and the help of his teachers in high school. He told me that during the long holidays he had gathered the youth of his village together and tried to keep them busy in different ways. He had used his Ethics class notes to give classes on various ethical values, along with

motivational talks on the importance of trying to continue their education, avoid getting into trouble and destroying their lives. I was very impressed by his story and the potential he showed; I was also glad to know that he had been able to use what he had learned in my unit to help his people in some way.

In his last two years at Strathmore, Davis managed to get help from our Community Outreach Programme and start raising funds to build a high school in his village, so that the young people there would have easier access to further education. When he graduated, he got a job with the Bill Clinton Foundation and continues working to raise funds to assist in educational and other projects around Kenya and Africa. He has become a role model for our students and at times returns to Strathmore to give motivational talks.

His story has taught me the potential which young people have to do good to others, if they receive the appropriate help and guidance. Although my educational influence in his development was partial, and combined with other influences and his own internal motivation, I realized that I could help to bring about change in my students through my teaching, which may well have other ripple effects in other people and society itself.

Perhaps because of this, in January 2008, when Kenya was in the grips of post-electoral violence, I decided to try to help the students to whom I was teaching Philosophical Anthropology at the time, deal with the tensions and ethnic conflict and hostility which had arisen among Kenyans. Many returned to school after the Christmas break in a state of tension, as was the case with most of us at the time. After asking them to write what they had experienced during the most violent times, I realized that I should design a practical project which could help them to come to terms with the various forms of diversity which exist in Kenya, and try to foster unity and harmony within their possibilities.

After discussing the issue of the dignity and equality of every human being in class, and highlighting the importance of respecting diversity and promoting unity, I asked my students, as part of their coursework, to look for someone different to themselves due to ethnicity, culture, or other reasons and try to do something with and for that person or

people. Afterwards they were to write up what they had done and reflect on the experience, to understand more deeply how unity and diversity can be compatible, and complementary. Many students came up with original and interesting initiatives, some of which were posted on the Strathmore website at the time. They demonstrated their capacity to contribute positively to their communities in different ways, promoting unity, harmony and peace in those difficult times. They also reflected deeply on their experience and learnt a lot in this process<sup>17</sup>.

### **The story of Cleophas**

This story begins with the project which I have just described, however it spiraled beyond to have further impact on Cleophas, his classmates, his community and myself.

Cleophas writes about how the leaders of different youth groups on Kibera<sup>18</sup>, of whom he was one, decided to organise a four day seminar for the youth in Kibera during February 2008, focusing on teamwork and reconciliation. When the young people gathered together, the leaders organized them into groups in which people from different ethnic communities were mixed together. *These groups had to compete against each other and so people got involved in putting their ideas together. The group that emerged the winner said that they really had to hear each one of their member's ideas and so leading to their success. The least successful group had members who were not participating and did not have good co-ordination. This practice made the youth realize that each on or each individual has a meaning in society and that putting ideas together could bring many good things in society.*

Other activities were organized, including watching movies. After watching "Hotel Rwanda", Cleophas comments : *When the youth saw the movie, they were really touched and said they didn't want Kenya to go to that state.* The young people also had a talk on reconciliation and forgiveness, and the effects of keeping grudges in one's heart. *After we had a talk from him, we decided to wash each other's feet as a sign of reconciliation and love,* says Cleophas. He concludes *The whole seminar was good and*

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<sup>17</sup> For further details on this project and to read some of the stories, see the paper I presented at the 2011 Strathmore University Ethics Conference.

<sup>18</sup> One of the Nairobi slums and one of the areas which was most affected by the post-electoral violence of 2008.

*the best experience we ever had and really changes the lives of people especially in Kibera. It made us understand that our differences in community were just accidents and that we were all one and could do great things together.*

The reflections and considerations which Cleophas made when linking Philosophical Anthropology to the situation that Kenya was going through were particularly interesting. He begins by explaining that, thanks to studying Philosophical Anthropology, he came to understand himself better, *to know who I am and what I need to do*. He then affirms: *By understanding myself better, I was not able to involve myself in criminal acts of violence*. In other words, even before the outbreak of violence in his home area, Kibera, Cleophas had already grasped from his study of the human person that he and others have special value, and this knowledge helped him in practice not to get involved in the post-electoral violence when it started in the place where he lives. He then gives examples of how he proactively responded to the situation: *One man was shot by an arrow and was lying in front of our gate. Because he was in pain and I was the only one around him, I decided to call some of my neighbours and helped one another to take him to hospital*. This was probably a risky thing to do in that context, but Cleophas had the courage to do it.

He also describes how his study of Philosophical Anthropology helped him to learn how to treat people like friends and family members, even if they were just passers-by, because he learnt that *a human being's dignity cannot be replaced by anything and it is the most expensive (valuable) thing in the world*. As a consequence of this, he explains that: *This is why we kept tight with my friends through the difficult times of violence and never parted with each other due to tribalism, even though we lived in the most affected area in the country*. I can testify that Kibera was a dangerous place for people of different ethnic communities to interact at that time. One evening, I called a friend who lived in another area of Kibera at that time. In the background I could hear the terrifying sounds of mobs shouting, threatening each other, and attacking each other, etc.; she told me that it was like that every night at the time. One of my tutees, who lives in another area of Kibera described experiencing the same phenomenon; in the case of her family, they were saved by the fact that the people of the area appreciated her

father's activity within the community, although they come from a different ethnic group to their neighbours. She also told me that, coming to university in January 2008 was a fearsome journey as one had to pass through the different areas which Kibera had been divided into according to ethnic background, and that to walk through an area that did not belong to your community was dangerous, especially at the "checkpoints" set up by those perpetrating the violence. One was often asked to give their name or to show their national identification card, and based on that, one could be attacked, or required to pay a "fee" in order to move to the next area.

Finally Cleophas concludes, *it (Philosophical Anthropology) has also enabled me to realize the dignity of the human person and to help those in need. This is why I always take my friends to accompany me to old age houses where we wash clothes for them and give them food. During the violence period, we went to visit disabled displaced people and gave them food, washed clothes for them and played some games with them to make them feel some sense of belonging and that they were still with us... (Philosophical Anthropology) has really built me; my personal being has really developed.*

As we can see from his account, through the unity in diversity project, Cleophas applied what he had learnt about the value and dignity of each human being to real life situations and contributed in different ways to helping others, especially his peers, to do likewise. The spiral effect moving from my educational influence on him, through his acceptance of that influence, is transferred or passed on as he attempts to transmit the same values to others, and bring well being to his friends and neighbours.

The story of Cleophas does not finish here. In July 2008, I took his class again for Principles of Ethics. This time, I designed a personal development project in which each student had to identify some goal they wanted to achieve during the semester, and work at moving towards that goal little by little, week by week. In the process, they did some journal writing to describe their efforts, successes and failures, and their reflections on these, in order to learn from them and adjust their strategy in trying to achieve their goals. At the end of the semester, they wrote a report on the project summarizing what they had achieved and what they had learned from it, using specific examples and

references to their journals. This project gave rise to some fascinating transformation in many of my students. However, here I will focus on the project carried out by Cleophas.

His report opens with an explanation about his goal and the reason he chose it:

*Through Strathmore University, I have been molded to understand very many things that I had never thought of as significant in my day to day activities. The study of Ethics here has had a great impact on me especially my way of life and I thank Strathmore University for this. Before my Ethics lecturer asked us to have a personal development project, I had already seen and experienced difficult situations around me, which I had been perceiving with ignorance before coming to Strathmore. Cleophas is referring here to some things which he told me about later in a personal conversation, regarding life in Kibera, such as the disregard for the corpses of the dead, which he would come across when moving around, along with the practice of abortion in brutal ways. He commented that at times he finds aborted fetuses that are still living, in a corner, or on a rubbish heap. This is why he comments *but after (coming to Strathmore), I felt like something had to be done and not by anybody else but it had to begin with me. For this reason my project was about dealing with people experiencing difficulty around me and to make them realize that they had dignity, and to avoid activities which would rather degrade their dignity as human persons. Actually this was to share what I had learnt in Ethics with the community that has brought me up and to put them into practice.**

Basically, Cleophas' project involved setting himself a weekly target of a certain number of sick people to visit, which he broke down to various visits to different people each day. He also carried out other social activities within Kibera. He describes how he faced challenges such as the need to catch up with his personal study because of dedicating more time to visiting the sick. When he tried to organize clean-ups around Kibera with his friends and other youth, people were suspicious and thought that he was being financed by some organization to do this, and so, they did not want to cooperate, or they tried to get money from him for loaning the tools they needed to do their work. He describes how he dealt with these challenges as follows: *this made me try to explain my intention by having some little meetings after the activity. Some of these people eventually joined me and became very actively involved....* Regarding those who

wanted to charge him for using the tools, *To solve this I had some talks with the group and explained to them my intentions and had to make it clear to them that I was to get nothing out of this.* At the same time, although he does not have money and usually walks to and from school from Kibera every day, as well as walking all over Kibera, Cleophas still bought snacks for a group of kids which he visited with some friends. At times he ended up getting home very late, as people wanted to talk a lot when he went to visit the sick in their homes. He also tried to get his friends involved in the various forms of social work which he organized.

In the self-evaluation he carries out at the end of the report, Cleophas states: *Through this exercise I was able to understand different people, different ways of life people have and it made me realize that there are very many people out there who really need my assistance. It also made me realize that human beings have to work together to be prosperous and that we need to put ourselves in other peoples' shoes and try to help them in times of difficulty. I too noticed that I had a task to shed light to the people who didn't have the opportunity that I had and so I had the responsibility to share my knowledge with them. This project has enabled me to change my perspective towards life and to realize that at one time I'll need someone to visit me when I'll be sick in the hospital; it has also made me realize that keeping good relations with people is very important since life is very uncertain. I realized this when I visited a house where there was a sick man whom neighbours didn't care about, claiming that he didn't have good relations with people when he was well.*

His evaluation of the personal development project itself was: *This project helped me a lot in the practical use of my freedom as through doing different activities in it, I was always the subject (owner) of my choices and always in my own hands. Through it I was able to love the real good of associating with others in trying to solve common problems we undergo. According to me this project was very successful and of great importance in my life as through it I got to learn a lot.*

Once again, in this project Cleophas showed spiraling effect of educational influence which moved from myself as educator, to himself as learner, and on to his own community, where also managed to change peoples' lives through his efforts.

In the next stage of Cleophas' story I found that I too had to get involved in another way. I include here a brief text which I wrote for publication in the *Strathmore Digest*, a bimonthly magazine about events in and around the university.

From July to September 2008 I taught Principles of Ethics to Cleophas and his classmates. During the unit I asked the students to carry out a project to help them develop themselves by achieving some chosen goal. Towards the end of the semester, Cleophas came to tell me of some activities he was carrying out to help his peers in Kibera to improve their lifestyle and upgrade their living conditions. I thought it was a great initiative and encouraged him but I did not get involved!

Then, in June 2009, IHEDS<sup>19</sup> invited some visiting lecturers from Ireland and the UK to carry out a staff training seminar on Action Research. The guests were interested in visiting some SU projects in Kibera, which they did. At the time I remembered that Cleophas was doing things there and I would have liked to introduce him to our visitors, but it was not possible. Then I decided that, the next time I saw him, I would ask how his activities in Kibera are going. Providentially I met him a day or two after making this decision and asked him how things were going. We agreed to meet so that he could update me.

So we met in early July 2009 at the Forecourt and Cleophas told me about how he had managed to help his friends to clean up their living conditions and to improve their lifestyles. He also told me that he had recently started going to Soweto Baptist High School early on Wednesday mornings, with the permission of the Principal there, to give classes in virtues and life skills to the students from Form 1 to Form 4. He said he needed more people to help with the project, especially to assist the girls in the school. I thought the project sounded exciting so I agreed to go with him on the following Wednesday, to see what he was doing. Elsie Onsongo accompanied me and we were very impressed and excited by the rapport that Cleophas had with the students, and their response. So I suggested to Cleophas that he ask some people in his class if they would be interested in coming to help us with the project as I had already decided that I wanted to collaborate.

The following Wednesday, we met at High-rise Estate at 6.45am with Cleophas and other 3<sup>rd</sup> year BCOM students. We went to the school and agreed to talk with the girls and the guys in separate classrooms as we had noticed that the girls were shy to speak and to

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<sup>19</sup> IHEDS: Institute for Humanities, Education and Development Studies at Strathmore University. In early 2011, the Institute was transformed into the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

give their opinion. And it went on from there! June came up with a schedule of topics for the remaining weeks until December, including human virtues, life skills, study skills and career talks. Little by little more SU students joined the early morning Wednesday group and we got to know the students at Soweto better. As they developed their trust in us, we were able to give them lots of practical advice and help which they really appreciated as shown in some of the letters which they wrote on one Wednesday when we could not go to see them because of exams at SU:

"I really appreciated all the efforts that you've made coming to teach us here in our school. By the lessons we have been taking with you all that time, it has really helped me a lot. I have changed a lot. I'm not the Alice I used to be. The lessons have helped me more getting to know myself really well, how to mingle with people and how to be generous. One thing that I have learnt about generosity is that you don't have to be generous in order to get paid or being praised; it's really a self want. The other thing is how to plant my goal and the steps that I have to take in order to succeed in life." (Form 3 student)

Many students commented how the study skills they were taught and how they have started to be more focused and to improve in their class work.

"I first thank the Almighty God for giving you the heart of encouraging young people like us. It was a very great opportunity where we were sharing with you and it has really changed my life. From form one up to form three I had never planned my timetable but when you gave us the way how we should prepare our home timetables I saw I'm getting something and in my mid-term exams I realised am improving in my academics slowly and slowly" (Form 3 student)

Other students speak of how they are trying to share what they have learned with their friends:

"I have learned how to control peer pressure. I now even take time studying instead of watching movies and visiting some places which are not close to studies like I did before. I am now able to control myself from my peers especially when they guide me in the wrong direction. I am more careful and instead I am the one who advises them to take their studies seriously. ..I really know who I am, who I want to be in future and the goal I would like to achieve at school and in future" (Z.M.)

They speak of learning to be courageous in facing reality, to live fortitude, to pray. They especially refer to how the SU students have given them encouragement, hope, new dreams and a vision for the future.

On the last day of class before the school closed for the long holiday the students at Soweto did a performance illustrating what they have learned through all the SU team has tried to transmit over the last few months. We really enjoyed it! Fenuel from COP came to video record the session, which we greatly appreciated.

I could go on, but I would like to underline that this project required a lot of sacrifice from the SU team of students; many came on days when it was cold, raining, muddy, when they had cats and exams, etc. To me the whole project brings to light what our students can do for others if they put their minds to it! We would like to take this opportunity to encourage other students from SU to join the project or to assist in any way possible. We hope that, from January, we will meet on Saturday afternoons at a hall in one of the church compounds in Kibera.

We already have a Saturday afternoon group for students from other schools following the same plan as at Soweto, which Cleophas and Sharon have dedicated themselves to assisting generously. We would like to focus on the Saturday afternoon programme to bring together even more students from other schools around Kibera. The more help we have from SU students and friends, the easier it will be to reach the point of helping these young people on a personal, one to one basis through mentoring by the SU team. This is our dream and goal for 2010!

One of the Strathmore students who got involved in the project was Irene. She described it as follows:

I got to know of and join this initiative 'by accident'. I had accompanied a friend to attend a meeting to discuss the progress of the initiative. Needless to say the reason I agreed to visit the school for the first time was merely because I was asked to.

But that decision to see what the fuss was all about changed my life forever. The sight of young ladies and gentlemen eager to learn from us and having questions that once overwhelmed me and the knowledge that I could actually make a difference in their lives erased all the skepticism I initially had about the project.

The more I got to visit them the more fulfillment I got compared to the alternative uses I could have invested my time in and the more I got to learn from them too. They are

intelligent, mature youth with great dreams and a willingness to learn that is not too common. And very entertaining too!

I got to a point that I cannot bear missing the Wednesday sessions we have with them and I hope that they are gaining something from us too. Big thanks to Cleo for coming up with this.

June also participated in the project and had this to say:

When Cleophas first mentioned the project to me, I was skeptical about my ability to contribute to it. However after meeting and interacting with the students, and remembering my teenage years, I realized that the problems I may have had at the time are similar to those they face, and all they needed was a sense of direction and hope, and someone to listen. This increased my willingness to help and also after the aim of the project was explained to me. The benefits accrue to not only the students but to all the participants of the project. Being of help to someone else is one of the greatest feelings, especially after seeing the increased receptiveness and participation of the students to the topics discussed as the weeks went by. I only hope that many more students can be reached by this project.

I may also add that when I began taking part in this project, I also learned many things. I had to overcome a certain fear of working Kibera, which gave me the opportunity to experience the reality of daily life there. I had to come out of my comfort zone and leave home earlier in the morning, while it was still dark and everyone was walking in silence to work, to be on time to meet Cleophas and the other Strathmore students. This allowed me to witness how Cleophas really seems to know so many people in Kibera as, whenever we walked to the school with him, he was continuously greeted or stopped by people he knows. The small children called out "Omosh", the name he is known by in Kibera, and the students at the high school are obviously fascinated by him and how he managed to bring students from his university to their school to help in different ways. For many of them, he is a role model and a sign of hope that it is possible for them to move beyond Kibera in the future and get training or even go to university, if they work hard and try to live well, so that they don't destroy their lives through substance abuse, disease related behavior, etc. I had to sacrifice my time and efforts to cooperate with Cleophas in the project, over and beyond my work in the

classroom, but this has broadened my outlook and helped me to discover once again what our students are capable of doing when they want to, and receive some support.

Cleophas continued with the project and also graduated with his degree in Commerce in June 2011. From March 2011, when he had finished his final exams, he combined job-hunting, like his classmates, with dedicating time to help sell raffle tickets to raise funds for the new environmentally friendly green buildings which Strathmore is still constructing, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Strathmore “brand”<sup>20</sup>. One of the staff members who was actively involved in the fund-raising told me that Cleophas spent many hours at a supermarket in a shopping mall near the university, where the tickets were being sold to customers. When possible buyers objected to purchasing the tickets because they thought that Strathmore is a university for the rich and wealthy, Cleophas would explain to them that he was born and bred in Kibera, and that he managed to go through Strathmore and obtain his degree through the efforts of his father. He presented himself as living proof that the university is open to all, and worthy of receiving the help of everyone because anyone can benefit from the university’s programmes. In this way and with these and similar arguments, he convinced very many people to purchase the raffle tickets, and so contributed greatly to the fundraising initiative.

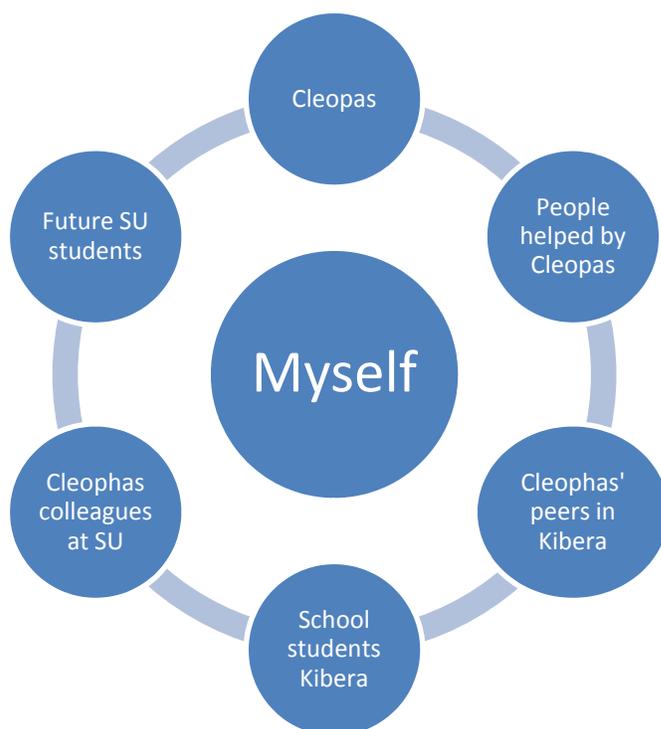
As a consequence of his commitment to “giving back” to Strathmore in this way, he was offered a job by the Managing Director of the company which donated the main prize, a car, for the raffle. In September 2011, I was asked by the company to write a reference letter for Cleophas, which I was very happy to do.

Through the story of Cleophas, I am showing that my educational influence has had a spiraling effect, moving from one person to many others, in various ways and to different extents, even to the point of spiraling back to myself as I too got involved in his project. It is difficult to illustrate this spiraling effect as, in some cases it moves from one person to the next in a linear process, and in others, it moves to the sides, giving rise to

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<sup>20</sup> Strathmore exists as a university since 2002. It received its charter as an independent private university in April 2008. The university developed from the partnering of Strathmore College and Kianda College, both of which opened in Nairobi in January 1961. See <http://www.strathmore.edu/50/> for more details.

other spiraling effects, and probably further consequences that I am not aware of. This diagram may illustrate something of the interlinking stories which move from one person to many people.



In a sense, perhaps I could say that the story of my self-enquiry into improving my practice gives rise to other stories, spiraling from one to another. We are creating stories within a story, which spiral beyond in some cases.

### **Why bother? What is my motivation in all this?**

As I reflect on my teaching experience since I arrived in Kenya, I realize that I am passionate about education in philosophy and the impact which it can have on my students and myself when it is taught in a manner that brings philosophy to life, by learning to apply the ideas in one's personal life and circumstances.

Following Whitehead's living theory, I have realized that the educational values which inspire and guide my teaching practice are those of love for my students, respect for

their freedom and my own, along with the desire to help them to develop themselves as persons, which moved me to struggle to cross the borders of change which I faced along with my students themselves, when I first began to teach in Kenya.

These are the standards of judgement (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) which I try to live each day in the classroom and beyond. They are also my criteria for action (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) as I design and implement my teaching plan each semester, especially in terms of building good educational relationships and facilitating the assimilation of theory along with its practical application by my students. Finally, I try to evaluate the extent to which I have actually lived my values and helped my students to transform themselves in some way. At times I assess the extent to which they may have assimilated the values which I try to live in the classroom, as I consider this to be a sign (evidence), that I am actually living my educational values in my practice. I use well-designed student feedback questionnaires or reports at the end of each semester to achieve this purpose.

I seek validation for (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) my claims to have influenced my own learning, as well as that of my students, and other people, through this student feedback itself<sup>21</sup>, along with presenting my findings in research papers at conferences and asking critical friends and others, to read and critique my research work.

### **My living educational theory**

What is the meaning of all this for me? Do these efforts to improve my teaching through self-enquiry and reflection, along with practical attempts, have any deeper meaning?

As I have mentioned above, the human values of love, freedom and personal growth are the motivating factors in my teaching practice. I often express them as follows:

“understanding educational relationships as a spiration of love in freedom for personal transformation”. This expression is inspired, through analogy, by my understanding of

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<sup>21</sup> At times the questions I ask focus directly on the quality of the educational relationships in the classroom, my role in these relationships and the effects they have on student interaction and learning. I also ask students to assess their own learning in terms of the extent to which they have grasped the theoretical concepts, have assimilated them and are able to apply them in daily life. I often ask them to give specific examples and evidence from their coursework to support their claims to learning.

the Christian mystery of the Blessed Trinity, which I have studied and taught as a unit in Theology for many years. As I reflect on the dynamism of the loving relationships with respect for each other which we try to create within the classroom and beyond, to facilitate transformative learning, I realize that the dynamics are somewhat similar to those within the inner life of the One and Triune God, the Blessed Trinity.

Following the revelation of Jesus Christ as taught by the Church He founded, I believe that the mystery of God is made up of three divine persons who subsist as the One True God. As an ancient Profession of Faith expresses it: “This is what the Catholic faith teaches: we worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in Unity. We distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance. For the Father is a distinct person; the Son is a distinct person; and the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. Still the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty” (Athanasian Creed, nos. 3-6). This is not the place to explain this mystery in itself, I simply quote this text to indicate my source of inspiration for understanding the educational relationships I strive to foster in my teaching practice.

Bearing in mind the obvious differences between the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and my students and I, there are certain elements within the theological explanation of this mystery which somehow coincide with my experience in the classroom:

<b>Blessed Trinity<sup>22</sup></b>	<b>My teaching and learning environment</b>
Plurality of persons (three different persons)	Plurality of persons (my students and I)
Oneness of the divine nature which is common to the three divine persons	Unity we wish to establish among ourselves, while respecting our diversity
Basis of the interaction of the three divine persons among themselves: their interpersonal relationships	My students and I all need to interact with each other for effective learning: we need to establish interpersonal relationships
Explanatory key to their interpersonal relations: love that is eternally given and received among the persons, in a manner similar to a spiral	Possible key to establishing good interpersonal relations in my teaching and learning environment: I offer love to my students; they receive that love and, moved by it, offer it to others, who can also

<sup>22</sup> There are multiple sources for accessing Church teachings on the Trinitarian mystery, and the various attempts at explaining this mystery down through the centuries. For the sake of simplicity in this context, I limit myself to indicating the following key source: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: numbers 232-267.

	<p>receive it and offer it to others in an on-going manner which we could compare to a spiral =&gt; foster a spiral or spiration of love which moves from one person to another</p>
<p>God is Absolute, Perfect and Supreme Being; as such, He is Perfect Freedom.</p> <p>The loving interaction among the three divine persons is carried out in perfect freedom.</p>	<p>For our educational relationships to be based on a spiration of genuine love among ourselves, we need to use our freedom; we need to choose to love and freely strive to foster that love among ourselves, while respecting each other's freedom =&gt;spiration of love in freedom</p>
<p>The Blessed Trinity, as God is perfect; inner life of the Trinity is a life of perfect love and freedom</p>	<p>As we strive to use our freedom to create and develop loving relationships among ourselves, we improve our interpersonal relations, our learning environment and we transform ourselves by making ourselves better persons  =&gt;spiration of love in freedom facilitates personal growth and transformation</p>
	<p>Improved educational relationships, created by fostering a spiration of love in freedom among ourselves which helps transform us into better persons, ultimately facilitates and improves the quality of teaching and learning in that environment</p>

In summary, I have come to understand that the values which motivate me in my teaching (interpersonal love, freedom, personal growth and transformation), are essential in establishing educational relationships which facilitate effective teaching and learning. These are the core elements of my living educational theory which, with the help of the analogy with the Trinitarian mystery, I express as *Understanding educational relationships as a spiration of love in freedom for personal transformation*.

### **My living theory methodology**

What is the process that I have followed and follow, to further improve my teaching practice for transformational learning and develop my living educational theory?

The methodology which I have used in my research follows the action research living theory model as developed by Jack Whitehead (2009b). This is characterized by methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001); action reflection cycles; personal and social validation; a relationally dynamic awareness of my students and their response to the values I communicate in our interaction; narrative and self-enquiry.

In my personal living theory methodology, I also focus on the creation of new strategies to facilitate transformative teaching and learning, along with the search for and reflection on student feedback regarding my teaching practice. I try to create that *spiration of love in freedom* within the classroom, to facilitate the personal growth of my students.

Finally, I strive to understand and explain my teaching practice and its outcomes using my Christian intellect. The term refers to a way of thinking and reflecting in which the union of human and supernatural reflection determines how we understand reality in its various aspects and allows us to achieve an ever deeper penetration into the meaning of life, experience and practice. Such an approach to reflection and research may only be effectively developed within the context of a genuine search for unity of life in the person. This concept implies the effort to always live according to the values one believes in, being able to explain what one believes and why one lives it out in practice as one does<sup>23</sup>. It is illustrated in how I use my knowledge of the Trinitarian mystery to explain the educational relationships which I try to establish with my students, based on

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<sup>23</sup> This approach is based on two assumptions: 1) The unity of Truth: the fact that the Fullness of Truth by nature can only be One, although we usually find it expressed in partial and participated forms in the created world. Even a small piece of new knowledge can be true as long as it can be shown to be a sharing in the Fullness of the One Truth, which will be expressed in the logical and intellectual harmony that exists between the two. 2) The harmony which actually exists between faith and reason. "Faith" here refers to truth which we know through God's revelation and our personal acceptance of this revelation through the gift of supernatural faith. We know these truths using our human intellect enlightened by faith, and they "take root" there, so to speak. "Reason" in this context expresses truth which we can access and know through exercising our intellectual capacity to know the truth, without the gift of faith. These truths are also rooted in our one and only human intellect. The harmony we are referring to, expresses the fact that the truths which can be attained by human reason alone are naturally in harmony with the truths which we attain and know thanks to the gift of faith. This is because the Truth is One. True knowledge can be acquired in two different ways, through supernatural faith or through the natural intellect alone; but as long as both "pieces" of knowledge are true, they share in the Fullness of the Truth and so, are also in harmony with one another.

my educational values of love, freedom and personal growth, and how I refer to these relationships as *a spiration of love in freedom for personal transformation*.

## **Conclusion:**

In this paper I have highlighted the multiple border crossings for change in my students and myself which I discovered upon arriving in Kenya and starting to teach at Strathmore University. I have explained how my desire to facilitate transformative learning moved me to try to act to bring about the necessary change in all of us.

In this context, I offer a comparison between Mezirow's concept of transformative learning and how the same concept appears in Jack Whitehead's living theory. I have included my own understanding of transformative learning within the context of action research living theory. This is key to understanding the specific ways in which I have tried to cross the borders of change along with my students over the years.

I narrate how I tried to bring about change, using self-enquiry and reflection, along with specific practices and learning strategies. I include comments from my students at different moments, as evidence of how I have changed and of how my students have changed themselves and their environment, thus showing the effectiveness of our efforts.

In order to illustrate how this has led to other stories of change, within my own story in crossing these borders, I show how my educational influence has spiraled out in other directions, through many different people. The case of Cleophas which I present in the paper clearly shows the changes which he experienced through my educational influence, and the further changes which he brought about in others, including myself.

I finish by explaining how the whole process of crossing the borders for change in higher education in Kenya has allowed me to create my own living educational theory, using the living theory methodology which I have also developed. In turn, I have been able to use my living theory to explain my multiple border crossings in terms of my personal educational values, employing my Christian intellect.

I hope to have shown that, if I, as a lecturer, wish to be successful in crossing the borders for change in higher education, I cannot simply focus on trying to change my students; I need to be ready to change myself in the first place. I will then be in a better position to facilitate change in my students, and work towards bringing us all across the borders together.

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