

**SHOW EVIDENCE of a CRITICAL REVIEW of
APPROPRIATE LITERATURE**

When I first read your letter of 5 September 1996, I didn't realise that you were telling me that I'd already shown evidence of a critical review of appropriate literature and just needed to draw explicit attention to it. I only realised this when I re-read your letter last night (6 April 1997).

Unfortunately, in your letter you yet again focus on the police side of my life suggesting that I could emphasise the action research approach to police training from John Elliott. Although Elliott has taken an interest in police training, it appears to me most notably through his involvement in the Stage II review of Police Probationer Training (MacDonald et al, 1987, Elliott 1988, 1991a & 1991b), I remain sceptical with regard to the changes that were introduced as a result of the recommendations of that review team. In my opinion, probationary police officers need a high level of recall of law and procedures if they are to apply them quickly and effectively during the course of their everyday duties. They do not have the opportunity to look them up in a book or hold an in depth discussion on the various aspects of a situation when they're trying to break up a fight or a thief is running away.

However, in his keenness to enable the patrol constable to *understand the law*, Elliott put case study at the heart of the police training curriculum. I agree that it is important for officers to understand the law as opposed to merely knowing it, but it seems that when trainers disputed the centrality attributed to case study, Elliott argued from his corner rather than entering into a reflective discussion (Elliott, 1988 p.150). I was disappointed to see the trainers' views dismissed, especially as I felt this contradicted the very *procedural principles for guiding the interventions of trainers in the learning process* that had been recommended by the Stage II team, (MacDonald et al 1987 p. 125) for example,

- 4 *Instructors should encourage a reflective discussion of alternatives, in which individuals attempt to understand each other's views, in contrast to an argumentative discussion in which individuals are primarily concerned with defending their views.*
- 6 *Instructors should ensure that individuals can articulate their views without fear of having a chain of thought interrupted, or being "put down".*
- 12 *Instructors should refrain from using their authority position to promote their own views on the presumption that they have expert knowledge which is not open to question.*

My own introduction to the changes when I became a trainer in 1989, and the way I felt I had to implement them, was an extremely stressful experience. On the one hand I was being advised that my views mattered as did those of the students, but on the other hand I was being told that if I disagreed with the changes, I couldn't be a trainer. It was nothing like the cosy supportive situation described by Elliott,

*"The major functions of the case studies is to accelerate, within a **safe and trusting environment** (my emphasis), the number of reflectively processed situations stored in memory before a full immersion into direct experience takes place. The whole structure of the course is intended to provide a controlled and gradual immersion into the occupation in a form that allows experience of real policing situations to be reflectively processed. In this way we hoped to develop in probationers the capacity to resist the negative aspects of the occupational culture." (Elliott, 1991a p.317)*

My view at this time is that by practicing a more dialogical argument and in a spirit of enquiry, individuals like myself may have been afforded an easier transition towards the educational stance taken by Elliott and the review team. Instead, I was expected to change my views literally overnight.

Jack, you've managed to keep coming back to my life as a police officer and particularly as a police trainer. What you've overlooked is that I left the training department in October 1994, I moved on to the Child Protection Unit, then the Complaints and Discipline Department, and now to a project attached the Human Resources Department. Therefore could we possibly move on from my involvement with police training and consider my existence as an individual regardless of which section of the police force I happen to be working in at this time.

My concern at this time is to do with how I can convince you of the value of our correspondence to the educational development of each other and why I see it as a legitimate form of enquiry and worthy of presentation to the academic community. Today I want to be seen as a writer, a learner, a teacher, and a friend.

You have suggested that I draw the explicit attention of the reader/examiner to the fact that I have evidence of a critical review of the appropriate literature. Well I've found a conversation in a book that I really must refer to again (Plummer et al in CARN Critical Conversations, 1993). Perhaps then you'll accept what I'm telling you about letters! I first mentioned this book in a letter to you dated 2 July 1995, it was one of the many letters that I didn't send at the time, but I'm not sure if I've shown it to you since. It was the letter in which I told you how angry I was when I read your written interpretation of the criteria for assessing educational action research (Whitehead, 1995a). This is what I wrote to you:-

Sunday 2.7.95

How do I say this, what words will really convey my meaning. How can I remain true to myself. Some things are best not said but how can I let it pass. I can't but I'm afraid of hurting you. You broke my bubble but you made a new one. You let me down but you didn't, you fired me up. I was angry. Angry with you. Its just a good job I didn't write this last night because there was the passion. There was the child who wanted to throw her teddy out the pram, couldn't play this game any more. Saw you as the teacher stamping authority, but saw you as the learner. Trusted that give it a few days and I'll calm down. It'll all blow over and I'll never need to reveal how I felt. I can temper it with nice words. Must not reveal my real thoughts because they'll hurt you and they're only there in the heat of the moment. The moment that says he doesn't understand and makes me cry. How can I fight the big wide world when even my friend lets me down, writes something that's totally alien to how I thought he was. The biggest compliment you could pay me now is to say "She has so much to learn". "She has so much to offer if only she would". If I say I have lots to learn it means I'm open to new experiences, ideas, meanings, understanding. There's a big space out there for me to explore, there's so much waiting for me. If I say I know it all then what's left for me. Just to look back I suppose, not forwards.

Now lets get to the nitty gritty of what's happened. Friday I came to the University of Bath (notice I say came not went). It makes me feel good. I know that I'll see you Jack, I know that you'll listen. Try to get on the inside of what I'm saying (your phrase). I know you'll ask me questions but they'll be gentle, they'll help me understand. You'll share your ideas with me. Well true to my expectations you did all that. I came away from you on a high, a real high and that got better all day. I thought Jack really wants to understand. He really

wants me to come up with something for myself, he really wants to help me, and I can do it. I've got further than I think, but I've still got a lot to learn, how exciting.

When I left Jack, I went to the library. They said "Take as many books as you can, we're having an extension built and can't store all the books." That was like a green light. I love books and I could keep them till October. I came away weighted down with 20 books. I couldn't carry any more. Like a kid in a candy store.

I had lots to think about. Bits of our conversation came to mind on the way home. You'd talked about Plato. I'd got a book with a chapter on him. I wanted to know more about his ideas. I wanted to know how my ideas related to Plato. I'd got books on communication and language. Never taken a conscious interest in language before but here I was fascinated by language and its effects. About how people talk and how they write. Couldn't wait to get home to start reading them.

Well as you've probably guessed I was straight out into my garden, laying under the apple tree with my nose in the book about Plato (Cohen, 1969). Sorry, didn't like him! I couldn't understand how you could enthuse about someone who put people into 3 different classes and allowed them education according to their class. I read the bits about dialectics but somehow it got lost in my dislike for the values he seemed to hold about class. Of course I realise that he lived in very different times to me and his experiences, norms, expectations, would have been very different, but nevertheless my first instinct was to call him a pompous old man. I know that's not fair and bearing in mind how Jack speaks of him I'm sure I must have missed the point somewhere along the line. Perhaps Jack is talking about Plato's ideas rather than the man himself. Perhaps I've got a bit too personal about poor old Plato. I have this feeling that I ought to respect him, want to respect him and shouldn't refer to him in such common terms, but my initial reaction to the class stuff has made it difficult for me. I have this feeling that I've spoken out of turn, disrespectfully, and if he were here I'd want to apologise for being rude to him. One thing he has done is given me something to think about, and through his ideas on dialectics, has provided me with an opportunity to use it. I could also see in the commentary on him something there about the one and the many but it wasn't clear. It wasn't written in the way that Jack speaks of it, not as clear. I liked this idea of virtue and happiness but where was the justice in what he was advocating. Had his emphasis on control overridden the justice of it all. Cohen quotes from what G.C.Field (1949) says of Plato's view of philosophical knowledge and says it can equally well be applied to his view of knowledge and learning generally "True philosophical knowledge cannot be simply transmitted by one person to another. It can only be grasped by each person for himself after unstinted argument and counter-argument and question and answer".(p42) Now that I like!

Lets leave Plato for a while and move on through the book. At the back I found Dewey. Why didn't Jack talk to me about Dewey. Surely I relate more to Dewey than Plato. Cohen's commentary on Dewey lead her into Gilbert Ryle - "The Concept of Mind". Cohen says "According to this view, mind is not a separate entity, nor do the names of mental faculties, such as judgement, perception, and intelligence, refer to things. What they all describe are activities which are the prerogative neither of the body on its own, nor of the mind on its own, but of the person. Not only can man not be artificially divided into mind and body, but also he cannot be separated by this kind of metaphysical gulf from the rest of the universe. Man is, on Dewey's view, himself a part of nature" Cohen refers to this theory as naturalism. (p82). Cohen goes on to say "democracy is considered by Dewey to represent the individuals most successful adaptation to his environment - the situation in which the greatest number of individual ends can be satisfied". Dewey went down the freedom line. Perhaps he's just missing the balance. The balance between freedom and responsibility, freedom and safety. Freedom and structure. Freedom and belonging.

Freedom suggests a sort of selfishness but that's not what it means to me. Perhaps we have to learn to care for others in order to maintain a sense of responsibility. We have to understand the other person in order to judge for ourselves the best way to proceed. The dialectic leads us in that direction. There's a balance between give and take. I really wouldn't want freedom without control. Its not just the things I like, but its also the things I don't like that help me in my coming to understand. They give me a wall to kick but also something to hang on to. There are just too many combinations to our lives to count, but that's what makes it exciting, all those possibilities.

Shall we get back to Dewey. Yes I liked him but I'm afraid that he looked too much at the individual and not enough at the whole. That seems strange coming from me. I always thought the individual was the most important but that can't be totally right within a community can it. Oh dear what a mess. Is it the quality and strength of the dialogue that keeps control.

Lets move back to the story. I read Cohen's book. Went to visit friends Friday evening on a real real high. When I got home past midnight I started on another book. Unheard of. Usually I'm asleep after a late night but there I was reading about communication and about writing into the early hours of the morning. I started on Language, Communication & Education (Mayor & Pugh eds, 1987). Nothing really appealed to me. The language in the text wasn't attractive to me. I couldn't take it in. Then to Teaching as Communication (Hodge, 1993). This was better, straight to the section on writing and power in the literacy chapter. "Precisely because literacy is so directly associated with the operations of social power it is also carefully constrained and controlled. As a general rule, the closer a form of discourse is to sites of power the more strictly it will be controlled, the more "formal" it will be". "Writing can be revised and corrected until it appears as "perfect copy" with all previous stages in its production removed from the public gaze. The other face of this capacity for perfection is that it can then be expected and required. Because writing is fixed on a page and can be taken away from the writer and studied at leisure it can be scrutinized and subjected to sanctions and controls. Writing can be produced in evidence days or months or years later, its permanence allowing it to be used in evidence against the writer, making writers feel vulnerable. Writing is an instrument of subjection as well as a means of power". (p139-140)

These were views that I could agree with especially because of my own concern with a suitable form of presentation for my own dissertation. As soon as I provide the "perfect copy" I lose what I have to say, I lose the meaning and I no longer feel true to myself. The chapter heading of "creativity and resistance" gives in three words the gist of some of my major concerns. How can we be creative if the act of creating is destroyed. How can I resist by arguing that I should be allowed to use a natural language when a more formal language is thought to be more powerful. The language of my argument is doomed from the start. Don't worry I know its not doomed because it makes sense. I'm sure you wouldn't really want me to translate all of this into a more formal style if that would lose its message and meaning. (Interesting exercise but I'm not volunteering for it). I jump around Hodge's book a bit further. He says "The strength of speech seems to be the fact that it can rely on context to make up for its deficiencies....Writers like speakers in this account must predict the reactions of readers, but writers do so more actively. They make "provision for" their absent readers, whose reactions can be predicted better because they are constructed in the text in the first place. This process of constructing readers only works because writers themselves are constructed by and in their discourse. The power of writers to construct readers is paid for by accepting the constraints on being a writer in that form for that audience. Writers cannot always say "what they think" (or what they would say if they were among friends)."

Isn't there something reciprocal about this that says if I speak (through my written words) to my readers in a certain way will they begin to speak back to me in a similar way. If I'm natural will they too be natural. I know that in the course of my studies I've picked up other peoples words and phrases. Through this we come to understand. I remember a session at the World Congress 3 last year, led by Stephen Rowland and Richard Winter (1994b) when we were talking about language and I said that I felt we must try to understand each others language. We don't have to be proficient at it, or use it unless we have to but its a major way in which we communicate. Its common courtesy. I can't remember my exact words but I've got a copy of the transcript here somewhere. At the time of saying it I didn't realise its relevance. The language I choose to use is a reflection of me as a person, but at the same time I can hide behind language, construct it in such a way that it misleads. It tells you how I'm feeling at the time. Sometimes I write naturally, sometimes I put up a barrier, sometimes I want to be perfect, sometimes I don't, sometimes I don't write at all, sometimes I change things, very rarely will I let you have it with both barrels. In fact I think I can say that I will never intentionally hurt you with my writing. In constructing my readers I imagine people who have similarities to me, who have a sense of kindness but also human failings. A bit of everything in different proportions. A feeling of instability.

On Friday we mentioned audience. I don't think that I see the audience as a particular group or set of people determined by their role, status, occupation etc. I used to, but now I'm looking for people who will treat me sensitively, whom I can communicate with. People who I can try to understand and respect. People who might like to take part. Can I give them a sense of belonging. I was on a course once where we did an exercise whereby the rest of the class had to say which vehicle each individual would be and why. They said I was a dormobile. Now I wasn't too pleased at first because I'd like to have been a nifty red sports car being seen in all the best places with lots of big hunks wanting to be my passengers. Oh well I suppose its not to be! Anyway the reason they said I'd be a dormobile was they said they saw me as opening the back doors and inviting everyone in for a cup of tea. The moral of this story is watch out for dormobiles. No, seriously the point I'm trying to make is that I don't see my audience as an audience in the usual way. I see them as people to have a cup of tea with. They might come to meet me this week but I'll go to them next week. We can laugh and cry together. I can be controversial and they won't mind. I can already see a few faces in the audience that I recognise whilst there's lots that I've not been introduced to yet. I'm wondering if what I'm saying is unrealistic. I make it seem too simple because really its not that simple to achieve. I know Jack's argued for suitable people on examining boards and that's probably a much more effective way of getting heard, but if you can't replace the ones who might not be very helpful can you try to change them a little, will they shuffle along a little way. Will they come in for a cup of tea and stay a while.

Going back to my original account of what's been happening to me, Saturday I carried on reading. I was still on a high but thinking this can't last. I wanted it to last but its terribly exhausting to be excited all the time. I started to flick through the books, trying to gauge how interesting they'd be. The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk amongst Teachers and Learners by Mercer, 1995. Yes that looks good. A comment about Northledge's work caught my eye, enabling students to move from everyday discourse to academic discourse, how the teacher might help and its importance. Mercer explains "One important characteristic of educated discourse is that speakers must make their ideas accountable to specified bodies of knowledge and do so by following "ground rules" which are different from those of most casual, everyday conversations" (p.82). Whilst everyday conversations may not have the same status, I would argue that they're equally as important as they put meaning to our everyday lives. They put us in the wider community. Mercer goes on

"People who make important creative contributions to any field of knowledge, even those who transcend the "ground rules" and reshape the ideas of a community, can always "speak the discourse" (p.83). Now I'd have to think a bit more about that one. I would ask how well do they have to speak the discourse - perfectly or enough to communicate on an understandable level. What happens when someone who can't speak English says something that I'd really like to understand. I would suggest that I either ask someone else to translate or I try to learn their language for myself even though I may not be able to speak it. You know I never thought I'd rattle on for so long about language. I didn't read all of Mercer's book, I've just had a taster, saved the rest till later. By now I'd picked up *Making Sense, Shaping Meaning* (D'Arcy,1989). I must say I was a little surprised Pat only gave us her finished product. Pat seemed to value the usefulness of writing, spoke of writing regarded as an active process, emergent writers, emergent writing but I couldn't see her own writing as it emerged. It was as if she already understood what she was all about before she started to write. Somehow I was expecting something different from all the other authors who write about writing. Having said that Pat, the little bits that I've dived into so far have confirmed many of my own feelings. I could go along with what you were saying. For some reason though, I thought I hope you don't analyse my style as much as concentrating on the meaning of what I have to say, but if I were to say that I wouldn't be playing fair would I. If I'm to look for shared understandings then I must allow you to comment in whatever way might be helpful, and that might include looking carefully at my style, and underlying reasons. I noticed that Pat's book focussed on childrens' writing but found it was also relevant to my own. I spotted an interesting comment which made me wonder who are the professionals. "The problem that besets older pupils and erodes their confidence, is the insistence of the education system that teachers should increasingly sit in judgement on their efforts as if they were professionals....Were it not for the examination system, they would much prefer to abandon grades and concentrate on constructive comments which could help learner-writers to pursue a writing journey to a satisfactory conclusion - in the light of their previous efforts and current intentions". She gives three suggestions for public acknowledgement, the third of which is "Our evaluation of their work therefore will be based on the improvements that we can detect in their writing as it progressively takes shape. In other words, our benchmark for evaluating the worth of what our students produce, should be where they finished compared to where they started". (D'Arcy p95-96) I confess Pat that I haven't yet read all of your book so my comments are rather premature. Having reflected a little more, I don't think I should have preconceived ideas of what I would read. There was an assumption on my part that your book would show how your own writing has improved, but I was wrong to expect that. I'd put you into my action research box as if there's a standard style when I don't believe there is. After all that's exactly what I've been arguing against all the while. I really opened my mouth before putting brain in gear. Your book suggests a sense of purpose and I recognise that as encouraging people to write. At least that's what its done for me. It informed me about writing. There are two things here for me. One is that writing can help as a means to understand. I'm reminded of Jean McNiff's view of writing being an aid in clarifying thoughts. The other is writing as both a skill and a means of communication. I think there also might be a third point which may be the most important for me. That is writing as a medium to demonstrate a way of life, as an indication of something that lies deeper. In this respect the writing can be very deceptive even though that may not be the intention. If the writing is being used as a medium then I'd suggest that it would be wrong to judge the writing in the way that you've said. In other words you'd only be judging what you see, not what you don't see, what's presented rather than where its heading. I want to leave Pat's book for a while and go back to the question of my audience, whoever you are.

Monday 3.7.95

Early this morning I gave some thought to audience as I think that the way we talk to them is vitally important. You'll notice that sometimes I've spoken directly to Jack. He's one of my audience you see. Now I hope it's appropriate to speak directly to him. I do it because I don't think he'll mind and if he does I hope he'll tell me, won't you Jack. Similarly I've slipped into talking directly to Pat. I have met her before by the way. I imagine you all here with me. At the moment we're in my living room because it's not so sunny today. I was thinking earlier about how we construct our readers. I want to acknowledge that you the readers may be unsettled by what I'm doing. There's a possibility that what I do, in being so changeable and often airy fairy, might cause you in some way to be anxious, angry or whatever. Also you might not want to be this familiar, it might irritate you to say the least. I'm not really giving you an identity am I, not something to hang on to. And that's pretty annoying. I've experienced it myself. I'm afraid you'll be going along but becoming increasingly frustrated and wondering if I'm ever going to give you any answers. I think there must be a balance between on the one side floating around and on the other providing somewhere to anchor in order to help the audience to understand. There's also the situation whereby certain people have to be here, it's their job. I'm talking about the examiners. What do they do if they don't understand. What happens if they only want to look in but don't want to join in. How do I give them something to recognise and relate to. I feel it's my responsibility to do something about this. What I'm going to try to do is give you a list of ideas that might help you understand what I'm working towards. They'll be something for you to hang on to but please forgive me if I then decide to float off again. Bear in mind these are ideas, still open to discussion.

* I've become interested in dialectics. Therefore I'm using this dissertation to practice the art of the dialectician. This means that through discussion, argument and counter-argument, question and answer, I'm trying to clarify my ideas. I'm using dialectics in an effort to try to come to understand.

* I've become interested in communication. Over a period of time I've found it very difficult to communicate my ideas largely because I wanted to write in a way that would come naturally to me but I thought that this would not be acceptable to the academic community. I skirted around this for a long time but eventually decided to do my own thing and then try to reconcile my differences through a dialectic approach.

* I resist systems and methods although I find them useful in themselves. I don't think that research should rely on systems and methods to the exclusion of spontaneity and misfits.

* I like to think that I'm open to anything that comes my way but I admit that for one reason or another I'll often close down for a while. I love to feel that I'm in a big world where life is full of uncertainty but equally I want to feel safe. I think I'm a pretty complex person. Just as you think you're getting to know me, so you find you don't. That goes for me trying to know myself too.

* I've been influenced by the work of Whitehead (1993) in that a lot of my motivation, but not all, has stemmed from tensions. This has usually resulted from a denial of my values but at this moment I'm not sure that this has always been the case. I go along with his ideas on contradiction. I see the descriptions and explanations of peoples' lives as useful to their own and my educational development. I'm still not convinced that this forms educational theory but I think my stumbling block is in my long established understanding of the word theory. I've certainly not dismissed his living educational theory. I'm still playing with it, bouncing it about. It's a theory that's hard to pin down, rather elusive like my own, but I believe it exists and is valid. At the moment I'm more content to see the descriptions and

explanations of individuals' forms of life leading to a transformation of knowledge. Transformation being a matter of interest to Jean McNiff (1984, 1992, 1993).

** I found that initially an action research approach, beginning with it as a method, enabled me to address my concerns. However, after a while I found that I needed to move on, yet retain action research as a means of identification, origin, and body of like minds.*

** My educational intention is to come to understand with a view to helping others come to understand. I think that I'm primarily concerned with individuals but realise that they live in a social setting and therefore can't avoid the concept of social order. I look for a sense of community but sometimes I just want to stand on the sidelines and watch. That's another reason why I worry about the way I speak to my audience. There are occasions when I don't want a speaker (writer) to point directly at me, I just want to be part of the crowd. I want to have a rather more subtle invitation when appropriate.*

** I believe that most of us are basically fairly sensitive at heart and we work towards what we think is good, rewarding and worthwhile. This is my opportunity to say that in trying to get there and sometimes in doing nothing, I make some terrible mistakes. Even though I may upset people it is generally through my ignorance, incompetence, or lack of understanding and skills rather than any intention on my part. In my attempts to come to understand I realise that it won't necessarily be a comfortable ride for any of us.*

** I see myself as developing my ideas through reflection, which includes public reflection in the course of the dialogue contained in the dissertation. To a large extent I have a feeling of doing, taking part, rather than merely talking about reflection. The reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action is all part of the action itself (Schon, 1983, 1987).*

** Lastly I'm trying very hard to be myself. I've spent many years doing as I'm told, afraid to step out on my own. Don't get me wrong, I'm a believer in discipline but not at the expense of educational growth. I'm trying to balance freedom with responsibility. I'm revealing a side of me that is rarely seen. I must confess that I don't like some of what I've revealed. I'm afraid of being seen as emotional and insecure, as unreliable and downright rude. This is why I say that writing sometimes gives a false impression and its impossible to respond to readers non-verbal signals so I go unrestrained down a dangerous road. When you actually meet me I hope you see a person who is polite, steady and interested in the world around me.*

*I hope that I've managed to locate my ideas for you in order to help you see who I am and what I'm doing. I'd like now to take you back to this weekend. The next book I opened was *Against Method* (Feyerabend, 1975). This author was first mentioned to me four years ago but although I noted it, I didn't read it and I forgot. Having said that, I suspect that if I'd read it then it wouldn't have had as much meaning as it does now. Feyerabend provides me with an argument for much of what I'm now saying and doing. He asks "It is thus possible to create a tradition that is held together by strict rules, and that is also successful to some extent. But is it desirable to support such a tradition to the exclusion of everything else? Should we transfer to it the sole rights for dealing with knowledge, so that any result that has been obtained by other methods is at once ruled out of court?" His answer is a firm and resounding No (p19). He goes on to say "events and developments...occurred only because some thinkers either decided not to be bound by certain "obvious" methodological rules, or because they unwittingly broke them...It is both reasonable and absolutely necessary for the growth of knowledge....given any rule, however "fundamental" or "necessary" for science, there are always circumstances when it is advisable not only to ignore the rule, but to adopt the opposite" (Freyerabend, 1975 p23). How comforting to know that way back in 1975 this man was challenging the dominant view, as a "flippant Dadist" but with a real message.*

Next, late Saturday afternoon I read some papers from Jack (Whitehead 1995b). Firstly his review of a book edited by Rudduck (1995) and also a book by Dadds (1995a). Certainly your review have encouraged me to read both books. Having recently read some work of Dadds (1995b) in book 3 of the CARN Critical Conversations, I was already interested in her work. In her own overview, in the Carn Critical Conversations, she makes the point "Thinking about our own work in self-evaluation can, thus, be a highly charged emotional experience, one from which we may be tempted to retreat, thus endangering further learning. If on the other hand, we have the support of caring sensitive and interested critical friends to help us through these potentially dangerous processes of self-evaluation, we are more likely to remain open to further learning and professional development. The company we keep and the circumstances under which we enter into self-study may have a significant effect, for better or worse, on our professional learning", (Dadds, 1995b p.91). She goes on to describe the experiences of Jo and Laura. How I could relate to it when I thought back to my own distress on my trainers course and on occasions since. Like Laura, I held back my emotional reactions, gradually sharing them over a period of time until now those emotional reactions are no longer a problem to me. I was grateful to Marion for opening up the area of emotion and context for it helps the rest of us to know that others do understand, and it might prevent us from forgetting what it was like at the time. Its all too easy to dismiss another persons pain when we've got over it ourselves, whereas really we should be easing it and if possible preventing it. I look forward to reading her book. I also look forward to reading Rudduck's book but I guess it to be of a very different style with slightly more detached arguments about education. I noticed your challenge to them Jack on the bottom of page 8 and into page 9 but I wonder if that was really fair. I mean the language may be different and the route may be different but your commentary suggested that you hold similar values. Clearly you like the sentiments that the authors express. There was a sentence in your commentary I didn't understand - Bottom of page 9 you used the word Disingenuous (insincere) - is that what you really mean?

Now comes the most difficult part of this. On Friday, Jack, you gave me your written interpretation of the criteria for assessing educational action research (Whitehead, 1995a) and I know you gave it to me with the best of intentions, in order to help me try to sort out this criteria business. I know that, Jack, and so I really must say how ashamed I am at my initial outburst which I can see now was TOTALLY irrational. When I read your interpretation on Saturday evening I was on a real high but as soon as I began to read it my bubble burst and I was brought back to reality. I felt as if I was being pinned down by you of all people. You were one of those people who'd encouraged me to believe in my own personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958) and now I was being pulled back into line. I thought I was beginning to show you what a joy it was to be free and suddenly I was stopped in my tracks. Can you imagine my disappointment. Yes I did cry. But what I said earlier was wrong. I wasn't angry with you. I was angry with the situation I found myself in. I was upset because I couldn't see my way. I thought that your written interpretation had brought my argument and our discussion to an end. However, everything I've written since then has helped me and enabled me to come back to the issue of criteria with a more positive view. It's actually hard for me now to see exactly what it was about your interpretation that concerned me so much. When I look at the individual bits I can't really see anything that I'd want to disagree with. I can see that the external examiners report raised the issue of the assessment criteria and therefore it had to be tackled.

There's just something about the whole thing that bugs me. Let me try to explain. When I was on the modules you let us have Peggy Kok's work as an example of how to put together the account (Kok,1991). About the same time you encouraged us to be creative and brought to attention some of the dilemmas over presentation. I thought that Peggy's was a beautiful

piece of work which held together and enabled her to tell her own particular story, but I didn't think I had to copy it. In fact I thought you were asking for something unique to my own particular circumstances. When you referred us to Peggy's dissertation you impressed upon me the struggle she had, the difficulty in accepting action research when she was used to a highly structured and perfectionist outlook, her coming to understand, her dances with action research, what she taught you, the special relationship you had, her genuine effort to learn, the clash of values. I saw the other criteria as secondary to the person she was.

On March 24th 1992 I wrote just two words in my diary. They were "(Name)'s account". I shall never forget that evening. (She) presented to us her account in relation to her correspondences with (another person) (Unpublished 1992). After we'd read it she asked for our comments, our judgement. I remember saying something like "I can't judge this, it's beyond judgement, it's real". Jack I was humbled.... It showed her coming to understand, her authenticity, the mutual respect of critical friends. Yes the account had the polished appearance of an accomplished writer but the value for me was in the sensitivity, warmth, feeling, it was in a person allowing me to see a deeper part of her. I was honoured that evening.

Just one more example Jack, and that was the work of (name) At the end of the term she brought in two hand written pages entitled "Academic Writing" and announced that she wouldn't be doing an assignment. It was from her that I got the phrase "Grown-up writing". A lot of what she wrote I've now come to recognise in myself, but I didn't see it at the time. I would never have walked away from a degree course, I was too overawed. Well Jack I respect her, and from those two pages I was helped to like myself as I am, warts and all. Again there was an honesty in what she wrote, she didn't need to justify it to me. Those two pages provided the evidence for me of her claim to know herself.

Sunday 9.7.95

I think that what I'm trying to point out is that each time I've appreciated a piece of work, my appreciation has been nothing to do set criteria. It's been more about genuine people in their own unique situations and who have told me how and what they've come to understand. I've been enabled to gain a picture of the paths they've taken. Although each one has come a long way, and may sometimes stop to rest, none of them gave me the impressions that they'd finished their journey.

As you know I've been bothered about criteria for ages. It's interesting to see that lots of other people are bothered by it too but they seem intent on replacing one set of criteria for another which I find even more annoying (for example - Whitehead, 1993; Lomax, 1994b; Winter 1989). Lomax explains part of the problem when she refers to award bearing courses and the judgements required (Lomax, 1994b). Even though she talks of intention, which suggests an openness, the overall message I received was of a finished article. As I said to you on Friday, Winter's criteria held me back because I used to be worried about whether I'd complied with them (Winter, 1989). Although I could understand what his words said, I couldn't understand how he'd got there. There he was with six principles which, when I first read them, I could go along with but they had little meaning for me. I find that we're now frequently faced with new criteria, but I just can't comply with them all or I'd spend my entire time checking that I'm on the right lines!

Going back to the University criteria for dissertations, I didn't think I had a problem with it until I read your interpretation. When I started my course I knew the criteria and was prepared to fit in with them, I still am prepared to fit in with them. I really don't know what it was that upset me so much. I'm now writing a week later but there was something in the style that I didn't recognise. I think it may have been in the words and phrases such as "justification" (repeated several times), "I would expect" (also repeated several times). I really wanted to crawl away into a corner feeling not worthy of a degree. I keep looking at

your interpretation and asking myself "What's wrong?" but I can't put my finger on it. Your interpretation seems reasonable and I could comply with it, or explain why I don't. However, because you now expect to see certain things, my work becomes merely something to be judged. On the one hand I wonder whether to carry on especially with the inequality that I now feel, but on the other hand I don't want to stop a dialogue that has all the potential for something that will help us to understand. Can you sense how I'm feeling Jack. I won't allow you to get away with repeatedly saying "I would expect to see" if you want a dialogue, shared understanding and the community that you've spoken of. I'm reminded of a "conversation" in the CARN Critical Conversations Book 2 on exchanging letters where Gillian Plummer, Kerry Newman, and Richard Winter (1993) argue a case for letter writing as a valid form of research. However, their "conversation" goes much further than simply letter writing, it goes right to the heart of relationships, communication and power. Surely any relationship which includes argument and dialectic inquiry has a very delicate balance with all parties having some responsibility for maintaining or improving the balance. You know Jack, I do believe that through our writing and conversations we are beginning to find the balance. I'm reaching a point where I no longer see you as my teacher, but as a trusted friend who has a lot of information and ideas to share with me. I sincerely hope that I can offer you the same. I think that perhaps I've moved a long way since 2nd July (95).

I did say when we last met that I'd tease out (another of your phrases!) some themes so that I might organise myself better. I must confess that I haven't done this yet as I've spent my time writing about these new and more immediate/pressing thoughts. Having now played around a bit more with styles of writing, criteria and so on I think I can see my way towards improving my dialectic approach to learning and research.

I think I'll end this here as I want to post it off to you and want to start writing a long letter. I do hope I haven't offended you (or anyone else) with my comments. I'll catch up with you sometime (soon I hope). I'm not necessarily expecting a reply to this as I'm sure you'll give it a bit of thought for the next time we meet. At least I think I know which track I'm on now - famous last words!

Thanks for being there. Look after yourself.

Hilary

(This letter was never sent)

I now want to concentrate on the conversation that I mentioned earlier and which I referred to in my letter to you, it was between Gill Plummer, Kerry Newman, Richard Winter, Rosemary Crowe, and Marion Blake (1993). It was entitled Exchanging Letters - A format for collaborative action research. In this paper they explore the notion "*that an exchange of personal letters, among those involved in an enquiry, is a legitimate form of research.*" (p.5)

Gill, Kerry and Richard consider two contrasted forms of letter writing:

"the impersonal, formal, factual, business letter, frequently written for an unknown recipient, and the informal, personalised, descriptive account, written to an intimate audience, that is, friends, relatives." (p.5)

They ask why, generally speaking, the former is attributed high status in our society but the latter is not, and suggest that perhaps the answer lies in the levels of subjectivity implied by the latter. They also point out that the latter is usually written by the women in a family whereas the former tends to be carried out by men.

They use their own correspondences within their text to demonstrate the points that they want to make, especially about the differences in the styles of communication, such as, the

level of accessibility, a differing sense of "audience", the language and structure. Whilst I found that the *content* of their letters made their points, mainly concerning the relationship between Gill and Richard, it was the actual *use* of the letters that I want to focus upon for the moment. For this I'm referring to the points they made in their commentary. They say,

"In a business research report the structure is carefully ordered and concise, with the intention of presenting the material in a logical sequence; whereas in writing a letter to a friend one is freed from these formalities. One starts and keeps going. Though we may acknowledge that the text "rambles", we have faith that friends are both willing and able to unravel our thoughts. We are also confident that our letter will not be criticised on account of its form. If taken out of this context into an academic context it would undoubtedly be regarded as deficient, but in terms of conveying an important general point, the "personal" style is intellectually perfectly adequate." (p.6)

They suggest that

"Letter writing for many women stems from emotional reactions, and whilst including elements of description, news, information, in their letters they frequently focus on feelings and thoughts, with the intention of seeking opinions on personal issues. This form of writing therefore incorporates a sense of sharing, a cathartic release, that is, "pouring out one's troubles", a valuing of a more detached view of events in one's personal life." (p.6)

They point out that

"Letters are always explicitly contextualized in their concrete situation, which always, of course, involve feelings. In this way, the letter format can overcome the unreal abstraction of thought from its involvement with emotion which is typical of most formal research reports." (p.6)

In reading their exchange of letters I was reminded of the similarity to some writing I did on the action research 2 module (Shobbrook, 1992). That involved an exchange with a male police officer of a higher rank than me and who was to be responsible for staff development in my department. The interaction between myself and him during an interview, which had been set up to help me, appeared to suggest an inequality in our relationship, he had the power. My reaction was to write about it in my personal diary in much the same way as Gill wrote to Kerry in her letters about her relationship with Richard. Gill then sent a copy of her letters to Richard, in my case I gave a copy of my diary entries to the male colleague. Both my male colleague and Richard responded in a manner that I see as trying to explain the situation.

In conclusion, Gill, Kerry, and Richard say that not only is letter writing a legitimate way of writing about emotions, it also has the major advantage of being a medium open to everyone. They observe that,

"Most of us feel we can, at a pinch, write a letter. Elitist definitions of the appropriate format for writing have until now excluded non-academics. Unlike "research reports" letters are an everyday format and not the province of a professional specialism (for example, "scientists", "researchers"). However, perhaps the "availability" of the letter form may even be one of the reasons why it has not, as yet, been used a research "method". If so, this is an important thing for action research, one of whose aims is to widen access to what

is valuable in the research process. Surely an exchange of letters is a perfect example of the collaborative format for enquiry, on which all action research would like to pride itself." (p.13)

I want to now move on from this paper by Plummer, Newman, and Winter, although I intend to come back to the responses by Rosemary and Marion, and Gill's reply to them, at a later stage in this letter as I feel that they address some of the criteria that I've yet to discuss.

For the time being Jack, I want to ask you whether you consider that I've *shown evidence of a critical review of appropriate literature*, or at least to a sufficient level that gives me permission to carry on to the next criterion?

If I can interrupt my train of thought for a moment, I want to mention my telephone call to you (8 April 1997). It was lovely to speak to you, although I was a little put out when you didn't seem able to accept what I meant when I said that I might have moved on from action research. I didn't mean to offend or challenge your views, its just how I feel sometimes. Anyway, I'm writing this as I sup my tea (I decided against something stronger in order to avoid snoozing in the sunshine all afternoon) and try to accommodate the explanations you've just given me on the difference between dialogue and dialectic - every time I think I know something you remind me that I don't. What I understood you to say was that dialogue is a form of conversation, whereas dialectic is a way of coming to know through question and answer - a search for knowledge and understanding, trying to make sense of an enquiry. That being the case, I think I must admit that in some of the places I've already used the terms, I may have got them the wrong way round or used them wrongly but nevertheless I hope that you will be able to understand what I've meant.