

DEMONSTRATE an ACCEPTABLE STANDARD of PRESENTATION and SATISFACTORY USE of ENGLISH

I'd like to speak a while on the question of a satisfactory use of English. Firstly let me say that although my grammar sometimes leaves a lot to be desired, my use of English for a letter between friends is as I would expect, and in my opinion is perfectly satisfactory. However, I've included hardly any of what I would call "academic language", that is long words and complex phrases that I don't use in my normal course of language.

I go back to a comment by Rosemary Crowe in her reply to Plummer et al (Plummer et al, 1993),

*"It is an empowering aspect to ask someone to take part in an activity which they can do well and for which there is **no serious judgement or criteria** (my emphasis). An area of communication which does allow the freedom to "ramble", be free from certain written formalities and explore issues which may well be personal and sensitive where being safe from the sometimes disempowering, binary role of teacher/student is of great importance and must enhance a strong sense of ownership. Is that not the real concern of action research?" (p.20)*

Whilst on the one hand she supports the use of correspondence, on the other hand she apparently sees it as an activity for which there is no serious judgement or criteria. I find this disappointing as it suggests to me that she doesn't see the worth and potential of letters to the extent that I do.

In her reply, Gill Plummer picks up on the difference in style between her two respondents and admits to her conditioned reactions, but thankfully for me highlights the lack of academic camouflage in letters;

"Rose chooses to present her thoughts in a formally structured academic paper, Marion in a series of informal letters. It is with some guilt that I admit that my immediate reaction to Marion's free flowing hand written letters was "Help! How am I going to unravel the ideas within?" What irony that I should find myself instinctively thinking that informality smacks of chaos whilst consciously arguing the opposite. I laughed at my own conditioned reactions. Having got past this self inflicted block, I found Marion's thoughts, ideas and views simply jumped off the page for there was no academic camouflage." (p.26)

Perhaps due to my desire to feel that I belong, I have a tendency to compare my writing to that of established writers. One part of me tells me that I don't need to make these comparisons and, by doing so, I'm falling into the hands of those who might criticise my informal style, but another part of me tells me that this argument is raging around me and so I can't ignore it. The obvious answer is to present it and see what happens! As Plummer observes,

"In comparing letter writing to traditional academic forms or writing, something we are equally guilty of, we are comparing, measuring, judging, a participatory paradigm with a non participatory one; a method of enquiry with a product." (p.27)

I'm made to feel as if I've strayed onto a very uneven pitch where there's a match being played, but the prize isn't education, its power, and I'm just an outsider with only a timid

voice to protect me from attack. I'm simply asking to be respected for the qualities I can bring and to be allowed to take part in an atmosphere of mutual support.

Plummer emphasises the power struggles involved when it comes to the language and presentation;

"It could be argued that academic writing is a matter of style, etiquette, convention. But it is a convention that has come to be valued by a particular group despite the fact that: often - for many people - it gets in the way of understanding; it implies that knowledge is fixed; the genre is a code to be cracked. The majority can't crack the code. Here lies its power. As Rose says, it is "impenetrable to the general populace of readers". That is opposed to the basic spirit of action research." (p.27)

I was fascinated by their critical conversation, not only because it raised for me major arguments concerning presentation and style, but also because I felt that I could pick up and run with it - I felt as if I could enter the discussion, help to enlarge and transform it, it came naturally to me.

One important issue here is authenticity. I have been concerned to present something that is as authentic as possible, which shows my process of learning. In your book (Whitehead, 1993), you mentioned your use of video tape in order to observe your practice, but video would not be practical for me when trying to show you my life. However, given my trust in your integrity, the letters with their natural and informal style have enabled me to get close to describing and explaining my life, thus producing my own, albeit tentative, living educational theory.

Something else I want to mention about language is how you've kindly translated and explained words and phrases to me. If I turn the situation around to police jargon, we're rather prone to using initials as abbreviations of phrases - RTA, TIC, TWOC, CID, FST (bet you can't get that one, I'll tell you the answer later), BOP, PACE, ETA - but I don't generally hear these terms coming from university academics. Hence I reserve them for my conversations with my colleagues in the police force and if it were necessary for me to lapse into them, then of course I would have to translate them. The point I'm trying to make is that although I might need to understand academic language and speak it on occasions when it's the only way of communicating, I'm a police officer who spends most of my life trying to keep my language simple in order to converse and get along with the wide range of people that I meet.

I was reading through my mum's book of rhymes when I found this advice:

With motorists who drive at night 'tis the unwritten code (in order not to dazzle other users of the road) to dim their headlights as they pass, and manners such as this 'twixt people on the road of life would not become amiss.

To outshine an acquaintance is a gratifying chance and we sometimes boast of knowledge, our value to enhance. We feel a little smarter, more important, and more grand when we glibly talk of matters someone else won't understand. Yet knowledge is acquired to help humanity that's all - not to be misused to make acquaintances feel small. Not to dazzle anyone who happens to come near, but used in moderation to make the way more clear. (Partridge, 1942 p.18)

Academic language always strikes me as being very clever and I respect those who have managed to learn it and speak it well. What I don't like is when I feel that it's being used to exclude me or put me down. Now I don't want to dwell on it - there's so many different languages and dialects, but I'm sure we can all get along with a bit of patience and there doesn't have to be any sort of power struggle.

This criterion - *demonstrate an acceptable standard of presentation and satisfactory use of English* is the last of eight listed by the university for the degree; and I feel that I've at least touched upon all of them to some extent, so I'll move on to the stage of bringing this letter to a close.