

## Chapter Seven: Innervations

*Of Where We Can Go and What We Can Do*  
—“Lift Every Voice and Sing”—

**I**t is interesting to note that scholars and scientists study and seek understanding of things that already exist. The engineers, innovators, and technicians create things that have never existed. Statements like these typically refer to the natural sciences. These days, however, there is growing cross-fertilization between the natural and social sciences. We see it, for example, in the discussions of “nature versus nurture” and “heredity versus environment.” And scholars consistently point out how they interact with each other to influence outcomes.

The DuBois Learning Center has as its primary concern the education and acculturation of our youth. And over the years we have seen this kind of cross-fertilization between disciplines take place. The early pre-school years are very important. The nutrition and the nurturing that our children receive in these years impact their later performance. The book *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips), points out the value of iron, for example, in the diet of pre-schoolers. Research, they discuss, has shown that children with iron-deficiency test lower in arithmetic and written expressions, among other things—an insight, among others, that most parents are unaware of. The neurologists have pointed out how the brain develops in stages, and how it does so should be taken into account during the developmental years. The book *Twice As Less*, by Eleanor Wilson Orr, discusses the role that language plays, Black dialect in particular, in learning mathematics.

Speaking of Black dialect: Over the years the linguists have been telling us the importance of language skills in the process of education. And some of the approaches to help African American students become proficient with Standard English oftentimes get misinterpreted. A classic example of this was all of that confusion, caused primarily by the press and other media “mavens,” over the Ebonics question that occurred in Oakland, California. For the record, the state of California had several ethnic groups within it that spoke a non-standard language. The state educational authorities decided that it would be best to teach them English as a second language, and appropriated funds to do so. The educators in Oakland realized that they were having the same type of problems in their efforts to educate African American students who spoke a Black dialect to become proficient in their use of Standard English. (Now linguists will tell you that Standard English is a dialect as well. It is the “standard” simply because the ruling classes speak it and, as a consequence, made it the standard.) The state of California did not want to give the Oakland educators any funds because their students spoke a “dialect,” not a non-English “language.” So the Oakland educational authorities gave it a name, Ebonics, in an attempt to have the “dialect” classified as a “language” so that they too could receive some funds to support their efforts in helping African American students improve their language usage. When that happened, the state department and the press went ballistic. They put it out that the Oakland educators were trying to legitimize “bad” English. All sorts of misinformation, confusion and “excrement of adult male cows” ensued. And a golden opportunity was blown!

In the process of thinking, people use the dialect that they are used to. In a formal setting, like school, they are encouraged to translate their thoughts from their dialect to Standard English when they speak or write. When they hear or read Standard English, they have to translate it back into their dialect for understanding. If one is bi-lingual, or bi-dialectal in our case, this task is simpler, if not unnecessary.

Likewise, most people are comfortable thinking in terms of their fields or areas of expertise. Oftentimes it takes an example, a thought, or a concern, etc., from another field or some other area of expertise to spark an insight that leads to a breakthrough or for an understanding of some sought-after solution. This is what happened that caused the idea to be conceived that sparked the breakthrough insight which led to the development of our Telehub Network.

In Chapter One [Step 4] it was explained how I was discussing with Harrison May about how I originally thought that when we came up with the idea of using volunteer professionals to tutor our children in our churches, that it would spread throughout the community. But that did not happen. I was speaking as a community activist, who happened to be somewhat versed in math and IT, and was concerned about the supplementary education of our youth. Harrison was well versed in Information Technology (IT) and networking. He saw (and continues to see) how advancements in his field could be utilized to address the concerns we had regarding the need to spread our concept of helping our kids.

This is an example of how a cross-fertilization of several fields (IT and supplementary education in our case) is often necessary to accomplish a desired objective. It is also illustrative of how the role of technology is becoming ever more important in the education/acclimation of our youth. And it's this cross-fertilization that fires the imagination that enables innovators to innovate. The Learning Center itself and the way it operates are such innovations. But, as has been shown, to come up with the vision that led to our Telehub Network really required an imagination fired by such cross-fertilization. James Weldon Johnson (who also wrote the lyrics for "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and was also a former executive director of the NAACP) talks about the importance to educators of what he calls "collateral knowledge" in his autobiography, *Along This Way*. He says that the master teachers all have it. We often use it at the Learning Center when we delve into our culture for relevant examples to help our students understand concepts by way of analogy.

As we move forward, we will need this kind of cross-fertilization and collateral knowledge from a variety of areas to continue to come up with innovative visions and ways to implement them.

**Books upon books have been written on "War and Peace."** And they invariably point out how it is not enough to have strategies to win the war; there must be strategies to win the peace. That's speaking globally. On an individual level, we learn from youth guidance counselors that it is not enough to get our troubled youth to know what they *should not* do; they have to have some vision as to what they *should* do. Similarly, it is not enough for members of our community to continue to expound on what's *wrong*; we have to envision what we need to do to make things *right*. And after we envision what needs to be done, we need to develop strategies and follow up with action on them.

But in order to develop viable strategies to carry out our visions, it is imperative for us to evaluate our strengths and assets. So let me offer a brief summary of how the Learning Center employed these processes:

- Situation to be addressed: The need to supplement the education of our youth.
  - Strengths and assets: Professionals with talent and time to volunteer to help, and churches with space where the kids can be tutored.
  - Solution and result: The DuBois Learning Center concept of professionals volunteering to tutor children in churches after school and on weekends.
  
- Situation to be addressed: Spread the Learning Center model throughout the community.
  - Strengths and assets: IT professionals with wide-area-networking knowledge; churches willing to house computer centers; students willing to be trained to prepare the churches to be networked; professionals willing to train and supervise the students to do the work; foundations willing to provide the financial resources.
  - Solution and result: Churches designated students to wire their facilities; professionals trained students and supervised their work; satellites centers established in the Telehub Network.

There is still much to be done, and much we can do. The DuBois Learning Center has been operating since 1973. The advent of our Telehub Network occurred in the mid-nineties. And with it came a cornucopia of collateral benefits, present and potential, to our efforts to supplement our children's education.

Among its' fruits are:

**Present—**

- The working together and networking of area churches and community centers involved with the Telehub Network. And the willingness of others to participate.
- The involvement of other persons with a variety of knowledge, talents and skills.
- The involvement of STEM (Scientific, Technological, Engineering, Mathematics) organizations (including the Black Data Processors Association, the Black Family Technology Awareness Association and the National Association of Black Engineers) with the DLC and its Telehub Network.
- The cross fertilization among the above that began to generate more ideas and possibilities for implementation.

**Potential—**

- Use of the technology by the youth (especially those within the neighborhoods of the churches involved with the Telehub Network) to do their homework assignments.
- Archiving of data and information.
- Hosting existing software applications, as well as software applications that we may have developed, for the use of our participants for classes to be offered or for interactive learning.

- Online and distance learning and instructions.
- Online broadcasting—print, audio, video, etc.
- Spreading the Telehub Network nationally and internationally. And ideally this should lead to a network of IT personalities to continuously develop, expand and maintain the infrastructure that's created.

Clearly the lists could go on. But this is merely to prick the imagination, and to stimulate the envisioning process, in order to bring into reality some of the various possibilities. As we like to say: “We are limited to our collective imagination.”

◆◆◆

*Stevie Wonder's album "Innervisions" contains the song "Visions" with the following lines:*

*People hand in hand  
Have I lived to see the milk and honey land?  
Where hate's a dream and love forever stands  
Or is this a vision in my mind?*

*But what I'd like to know  
Is could a place like this exist so beautiful  
Or do we have to take our wings and fly away  
To the vision in our mind?*

◆◆◆

**What I hope I have shown thus far** in this memoir is how like-minded people can accomplish things when they come together to work together. “People hand in hand,” writes Stevie Wonder, and that speaks to our approach, as illustrated in the way our community has cooperated to make the Telehub Network as successful as it is. And we anxiously anticipate greater things to come.

Again, let me reiterate that people often tell us how impressed, and even amazed, they are by our ability to attract so many high quality volunteers to bring to reality this environment where we can freely address the pressing need to supplement the education/acclturation of our youth. (Could this be a form of “the milk and honey land” that Stevie sung about?) Comments have been made, that if we tried to account for all of the hours donated by our volunteers, we would be looking at millions of dollars. But we didn't have that kind of money. What we had was each other and our collective imagination, knowledge and expertise, and our willingness “to take our wings and fly away to the vision in our mind.”

As we move forward, the “people hand in hand” will have to go beyond the environs of Greater Kansas City. The “vision in our mind” is to expand the Telehub Network throughout the nation. To do that will require us to network with IT persons in other cities. It will require us to organize as we did in the sixties, except—recalling the concept of the “historical helix” again—on another level.

In several ways the seeds of this are already beginning to take root. There are leaders of nationally known entities who are aware of what is happening here in Kansas City. One is Tyrone Taborn, the CEO and publisher of *U.S. Black Engineers Information Technology* magazine. He has made several others aware of our work here and some of

them have expressed an interest in coming to Kansas City to find out more information and to discuss ways we can work together. Another is Dr. Conrad Worrill, the chair of the National Black United Front. He has put several persons in contact with us to work on projects of mutual interest. Archie Welch is a former member of Freedom, Inc. who now lives in Phoenix, Arizona. He has put us in touch with Larry Witherspoon, who has national IT networks in place and is seeking to expand. Carl Boyd, who is a nationally renowned speaker and educational consultant, continuously works with us to develop programs and projects that could very well have national import. Others have seen our websites ([www.duboisl.org](http://www.duboisl.org) and [www.duboisl.net](http://www.duboisl.net)) and have contacted us about the possibilities of working together. George Walker and I have held several conference calls with persons in other cities to discuss the possibility of us working together on a variety of projects. Already we see the need to put in place a “new business” committee of the Learning Center in order to appropriately evaluate the continuing propositions that are being presented to us.

Back in the eighties Dick Gregory visited the Learning Center one Saturday morning and had an opportunity to witness our math program in operation. We took out time to let him speak to the students, and later he talked with some of our staff members. He spoke well of our efforts and went further to advise us that we needed to develop and engage in some economic activities. We took his advice to heart. However, the advent of our Telehub Network has really presented us with a vehicle through which we can explore his visionary musings. And the preceding discussions allude to the many possibilities opening up to us.

Of the various types of possibilities opening up to us, there are three in particular I think are worthy of delving into. One of them addresses our concerns regarding the education/acclturation of our youth; another addresses the opportunity for developing financially enterprising ventures; and the other addresses a form of community networking possibilities in what may be called a Harambee Ujima Effect (HUE).

WITH REGARD TO THE FIRST: Let us consider the nature of the school activities that attract the attention of our engaging and energetic youth. It is the extra-curricular activities that capture their interest. They are the ones that you find them engaged in. To paraphrase the sage Curtis Mayfield: “Got to give them something they can feel.” So that suggests that what we should do is establish some activities of this sort that can capture their imagination. Several community organizations that have members involved or are familiar with us, have used the Learning Center to operate their youth programs. However, the Internet radio project, mentioned in Chapter Four, that we call the Frontline Multi-Media Network is one that seems to hold great promise. In addition to it, there is the online teen newspaper, *The Rising Sun*, which we initiated that holds great promise as well. (The name comes from the line “Facing the rising sun of a new day begun” in the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” And the fact that the sun is a star, and our youth are rising stars.) The plan is to have *The Rising Sun* be the youth component of the Frontline Multi-Media Network. That way we will have the adults mentoring the youth. In the schools we have faculty advisors. For *The Rising Sun*, we will have community advisors, which is an approach we plan to take with all of our extra-curricula activity programs and projects.

A collateral benefit of these programs is that the academic skills of our youth will sharpen as a mere consequence of their participating in them. They may not even consider themselves as receiving academic enrichment, but that will be a natural occurrence as a result of the guidance and mentoring they will inevitably receive. And by having students with a variety of talents and interest interacting with each, a wholesome environment can be created.

People learn from each other. And there are certain unavoidable processes that must be followed. As the jazz great pianist Walter Bishop, Jr. puts it: First you imitate, then you assimilate, and only after that can you innovate. Everyone learns by *observing* a “master,” by his/her example and by *imitating* him/her. *Assimilation* occurs when you *contemplate* the works of “several masters” and draw aspects and bits-and-pieces from them and evolve your own style or way of doing things. And only after “mastering” the concepts and techniques of the “masters” will you be able to acquire the *innervision* to *innovate*.

The best way to get knowledge is to be around it. And by innovating extra-curricular activities wherein our youth can be exposed to “masters” (or “high status workers” as the census bureau puts it) we hope to facilitate this process.

NOW FOR THE SECOND: After each scientific breakthrough, there follows what is called the clean-up period. That is when the true findings of what has been discovered are delved into and tweaked up; when the painstaking work of solidifying its meaning takes place; and its various uses to which it can be applied are determined. So it is with the establishment of our Telehub Network. This brings us again back to the question posed by the O’Jays: “Now that we’ve found love, what are we going to do with it?”

Let’s explore. As stated earlier researchers, scientists and scholars study and discover things that already exist (like discovering laws of nature, science, and mathematics). Engineers, innovators and technicians take those findings and invent things that never before existed (like inventing things like the light bulb, the telephone and the computer). However, it is the entrepreneurs, commercial and business minded folks whose endeavors find ways to bring the fruits of those labors to the masses for use (like the folks at GE, SBC and IBM). Let me put it another way. As the evolution of science and technology unfolds, that which at one time is the province and playthings of a privileged and esoteric few, in time become the necessities of the masses. Telephones and televisions are typical examples of this dynamic. And the various devices and products resulting from telecommunications and Information Technology (IT) are following in this same phenomenon.

It has been previously mentioned that there have been several persons who have approached us with possible economic ventures. At first we received them graciously, but we really didn’t feel that we were quite ready for such engagements at that time. But as they say: “times change.” Throughout this memoir I hope I have shown how we have grown and evolved. I mentioned the quantum leaps we have taken: getting the building; setting up the Internet service; establishing the Telehub Network. At each step we had to kick it up a notch. And now we are at the point where we really need to engage the infrastructure established by our Telehub Network to maximize its potential for economic ventures. I have already mentioned that (as of this writing) we will need to establish a “New Business Committee.” There are both internal discussions by members of the

Learning Center and external discussions by persons who have heard about the Learning Center that will have to be thought through and evaluated as to the possibilities of something we can do. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prophesied; “There’ll be some difficult days ahead.”

AND FINALLY THE THIRD: First of all let us note that the words “harambee” and “ujima” are East African words that mean “come together” and “cooperation” respectively. Ujima is the third of the Kwanzaa principles, which calls for “collective work and responsibility”—hence the label Harambee Ujima Effect, which yields the acronym HUE.

In the process of establishing our Telehub Network, it has been very heartwarming to see the various components of our community “work together” to make the project as successful as it has been. As we move forward to expand nationally, it will require more HUE as we engage other cities. We will have to organize and collectively work with other IT persons to network with the IT persons here in Kansas City as we proceed. We will, for example, have to network and organize to:

- employ backup databases in other cities even;
- engage in various forms of file sharing with archived materials and files;
- network with other persons as they engage in various uses of the technology to operate programs and projects;
- participate collectively with users in other locations through teleconferencing, distance learning, blogging, chat rooms, etc.

This can very well cause us to network and organize in ways reminiscent of the “sixties.” Rev. Wallace Hartsfield often says that: “It is not that we aren’t doing anything, it’s just that we are so disconnected.” This suggest that it is in our best interest to find ways to come together so that “our left hand can and will know what our right hand is doing, or at least is capable of doing” so that we can better cooperate and cross-fertilize with each other.

We have seen that our Telehub Network encourages, even creates the need, for those engaged within it to work together in order to ensure even greater success and possibilities that otherwise would have been much more difficult to achieve. As the old gospel song says: “Blessed be the tie that binds.” And our Telehub Network has demonstrated that it is a “tie that binds.”

And in addition to that, I humbly submit that our Telehub Network has presented us with an infrastructure through which all three of the possibilities referred to above will be embraced as we move forward.

**Let’s explore further.** I have pointed earlier (in Chapter Three) how in the sixties that African Americans entered into the corporations in large numbers for the first time in our history. By the seventies many entered into supervision. By the eighties several entered into mid-management. By the nineties some had moved into senior or upper management levels, some had become directors and others were on cooperate boards. By the turn of the millennium a few had even become corporate CEO’s. And the same thing can be said with respect to academia and government as well other aspects of society.

All of this means that we now have among us an abundance of experience, knowledge and information, and may I add insight, on all of these levels that we now can tap into. And many have stepped forth to help out the Learning Center in various capacities commensurate with their levels of expertise. It is incumbent upon us to develop processes and structures within our community based organizations that draw upon what these “well placed” professionals have to offer and make it easy for them to “give back.”

For us to confront the challenges that lie ahead we will have to “lift *every* voice and sing.”

I have discussed how corporate professionals have worked with us to secure grants and other resources. Some have even invited us to workshops and presentations to gain exposure and knowledge to some of the latest business procedures and processes. All of this is good and advantageous for we are clearly on the verge of plodding new territory. And it helps to be abreast of the current ways of operating. But as I see it, we will clearly have to learn some things as we go; we will be devising new approaches as we go along.

I often tell young people that I know that they are going to make mistakes in life. But I admonish them not to make the old ones. Their charge is to learn from us so that they won’t make the ones we made. What our generation expects from them is for the mistakes they make to be brand new ones, to learn from them and pass on the knowledge and the lessons learned.

As we move forward in implementing plans with regard to our Telehub Network, it is clear that we will have to devise revenue generating activities because relying on grants is risky business. That’s why we are somewhat at a stalemate with regards to the advancement of our Telehub Network as of this writing. It is the lack of resources that is preventing us from bringing on board the twenty-some-odd churches and community centers that have expressed an interest in joining us, both locally and nationally (and even internationally). How long will Harrison’s Hypothesis prevail?

**Stevie Wonder’s album *Innervision*** contains the classic song “*Living for the City*.” In it he speaks to some of the problematic aspects of our urban cores. The mission of the Learning Center is to address some of those same aspects that pertain to the education/ acculturation of our youth. However, in so doing, a collateral benefit has been that we have also begun to lay a foundation or infrastructure that can be useful in addressing other ones as well.

Finally, let me wind down by relating one of my favorite Texas Southern University stories. It centers on the world record holding mile relay team we had in the early sixties. Notice I did not say they were the best in the state or world at that time, although they were. They were the Mohammad Ali of mile relay teams in their day. They were the “greatest of all time.” I happened to overhear the track coach, Stan Wright (who often took the “right stand”), explaining to some of the other professors how he worked with his charges. He stated that relay races are won and lost in the baton passes. And that he would spend seventy-five percent of their practice time working on passing the baton. So being from Missouri, the “show me” state, I had to see for myself. At the next track meet I was determined to check things out. Now let me add that we were in the Southwest Athletic Conference (the SWAC as we called it). That meant we had to

compete, at that time, with Alcorn, Arkansas AM&N (now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff), Grambling, Jackson State, Mississippi Valley State, Prairie View, Southern, Texas College and Wiley. And all of them had some fast brothers. So when the starting gun was fired, the brothers seemed to be running neck and neck. Then in the baton pass I saw TSU shoot about five-plus yards ahead. I said to myself: "Wow! Check that out." And I observed our lead increase with each passing of the baton!

The analogy I now draw from this is as follows. If our kids are just as smart and talented as other kids (and we all know that they are), how is it that we are losing ground? I argue that it is in the baton pass. That is to say, in the education/acclulturation process. That's why I personally feel that what we are doing in the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center is so important. We cannot afford and sit back and wait until the schools get it together. It is incumbent upon us to get involved in order to try and rectify the situation.

◆◆◆

*I think the essence of this sentiment as it pertains to our past, our present, and our future is analogized well in the second verse of "Lift Every Voice and sing."*

*Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

◆◆◆

By calling upon those of us that have something to offer, to give back to our beloved communities, I believe we can make a difference. Again as we like to say: "We are limited by our collective imagination," or as Stevie Wonder puts it, to our *Innervisions*. What I submit we have to do is come together so that we can work together in harmony. Recall the old saying that "we can all sing together but we can't all talk together." What we need is some HUE so that we can come together and "*Lift Every Voice and Sing*."