

**4 LIVING CONTRADICTIONS - I am a creative academic. I am not.  
I can question the judgements of other academics. I cannot.**

You may have a degree and recall your graduation ceremony. I remember mine at the University of Durham in 1965. My parents expressed their delight. I was pleased to receive a degree but I recall the distinct feeling that there must be more to education than my specialised degree in Science. It was later that I experienced the delight of feeling that I had learnt something worth while, on receiving my Academic Diploma in the philosophy and psychology of education from the the University of London in 1970. I felt a more subdued relief on receiving my M.A. degree in the psychology of education in 1972. The relief came because I had taken a risk in rejecting the whole basis of the M.A. programme in my examination papers. I wonder if you share my view that a University graduation ceremony should be a celebration of learning. It should be a recognition of intellectual achievement and something to recall with the pleasure of such achievement. It is usual for most academics to have received a PhD Degree for making original contributions to knowledge of their subject.

I have submitted two doctoral theses to the University of Bath for examination in 1980 and 1982. The examiners were required by the University to judge the theses in terms of criteria which included the following.

*1) Has the candidate shown that he is able to conduct original investigations and to test his own ideas and those of others?*

*2) Does the thesis contain matter worthy of publication?*

All examiners of reseach degrees were informed that the results of the research and study must be satisfactorily presented in the thesis,

*"which should include matter worthy of publication although it need not be submitted in a form suitable for publication."*

Bearing in mind the problems I outlined above I think you will understand why I made the point about the assessors of my work in the following letter to the Secretary and Registrar on the 25 October 1977.

*I shall be submitting a thesis to the University sometime after August 1st 1978 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. According to the University regulations I believe that I need to inform you of my intentions at least 6 months before my proposed date of submission and pay a fee of £10. This fee is enclosed.*

*The university regulations also state that assessors will be appointed. Whilst I would not normally comment on the appointment of assessors by the University I have had an unfortunate experience with assessors within the University which leads me to make the following submission. In the past I have been questioned by University Assessors on the quality of my research. As part of my academic training I learnt the*

*importance of judging a person's understanding of a piece of work through the quality of the questions asked. In my own case, I was asked questions which demonstrated the questioners' lack of familiarity with my field of enquiry. I would ask that the University appoints assessors who have published research in a field closely connected with my own. That is:- educational theory and the process of improving education within comprehensive schools.*

**The Secretary and Registrar responded on the 2nd November 1977.**

*Thank you for your letter dated 25th October advising me of your intention to submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the provision of Regulation 18.5 Method B.*

*In accordance with the provisions of that Regulation I shall advise the Chairman of the Board of Studies for Education that he should ask the Board to recommend to Senate the appointment of members of staff to advise you on the presentation of the work. I will also draw his attention to your comments on assessors.*

**I then made a request to the University to take care in ensuring the competence of the examiners to which the Secretary and Registrar replied,**

*Thank you for your letter of 8 May regarding the submission of your Ph.D thesis.*

*External examiners are appointed by the Council on the recommendation of Senate, and Senate is advised by the appropriate Board of Studies.*

*It is therefore a matter for the Board of Studies for Education in the first instance to satisfy itself of the competence of the examiners. I understand that you have already written to the Chairman of the Board to make your point, and I am sure every consideration will be given to it.*

***Once the examiners have been appointed, their competence cannot in any circumstances be questioned.*** (My emphasis)

The Thesis I submitted had the title 'Educational Practice and its theory - an analysis of a research programme on the enquiry, 'How do I improve this process of education here?'. The following abstract should give you an idea of the point of the thesis.

### **ABSTRACT**

*This thesis presents a claim to know an individual's educational practice. On the basis of this claim it is argued that the dominant concept of educational theory is too limited to produce an explanation which corresponds to an individual's educational practice. A psychological form, for a dialectical materialist's approach to the production of educational theory is presented as an alternative to the dominant concept of educational theory. The alternative is based upon an exploration of the implication of the practical educational problem, 'How do I improve this process of*

*education here?'. These implications include the fact that the problem was formulated within the political and economic realities of the division of labour in society.*

The examiners appointed by Senate on the recommendation of the Board of Studies for Education were Professor Jeff Thompson who had recently joined the School following the retirement of 'Bunny' Dowdeswell, Professor William Taylor, now Sir William and recently retired as Chair of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and Professor Jack Wrigley from the University of Reading.

The viva-voce examination was held on the 14th October 1980. The Examiner's Report to the Board of Studies for Education recommended that the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy should not be awarded and that I should not be permitted to resubmit my thesis. The Board of Studies accepted the recommendation. Just as I asked you to focus your intuition on identifying with my existence as a living contradiction as you read the letter of March 1976 terminating my employment I now ask you to use all your intuition and insight to empathise with my response to hearing the following judgements on my research which were again made with the full force of the University.

**The examiners were agreed that I had not shown that I was able to conduct original investigations and to test my own ideas and those of others.**

**They were agreed that the thesis did not contain matter worthy of publication.**

**They were agreed that I should not be permitted to re-submit my thesis.**

I held a view of my thesis as an original contribution to educational knowledge which contained matter worthy of publication. After some thirteen years examining Masters Degrees and M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees I am now more certain of these judgements. I had to hold together the view of myself as an original researcher with the University judgements that I was not. I had to hold together my view that the thesis contained matter worthy of publication together with the University view that it did not. I also had to hold together my questioning of the competence of the examiners' judgements on the grounds of bias, prejudice and inadequate assessment, together with the University's instruction that I could not question the competence of the examiners under any circumstances.

Having informed the University of the dialectical basis of my work and the need to take care in the appointment of examiners, the University appointed Professor William Taylor. In 1978 Professor Taylor published the following views on the 'New Criticism' in Education - the field of my research.

*"In commenting upon and expressing disquiet about the implications of the ideas of these authors, I do not wish to identify myself with those who dismiss their work as of little consequence. Whether we agree or disagree with their mode of analysis and conclusions - and my own disagreement is almost total - we cannot ignore the attraction of their ideas for large numbers of students and teachers, or their influence*

*on the development of curriculum study..... the New Criticism, in directly opposing the values of bourgeois society and the 'liberal ideology', undermines institutional structures and practices that sustain possibilities of individual freedom and democratic pluralism, and is very imprecise about the structures and practices that would characterise post-capitalist social and political life."*

On the 11th November 1980, I wrote to the Secretary and Registrar asking for information on which examiner the University believed to be an authority in the field of my research.

*I wish to draw your attention to your letters of 2/11/77 and 13/5/80, in which you noted my points about assessors and said that you were sure that the Board of Studies for Education would give every consideration to my request concerning the competence of my examiners. My reason for writing to you on the 13/5/80 was to alert you to the central importance of dialectical materialist epistemology in my claim to have made an original and substantial contribution to knowledge. One of my advisers had written a report in which he acknowledged his lack of competence to judge the validity of the epistemological base of my work. This adviser is a recognised authority in the field of education. I felt that I ought to point out that the examiners (or at least one examiner) should be competent to judge my claim to have made an original and substantial contribution to knowledge, a claim made from within the tradition of dialectical materialist epistemology.*

*Following my viva voce on 14th October, I was informed by the Chairman of the Examination Board that the examination of my thesis, 'Educational Practice and its Theory', was continuing. I was informed on the 20th October that the examiners had arrived at a decision. In the light of the nature of my examination I am curious to know which of the examiners was appointed by the University as an acknowledged authority in the field of my work. Could you please supply me with this information?*

.....

The Head of the School of Education informed me that Professor William Taylor was the University's choice as the acknowledged authority in the field of my research. The University appointed an examiner whose disagreement with the mode of analysis and conclusions of my field of research was almost total and who believed that it undermined institutional structures and practices that sustain possibilities of individual freedom and democratic pluralism. It should surely be permissible to raise just the hint of a question about the possibility that such an examiner might be just the tiniest bit biased against the mode of analysis he is in almost total disagreement with. One of my hopes and entertaining thoughts for the future is that Sir William Taylor is remembered for his 'academic' judgements on my original contributions to educational theory!

**The Secretary and Registrar wrote to me on the 14th November 1980 with a splendidly clear re-affirmation of the instruction that I could not raise any question about the competence of the examiners.**

*I wish to acknowledge your letter of 11 November.*

*Clearly, in any matter related to your submission for a higher degree I must treat you in the same manner as I would treat any other candidate for a degree.*

*I must re-iterate that no question may now be raised about the competence of the examiners, and I must also say that I cannot enter into any discussion as to what may have been said in the viva voce examination.*

**I wrote to the Secretary and Registrar to request a review of the results of the examination on the 3rd December 1980.**

*In the absence of my Head of School I am writing to you to request a review of the matter of the results of my candidacy for the degree of PhD. I informed my Head of School on November 27th of my request for a review and I have given to his secretary my reasons in writing. I simply wish to record that my request was made on 3.12.80.*

*The procedures, under University Regulations 17.5 'Duties of Boards of Studies' are unclear. May I call witnesses to the hearing? Could you assure me that all the evidence considered by the Board will be open to myself and my adviser to challenge?*

**The Secretary and Registrar replied.**

*Thank you for your letter of 3 December. I believe the Board of Studies for Education will be meeting to review the result of your PhD submission later this month.*

*I should perhaps make it clear that the purpose of the meeting is to consider whether any of the matters which you raise were not known to the Board of Examiners, and are such that, if they had been known, they could have influenced the Board's decision. If the Board of Studies sees fit, it can bring the attention of the examiners to these matters. There is no question of the Board having before it any evidence other than your own. There would be no point in calling witnesses unless there were some dispute on a matter of fact.*

I think the following grounds for requesting a review speak for themselves. The majority of the members of the Board of Studies hearing the request for a review were my colleagues in the School of Education. Some of them still are. In my judgement there is still something shameful in the rejection of my request for a review and something profoundly anti-academic in the refusal to permit me to resubmit the thesis.

**My request for a review of the results of the examination of the thesis, "Educational Practice and its Theory" submitted to the Board of Studies for its meeting on December 17th 1980 - 3rd December 1980.**

*The matters I will raise, when heard in person by the Board of Studies, are included within the following points;*

*My thesis is that educational theory can be produced from the explanations which individuals give for their own educational practice. The thesis contains an explanation for my own educational practice. The standards of judgement which can be used to criticise the explanation as a dialectical materialist's claim to knowledge, are presented in the thesis. These standards are defined in terms of,*

- 1) scientific criteria*
- 2) ethical criteria*
- 3) aesthetic criteria*
- 4) use value.*

*I am disturbed by the discrepancy between the judgements of my advisers and the examiners on the presentation of my thesis. I do not question the right of the examiners to disagree with the judgements of my advisers. What I do suggest is that there is an intimate relationship between the form of presentation and the content of the claim to knowledge, in the epistemology of dialectical materialism. I further submit that, as there is a strong possibility that the form of the presentation did not present my thesis in a way which enabled the examiners to clearly see its nature, I should be permitted to re-submit my work in a form which clearly reveals the thesis to the examiners..*

*Material placed before the Board in relation to the examiners' judgements (on the following five criteria used by the examiners in judging the thesis).*

***1) Has the candidate shown that he is able to conduct original investigations and to test his own ideas and those of others?***

*I claim that I have shown that I am able to conduct original investigations and to test my own ideas and those of others in the following areas;*

*A) The presentation of a dialectical materialist's claim to know the art of education. This presentation included an examination of different claims to knowledge in terms of propositional knowledge (Know-that), procedural knowledge (Know-how) and knowledge with a direct object (Know-this). The examination included a dialectical materialist's testing of the epistemological positions of P. Hirst and L.A. Reid with particular reference to the claim to know the art of education.*

*B) The presentation of a dialectical materialist's movement through four methodological approaches to the social sciences. I claim that this is an original investigation to discover the mode of enquiry and the logic of an appropriate methodology, for use in the investigation of the practical educational problem, 'How do I improve this process of education here?'. I claim to have tested, in a dialectical materialist's way, the modes of enquiry and the preferred logics of the methodological*

*approaches of the Analytic Scientist, the Conceptual Theorist, the Conceptual Humanist and the Particular Humanist (Mitroff and Kilman 1978).*

*C) The presentation of a dialectical materialist's movement, from the epistemology of Objective Knowledge (Popper), through the epistemology of Personal Knowledge (Polanyi) and into the epistemology of Dialectical Materialism. I claim that this is an original investigation to discover a valid epistemological base for use in the claim to know an individual's educational practice.*

*D) The presentation of the discovery of a psychological form for a dialectical materialist's approach to the production of educational theory. This presentation involved the explication of the units of appraisal and the standards of judgement, which could be used to test such an approach, from within the dialectical materialist's position. I claim that this is an original investigation which involved the testing, in a dialectical materialist's way, of the units of appraisal and the standards of judgement which have been used in the epistemologies of Popper, Lakatos, Kuhn, Polanyi and Rubens.*

**2) Have I shown that I understand how my special theme is related to a wider field of knowledge?**

*I claim that I have shown, in a dialectical materialist's way, how my special theme is related to a wider field of knowledge. My claim to know an individual's educational practice not only undermines the disciplines approach to educational theory but can form the basis for the production of a dialectical materialist's alternative. The special theme is the existence of 'I' as a living contradiction in my claim to knowledge. I claim that I have examined the assumptions in the linguistic school of the philosophy of education, the behaviourist, cognitive theorist and humanistic schools, of the psychology of education, and the structural functionalist, phenomenological and marxist schools of the sociology of education. I also claim to have tested these assumptions, in a dialectical materialist's way, and found that they explicitly exclude or omit the existence of 'I' as a living contradiction from the explanations of human action.*

**3) Does the thesis contain matter worthy of publication?**

*Matter already publised from the thesis or accepted for publication.*

*a) Improving learning in schools - an in-service problem. British Journal of In-service Education. Vol.3, No.2, Spring 1977.*

*b) Evaluation and Learning in Secondary Schools (with Joan Whitehead) in Outcomes of Education. Ed. Burgess and Adams. Macmillan 1980.*

*c) In-service Education - The Knowledge Base of Educational Theory. British Journal of In-service Education. Vol. 6, No.2. Spring 1980.*

d) *A Practical Example of a Dialectical Approach to Educational Research*. in *Human Inquiry*. Ed. Reason and Rowan. To be published by Wiley 1981.

e) *Educational Evaluation and the NAIEA*. Accepted for publication in the *Journal of the National Association of Inspectors and Educational Advisers* for the Spring 1981 issue.

*Transforming Education Now*. A publication accepted by the Inspectorate of Mauritius, 'to help form the nucleus of a Resource Centre for the Inspectorate'.

#### **4) Are the style and general arrangements of the thesis satisfactory?**

The Board of Studies for Education appointed Professor Austwick and Professor Hoyle as my advisers. I presented my initial draft to Professor Austwick in September 1978. In January 1979 Professor Austwick returned the draft and read out a report from Professor Hoyle. He then gave me a copy of the report. Having acted upon the advice, given by Professor Hoyle, I gave Professor Austwick the rewritten thesis in September 1979 and asked for his advice on the relationship between the epistemology and the presentation of my thesis. This was a crucial problem in the presentation of a dialectical thesis on educational practice and its theory. Professor Hoyle assessed the thesis. I received no further advice and submitted my thesis to the Registrar in March 1980. The advisers reported to the Board of Studies of May 14th 1980 that the work presented was worthy of examination.

#### **5) Were the results of the oral examination satisfactory?**

I claim that the results of the oral examination could not have been satisfactory. The examination was conducted solely within an epistemological position which was incompatible with my claim to have made an original and substantial contribution to knowledge. I claim that the examiners did not ask one question which examined the thesis from within its own epistemological position. After one hour and forty minutes of questioning the Chairman of the Examiners asked if I had any questions to put to the examiners. I asked the examiners to examine the thesis using the criteria I had explicated in his claim to have made an original and substantial contribution to knowledge of his subject. One examiner replied that the University had its own criteria. The viva voce then terminated. On going to my Head of School, the following day, to express my dissatisfaction with the viva voce, he was told that the external examiners had taken the thesis away and that the examination was continuing.

I may also wish to raise the following matters.

*The report of the 1980 International Conference of the World Education Fellowship.*

I presented an outline of this thesis to the conference in August 1980. The conference report clearly shows the part which the video tapes play in the claims to knowledge and in the testing of the claims to knowledge. It is an indication that the examiners were operating from a different epistemological position in that they did



*not see fit to have video facilities available nor did they ask questions which required reference to the tapes. I requested that the examiners should examine the thesis from within its own epistemological position and this met with the response, 'The University has its own criteria'.*

*2) At the meeting of the Board of Studies of November 26th, a member of the Board proposed an amendment to the report. He also stated that the examiner's report did not contain sufficient information on which he could satisfy himself of the examiner's report. This member proposed that I be allowed to re-submit my thesis. The Board was advised that its function was to receive the report as a whole. It was not advised that the Report could be referred back to the Board of Examiners for reconsideration of the recommendation that the candidate be not allowed to re-submit.*

*3) I had written to the Registrar and the Chairman of the Board of Studies to emphasise that his work should be judged as a contribution to the epistemological tradition of dialectical materialism.*

*I had not been able to discover whom the Board of Studies nominated to the Board of Examiners as an acknowledged authority in the field of my work.*

*5) I may wish to raise the matter of the views of the internal adviser on the nature of his research.*

*6) I submitted, to a staff meeting in the summer 1980, a proposal for a module on the M.Ed course.*

*7) I claim that the use value of his thesis can be seen in the MEd and MA dissertations of,*

*B. Green M.A. London University 1979*

*C. Bell M.Ed. Bath University 1980*

*C. Peters M.Ed Bath University 1980*

*J. Vowles M.Ed Bath University 1980*

*J. Hayes M.Ed Bath University 1980*

*The M.Ed submissions of D. Foster and P. Denley.*

*On the 17th December 1980 a special Board of Studies meet to hear my appeal*

*The chairman explained that Mr. Whitehead was appealing against the Examiners' Report on his examination for Ph.D. The Board would have to decide whether the appellant had produced fresh evidence that was not available to the Examiners at the time of his examination which could have materially affected the result.*

*Mr. Whitehead, accompanied by Mr. T. Adam, School of Engineering, were invited into the meeting. Mr. Whitehead made a statement to the Board outlining the matters he considered to be new evidence which the Examiners either did not have, or took no account of during his examination.*

*The Board was given the opportunity to question Mr. Whitehead on his statement. Mr Whitehead and Mr. Adam then withdrew.*

*After considerable discussion the Board voted on the matter and rejected the appeal on the grounds that the evidence presented was insufficient to refer the matter back to the Examiners.*

*Four members of the Board abstained from voting because they considered there was an absence of clear guidelines in the matter of an appeal against a Ph.D. examination.*

*The Board expressed concern over the regulations governing Staff Candidature (particularly under Regulation 18.5 Method B) and agreed to discuss the subject at a future meeting.*

I spent the next twelve months working on ways of re-presenting my thesis in a way which could be presented as a new submission to the University rather than a re-submission. This thesis, entitled 'A dialectical approach to education', was examined in 1982 and again rejected. The Abstract will give you some idea of the contents of the work.

*The past twenty years have seen the emergence, dominance and partial decline of an approach to educational theory which has become known as the 'disciplines' approach. The principle of differentiation in this approach is contained in the statement of R.S. Peters that '... Though it (educational theory) must be presented in a differentiated way the different disciplines must also mesh in with and be seen to mesh in with each other in relation to matters of educational policy and practice'.*

*This thesis seeks to replace the principle of differentiation of the 'disciplines' approach with a 'dialectical' alternative. The alternative is presented in terms of an individual's claim to know his own in-service educational development.*

*To show that the approach has some universal potential its implications are explored in the in-service educational development of a manager in a local Authority Youth service, a teacher and an educational researcher.*

*The dialectical approach is shown to have some emancipatory potential. It also throws some light on the problem of finding a way of integrating the contributions of the different disciplines of education in the solution of a practical educational problem."*

In May 1981 I wrote to the University to give notice of my intention to submit a thesis and the Secretary and Registrar replied that Senate would appoint an adviser or advisers to assist me with the presentation of my work. Senate appointed Professor Jeff Thompson to assist me. Given the dialectical basis of my work this was an interesting choice. I recall with a mixture of amusement and irritation his suggestion that I remove a section dealing with the significance of Marxist thought for my thesis.

Senate appointed Professor John Nisbet from Aberdeen University - Education, Professor Stephen Cotgrove, a sociologist at Bath and Richard West now a Professor of Education.

Following a viva-voce examination on the 4th November 1982 the examiners reported to the Board of Studies on November 24th recommending that the award of Ph.D. should not be granted.

**The examiners were agreed that,**

**I had not fully satisfied the criteria that I should show that I was able to conduct original investigations and to test my own ideas and those of others.**

**The thesis did not contain matter worthy of publication**

**I should not be permitted to resubmit the thesis "A dialectical approach to education".**

The Board accepted the examiners' recommendation that the award of Ph.D. should not be made and that I should not be permitted to resubmit.

Requests for a review of results have to be made in writing up to fourteen days after being informed of the decision. At the time of this second failure I was due to be assessed by the University to see if I should pass beyond the efficiency bar. The advice I received from the Association of University Teachers was that I should wait until I failed to pass the bar and then bring a grievance which would include the case of the second Ph.D.. In the event my work was judged as satisfactory and I passed the efficiency bar. I now regret the decision not to request a review of the results. I recorded a decision at the time to fight my case in the public arena.

I think it worth recording that one of the examiners in this later examination (Professor Cotgrove) had previously been a party to the recommendation to terminate my employment on the grounds that there was an absence of evidence to suggest that I had pursued research of sufficient quality for the assessors to be assured of my ability to perform adequately the duties of a University Lecturer. Should I not be permitted to raise the possibility that this examiner, having been party to the recommendation to terminate my employment, could have perhaps been a little prejudiced in the matter of examining my research?

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The 1985 paper which follows makes no references to these experiences even though it is explicitly concerned with an analysis of my educational development. I am still treating my educational development as if it is solely concerned with reaching understanding of a form of educational knowledge which is independent of the context within which it was being produced. It was written in 1983 following the rejection of my second Ph.D. submission on grounds similar to the first rejection. Again the judgements were made that the Thesis contained no matter worthy of publication and that I should not be permitted to re-submit. The paper is focused on the epistemological issues related to an individual's claim to know their own educational development. In terms of action research I am concerned to explicate the methodological and epistemological assumptions in my claim to educational knowledge. I think you will clearly see the development from my 1980 paper in extending my cognitive range and concerns into the work of academics such as Edward Ilyenkov, Michael Polanyi and Jürgen Habermas. I related their ideas on logic, personal knowledge and social validation to the three original ideas from my own research. If you had any doubts about the primary explanatory principle for my own educational development being my commitment to reconstruct educational theory, this paper should dispel them. Following this 1985 paper I will describe how my enquiry was pushed forward through violations of my value of integrity, truth and justice, in another experience of existing as a living contradiction.