

16 C) WORKING WITH PEGGY KOK

During the 1990/91 academic year I tutored Peggy Kok for two action research modules and her M.Ed. dissertation. Peggy was on study leave from the Singapore Technical and Vocational Training Board. In the following chapter from her M.Ed. dissertation, *The Art of an Educational Enquirer*, Peggy analyses four educative conversations in which she is experiencing a tension between her commitment to the values of excellence and the social order in Singapore and to the values of freedom, justice and democracy within a different form of social order.

Peggy's chapter is presented in full below. I do not want to edit it as it reflects a struggle for meaning whose authenticity I witnessed. Yet I do want to engage with her text at the points where I think it is revealing something significant about my own educational values and competencies. You will see my responses in **bold, italic, ten point type**. I do hope that these are not experienced as violations of Peggy's text.

CHAPTER 6 OF THE ART OF AN EDUCATIONAL ENQUIRER

In Chapter 1, I had likened the writing of this dissertation to Dewey's (1934) notion of building a cathedral:

"Probably the aesthetic quality of medieval cathedrals is due in some measure to the fact that their constructions were not so much controlled by plans and specifications made in advance as is now the case. Plans grew as the building grew...Every work of art follows the plan of, and pattern of, a complete experience, rendering it more intensely and concentratedly felt."

I had made many changes to the original outline of my dissertation in the course of writing but the overall objective of the dissertation has always been kept in sight. Each change had followed reflection upon what I had written and consultation with my supervisor. The writing of the previous chapters was pure labour of thoughts. However, I feel that it somehow lacked the aesthetic quality that Dewey was talking about. It did not possess the intensity of a "complete experience". It was a technically competent piece of work so far - the cathedral is merely structurally sound.

This last chapter is part of the dissertation where art enters it. Art as defined by Dewey (1934) is not an object to be put on a pedestal and admired by the privileged few. Instead art should be seen in the light of the experience of the artist in the creation of an object.

"With respect to the physical materials that enter into the formation of a work of art, everyone knows that they must undergo change. Marble must be chipped; pigments must be laid on canvas; words must be put together. It is not so generally recognized that a similar transformation takes place on the "inner" materials, images, observations, memories and emotions. They are also progressively re-formed; they, too must be administered. This modification is the building up of a truly expressive act. The impulsion that seethes as a commotion demanding utterance must undergo as much and as careful management in order to receive eloquent manifestations as marble or pigment, as colours and sounds." (Ibid.)

In this chapter, you will be able to see how the commotion of emotions arose within me, how they were managed and directed towards manifestation as a work of art. I will show that the writing of this chapter has been an experience that follows the order below:

"Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it - either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed....Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives." (Ibid.)

It is the story of how I had passed through the turmoils experienced when I discovered that my values were in conflict with those advocated in the living educational approach to action research and how I resolved those conflicts, finding a balance between my "energies" and the conditions under which I live in my country and in so doing I have fashioned a work of art out of the rigid structure of the earlier chapters. The content of this chapter is made up of real-life experience, a large part of it was derived from the tape-recording of the third and fourth conversations I had with Jack Whitehead and an interview with Jim Harvey, Director of Studies (Transcripts 3, 4 and 5).

Dances with Action Research

I was courting action research for the six months that I had been on the two action research modules. There were times when I had wanted to call off the relationship and there were times when I considered marriage. At the end of my assignment for the second module I saw myself very much like the hero in the film "Dances with Wolves" and summed up my feelings for action research in the following way:

"I see the present stage of my development in action research as being at the point where the soldier, out of loneliness at his post, built a fire and did a Red Indian Dance round it. He was able to forget his inhibitions and the fact that he was white and for the duration of the dance he was just communicating with his friends through dance unaware that they were watching him. He was called Dances with Wolves because a wolf was near him when he was dancing. Perhaps I may be called at this stage of my educational development - Dances with Action Research. Perhaps I am shedding my inhibitions more and more now that my understanding of Action Research has deepened through the two inquiries I carried out in this assignment." (Kok, 1991)

As a result of my intense involvement with action research over a period of six months, I had decided to probe deeper into this unorthodox way of doing educational research through a dissertation which I knew would take me to the core of action research based on the living educational theory approach. As can be seen from the previous chapters in this dissertation, I had positive feelings about action research as the sensible alternative to the traditional method of doing educational research. I had demonstrated my understanding of the form and content of the living educational theory in the preceding chapters. From there, I could have proceeded according to my original plan of applying the set of criteria I came up with to some action research case-studies and finish up the dissertation with whether I thought action research was capable of standing up to criticisms that it lacked rigour and validity. This plan was not followed through because after the first two interviews with Jack Whitehead in which the purpose was to get real-life knowledge about his theory, it suddenly dawned on me that there were ideas that I could not agree with and that there existed fundamental differences between Whitehead's and my concept of what "values" should be.

Experience of Disharmony

It all began when I discovered that the values that permeated the action research inquiries of both Whitehead and those who practice his living educational theory approach to action research, were values which I could not advocate to be the dynamic force behind the action research which I would do in the VITB. It was not so much the discovery of the difference in values between us but the realisation that in order to do action research and be true to the living educational theory of Jack Whitehead, I would have to actively promote the values that form the basis of his theory. Because of the realisation that there was no way in which I could take action research back to my place of work with the values held by Whitehead that a sense of alienation overcame me. Although I have adopted the form of the living educational theory approach to action research, I was not prepared to retain the values that were central to this approach:

Peggy: I notice that the values that you hold are very strong in the areas of democracy, justice and freedom and when I looked through the case studies, these values were also reflected there in the work of Erica, Kevin Eames and Moira. These are the values you hold and which others working with you are also holding. That's why you aim for change, not just in the teachers but also in the students for a better society, am I right?

Jack: Yes you are right, go on.

Peggy: I was confused all over again. I read Dewey's (1966) "Democracy and Education", the chapter on "Vocational Aspects of Education". I read it some time ago but did not find that I could use any of it, didn't really get much from it. Yesterday, I read the chapter again, took down some notes and found myself disagreeing with the whole lot of it. That's (what Dewey had written) the ideal. Where I come from and you know it, it's the total opposite of what Dewey is advocating for education and vocational training. What he disagrees with, I agree with because that's my society and then I began to ask myself, "Can I have these values of freedom, democracy and justice?" Well, as an individual, as a person, probably. I don't know. But being where I am, in that kind of set-up, I cannot hold these values because if I do, it will be in total opposition to my place of work and even my country. I can't go back and ask the trainers to train their students to be more democratic, to question because we are in training and it is very complicated. The students who come to us are not academically inclined. They come to us for a skill and all we teach them is skills and our better society is that they get a job, everybody gets a home and we have progress in our way - mechanistic, materialistic but that is our way of life."

What then are the values that I hold which are contrary to those held by Whitehead?

"If I go back, what are my values and if I intend to do action research there, I must have values because it (action research) is meaningless without the values. I would say that based on who I am, what I have been through, the situation I am in, who I work for, my country, I think that my values would be in line with those of the government, and that is "excellence" in whatever you do and I will hold this value when I train my students and they will do likewise when they train their students."

Whitehead made his view regarding educational values very clear when he said:

"Now this is something that you and I have talked about, about the way which in educational research, it is the values which characterise whether that what you are doing is educational or not. And you know within my own culture, I have selected values which I think have universal potential, they may not have, but I think they have and those are the ones you've picked out - democracy, freedom and justice." (All extracts above are from Transcript 3)

The following extracts from the transcript of the fourth conversation we had provide further clarification of Whitehead's position:

Peggy: We were talking about values and how your set of values of democracy, freedom and justice are fine for your culture and in a way you are going for social revolution. Jim had said, "Jack is for revolution, I'm for evolution" (Transcript 5). What do you have to say?

Jack: I think that if we take the positive view of revolution which is Kuhn's idea and the debates he had with Popper about changing a way of thinking, changing the way we act in the world then yes, I feel I am a revolutionary in that sense. Now, I take that to be a positive view - revolution - where you get paradigm changes. Kuhn talked about the structure of scientific revolution in a very positive way. It was a way of taking ideas forward. But if he used it in a way which tended to have negative connotation, which had to do with the revolutions in places like the Soviet Union because of commitment to a particular ideology so that it became a class struggle between capital and labour, then in that sense of a revolution, then I am not a revolutionary. My own belief is that if you work from what I call the ideological base, *if you work trying to transform the way people think, the values they subscribe to, the form of action that they take, then you will lead to social improvement, you will lead to the transformation of the world to greater democracy, to greater freedom and greater justice.* Now that is where I place my faith for social change and social improvement rather than in mobilising on a class-based struggle, the power relations between power and labour.

(13th February 1993. Can you see in the section Peggy has italicised above that I am seeking to communicate to a student the values which have characterised my educational development throughout my research programme? I am expressing a commitment to transform the way in which people think, the values they hold and the actions they take in a way which leads to greater freedom, greater justice and greater democracy. Back to Peggy)

Why was there a conflict and why couldn't the conflict of values be resolved? My difficulty in fully accepting Whitehead's values as the basis for the action research that I would be prepared to do lies in the explanation below:

"I really appreciate that I have come into a culture where I am exposed to these values, like you say they are universal values. But also I have to fight against what I am, what I have been brought up as, the country I grew up in, the set-up that I work with. So I find that on the one hand these are human values (democracy, freedom and justice) that I should as a human being hold, on the other hand, I am in a country where I see progress, I don't see people starving, I don't see beggars and for everything the government takes from us - the taxes - we get it all back. People have

homes so I think it is not bad too and what Dewey says about vocational training, that it should not be slotting people, putting people into specific occupations and then then they are stuck for life, well, I don't agree with that. To a certain extent it is true, people who are streamed or channelled find themselves in vocational training and they will be technicians, they work in factories but it is not true to the extent that the government makes sure of progression for people in their lines of work. There are classes, funds for training, you can study, you can move, you are not stuck in a rut, you are not forever a production worker....I don't agree with Dewey's view but of course he is in another culture that is different from mine. He has not been in my culture to see that done in a way which he thinks is wrong, things work and people are happy."

I agree that the values of freedom, democracy and justice are universal in that they do promote peace and make the world a better place for every one in it. I respect people who hold these values and believe that the world should be transformed through education towards those ends. I experience a great tension in trying to sort out two sets of values (a) the values of freedom, democracy and justice which I can see are noble and agree that people should hold these values for a quality of life that goes beyond material and economic successes and (b) the value of excellence in whatever we strive towards be it at a personal, group, work or national level. I believe that the first set of values is good but I happen to place more importance on the second set of values and both sets are directly opposing in nature but at the end of the day, it's the second set of values that won:

"you've dealt with something which is really fundamental in terms of the economic and material base of people's existence which is a value which doesn't come into democracy, justice and freedom that we do need that value that the vast majority of us place on economic survival and you have actually put that as a central value. That is where there is a conflict between various values. Very different balance. But I think you've got on tape here the nature of the values that you hold." (Transcript 3)

Towards the end of the third interview, I still had not found a way to resolve the tension that was tormenting me:

Jack: What you have got on tape here is very important about tensions you have experienced and are experiencing.

Peggy: I am in training, not education. For twelve years I have been in vocational training and I can't suddenly change and say that just because certain values are embraced in the West, this is progressive thinking and I should go back and advocate change for society through education.

Jack: I suppose the difference is this: my work is in education, the degree you are going to get is a Master of Education. I think that we have actually fulfilled what I understand by the criteria of education. I've seen you thinking, developing. So from my point of view, the process of education I have seen working within you...

Peggy: I have been educated. I wasn't educated in schools, I was taught. I wasn't even educated in the university. But I think I truly had an education here.

Jack: This is what my father told me about the university. He said that in his whole working life he had very little time to think because of the nature of his job and once

you get into full-time employment you will find very little time to think because it should be educational. Now hopefully this year, you've been able to - and I've seen you working extremely hard but with the time to think, so even if you now go back into a context that - like my father was describing, the vast majority of his life is going to be training - is going to become better and more efficient and excellent in training, the fact that you've had twelve months...

I have had twelve months to think and I felt very privileged to have had this time to develop my mind but I was not contented with having had the time to think. I wanted something concrete, something usable, something that I could do in the future that would draw on all the thoughts and experience I had accumulated here in the University of Bath and which would enhance my practice although I am aware that the quality of thoughts manifested in practice cannot be measured in tangible terms. I should have been happy to finish this dissertation with what Whitehead had proposed in the third interview:

"What you could do is simply leave the ending of your dissertation where you are at the moment, that is, the recognition that there are different value positions within your own commitments and in the commitments of this group here, couldn't you? I mean that is true."

(13th February 1993. I was conscious at the moment of saying this that I was holding to Buber's view of the educative relation in which the educator subordinates his or her own structured view of the world to the particular being of the student. At this moment I had accepted Peggy's right not to embrace my educational values and to hold firm in her own. I think this ability is one of the great achievements of an educator. It seems to be that this ability prevents the abuse of power in an educative relationship. Peggy was free of any intentional constraints on my part that she should conform to my educational values. I had accepted Peggy's right to be different. However Peggy moves on....)

That was true - right to the very end of the third interview, that was the position I held. I left the interview feeling that an ending like that to the dissertation and to the one year of work in action research would have been education for education's sake. My feelings were exactly those described below by Dewey (1934):

"The rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes. Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony. With the realization, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning. Since the artist cares in a particular way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total."

I had wanted to write this dissertation the way an artist creates a work of art. I wanted to be able to step back when this dissertation is finished and be able to see a synthesis of all that I have thought about and experienced in the form of a harmonious whole. I needed to carry on, to move forward with what I had learnt.

The stumbling block was my inability to take back with me the set of values of freedom, democracy and justice which was the motivating force behind the living educational approach to action research. I could import the method of doing action research and leave the values behind but that would be like telling people to how to do something without telling them why and without them wanting to change their own practice themselves. I was still plagued by the tension of seeing two sets of values which I could not reconcile and which I believe are equally good. To choose one over the other would mean annihilation of half of what I believe in and leave me with a sense of incompleteness. I was out of rhythm with life but I did not give up hope that my tensions could be resolved. If one can break one's back doing manual work then my brain almost suffered the same fate. Fortunately, by the fourth interview the next day, I had found the synthesis I had been looking for.

Resolution

It was sheer agony trying to overcome this tension within me and to finally decide for myself what I should do. Peters (1973) was right when he wrote:

"Independence of thought is not a natural unfolding; it is a laborious achievement."

I had spent all my waking hours reflecting on the conversation with Whitehead in the third interview. I had to see things in perspective. I went home and read once more Corey's (1953) "Action Research To Improve Schools" the first book written on action research in education. I read again Rudduck and Hopkins (1985) "Research as a basis for teaching: Readings from the work of Lawrence Stenhouse" and R.S. Peters' (1959) "Authority, responsibility and education". I then came to the following conclusion:

"Yesterday when I went home I was thinking of what Jim had said - I was listening to the tape of the interview with him on the bus - the first question he asked was "What's the difference between action research and what Jack is doing?" I asked him what he thought action research was and he said that action research was just problem-solving. You don't have to put the "I" in it. Values don't have to come into it. I thought perhaps that's another view of action research. I have been exposed to most of the time just your brand of it and I thought maybe it will be quite interesting to see if he's right. I went back and read Corey and I find that this is nearer to Jim's definition of action research - problem-solving. But it is one step ahead of Jim's definition because Corey says that it is the practitioner who should do action research and he says that it has to be very scientifically done so he says you have to set up a hypothesis, test the hypothesis, not quite in the way that you do it but for example I may have this hypothesis that in this situation, if I applied this method the kids would do better. Then the teachers would either alone or collaboratively go into this action research. They could collect data, they could go into quantitative analysis, come to a decision, apply it and decide whether they have improved. So I find that this is still one step away from what Stenhouse is advocating. Stenhouse moves away from the quantitative but focuses more on the meaning generated by the teacher, what the teacher is capable of doing herself, because she has experience and knowledge, tacit knowledge that kind of thing. Then I find that what Stenhouse is advocating is still one step away from what you are doing. It appears to me that you take Stenhouse's idea of the teacher as researcher but you put the "I" inside, the values. At the end of it I put it down in a hierarchy like this and said "Let's look at Jim's version, then go into Corey's - because he was the first person to write about it -

and then into Stenhouse and then into your theory. I find that of the four, maybe because I have spent so much time on your theory - but *having looked at the overview in a way, I think that your theory is more powerful than all the rest because I've been through it and if you put the "I" in it, change will come because when you put the "I" in it, it is the teacher who says, "I want to change because I see the need to change.* Whereas in the other cases it is, "here's the problem, how do you solve it?" Stenhouse is of course better than the other two because he says, "Look at the teacher, I believe that the teacher has the judgement to know what's right and wrong and how to improve her practice." But in your case you put the values in.

Having now put things in their proper perspective, I was able to resolve the tension of the past few days in the following way:

"When it comes to values of democracy, freedom and justice, I've thought about it. I said yesterday that I couldn't bring those values back and use them as the base for the education of the trainees the way it is done here, you are actually educating your young to be more critical so that you move towards society which is more questioning and not take things handed down by the authority and the whole idea is you work towards a better society in that way, human rights and things like that. I thought about it, I can't bring it back and have the trainees embrace these values. I can't preach these values to the trainees in the VITB. But as I read R.S. Peters' 'Authority, responsibility and education' the chapter on 'Education and seeing what is there' - there is this part where he said, *'Individual inventiveness is always to be understood against a background of a public inheritance. And though good teachers always encourage individuals to develop their own point of view, they also provide them with the necessary equipment to have one.* And it is education which provides this equipment, which transforms the wild wishes and intuitions of the individual into an informed understanding and inventiveness. For we have to be trained to see things as they are - and to see what no one else has seen.' That's what you are doing, you provide the teachers with the equipment i.e. through action research to be more critical, to be more open to ideas, to develop themselves and they in turn use this process to develop their students in that way. So you can do it this way. I thought about it, I like what R.S Peters said about providing teachers with the necessary equipment to develop their own point of view. I am a teacher trainer, or educator...whatever, well...my business is to train teachers to be effective in their job. If I can't reach the students (trainees), I don't think I want to because of my values, I could reach the teachers and say that if you want to improve your job then one way is to be more reflective, to be more critical and to work more democratically and collaboratively, to have part of these values (freedom, democracy and justice) so that they can improve their job and the consequence would be that the trainees will benefit because of their improvement. Just as I have come here and have gone through this process and I think educationally I have improved. I have read things which I have never read, I have been exposed to your theory, I have had these conversations with you to develop intellectually in this way. So I hope that when I go back and do action research it would be towards this end, that I would equip my trainers with whatever is necessary to develop their own points of view - to question me if I were to tell them that, 'This method is good' not to just take it but to question and to develop, to think what is good for them in their practice. That's all I can do. I can't go for social change."

I found harmony at last in coming to a compromise between the values of freedom, democracy and justice and the values I held regarding excellence in

doing a job. The action research that I take back with me to my place of work will be based on the values of excellence which I will promote in using action research in teacher training just as Whitehead promotes the values of freedom, democracy and justice in his action research activities in the United Kingdom. I have to make very clear that it is the value of excellence that powers the action research that would be prepared to do back in my place of work:

Jack: So I think you have got a way of working in terms of how you described it with your teachers that will enable you to live out your values.

Peggy: Yes, but **the ultimate aim in that is still they have to be excellent in what they do, they have to be effective.** It is very instrumental in achieving this very objective kind of end, but I want to see results, I want to see that their practice is improved, that they should be better than they were - like me. I know that I am intellectually better than when I first came. My capacity has been stretched and improved. So that is how I'll see the goal for these teachers I train. They should always believe in excellence and they should live it out and they should have proof that they have improved. And the way I go through with it is to use your process of action research because I think that is the most powerful of all because the teacher herself examines her values and of course these values will be towards excellence and here she wants to improve, that is the important thing.

Whitehead sums up exactly my position at this point of the conversation when he said:

"I think when you hear this tape, you will hear the kind of resolution to the kind of tension that you expressed the other day and I think you've really worked through to a position which enables you to resolve some of the tension you have. So I think you now see a way forward when you go back to relate to the teachers that you are working with in a way that enables you to bring in some of the educational values you hold whilst at the same time enhancing their skills in the direction that you believe to be enhanced. So that's what I feel in terms of that conversation."

Personally I feel that the ability to resolve the tension I was experiencing for the past few days is expressed most clearly in the following excerpt from the fourth interview:

"I am not in education. I am not a teacher in the Ministry of Education. And in the Vocational and Industrial Training Board, neither am I a member of the training staff - I don't train students in acquiring skills - I am in a strange position where I could, I should educate people, I am dealing with trainers who would train another group of people. So I suppose having come this far, I've had the opportunity to think about it...my role, the way I have seen my role as a teacher trainer, has been very narrow, because I see my role as a trainer in skills, I impart teaching skills to the trainers who then impart trade skills to the trainees. So maybe this is what R.S Peters talks about as the "tunnel vision" that you just see things from a framework. For twelve years I have seen my role within a framework of skill training. I think this experience here, having had the opportunity to think about what education is, I am able to see, I can see that there is a wider world, there is a world outside of this framework that I work in. It's not just training because if you just train people to teach and they just apply the skills that they learn from you, it is mechanistic, you are after all dealing with human beings. So maybe I see my role should not be to merely to train people

mechanistically as we have been doing but also to educate them...to train them to be more independent in their thinking...see I use the word "train" again...or rather to provide them with the facility to think for themselves and questioning of me, not of authority, but of me, to dare to come and discuss in the open, not to be defensive, if they are challenged in turn. But really I think this kind of education should also come into the preparation of teachers who are vocational trainers. I think I see that now. The teachers would be poorer if they just went away with a set of skills. They would be much enriched if the way they have been prepared for teaching trains them to develop educationally and individually and as human beings. I think I see this other side now."

I had found the solution at last in being able to incorporate the two conflicting sets of values into a way of doing action research that I can accept and carry out. Because action research is in essence participatory and collaborative involving critical reflection and judgement, people have to work closely and harmoniously. If freedom, democracy and justice are values which people can be encouraged to hold in the process of inquiring into ways to improve their practice, then the process of action research will proceed more smoothly. In other words, the values of freedom, democracy and justice will for me, become part of the process of action research and not the basis of action research.

I had said explicitly that the value that underpins the form of the action research that I would take back with me would be the value of excellence in performance. It is at this point that I moved away in spirit from the living educational theory because as I had told Whitehead:

"...the values that I bring back - not your values, but the values I have come to on my own." (Transcript 4)

I am now able to step back and enjoy my art.

(14th February 1993 This Chapter of Peggy's dissertation had a profound influence on me of the same quality as the one I experienced in 1971 on reading the work of Michael Polanyi. The reason I would say our relationship was an educative one was because both tutor and student learnt something significant. Peggy learnt how to hold together values she initially believed to be opposed. I learnt to refocus my attention on to the educative power of conversations and correspondences.)

I now want to move on to consider my work with a group of senior managers from Wiltshire, Avon and Gloucestershire, who are undertaking action research programmes for their Advanced Diploma's in Professional Development. This work (1991-1993) has focused my attention on the extent of the penetration of market forces into the working lives of local authority managers. It is raising my concerns about the increasing penetration of these forces into my educational context and hence my educational development. This tension has stimulating the action plans which conclude this account of my educational development. As you might expect they contain the intentions and values which I hope to use in judging the quality and effectiveness of my contribution to education, in theory and practice.