

Remarks submitted to EDUCATION25 marking the 25th anniversary of Robert Lenkiewicz's 17th Project – *Observations on Local Education*.

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Painting exhibited as number: 120

What book or object are you holding in your Project 17 portrait and what was its personal significance?

I only have a recollection of one the two books on my knees – a copy of *Industrial Design* by John Heskett. I vaguely remember that the other book was a novel, but cannot honestly recall which one. The Heskett book was one that I had studied in college (St Mark & St John, Plymouth) and had found interesting.

Of more enduring personal significance was the flute. Most of my out-of-work time was spent playing flute and bass guitar in a band (we had the Saturday residency at The Swan pub in Devonport at the time). I still have the flute. Although it is barely playable now it remains a repository of past dreams (both realised and unrequited), a reminder of good times and an icon of the joyful foolishness of youth.

To what extent did Lenkiewicz make his own views on education known to you prior to or during the sittings?

Robert made his views on education known to a certain extent, although what conversations we had were more dominated by Robert expounding his views on love, sex and relationships. The exchanges between us were somewhat overshadowed by the fact that at that time I was having an affair with someone who was also one of "Robert's women". We were both aware of the other's involvement, which tended to add an interesting set of perspectives to our exchanges.

What did you think of his views at the time? And now?

At the time I was too determined not to think much of his views and not to reveal too much of mine to have made an objective judgement. The perceived (and probably misconceived) sexual rivalry that I felt existed between us hung like a malevolent veil between painter and sitter. In retrospect that veil was probably entirely of my own manufacture. I doubt that Robert felt anything of the sort. A pity really, as it was undoubtedly an opportunity lost.

Re-reading your original essay, have any of your views on education changed and if so, why?

Looking back through the lens of the intervening 25 years and a journey as an educator that has spanned several continents, I still stand by the general definitions espoused about the nature of education itself and the underlying implication that schools exist, at least in part, as a means of social control and manipulation.

However, I would no longer draw such a simplistic distinction between 'educating' and training'. There appears to be an implication running through the essay that students only learn what is taught by teachers, in the manner in which it is taught. This is at best an inadequate and at worst an insulting perspective. Likening learners to Mynah birds, eternally condemned to repeat the mantra of their teachers, fails to acknowledge the capacity of the same learners to make their own connections and formulate their own internal maps of reality. If there is a distinction

between training and educating, that distinction exists more in the intentions of teachers and institutions than through the responses of learners.

Neither would I be quite so strident in my dismissal of the idea of transferrable skills. I still maintain that there is nothing inherent in a skill (or any knowledge) that makes it 'transferable' – one of the errors of thinking we made back then was to seek 'transferability' as if it was an attribute of the skill itself. In reality, the ability to transfer, re-formulate, adapt and apply skills and wider knowledge is an attribute of the knower, not the skill.

Yet, it is those very capacities of free-thought, reflection and synthesis that are still undervalued, and at times suppressed, by school systems throughout the world.