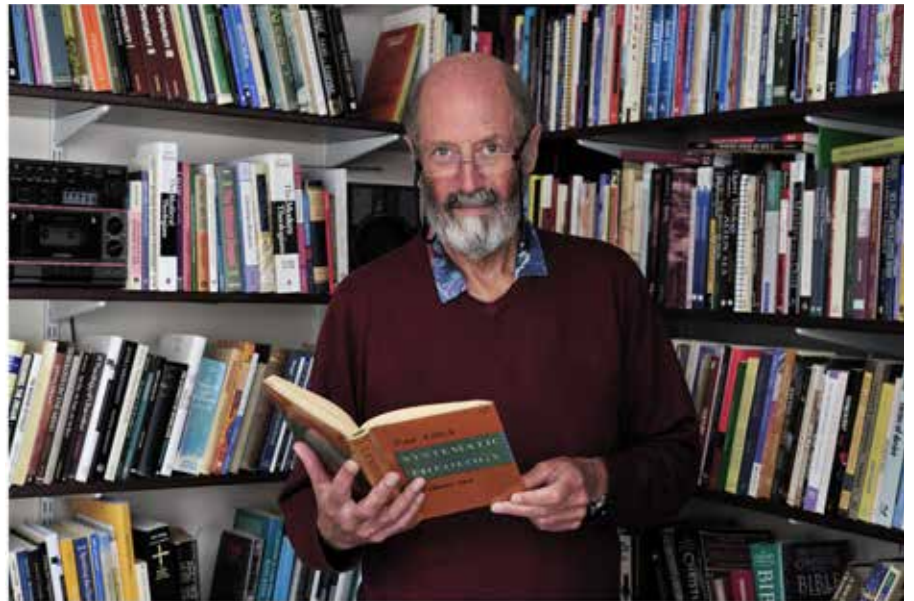
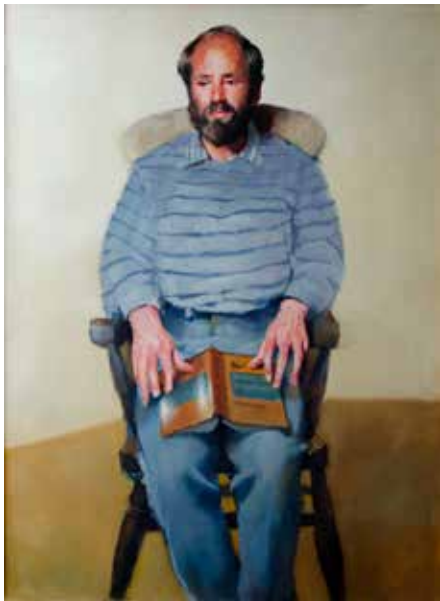


EDUCATION 25

Observations on the 1988 Project by Robert Lenkiewicz (1941–2002)

Project 17: Observations on Local Education reflects over three years of focused inquiry by Robert Lenkiewicz into British education in the 1980s. The Project produced 150 studies from nearly twice as many sitters, and two large volumes of notes compiled from 240 sitters' observations about the state of British education, and a fascinating photographic archive by Dr Philip Stokes.

The Lenkiewicz Foundation, Plymouth College of Art and Fotonow are pleased to announce a partnership, which will revisit this Project 25 years after it closed to the public at the painter's Barbican studio. **Professor Adrian Thatcher**, experienced educationalist, accomplished author and one of the major contributors to Project 17, will announce the opening of this new chapter at **Plymouth College of Art** on **Thursday 31st October at 12:30**. The catered event is open to the public and The Lenkiewicz Foundation hopes a good crowd will attend to show their support.



Professor Adrian Thatcher, then and now. (Photo: Matt Pontin).

The Foundation hopes that previous sitters of the Project will contact them to become involved in the upcoming activities. Those who were involved will be encouraged to identify their painting and written contribution (all archived and accessible online at the Foundation's website www.robertlenkiewicz.org) and revisit their experience with a present-day photographic portrait, questionnaire response and/or recorded conversation. Anybody interested should contact: info@lenkiewiczfoundation.org or via the website, or call 01752 221450.

Plymouth community favourite **Fotonow** will be running a busy programme of activities exploring local education, which you'll find promoted through their website www.fotonow.org and social media presence. Look out for overlapping projects on The Lenkiewicz Foundation's website. Matt Pontin, Creative Director of Fotonow explains, "The anniversary of this period of work will allow us to explore our own thinking on education, questioning perhaps where we are as a society in supporting people to learn. ... we look forward to making new photographs, discoveries and more importantly sharing these with the people of Plymouth."

The painter's view

Lenkiewicz' encounter with academic professionals, administrators, teachers, parents, and pupils – 240 of whom contributed their own notes to the Project – had an unsettling effect on the painter:

"Throughout the work on this Project, I have frequently returned to a single and overwhelming speculation; the nature of the relationship between the Adult and the Child. Education, despite all grandiose schemes, bureaucratic generalisations and cross-referential subtleties, is about this relationship.

[...] It seems to me startling and eccentric to conclude that adult fear and sometimes hatred should so successfully lie hidden within educational policy. The conscription character of schooling, the effects of isolation amongst large numbers of other people, examinations, and destructive forms of competition, are patterns of control. Sensuality, energy and amoral curiosity frighten the adult, and therefore the adult will fear the child."



The Deposition – The Burial of Education, in progress in 1986.

"The metaphor of the soul of the dead child rising to 'heaven' is of great significance to this Project on education. This painting may be seen as the heart in the body of this collection." (Photo: Dr Philip Stokes).

EDUCATION 25



Governors of Southway School (The Blind Leading the Blind), 1987. Oil on canvas, 213 x 610 cm.

The kneeling figure holds a compass whilst directing his gaze towards a crumpled drawing of Sir Isaac Newton by William Blake. The coloured monotype, in the Tate Gallery – for which this drawing is a reversed sketch – indicates that Newton is sitting at the bottom of the sea. For Blake water was the symbol of Newton's materialistic philosophy.

In *Tiriel*, a poem illustrated with drawings but not published, Blake had already denounced the current view of childhood – deriving in great measure from Locke, that early forerunner of behaviourism and brain-washing – as a passive state to be 'formed' by 'instruction'. The poem describes with scathing indignation the consequences of 'forming' a child according to the laws of mechanistic rationalism, imposed all from outside and regardless of the mysterious formative laws of life itself. Tiriel, the blind parental tyrant, is himself the product of such an education, and dies cursing those who, by compelling him into conformity, had denied him life. 'Infancy', Rousseau wrote, 'has a manner of perceiving, thinking and feeling peculiar to itself.'

Premature instruction is 'without regard to the peculiar genius of each. For, besides the constitution common to its species, each child at its birth possesses a peculiar temperament, which determines its genius and character; and which it is improper either to pervert or restrain, the business of education being only to model and bring it to perfection.' So also thought Blake. Childhood, for Blake, is the purest essence of the spirit of life; the thing itself. The instructions of education can add nothing to Being. 'Everything that lives is holy', not by virtue of any added qualities, but in its essence:

'I have no name,
I am but two days old.'
What shall I call thee?
'I happy am,
'Joy is my name.'
Sweet joy befall thee!

Blake in these seemingly naive lines is describing the nature of life as he conceived it. Joy – delight – and all life seeks joy as its natural state. For him, the mechanistic view of the universe – Bacon, Newton and Locke – was the enemy of life; life which is immeasurable, not to be captured or contained within the quantitative 'laws of nature'. Blake recognized Newton's genius, and therefore attacked his error, which was the triumph of materialism.

'He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God.
He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.'

In Blake's view, Newton is thus the Self-obsessed rational man.

From Lenkiewicz' exhibition notes, 1988