

6 LIVING CONTRADICTIONS - *My writings are consistent with my duties as a University Academic . No they are not.* 1987

For the third time I experience myself as a living contradiction in the workplace. The passion to continue with my contribution to educational knowledge and determination to stand firm in the values of academic integrity, freedom and justice stimulates my imagination to think of an action plan and moves me to act in support of my values.

In April 1987 two Professors of Education, Jeff Thompson and Ken Austwick, complained about my activities and writings to the University. On 1 May 1987 the Secretary and Registrar held a meeting, under the authority of the University Council to hear the complaints. The constitution of this meeting was The Secretary and Registrar, The University Solicitor, The University Personnel Office, An AUT friend and myself. In June 1987 The Secretary and Registrar informed me that my activities and writings were a challenge to the present and proper organisation of the University and not consistent with the duties the University wished me to pursue in teaching or research. I was also instructed that I must be loyal to my employer.

As in the previous experiences I was faced with judgements being made in the name of the University. I held the above judgements together with my judgements that I was a creative academic whose educational research was contributing to the good order of the University and who had the academic freedom to research his chosen field and to tutor his research students as determined by his academic integrity. The experience of this disciplinary hearing marks a fundamental change in my perception of my educational development. From this meeting onwards I work at integrating my experiences of the abuse of power and my understanding of power relations within the story of my educational development. I returned to the documents which related to my fight over tenure and the regime of truth which made and upheld the judgements on the two Ph.D. submissions. I began to understand the dialogical form of the correspondences relating to these cases and saw that I could reconstruct the story of my educational development in a more comprehensive way than my 1985 paper because the story could integrate my learning from the above experiences of existing as a living contradiction. Here is the story of the experiences which finally moved me to integrate my understanding of context, within a dialogical form, in the story of my educational development.

At the meeting of 1 May 1987 the Secretary and Registrar explained that the complaints from Professor Thompson were focussed on the contents of a paper I had presented to an MED Seminar at Bristol University on 4 February 1987, a letter I was held to be responsible for sending to the Times Educational Supplement (13/2/87) and his allegation that I did not accept his authority as Head of School. The complaint from Professor Austwick was that I had deliberately flouted an instruction he issued in a letter to a student of July 1986 and that I had published information without authority.

I attended the meeting of the 1st May with the Secretary and Registrar acting on behalf of the University Council, the Personnel Officer, the University Solicitor, and my AUT friend.

Following the meeting I made the following notes and sent them to the Personnel Officer.

I have checked through the accounts made by Rod Brunt and I during the disciplinary meeting on Friday 1st May. Could you let me know if you think there are any errors of fact in the background and notes .

NOTES ON THE MEETING.

The meeting began with Mr. Whitehead being informed that this was a properly constituted meeting with Mr. Mawditt representing Council as Secretary and Registrar. Mr Mawditt assured the meeting that only recent behaviour would be considered.

THREE CHARGES WERE BROUGHT BY THE UNIVERSITY AGAINST MR. WHITEHEAD.

1) The first was based on Professor Thompson, 'holding Mr. Whitehead responsible for a letter which appeared in the Times Educational Supplement on 13.2.87'. This letter was held to be evidence of 'incompetent and perhaps mischievous behaviour'. The Secretary and Registrar stated that this was not the first time the University had received evidence which called the competence of Mr. Whitehead's work into question. He referred to correspondence from Professor Wragg of Exeter University in 1983.

A letter from Professor Thompson of the 4th March 1987 to Mr. Whitehead, all members of staff, the Vice-Chancellor and the Secretary and Registrar, clearly held Mr. Whitehead responsible for the letter to the Times Educational Supplement.

2) The second charge was unspecified. Professor Thompson had complained about a paper on, 'A Living Educational Theory', presented by Mr. Whitehead, to a Higher Degree Seminar at Bristol University on the 4th February 1987. Professor Thompson was 'aggrieved by matters in the paper', specifically on pages 5 and 6. He was also 'aggrieved that his authority was not accepted by Mr. Whitehead'. Mr. Johnson explained that he had thought of recommending action over the paper. It was however, 'following the letter to the Times Educational Supplement that the position is now unacceptable'.

3) The third charge followed the request from Professor Austwick that action be taken against Mr. Whitehead. The charge was that Mr. Whitehead had deliberately flouted an instruction and had, 'used information without authority', in papers to conferences and at meetings which was 'disabling his employer from giving facilities', not only to his employment but to the employment of others.

The instruction to Mr. Whitehead was contained in a letter sent by Professor Austwick to a student in July 1986. As the student's supervisor Mr. Whitehead had been given a copy of the letter.

The information, papers, conferences and meetings were unspecified. Reference was made to a confidential letter from the Wiltshire Authority relating to this charge. Mr. Whitehead requested that he see the letter and be given a copy. Both requests were refused.

Mr Whitehead requested a copy of all statements made by Professor Thompson and Professor Austwick which had played any part in initiating the formal action. Mr. Johnson explained that Mr. Whitehead would receive a letter which would contain details from these statements in relation to the charges being brought.

In the discussion which followed Mr. Whitehead took up Mr. Johnson's suggestion that it might be wise for all parties to have a meeting before a formal letter was sent to Mr. Whitehead. Mr. Mawditt undertook to see if the two Professors would agree to such a meeting.

The Secretary and Registrar wrote to me on the 24th June to inform me that amongst other things that my activities and writings were a challenge to the present and proper organisation of the University and not consistent with my duties in teaching and research. I was also informed that I must be loyal to my employer.

NOTE

The duties of the Secretary and Registrar, under the Statutes are:

" The Council shall appoint a Registrar of the University with such functions, at such remuneration and upon such terms and conditions as it may think fit.

.. to be responsible for providing secretarial services for the Court, the Council, the Senate and any Committees or Joint Committees of these bodies."

It appears that Council permitted the Secretary and Registrar to hear the complaints of two Professors against a member of academic staff and to act on its behalf, with the support of the University Solicitor and Personnel Officer. The order of the University permitted this group to judge the research, writing and teaching of an academic without any representation from the academic members of the University. The questions which I feel I should pursue are: If faced with the above evidence, of actions taken on their behalf, would members of Council accept the order established by such actions as a 'good order'?; Faced with such evidence would the Academic Assembly of the University accept that my activities and writing are not consistent with the duties which the University wish me to pursue in relation to my research and teaching?

As I have said this experience focussed my attention on the significance of the politics of truth and good order for my educational development in my workplace. The paper on creating a living educational theory, which follows, was written in 1988 and published in 1989. It shows that I am still primarily concerned with the production of an educational theory for professional practice as if the knowledge being produced were independent of its social context. However what I now begin to do is to integrate an understanding of the politics of truth and of a good order within accounts of my educational development.. I presented such an account in 1990, to the first World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management. This follows the 1989 paper and it was published in 1991 in the proceedings of the Congress. I explain my educational development in terms of an attempt to overcome the experience of the violation of integrity, freedom and justice within the workplace as well as attempting to contribute to the creation of a new form of educational theory.