

INTRODUCTION

27 April 1997

Dear Reader

As I was preparing to write this letter, I drafted several false starts which have all found themselves in the waste paper bin this morning. The reason was that I'd been trying too hard to produce a perfect introduction for you which would leave nothing to question. Unfortunately that contradicted some of the very important points that I wanted to make in this dissertation about accepting research which is not perfect and which leaves many questions unanswered.

This morning I'm trying to be as spontaneous and natural as I can be but still conscious of my tutor's advice when he wrote to me a few months ago and said, *"Why not take the trouble you would take with someone who is not a friend but you are getting to know and who is interested in understanding you. Help them along the way with more explicit explanations than would be needed with a close friend where the tacit understandings can be taken for granted."* (letter from Jack dated 26 Jan 1997)

So let me give you the background to all this. I'm a Police Officer who enrolled at the University of Bath in 1991 as a part time student in the School of Education. I completed the required six modules and now find myself writing the dissertation in order to attain the degree. The first two were action research modules which provided me with a way of thinking and acting which would stay with me throughout the course. It was therefore not surprising that I returned to Jack Whitehead, the action research tutor, when it came to working on my dissertation.

Back in 1991 I had asked myself the question *"What are my teaching/educational values?"* and I had answered *"I think that a teacher should be helpful, should guide the student and should encourage the student. I want education to be enjoyable."* Those values have remained with me although I could perhaps add that education should fit in with my life as I believe that my life and my education are closely linked. These values have meant that every time I have felt a tension between my values and my practice, I've had to stop and try to change my practice in order to live up to my values more fully.

Hence the earlier beginnings of this letter were discarded as they took on a formality that I didn't like and they failed to suggest any possible educative relationship between you and I. As I read back over the earlier drafts I saw myself talking *at* you not *to* you. It was not enjoyable. I'm keen to enable you to feel involved in my life so that you can understand it from the inside. In writing this I've had you in mind as a real person, not just an audience but a thinking and/or speaking participant if that is what you would like to be. Of course I also reserve you the right not to take that part, but instead to read my story as an interested observer.

This brings me to my extensive use of correspondence in the form of informal letters, mainly between myself and my tutor, Jack. I think that I privately knew of its importance quite early on but I struggled with my own apprehension about it so it took me a considerable time to make it public. The use of our correspondence is shown and explained in greater depth in the letter that I wrote to Jack commenced on 1 April 1997 and reproduced in full in this account.

Jack and I have agreed that our letters can be used in this dissertation although I should say that there was a time that I would not have wanted to make them public, I just wasn't ready for that. In fact there were a number of letters that I didn't even send, some of which dealt with matters that were personal and painful at the time, but the writing of them was helpful to me. I mention this because I've been toying with the use of correspondence for quite a while and in early 1995 I showed a few to a friend of mine. His reply surprised me,

"Thanks for allowing me to see your letters. I found them most interesting yet frustrating. Interesting in your approach, using letters as a method of dialogue. This was quite refreshing and soul searching. Frustrating in that I found I often struggled early on to detect just what it was you were trying to convey, not that the content lacked substance I think it was because I felt I was an outsider intruding upon your privacy. (Maybe an introduction setting the scene?)

Bearing in mind his remarks, I want to assure you that you are not an outsider intruding upon my privacy, as I (and Jack) have decided to make the letters public.

The day after I received the above note from my friend, as usual I was listening to the radio on my way to work. There was an advertisement for wardrobes which went along the lines of a conversation between two people; the first saying words to the effect "Have you seen there's a sale on at such and such a shop?" with the second person asking where the shop was located, followed by the reply with some more detail, and finally ending with the phone number and a jingle.

It struck me that this was the method I was using to get my message across in an indirect sort of way. It's intentionally allowing third parties to overhear the conversation, as happens every day when I watch the soaps on the television. (And yes, as I become involved in the story, I do sometimes talk to the actors from the comfort of my own armchair!) It's somewhat different to the news bulletins and party political broadcasts when the speaker looks into the camera and talks directly to the audience with no questions asked.

I hope this comparison helps you to feel a little more comfortable when reading my letters and that my introduction does indeed set the scene for you. I believe it also provides the possibility of drawing third parties into the educative relationship between Jack and myself without forcing the issue. Instead there is a standing invitation.

Through correspondence I have adopted a *dialogical* methodology in this research. Two words that I have used during this enquiry have been **dialogue** and **dialectic** and I feel that I should now give you the meanings that I have attached to them.

The meaning that I have used for the word dialogue is a form of conversation:

This may take the form of verbal conversation as in face to face discussion, speaking on the telephone with another person, talking to ones self or even to imaginary others or things. It may also take the form of conversation in writing such as a personal journal or in correspondence.

For it to be a conversation as opposed to mere statements there needs to be some sense of an exchange of ideas and a balanced relationship. It is talking to not at the other. The speaker and listener have an attitude of mind not based on power but based on wanting to communicate and learn. It is a collaborative effort.

It follows that for something to be dialogical it has a conversational form.

The meaning that I have used for the word dialectic is a way of coming to know through question and answer which is involved in a search for knowledge and understanding:

The questions and answers may not be explicitly asked but nevertheless they exist. They can be present in a situation or document that is open to question and which accommodates the possibility of multiple answers and interpretations. The point is that the search for knowledge and understanding continues through the acceptance of further question and answer, rather than any assumption that the search has ended with the acquisition of some knowledge or understanding. I can never know or understand everything and just as I think I'm beginning to know or understand something it moves out of reach.

It follows that for something to be dialectical it involves an ongoing search for knowledge and understanding.

Having now given you the meanings that I attach to the words dialogue and dialectic I should say that there may be some places in the initial stages of this account where I have used them incorrectly. This is because I was then still confused about their meanings and was in the process of coming to my current understanding of them. Despite this, I believe that from the context you should be able to grasp what I mean when you see these words used.

I now wish to make two claims in relation to my enquiry:

- 1 I claim to be able to show, through the process of writing letters, a **dialectical** approach to my own education.
- 2 In addition, I claim to have done this through a **dialogical** means by using mainly correspondence to record, interpret, analyse and evaluate my search for knowledge and understanding.

Within the correspondence is evidence of my search for knowledge and understanding as I try to make sense of my enquiry. This is done through repeated reflection upon my own ideas and writing, as well as using experiences, Jack's guidance, suggestions put forward by others, and literature to move my thinking forward.

I've assembled a sample of my correspondence with Jack, all contained in one letter dated 1 April 1997 in which I eventually managed to pull together a range of my ideas in one hit. I would ask you to read this bearing in mind that there are tacit understandings between Jack and I which have developed since 1991. The letter of 1 April 1997 shows a stage in my search for knowledge and understanding, but it cannot show the beginning, the end, or even the full story of the stage that is shown. Nevertheless, I believe it is sufficient to support my claims for this dissertation.

Throughout my enquiry, I've insisted that my claims must be presented in a way that is *authentic* to me and *reflects the life that I lead*. In order to do this I have used my dialogue in the form of letters to constitute both my research and my report.

This is perhaps the best place to introduce my *epistemology*. I should say that epistemology has been a word that I often avoid because it's not part of my normal everyday language and I have to keep reminding myself of its dictionary meaning - *Theory of the method or*

grounds of knowledge (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1982). It really doesn't seem to occupy a place in my own thinking. However some time ago I did attempt to explain my position on this issue and this is what I wrote,

"In terms of epistemology, I am grateful to Moyra Evans where in a conversation with Jack Whitehead she clarifies that whilst the epistemology of certain others may be grounded in the views of previous writers in the literature, her epistemology is grounded in her practice (Evans, 1995 p.232). That in itself has allowed me to say that I believe my epistemology is grounded in dialogue based on my unfolding life. ... My epistemology is not something that is separate to me. ... Because my epistemology is grounded in my unfolding life it is naturally chaotic and confusing at times. By embracing my whole knowledge it includes the times of not knowing. Everything is thrown into the cooking pot and given a stir. ... I am coming from a point of view based in my own real life that varies from being calm, confident, and disciplined, to being chaotic and confusing." (undated paper 1996)

Now I'm not sure that I've explained this very well and as time has gone on I've wondered whether this early attempt at the "E" word is enough to enable my audience to see where I'm coming from. Would it be clearer if I said that my epistemology is grounded in a dialogical approach to a dialectic way of life. Would it be simpler if I said that my epistemology is grounded in my life. Let's hope that this has now clarified the situation enough for us to move on.

The university criteria for assessment became the *subject* of my enquiry, although I must admit that I am prone to running off in other directions when the fancy takes me. The reason I concentrated upon the criteria was that they troubled me terribly and so they were something that I had to come to terms with before I could progress. It was as if I had to deal with them rather than ignoring them knowing all along that they would continue to haunt me if I didn't address them.

Although the university criteria became the *subject* of my enquiry, I believe that there was much more actually going on and being revealed than merely an enquiry into criteria for assessment. Through the process I developed an increased understanding of my own educational development and was able to explain my *"living educational theory"* (Whitehead, 1993). Even as I write this I'm still learning and thinking through new ideas, such as, whether my epistemology can now be said to be grounded in my living educational theory, but that's perhaps a question to be addressed another day.

What I'm trying to point out here is that I may have been focussing upon the university criteria but I didn't just gain knowledge and understanding about that, for example, one major thread running through my account is my use of correspondence and how I might legitimise that as a valid form of both research and presentation, all the time insisting upon authenticity.

I've been trying to give you some indication of where my work is located in the grand order of research. Let me now take you carefully through my correspondence with Jack so that I can perhaps give it some more cohesion and explanation for you. Whilst the letters may not include "signposts" as they develop, I'm now looking back over the correspondence in order to map the territory for you as I now see it.

LETTER DATED 1 APRIL 1997 - A GUIDE:

You will see from the opening of the letter that I have adopted an informal way of writing to Jack, typical of the way that I write to friends and which enables me to maintain the personal relationship in conjunction with the professional. It also allows me to get my ideas down on paper, no matter how disjointed or irrational the thoughts may seem, in the knowledge that friends make the effort to make sense of them. Furthermore it accommodates my natural tendency to try to look at situations from a humorous or stoical point of view whenever possible, especially when I'm struggling.

The question that I ask in the letter is *"How can I enable my communication through correspondence to be seen as educational and worthy of presentation in its original form?"* This is a question that throughout the letter I endeavour to answer as I address the university criteria by using correspondence and presenting it in its original form.

Early in the letter I point out that *enquiry is not just for professional practice, it has an effect on my whole life*. In a previous letter, not reproduced here, I wrote, *"You need to see my dissertation in the context of a person who is trying to explain her theory that educational development can almost be considered synonymous with the progression of life itself and therefore to understand my educational development, you have to understand my life."* (letter to Jack dated 19 November 1996) In his reply to that letter Jack pointed out to me *"Now this is a very powerful statement and I think it needs to come into your abstract and introduction to your dissertation."* (letter from Jack dated 26 January 1997). There are two important themes here. They are (a) the integration of the personal and the professional and (b) the linking of educational development with the progression of my life.

The letter introduces the task which I'd set for myself, that is to address the university criteria which I had dabbled with but resisted for a long time. It suggests that there is a history of discussion between myself and Jack on the question of criteria (which is documented in previous notes/tapes of verbal conversations as well as correspondence not reproduced within this account).

Something that's alluded to but not explicitly said at the beginning of the letter is the fact that writing for a dissertation was not enjoyable for me, whereas if I could get the thought of a dissertation out of my head then I could enjoy writing. That's why I said *"Let's just forget the dissertation..."* There's something relevant there that strikes me about attitude of mind which I'll perhaps be able to develop later.

The letter deals with each of the eight university criteria in turn, albeit that the evidence for some overlaps with others. As I endeavour to address the first of the criteria - justify the appropriateness of the methodology to the nature of the enquiry - I begin to think about and describe my methodology highlighting its **dialogical nature and acknowledging its grounding in action research**.

Once I had got to grips with the first one, it seemed to me that the remaining seven criteria fell into place. I was able to draw on the knowledge and understanding that I already had whilst allowing my writing and associated reflection to reveal new questions and answers. As I recorded the criticisms of letter writing they were no longer quite so worrying for me as I balanced them against the arguments for dialogical methods and dialectic enquiry. Furthermore I found enough support for different forms of presentation to alleviate my concerns (McNiff 1992, Lomax & Parker 1995, Lomax 1994a, Rowland & Winter 1994a, Whitehead 1993, McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead 1996, Three books of CARN Critical Conversations).

Probably to Jack's relief, at last I showed how I integrate the literature into my thinking and engage with it in order to explain its relevance to me.

In my letter to Jack, when it came to the questions of whether I "*show evidence of an ability to interpret, analyse, and evaluate the data*" and whether I "*demonstrate a ... quality of argument*" I said that I would address these issues in an introduction to my dissertation, so here goes.

I had previously produced two lists. The first shows the features in the literature to which I most closely relate and the second shows the features that make me feel uncomfortable. I think that the first list can be broadly termed as *natural* and the second as *controlling*. The lists were as follows:

NATURAL

case study and self study; reflective practice; the integration of personal life with professional practice; the admission of emotion into research; forms of representation; tentative style; dialogue and dialectic enquiry; confidence in personal knowledge; contradiction; holding together diverse and multiple ideas; freedom and justice; responsibility and integrity; kindness, sensitivity, and caring; spontaneity and informality; practice before theory; learning from experience; doing the right thing in the circumstances; being involved in the research as opposed to being outside it.

CONTROLLING

rigour; action planning; judgement; criteria; rules and conditions; systems; procedures, methods, and structure.

This should give you an impression of the features that I readily accept - the natural group; and the features that I resist - the controlling group. In turn this affects the nature of my enquiry with a leaning towards natural features.

If I then consider the features of correspondence in the form of letters between friends which I have listed in my letter to Jack they too can be loosely grouped as *natural* (see list in section entitled Draw Justifiable Conclusions Acknowledging the Limitations of the Study). Correspondence between friends has a dialogical nature. Correspondence between myself and friends does not include *controlling* features because my friends just don't behave in that way towards each other.

I think that perhaps this may help to explain why I chose to use informal letters as the basis for my research. They contain the type of natural features to which I relate and omit the controlling features that make me feel uncomfortable.

However, I believe that it is possible, within informal letters between friends to incorporate rigour through the question and answer of the dialectic. This is particularly apparent to me where there is an educative and caring relationship between the parties involved. This way it doesn't present itself as *controlling*, but instead it is *supportive*. It is truly educational and not based on power.

Whether I could accept the other features that I have labelled *controlling* if they are introduced in the context of educative relationships remains to be seen.

Now I want to tell you what to expect to see so that you can get into the main body of this account.

I have given you a research report; that is not presented to you as a perfect article; that uses everyday language as opposed to what I call "academic language"; that is chaotic in that it darts about touching on issues but then leaves them with no guarantee that they'll be re-considered later; and that uses informal letter writing as the basis for both the research and the report. I have given you a *natural* enquiry in which I haven't relied upon *controlling* features.

Even though it doesn't have the formality that is often associated with research reports, I am satisfied that my account remains *authentic*, adequately portrays my thinking and priorities, and demonstrates my search for knowledge and understanding, blending with my life as it progresses.

Don't forget that in the process of writing my letters, including the current one to you and the exchanges with Jack that I've reproduced, the dialogical nature of my enquiry continues. Hence none of my letters either tell you all that I have to say or finish the story. They are part of an ongoing process. Even if they appear as a product they can only be a provisional product.

So without any more ado I invite you to read and hopefully enjoy my story.

* Note: See also pages (75-76) for further discussion on your reading my correspondence with Jack and the difficulties that it may cause for you. This comes under the heading of audience. I do not want you to feel uncomfortable at reading the letters that Jack and I exchanged, you really are supposed to be there.

INTERLUDE

Back Garden, 4 June 1997

At the end of April this year I presented the introduction to my dissertation to a group of friends at the University of Bath, School of Education (Action Research in Educational Theory Research Group). My introduction took the form of a letter to them dated 27 April 1997 (see ante) and I was convinced that through this they would be sufficiently briefed on my enquiry that our subsequent discussion would take the form of my just reiterating a few points and summarising the main body of my research.

Wrong!

Gradually their doubts became clear as one by one they said things like;

"I can't see the practice in it. I was looking for the police."

"I can't see what it's all about."

"Is it about yourself, is it navel gazing?"

"You're in the personal, where's the practice? Practice is the research."

"How did you get to the point you're at? Did it start with practice? How did you get to the subject as criteria? Is this something to do research on?"

Although I wasn't going to admit it at the time because I was trying desperately hard to think and speak positively, I went away somewhat troubled and not knowing what to do next. So I did nothing, except read a few more books and articles. I put the dissertation out of my mind until today when I read my introduction again. I still thought it was pretty good actually, but obviously not good enough to enable my audience to understand what it's all about.

So let's have another go.

There is an extremely important point that I must emphasise if you are to grasp what this account is about. That point is that I cannot separate my personal and professional practice. When you see something about this account that you think is personal, it is likely that I see the same thing as practical. Therefore to understand my practice, you must understand my life, my way of looking at the world.

You might see my letters to Jack as personal and they are, but they have also become part of my professional practice as I try to realise their importance to my own educational development.

The second point the I want to emphasise is that I wanted to show how a dialogical account could be constructed and how a dialectical approach might appear in practice. I didn't just want to write about it, but I found that process difficult to represent. I wanted to do it and to demonstrate it. My correspondence with Jack does show both the dialogue and dialectic. I didn't want to be saying, "I've done this," I wanted you to see it in action as it developed.

I recognise that reading someone else's letters can be a problem, but I've now come to realise that the presentation of the letters was perhaps not the nub of the exercise, but it was the quality and authenticity of the communication. Something that caused me to realise this was an open letter by Martyn Hammersley to Pat D'Arcy (Hammersley, 1995 p.117). I saw that his communication was quite different to mine. He was defensive, aggressive and

deriding, albeit I don't know the tone of Pat's remarks that originally gave rise to his reply and it may well be that her comments were just as confrontational.

What I am trying to explain is that even though Martyn Hammersley used the format of a letter, commencing "Dear Pat", and appeared to be writing directly to her, it was more of a "put down" than any real expression of support. So although much of my work to date has taken the form of letters, it has been the sense of having the recipient in mind in a co-operative sort of way that has assisted the communication. It was a certain attitude of mind. A genuine desire to learn and progress on my part and a genuine desire to help on Jack's part. There have been disagreements along the way, but always a mutual respect, there were different ideas to be argued but with no need for a win or lose result.

The letters that I wrote became the means by which I could express my thoughts with the minimum of distortion. It was suggested to me when I presented my introduction that I use correspondence as a form of representation, not presentation. The correspondence represents my research. I was referred to Lomax and Parker (1995) who say

"The dialogue, which is a written representation or record of conversation, is a new way in which action researchers try to represent the living aspect of their theories about practice." (p.303)

And now I suppose I should again try to address the questions of "What is it all about?" and "How did I get to make the University criteria the subject of my enquiry?"

I'll deal with the latter question first. I started by writing private diary entries, letters to myself, letters to Jack (often not sent), and transcribing taped monologues and conversations. All of these were ways of expressing my thoughts and evidencing them in writing. Whilst I did write a little that was directly about my work as a police officer, a lot of my thoughts were more about my life in general, and particularly about my own educational development. I didn't seem to make any great distinctions between my life as a police officer, my life as a daughter, my life as a teacher, my life as a shopper, my life as a holiday-maker, and all the other roles that I undertake. My practice was wrapped up in my life and whole outlook.

Over a period of time I realised that I was reflecting upon my earlier thoughts and reconsidering them over and over again as if to clarify them to myself and to make sense of my experiences but at the same time allowing them to remain in a state of flux and open to change.

It dawned on me that my educational practice had included the dialogue contained in my various writing, and particularly in my correspondence with Jack. And so my correspondence became my practice. In turn it became increasingly clear to me that communication was my practice. Dialogue was my practice.

I also realised through looking back over my writing and because I couldn't get it off my mind, that I was obsessed with issues to do with criteria and judgement, in that I felt that the criteria for judgement would push me and my enquiry into boxes and constrict me whereas the dialogue I had enjoyed was doing the opposite. I felt that I had to find a way of satisfying both. Hence I developed my dialogue around the university criteria.

Now to answer the former question - "What is it all about?" I think that here I can only repeat that it's about my search for knowledge and understanding. I am concerned that some

action researchers in my audience may be expecting some sort of linear account that clearly explains how I have been improving my practice as a police officer but unfortunately you will be disappointed. I started out with the intention of improving my practice and I believe that I have done so, but I'm afraid that I have not demonstrated it to you in terms of my police work.

Instead I have explained my own educational development and it is through that educational development that I am enabled to improve my practice as I come to better understand and know my own practice. My contribution has not been yet another police story - you can see those nearly every day on the television - but it has been an account which shows the dialogue and dialectic that I value so highly. I hope that it also enables you to see the value of that dialogue and dialectic and helps you to improve your practice in this respect. One of the books that I recently read was *Thought as a System* (Bohm, 1994). Near the end of the book, he talks about dialogue and says;

"What I'm trying to present is the meaning of dialogue - a "vision of dialogue". By seeing the meaning we will then begin to feel the value of it and begin to establish purposes, which may help bring us towards it." (p.207)

In this section, I have again tried to explain myself and no doubt that necessity will continue. If the group had reacted as I had wished for at the end of April, then there would have been something wrong, because the search for understanding and the dialogue involved in that would have come to an end. In fact I believe that an educational enquiry should provide the basis for continued dialogue and dialectic.

And now let us go back to the beginning of April 1997.

LETTERS TO MY TEACHER

1 April 1997

Dear Jack

It was good to see you recently, how did it go in Chicago? I must admit I thought you looked a little tired when I saw you and I came away wondering what was wrong. I realised that you weren't too impressed with the most recent writing I'd done for "that wretched dissertation" but you didn't really say so, although your disappointment at it being in the third person seemed pretty obvious to me. In fact I was glad that you didn't criticise because I'm sure I would have left feeling absolutely devastated and not knowing what to try next! Do you know what gave you away - it was that you asked hardly any questions. I believe the only time you laughed was when you read how I had described myself as having *"trundled on, drafting dissertation after dissertation"*. It took me a while to realise that there was something wrong and to work out why I felt that meeting hadn't gone as well as some of the others we've had. You just didn't ask me your usual questions, it was as if my writing hadn't given you any excitement or anything to argue about. I'm still not sure whether it was just my boring writing that was the damper or whether, as I've suggested, you were a little tired, perhaps you've been overworking lately, or is having a son who's reached 18 making you feel your age! Whatever the reason, I do hope that your visit to Chicago has rejuvenated you and I guess you've come back with lots of new ideas and things to talk about. Does this mean that I'm going to be showered with more literature - I'll get my brolly out! Just the thought of it makes me smile.

Now about this wretched dissertation, to be quite frank, it's not going too well, and I'm still "trundling on". "Tell me something new!" I hear you cry. As you know, I began to do an overview to try to explain my progress over the past few years (yes its run into a few years now), to try to locate my work and to link it to the literature. It wasn't me though, I wasn't comfortable, and I wasn't enjoying it. So I'm sorry but I had to get back to writing "letters to my teacher" as opposed to "a dissertation on my educational development grounded in Whitehead's living educational theory" (Whitehead, 1993) which is what it was turning out to be. Can you now see the difference in our style?

The purpose of this letter is to do 3 things. They are:

- * to demonstrate through correspondence the features that makes it a useful aid or system for me when explaining ideas (a theory?)
- * to show through the use of correspondence that it can adequately present my ideas
- * to reveal, maintain and develop the educative relationship between yourself and I.

Let me now concentrate on communicating my thoughts and ideas in a way that is authentic and true to myself. Let me start living out some values regardless of whether they fit with academic criteria or not. Let's just forget the dissertation and allow me to argue with you for a while (and stop nodding Jack)!

Every time I try to write about what I've done, I lose interest and the writing doesn't seem to come to life for me. It's as if I'm not writing about how I feel but instead I'm writing about how something was, something out there as opposed to in here, something that's no longer important to me because I've moved on. Instead I want to capture the immediacy of research and enquiry, I want to communicate it to you in a way that really tells you how I feel about it. That's why I use letters, they're addressed to you and they speak directly to you. If someone else wants to eavesdrop then that's fine, but it's to you that I want to make

my point. I feel that you are the person, if anyone, that can help me to explain my position simply by enabling me to speak with my own voice. But I'm not speaking to a blank piece of paper, I'm speaking to a person who has a different point of view, who will bring new ideas and interpretations to our conversation, and through that conversation we move on and keep the communication alive.

The question that is on my mind is the one that says "How can I enable my communication through correspondence to be seen as educational and worthy of presentation in its original form?" At the time of writing, I am absolutely certain in my own mind that correspondence and conversation is educational, my difficulty lies in trying to explain my view in a way that enables it to be *seen* as educational and indeed as *worthy* of presentation in that form.

Over and over again I've asked myself why I keep coming back to this type of question rather than one that would appear to be more directly connected to my work as a police officer. There's nothing about the police force in my question, even though I know that you would want to see it because I believe you see the educational research that I embarked upon to be intended for the improvement of professional practice, which in my case is my work as a police officer.

I have a different point of view. Mine says that enquiry is not just for professional practice, it has an effect on my whole life. I don't see personal and professional values as separate although I must admit that I do seem to separate my personal life from my professional life to a certain extent. Perhaps that's one for further exploration at another time. For the moment please allow me to stick with the task that I have in mind.

It seems sensible for me to try to present my argument to you in a format that you would understand. The thing that's been bothering me for a long time and annoying me because you won't let it go, is the list of university criteria. You witter on about them at every opportunity as if that list of eight points are the be all and end all of life as we know it! Mind you I'm no better, getting myself in a state over whether I have or haven't complied with them. Despite that, here's my attempt at dealing with the criteria or should I say getting the better of the criteria.

Yes Jack, I am at last prepared to communicate with you on the thorny issue of criteria without disappearing, running out of steam, or becoming terribly defensive and I am trying very hard not to be too much of a rebel! Therefore the subject matter for at least this part of the letter will be the university criteria.

Justify the appropriateness of the methodology to the nature of the enquiry

Well, in the police force we constantly use correspondence and conversation as our main means of communication, although internal correspondence generally takes the form of reports or memorandums rather than letters. However, I don't believe that the possible educational value and potential of these exchanges has been fully recognised or explored yet. At present they are used more for transmitting information than for any educational purpose. The contents of the reports and memos do not generally invite deep and lasting discussion or an ongoing dialogue. Instead they are concise and usually submitted in order to answer questions rather than ask them. Nevertheless, I believe it would be quite easy to change the style of some of our internal correspondence to make it more educational, the main drawback being that we are used to looking for answers and so it could be quite frustrating and confusing in the early stages.

Recently, I have in fact started to write to a few colleagues in the style of "educational letters to friends" but it's still early days and something that I'm in the process of developing so please don't ask me too much about it yet and no I haven't got the evidence about how its been received! When I use the phrase "educational letters to friends" I mean friendly letters with the usual courtesies but including contents concerning professional practice which inform or challenge or question or give ideas and so on.

For some time there's been distance learning with training packages that are written in a style that speak directly to the student. However, within my own force these don't involve writing back to a tutor. Instead, the self-teach booklets are littered with blank boxes in which the student is expected to write their answer before moving on to see what the book says. In practice I've never bothered to fill in the spaces but have simply read the booklet, or watched the accompanying video, from start to finish.

Then there's inter-active learning on computers, which don't let the student move on until they have answered the questions. We haven't got that in my force yet but from what I've seen of these computer programmes, they don't allow discussion or creative thought, but tend to give simple answers to simple questions.

I'm looking for more than these packages can offer, because I want argument and the educative relationship with the teacher, critical friend, collaborator, opponent or whoever. When I consider the amount of one to one communication that police officers do with the public, I find it quite amazing that as an organisation we haven't gone further down the line of educative correspondences with each other in order to help us make sense of our experiences.

I suppose I could say that I've used my correspondence with you as a practice ground which has enabled me to become comfortable with using correspondence and conversation as the basis for my own educational development. I find that I'm able to reel off letters in this style in relatively little time whereas if I try to make the same point in some detached third party "matter of fact" way it takes me much longer and the "emergent thought" has gone by the time I've rearranged it to write it down.

As you told me in a letter some time ago, I "focus on conversations and correspondence in making sense of the operational life of a police officer." Of course I have to disagree with you in that it's not only that I use it to make sense of my life as a police officer but I use it to make sense of my whole life. That was you again focussing only on the police part of my life, one day I'll convince you that there's more to me than the police force.

So what is my methodology. One thing it's not is static or fixed. In fact I would say that it's changed and developed over time, just as my form of presentation has. Later in this account I would like to explain how my methodology has changed but for the moment I'd like to concentrate on the point that I've reached, my methodology as it is now.

To date I've not been able to get clearly into my mind the meaning of the word methodology. I'm therefore at a disadvantage when it comes to justifying my methodology. Judith Bell (1987) talks about *"approaches to educational research"* and says

"Different styles, traditions or approaches use different methods of collecting data, but no approach prescribes nor automatically rejects any particular method." (p.4)

She continues,

"Classifying an approach as quantitative or qualitative, ethnographic, survey, action research or whatever, does not mean that once an approach has been selected, the researcher may not move from the methods normally associated with the style. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses and each is particularly suitable for a particular context." (p.4)

So Bell seems to define methodology as an approach to educational research which have differing labels such as action research, case study, ethnographic, surveys, and experimental, each with their own features that separate them from the rest.

Cohen and Manion (1989) only served to confuse me. They have a section headed methods and methodology. Methods was easy to understand in that they said

"By methods, we mean that range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction." (p.41)

On the other hand, when it came to methodology they quote from Kaplin which quite frankly did nothing for me as I thought it was gobbledegook. However, they summarise it by saying

"... he suggests the aim of methodology is to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry but the process itself." (p.42)

Unfortunately for me, this still didn't fully clarify the meaning of the word methodology.

Having gained little joy from Cohen and Manion I moved on to Verma and Beard (1981). They say that a

"useful way to classify or categorise educational research is by purpose which lies along a continuum from the most basic to the most applied. That is to say, is the research designed to add knowledge to the field of study which may or may not be of any immediate value (basic) or is it to be of immediate practical application?" (p.36)

In addition to this, they go on to list eleven kinds of research offered as an outline by Rowan (1976), which includes some very long and fancy words. However, the two types in there of interest to me were action research and dialectical research. Whilst Verma and Beard describe action research, they pay little attention to the dialectic. However, they summarise by saying,

"It is apparent that educational research can take many forms; ... The most important point to be remembered is that the focus of educational research must be education, and that the foremost function is to assist teachers, administrators and all concerned in the field, with the aim of improving the quality of the educational process, and thus enhancing the quality of life." (p.40)

Later they comment that,

"There seems to be so many difficulties at both the conceptual and technical level concerning the methodology of research in education. For example, human behaviour - the concern of most educational researchers - is far more complex to understand and interpret than the forces operating to make up the content of the physical sciences. Educational research is a planned and deliberate intervention designed to improve the educational process which may differ from situation to situation, and from time to time in the same setting." (p.51)

Now can you see Jack why I get myself wound up about criteria when I can't even understand what the word methodology means and I have to say that I can't see the importance of my understanding it. Everywhere I look I find a different slant on the word, which leaves me feeling lost. My vocabulary, until coming to the university, managed perfectly well without methodology, but since coming there I've not only been conducting an enquiry but I've had to learn a new form of language in the process.

I have no doubt that my initial approach was one of an action researcher, that is of course if you accept action research as a methodology. Having read McNiff's comments (1988) I even have some doubt about that as she says, *"...my reading in the field led me to believe that a great emphasis was placed on an approach to action research as a methodological issue rather than a philosophical view of the nature of educational knowledge. This latter view is held by Jack ..."* (p.xvii) In spite of this, can we say for the time being that my methodology was grounded in action research. Now I'd like to come up to date and describe what I do now so that I can suggest a label for my present methodology and justify its appropriateness.

Well quite simply I use correspondence as a means to express my ideas that hopefully you will recognise as points that are open to discussion, argument and development. The letters are the medium by which I can tell you my thoughts with no fear that you will attack me, not least because you know how vulnerable I am when trying to put forward an argument that is still in the process of formulation.

If you challenge my ideas I have no need to lose face. Instead I can have time in which to construct my reply whilst maintaining my own sense of pride, judgement, and values. It is a gentler form of argument, based on a willingness to properly listen and engage with the other's point of view. It's what we make it.

It has a conversational base to it but provides the opportunity to think again and review the words before posting it off to you. It provides the chance to communicate when there's no time or space to meet or speak verbally to the other.

On several occasions you've mentioned the art of the dialectician to me. You referred me to the works of Plato and although I've not read his work, I've now read about him, especially what is said about him and dialectics. Cohen (1969) started me off in her introductory book on Educational Thought where she describes Plato's theories. She talks about Socrates, *"whom Plato makes a leading figure in most of his dialogues,"* and says

"The most significant event in Socrates' life, indeed its turning point, was a declaration of the Delphic oracle: that there was no one wiser than Socrates. According to his own report, from that time on Socrates embarked on the career of questioning for which he is famous, his object being to prove the oracle wrong ... he tackled various "wise" men on the subjects on which they were supposed to be expert. He did this in apparent innocence, only wanting to make sure that they really were wiser than he was himself, but this method of questioning quickly reduced them to confusion. As a result of this procedure two things happened; one was that Socrates finally decided that the oracle was probably right, in that although he knew nothing, he was wiser than the professedly wise, since he knew that he knew nothing, whereas they laboured under the false impression that they knew something. The second result was to be expected; Socrates became less and less popular with people of importance in Athens," (p.29)

Cohen goes on to explain Plato's Dialectical method, saying,

"In earlier dialogues the method of discussion, which is clearly a faithful representation of Socrates' method, is dialectical. The Dialectical method is characterised by the fact that, at the outset, the aim is usually a definition, eg of justice, courage or beauty. A hypothetical definition is then suggested which should cover all cases; next a counter-example is found, and the definition has to be amended to cover this counter-example. The new definition is corrected and improved in the same way, and provides yet another definition, each definition being nearer the truth than the last. The positive function of the dialectical method is, first of all, the clarification of ideas; secondly, the philosophical or logical training of those engaged in it; and thirdly, the examination of presuppositions." (p.30)

Very interesting Jack, but I don't take part in dialogue in order to define things, in fact I think I'm quite the opposite, I don't want to pin them down but would rather allow them to develop into something new and different.

Then I turn to Barrow (1976) for more information about Plato. He introduces me to the techniques of "elenchus" and "epagoge", saying,

"Elenchus" is the technique of causing a man to drop or revise his original statement by leading him in the course of questioning to accept as an ultimate consequence of it a statement contradicting it. "Epagoge" consists of causing another disputant to accept a generalisation by getting him to agree to a series of instances. Perhaps, finally dialectic defies accurate description: it is that which Plato creates in his dialogues. It is the ruthless pursuit of some problem, the search for truth on some matter conducted with determination, subtlety, precision and care. It eschews short cuts, debating points, and persuasive arguments. It involves a genuine dialogue between two persons concerned not to "win" but to lose something of their own ignorance." (p.42)

Whereas Plato used the dialectic method to define things, perhaps the contradiction might be that it can also be used to do the opposite, as I have suggested here, to open up my mind to new ideas, to broaden it, to accommodate the contradiction. I smiled when I read that Plato reserved the dialectic for the final stage of education, with Barrow quoting Socrates to make the point -

".. young men when they first get a taste of disputation, misuse it as a form of sport, always employing it contentiously ... they delight like puppies in pulling about and tearing with words all who approach them" ((Republic, 539) (p.43)

I wondered whether that was me at my more rebellious moments!

Then I read on and saw the control go back into Plato's ideas where Barrow remarks,

"That the students involved in dialectic should submit their own views on the question at issue is one thing; but that they should also be the arbiters of what criteria they use for assessing the validity of their argument for the view is quite another. The student of dialectic is not subject to the authority of any teacher, but he is subject to the rule of reason: he goes not whither he will, but whither the argument leads him." (p.43)

It would surely be interesting to me to figure out the contradiction to Plato's views on criteria, the contradiction that makes me wonder whether one day I will be able to convince you that there is no need for criteria.

We've talked about the dialectic approach, so here is my dialectic approach, in the form of correspondence.

Now I have to justify this dialectic approach as a valid means of enquiry. I've taken your advice Jack in reading yet again "The Narrative of an Educational Journey or Crossing the Track" (Lomax, 1994a). She proposes

"that we must look for an appropriate methodology and epistemology for the educational enterprise outside of social science." (p.4)

She says,

"We need to make a stand to support alternative forms of research, to challenge old assumptions, to work constructively with contradiction, and we need research that is able to make itself transparent so that we ourselves do not slip unconsciously back into that old world." (p.5)

She asks

"Why should our descriptions and explanations be constrained in the form of a research tradition that belongs to social science?" (p.6)

She points out

"I am asking the gatekeepers of research to move over a little, to recognise a new partner, to respect another way, to let an educational form of research into the academy." (p.6)

Her words reminded me of a rhyme I read not long ago:

I took a crowded train today from London Bridge to Lee, and someone kindly shifted up to make some room for me. "Squeeze up," he said to everyone, "and make another seat, 'twill save this little lady from wearing out her feet." And what a friendly attitude, and kindly thing to say, to make room for a stranger in such a pleasant way.

It would be well with bigger things to use this little plan, and squeeze another person in to any place you can. Not spread yourself, and take more room, and flaunt your luck about, using every means you know to keep another out, hoping in such manner your position to advance, but squeezing up a bit to give another man a chance. (Partridge, 1942 p.34)

There's no doubt in my mind that Lomax was opening doors to forms of educational enquiry that are better suited to the context in which they take place. However, I remain a little sceptical when I think back to a discussion at the World Congress 3, held at the University

of Bath in 1994. I went to a meeting where Kevin Eames introduced the idea of *"The Education Journal,"* and which was also attended by Pam Lomax,

Eames had with him the introductory issue of the journal in which he feels that

"the dialectical form of educational knowledge is appropriate as a form of professional knowledge for educators," (Eames, 1994 p.7)

and he says

"a dialectical form of knowledge ... is above all an educational form, in the sense that it educates the participants - moves them from not knowing something, or not being able to do something, to knowing it or doing it." (p.7)

Yes I could go along with that.

The discussion initially appeared to go along the lines of accepting the imperfections of all of us as we use dialogue with others as a means to learn and move forward. This, I thought, could be a journal that included the contributions of the likes of myself, I had things to say but wasn't particularly good at expressing them. Perhaps the ongoing dialogue would enable me to speak up more and to take a more active role in the development of educational knowledge.

Eames had written,

"The Journal needs to reflect, as far as possible, the dialectical nature of educational knowledge ..." (p.7)

He continued,

"Such a process would embody the function of the journal - as a form for debate, where views are put forward on the understanding that they will form part of a developing dialogue. It would also embody the way our own educational knowledge develops within a conversational community, as we fulfil our professional responsibility for improving our practice, and hold ourselves accountable to our fellow educators by offering descriptions and explanations for scrutiny." (p.8)

Then came the contradiction which I found to be both shocking and distressing, as someone raised the question of how the contributions would be judged and what standards would be applied. Suddenly it became obvious to me that my contribution would be excluded because it wouldn't be of a refereed journal standard. And guess who was speaking up for standards so that this journal would have credibility - Yes it was Pam.

Well Jack I'm sure you can imagine my anger. I was so annoyed and disappointed that I didn't speak, if I had I would have cried. Instead, I went away thinking "I don't want to be associated with a journal that excludes those of us who are just starting out, or think differently." For the rest of that meeting, indeed the rest of the day, I didn't feel valued but no-one knew because I couldn't tell them, and anyway I don't believe they would have understood. In some ways I'm sorry that I didn't tell Pam but maybe now that time has passed we will both be able to see the contradiction. It should at least help you to understand why I am so suspicious when I read of academics who appear to support a

dialectic form of enquiry, I remain afraid that they'll dismiss my contribution because I still have much to learn.

Perhaps you can remember the occasion when I accused you of the same thing, of being my gatekeeper, because no matter how much work I did, you still kept telling me that it wouldn't pass for a degree.

I feel as if perhaps I've gone a little off track as I recall that incident at the World Congress 3. In fact I still get upset about it. It reminds me of a time when I felt unable to speak even though I was surrounded by people who were asking for more dialogue. Perhaps I should get back to a more structured approach (gosh did I say structured, most unlike me!) Anyway I have tried to discipline myself into thinking more about the task in hand which is justifying to you the appropriateness of the methodology to the nature of the enquiry.

I've now started to consider this in a back to front way in that I've begun to think about the nature of my enquiry before dealing with the methodology itself. Let me tell you what I've come up with. I've thought about the nature of my enquiry in terms of the features that it includes. I should say that these are not features that I planned to include, but it's just how it is. I think this needs some explanation because I believe that it has been through the process of our conversations and correspondence, as well as my reading of literature, that I have come to realise the nature of my enquiry. When I started out I saw the nature of my enquiry in a very different way. I saw it as engaging in action to improve practice which it probably was at that stage. That action was clear and organised addressing questions based on your action planner commencing "What is my concern, what do I want to improve?" Now I've moved on to a different type of enquiry which is much more integrated with my whole way of life. It seems to have a different purpose but I really don't feel that I can explain that to you at this point in time. I know that's not very satisfactory but I just can't pin-point exactly what I want to say about it. Maybe it will help if I go on to explain some of the features that make up the nature of my enquiry.

NATURE of the ENQUIRY

It is Personally Based

My enquiry relates to problems faced *by* me as opposed to problems posed *for* me by someone else - It could be said that by addressing the criteria in this letter I'm dealing with a problem posed for me by you. After all I get the impression that it is you that keeps raising the issue of the criteria for judgement, but the reality is that it is also of concern to me. In fact it's probably me that is more inclined to raise it now. I don't feel as if I can rest until I've fully explored and exhausted the issue with you. It's now my choice to discuss the university criteria because I want to get the better of those criteria, I want to be able to put them aside and say they're sorted. I think I'd also like us to be able to shut-up about them!

It seems to me that because your enquiries are based in the professional but mine are now more inclined to the personal or the personal as part of, or the same as, the professional, then we have a different outlook, a gulf between us as I try to understand enquiry from your point of view and you try to understand it from mine. I know that you're trying to understand my thinking as you referred me to Ardra Cole's paper (Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole, 1996). They make connections between the personal and professional. They used an autobiographical self-study approach saying,

"In this focused personal history-based account of Ardra's teaching practice, we reconstructed some of the elements of her personal history that find expression in her pedagogy - the beliefs, values, and perspectives firmly rooted in Ardra's early experiences which give shape and meaning to her adult self and her teaching practice. As we followed the narrative threads that emerged through our analysis, we became increasingly aware of the entangled nature of the personal and professional realms of our lives, and the importance of making those connections known to ourselves." (p.19)

In her own commentary, Ardra addresses the question of legitimacy and tells how she feels about it,

"My unease relates to the broad context within which the research is situated and the relationship between the individual/personal value derived from self-study and its perceived value as a contribution to the enhancement of knowledge about teacher educators and their work; in short, its legitimacy as a form of research. ... Products of self-study work in general are various characterized by non-sympathetic academics as "narcissistic", "solipsistic", or some similar term that renders the work "unacceptable". Those who hold such views are, it seems, part of the preserving force that maintains the status quo of the academy." (p.21)

My enquiry acknowledges the presence of emotion - In documents that I present in the course of my work as a police officer, there is no place for emotion. Courts want to hear the "evidence relating to the offence", not the feelings that go with it. Emotions don't usually come into the definitions of criminal offences. However, you'll see that I'm relating my enquiry to something that is personally based rather than just practitioner based. That's not to say that it can't be both, for example, when I'm addressing a question directly to do with my work in the police force it can be practical, personal or both. One of the best books I read which dealt with emotion was that by Dadds (1995a). In commenting upon her reading about action research she says,

"Affective dimensions of the action research process were missing from the neat models but not from the teachers' untidy lived realities." (p.3)

She argues that:

"There has to be scope for speaking of head and heart; for acknowledging past and present; for representing pain and pleasure, individuality and community. We need a language that allows us to view professionalism as part of the complexity of life; a vocabulary that speaks of our work as part of our being; a discourse that treasures human caring in the challenging task of education. This is the place for a language which renders strange and special that which is taken-for-ordinary; a canvas and colour to paint the many varied validities of committed professional growth that pass by unnoticed on the treadmill of life. We need an infinitely flexible research medium. We cannot dispense with story." (p.166)

My enquiry recognises vulnerability of self - When standing on the outside of something, looking in, it's sometimes easy to criticise, it doesn't hurt the critic and I must confess it comes almost naturally to me. But when I'm the one on the inside being looked at, then I realise the pain that can come from such a common exercise. That's why I build up my means of protection, either in the form of barriers, or by ensuring that I can control the criticism by influencing the relationship between myself and the critic. I have to enable the other parties to understand my boundaries when it comes to being challenged just as I have to understand their boundaries. And there's no way that we can get it right all of the time. Consequently my enquiry has to have its own protectors that enable me to get out of difficult situations, that allow a relatively equal balance of power, and that prevent me from totally losing control of my own situation. I do that by giving you hints and sometimes even being blunt about the way I want my ideas to be treated.

Again Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole (1996) seem to understand my difficulty when they point out,

"Self-study, by its very nature, renders individuals and institutions vulnerable and accountable. Research that is both personal and practical in its orientation not only endangers the reputation of the academy but also is part of a political agenda to challenge traditional conceptions of what counts as knowledge and research. Thus, it is argued, it is not in the best interests of the academy (and those who align themselves with the academy) to support such an agenda." (p.22)

Well I can't claim to be politically motivated but it does make me feel more important to be put into that particular box as if I'm part of some battle that's being fought. On the other hand, I wouldn't want to feel that my contribution is going to be used to support a political argument that doesn't matter to me, I am not a pawn in a game. My motivation comes from simply wanting to take part, to be allowed to speak in order to improve the understanding of both myself and others who may wish to enter my arguments.

I was recently reading Newby's attack in the Journal of Philosophy of Education (Newby, 1994) on Jean McNiff's book (McNiff, 1993) which reinforced how vulnerable I am. He said of her work *"I am opposed to founding such work on the admittedly embryonic philosophy expressed here." (p.119)* It was some time ago that I first read McNiff's book - Teaching as Learning - but I don't recall it being as antagonistic towards the experts as Newby seems to view it, but perhaps that's because I'm not an academic. The sad part about Newby's review was that I didn't find it to be particularly educational except that it clearly revealed the gap between their thinking.

It did make me wonder though about this antagonism towards academics. A little while ago I was thinking that maybe I talk about academics in an unfair way and I'm afraid that might be because you've led me down that path. Its been a path that made me believe that the academics won't listen to me, whereas in my heart I want to believe that they will. I sometimes feel as if I've be brought into a situation that I would like to stop, so perhaps I should begin that process by refraining from talking about academics as if they're some kind of object.

I noticed that your reply to Newby (Whitehead, 1996) was more restrained than I might have expected in the circumstances, but then you referred directly to this when you mentioned your tone which I believe aimed towards "*the art of a dialectician in embracing opposites and working with contrary views*" (p.460). I must admit that I would have found it hard to be so careful and yet at the same time I wanted to write to him myself although goodness knows what I would have said and it probably wouldn't have made sense to him at all!

2. It is Context Bound

My enquiry must fit with the context - I would argue that the most important part of the nature of my enquiry is the context in which it takes place. The context is that of my whole life as well as various parts of it. In order to understand the context you have to understand my life. The context is one in which I try to integrate my writing with my life and actions. At this moment in time I'm writing to you about the university criteria for judging dissertations. I find myself on holiday, at home worrying about when I'm going to find time to cut my grass in the garden or to sort out which type of new front door I'm going to buy, not able to forget the difficulties I have at work when trying to influence my mainly male colleagues. Those other issues are on my mind, but instead I choose to write to you about criteria. The context is not one of being able to detach myself from all the other considerations in my life, so my letter has to somehow get round those, or fit with them, in order to concentrate on the task in hand.

The context is one in which my mind doesn't have a single focus. So I write to you about a subject that I believe will be of interest to you as well as me, I don't suppose you want to know too much about my need for a new front door or where I'm going to get my lawn mower serviced. The context is one in which a large part of me says that I don't really want to talk about criteria but somehow I know that I must if I am to get the better of it. The context includes an attitude of mind. When I'm at work it involves my life as a police officer, when I'm at home it tries to forget my life as a police officer even though I can't.

I don't know whether I've explained the context very well. I get the feeling that you see context as being linked to a description of the environment in which I work, but I believe that my context is much broader than that; it's my whole environment and motivation that gives me my context.

My context involves others, whom I cannot control, and who are liable to divert my attention. In enquiring into my own practice I have to take into account that part of my environment that I cannot change and which may even cause me to change.

My enquiry must be flexible - If you accept my view of context, then hopefully you will accept that the nature of my enquiry must be flexible because my context is constantly changing. Therefore the nature of any enquiry that I adopt must be able to accommodate a

shifting perspective. It must have sufficient flexibility to be able to twist and turn, stop and start, do the unexpected.

My enquiry must be part of both my personal and professional life and not outside it - Earlier I mentioned this, but I come back to it because it's so important to me and ties in with this idea of being context bound. What I am trying to say is that I would like the enquiry itself to be part of my personal and professional life and not something that is outside of it. Accounts and dissertations do not feature as part of my (normal) life, but letters do. I therefore want to show the value of those letters in terms of my own educational development. I have been enabled through the course of our correspondence (and conversations) to speak up for myself, at least to you, and to play with contradiction as a means of appreciating my own situation.

My enquiry must accommodate chaos - Building on the argument that my enquiry is context bound then it must accommodate chaos. I have no doubt that my life is filled with chaotic episodes that prevent it from being utterly boring. That chaos has presented itself in many ways, for example, there's been the chaos when I haven't really known the focus of my enquiry, there's been the chaos when my partner left me for a floozie, there's been the chaos when my mother died suddenly and unexpectedly, but despite all that my enquiry has continued through my willingness to communicate with you and vice versa.

Looking at your book there too is a feeling of chaos, (or is that an under-statement!), when you were told that your employment as a University academic would be terminated and then later when your doctoral theses were rejected. Like me, you also included that chaos into your writing but unlike me, you presented it in an organised fashion (Whitehead, 1993).

3. Open-Ended

My enquiry incorporates continuing dialogue - I said that context was the most important but having now reached the point of continuing dialogue, I would say that continuing dialogue is probably just as important a feature of my approach as the context. It is fundamental to the nature of my enquiry. Once we consider that the dialogue has ended, then the enquiry loses its reliability. If I were to suggest that I have reached some final solution or conclusion then my words would be merely historical. They would lose their life and revert to simply being words on a page. The ongoing dialogical nature of my enquiry means that everything I write is prone to change, it can only be accepted for what it is at this moment, later it will have changed. Collingwood (1939) explained this well when he wrote about his *"first principle of a philosophy of history"* relating history to processes:

"that the past which an historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present. ...history is concerned not with "events" but with "processes"; that "processes" are things which do not begin and end but turn into one another; and that if a process P1 turns into a process P2, there is no dividing line at which P1 stops and P2 begins; P1 never stops, it goes on in the changed form P2, and P2 never begins, it has previously been going on in the earlier form P1. There are in history no beginnings and no endings. History books begin and end, but the events they describe do not." (p.97)

Similarly with an enquiry that has a dialectic nature. It is constantly moving forward but that which has been said and how it has been said has an effect on what is being said, which in turn will affect what is to be said. What is being said is an indication of what is being thought, although they may not always be the same.

You may see in my letter, points that I've made to you before, but I'm not simply repeating them, they've now become part of a new context, there is a new purpose in my saying them again. The correspondence becomes part of my story. *"When we started telling stories we gave our lives a new dimension: the dimension of meaning - apprehension - comprehension"* (Okri, 1996 p.23). This tends to suggest that there is more to what is being said than the mere words. Having now probably totally confused you by my thoughts on continuing dialogue, I'll continue the letter.

It is the continuing dialogue that allows for an uncertain style of language. Almost a questioning style but with no question marks. I believe this is what Lomax (1994a) would call the *tentative* characteristic of educational research;

"Its findings are "true for us" at the time but subject to change. This is because of the nature of education, which by definition is a continuing process by which we come to know but never achieve the final completed state." Lomax (1994a p.12)

My enquiry accepts changes and the transformation of ideas - For some reason whilst I was writing this letter I stopped to look at one of the BERA dialogues (1990). I don't know what made me want to read it but it fell open at a page on the writing and the creation of educational knowledge (McNiff, 1990). In this article McNiff says,

"I would always regard as intrinsically educational those processes which transform the workings of mind so as to generate ever-renewable self-generating forms of thought." (p.53) McNiff referred to the writing up of her PhD thesis and said,

"The thesis itself became an instrument to access my own forms of knowledge. I transformed my thinking from propositional to dialectical." (p.57) She went on to say,

"The task of writing the thesis brought home to me the enormous power of writing as a reflection of mind, and as part of the educative process." (p.57)

I want my enquiry to be able to allow my thinking to change or transform and without it having to be too painful. In my opinion, our conversations and correspondence has allowed that to happen.

4. Educational

My enquiry develops and uses ideas - By insisting that my enquiry must be part of my personal and professional life, any ideas that I have I am able to develop and use without having to rely upon passing them on to someone else to develop and/or use. In other words there is a feedback loop to myself and I will be at least one of the main benefactors of my own enquiry.

In respect of our correspondences, it's taken me a long time to develop my ideas and I'm still in the process of developing them. I've dabbled with correspondence, practiced it, never abandoned it, correspondence has been part of my life, a way to communicate.

In my enquiry the process is educational - Well for it to satisfy me, the nature of enquiry has an educational process. Although I am aware that there are those, such as Lomax (1994a p.12) who highlight the difference between Research into Education and Educational

Research, I don't particularly want to enter into an argument over what is best or valid, except to say that I personally prefer to think that I am involved in educational research.

I needed a process that made me get to deeper levels of my own understanding. I don't see myself as displaying technical ability to you, but I would like to be able to claim that through my letters I have shown you the human and thinking sides to me.

I can speak for myself when I say that the process has been educational for me in that I have increasingly gained confidence when speaking up on matters that I know little about (especially when it comes to the university criteria). I've realised that my strength comes from accepting that I have much to learn but no need for the power that may be associated with knowledge, although I suppose Newby (1994) would call me naive.

You must speak for yourself, but I must admit that I'd be terribly hurt if I thought you'd learnt nothing through your correspondence and conversation with me.

My enquiry tends towards extending understanding - To extend understanding from this form of enquiry I believe there must be a high degree of sensitivity and patience. It's no good just taking things at face value, there is a need to look deeper in order to find that understanding

I'm not sure if this is the nature of the enquiry or a condition that I attach to it. It is with this intention to extend understanding that the enquiry brings in some of the features of educational research as listed by Lomax (1994a p.12), such as - *It has an ethical dimension, It is self-developing, It is authentic, It is democratic.*

My enquiry admits contradiction - Admitting contradiction is one of the means by which the enquiry moves forward. I would suggest that it could be the feature that, together with continuing dialogue, gives the enquiry rigour. The dialogue, coupled with contradiction, means that I am never going to be considered absolutely right about anything. The rigour in an enquiry of this nature prevents me from being able to sit back and say, "There, I've finished it." Instead, the rigour stops me from resting, it makes me carry on the enquiry even though future stages of my enquiry may not necessarily be made public.

5. Improves Practice

My enquiry refines skills through greater understanding and reflective practice - Improvement of practice does of course identify me with action research as this tends to be the stated intention of action researchers. And when we talk about criteria for judging action research Lomax (1994b) argues for *intention* to be included saying that,

"Teacher action research is a systematic and intentional inquiry by teachers in order to make sense of their practices and improve them. This suggests a criterion to do with the intention of the research that is not usually applied in other types of research." (p.115)

Whilst Lomax emphasises the practical basis for teacher action research and questions how a dissertation may be judged to merit a masters award, unfortunately for me she replaces one set of criteria for another.

When I started out on the action research trail, I was drawn along by the over-riding emphasis on the improvement of practice and I remain committed to that as an aim to my enquiry. However, I now feel that the improvement could materialise in an indirect sort of way, that is to say that it could be that through an increased understanding of an issue it

leads indirectly to the improvement of practice. When I look at my series of letters to you Jack, I have difficulty in seeing my practice because I seem to have gone off at a tangent in order to address the issues that trouble me, such as my compliance or otherwise with the university criteria. By trying to address those issues, I can endeavour to move towards my goal which is to speak up, be heard, and be respected, even though I am new to the game.

Recently I've had to re-think my position on whether my enquiry is really concerned with the improvement of practice or whether it has become more of a personal account that highlights my futile attempts to have my views legitimated. Suddenly I find myself becoming quite depressed as I imagine the choice between changing tack in order to gain admittance or continuing to knock on the door of a community that seems determined to keep me out.

JUSTIFY the APPROPRIATENESS of the METHODOLOGY

(a bit more)

Having tried to explain the nature of my enquiry, let me now go back to try to justify my methodology. I feel that I have already provided some justification with my references to the work of Plato, Lomax, Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole, and Eames, but here's some more - I'm always willing to please.

You said in your letter of 5 September 1996 that I could get further support from Marshall and McNiff, so let me begin with Marshall. Firstly Marshall (1995) points out that her book *"enters contentious territory, but seeks to do so with an attitude of curiosity rather than combat,"* (p.3) and goes on to say that the stories, from sixteen women's lives, are *"offered as glimpses of issues which are in process and provisional 'truths' which are continually in flux."* (p.3)

Marshall refers to questions put to her which indicate that others doubted the importance of her embarking on a study of women managers leaving organisations, but she argues that the stories are important because they speak from an important realm of women's experience and *"precisely because they are contentious in terms of meaning."* (p.13) Marshall says in her book,

"I invite you to join in as you read - to notice your reactions, reflect on why you like and dislike what you do, catch your assumptions in action, trace their sources, and explore alternative possibilities. I hope that you can enjoy questioning yourself in these ways, and that you may also sometimes feel sufficiently unsettled that new impressions will arise for you." (p.18)

I guess that is where you're suggesting that I write in a similar way to Marshall, with an invitation to the audience to take part with a sense of fun and enjoyment at the interpretations that might be forthcoming.

Marshall too had decisions to make in finding a form for her book which would tell each story in some fullness. Also, like me, Marshall wanted her research to fit in with her life, and says,

"The project has happened in phases. I wanted to do it in a way which did not erode my life too much, so there were some times of intense activity and then lulls as other work and life areas needed attention." (p.23)

She describes her style as "constructivist" (Belenky et al, 1986) and links such research to the researchers life process,

"I believe in research which is experiential, action-related and collaborative in intent. Any ideas generated are constructed through the process of research, and historically situated." (Marshall, 1995 p.24)

Another point of interest to me was that she let the inquiry process inform her about the topic, explaining that this is rather different from the many forms of traditional social science research, in which the topic area has to be defined in advance. I see this as having some similarity to my situation in that our correspondence has revealed a topic, the university criteria, that has repeatedly come to the fore and which could not be ignored, as opposed to my knowing the topic from the outset.

As I read on Jack, I continue to find similarities with my own position, especially concerning my wish to stop worrying about whether I'm getting things "right" or whether my account would gain me a degree, for example, Marshall observes:

"I realized that I was trying to ensure that my ideas were "right" so that I could be sure when voicing them, and not expose myself to either undue praise or criticism. I despaired of achieving this, ... Happily I woke one morning with a revelatory insight - that I would never get it right, that seeking to do so was a futile waste of energy, that I should proceed with this "truth" in mind and allow myself to be more playful in my explorations. With this "permission" I could appreciate theory and action in gender-related areas as ever-evolving. They need clear, forceful expressions at their appropriate times, not in order to stand as enduring truths but to become available to be explored and used as bases to move on. This book is offered with this intent." (p.28)

I've included large chunks of Marshall's words because I feel they are so fundamentally important to my arguments for the inclusion of a personal perspective in my enquiry. She continues,

"This phase of the research went more slowly than I had hoped. This was partly because I had other busy demands on my time from work and home. Writing the stories required concentrated and sustained time, energy and attention which I could not always find. I did later discover that I could work on them at home, enjoying the odd break to talk to people or go for a bike ride, as long as I could keep my unconscious attention with the writing. But sometimes I had to leave a story partly finished and move on to other activities, such as teaching. Doing this was frustrating and painful. And it meant that I started nearly afresh the next time I worked with that story, as I had to repeat the groundwork of engagement before I felt confident to write." (p.33)

I can feel her frustration and see myself stopping to go for a bike ride. She goes on to describe how she sometimes wanted to leave, haven't I described that feeling to you so many times in my letters and haven't I also told you that I wanted to stay, in a similar way to that explained by Marshall:

"As the research progressed and gathered its own energy it became a substantial reason for staying. But then working on it challenged my lifestyle. I wondered why I work so hard for so many hours a week and for so many weeks a year. I regretted all the other life activities I do not find time for. I questioned how much choice I have in these matters, and what motivates me. These last few years have been busy and tiring on all life fronts. (They have included the building works which predictably occur in the middle of any major academic project - but we are delighted with our new kitchen and functioning central heating.) Some of my lifestyle questions await attention when I finish writing this book." (p.34)

By describing her difficulties, joys, emotions etc. in writing the stories of the women managers she gives a glimpse into her own life.

"At this point the risks and vulnerabilities of the project struck me again. I was shocked at how revealing many stories seemed. I wondered whether I dare or should publish all the detail. I realized that concern could make me tone the book down. I resisted the impulse, hoping that the stories could be read with an appreciation that people can be both vulnerable and strong simultaneously, and that sense making is multi-faceted and elusive." (p.35)

Marshall compares her sense-making to freeing the ends of a tangled piece of wool and comments,

"I am not impatient to disentangle this tangle. Working with it is mostly enjoyable, exciting, lustrous. I do not think there is a final goal or realisation to be achieved. I can leave the task, and return if I choose. My preoccupation is with not pulling each strand of wool too tightly, lest it lose its texture." (p.37)

Marshall acknowledges her tiredness in the later stages of writing,

"I was beaver away inside the project, but became concerned that I had lost my sense of perspective. I had set aside all the life activities I could, to give the writing priority. But my life became flat and dull, and this affected my writing. There were times when I seemed to have a very limited vocabulary; words with texture did not come readily. I noticed all this and allowed myself a little more activity, leisure and reading fiction." (p.38)

I believe that Marshall's account of the way she made sense of her research, and the experiences she felt through the process, mirrors my own to a certain extent. The main difference between our accounts is that her focus seems to be the research participants whereas I concentrate on my need to explain my methodology and to have my form of presentation accepted by the academy.

I worry that I'll be criticised for reproducing passages from Marshall's book instead of "critically reviewing them" but I imagine that Marshall herself would say *"Stop worrying, you will never get it right and seeking to do so is a futile waste of energy."* Looking back I find it interesting to see her priorities, somewhat similar to mine, whereas the first time I read her book, I didn't notice these things.

Moving on to McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead (1996), this book takes a very different form to Marshall's, and to some extent I don't find it as interesting. I think the problem is that it's too organised and doesn't *show* me the process by which the book was put together. It causes me to read it in a way that makes me ask myself "Have I done this, that, or whatever?" and if I can answer "Yes" then I have "done" action research. Strange because I also felt that wasn't the intention of the book.

When I look at the main features of the action research process as summarised by McNiff et al (1996 p.16), I can rest assured that I can satisfy them:

- 1 *A commitment to educational improvement*
- 2 *A special kind of research question (of the kind How can I improve ...my personal practice, ...my understanding of this, ...the wider educational situation?)*
- 3 *Putting the "I" at the centre of the research*
- 4 *A special kind of action that is informed, committed and intentional*
- 5 *Systematic monitoring to generate valid data*
- 6 *Authentic descriptions of the action*
- 7 *Explanations of the action*
- 8 *New ways of representing research*
- 9 *Validating claims made as a result of the research*
- 10 *Making the action research public.*

The one of special relevance to me with regard to this letter and justifying my methodology comes under the heading of representing the action research. McNiff et. al. point out that they have presented some of their action research writing in conversational form and say *"These dialogues are a new way in which action researchers try to represent the living aspect of their theories about practice. Jack Whitehead (1993:69) argues that this approach celebrates a "living form" of educational theory, that is open-ended and contains an intention to create something better."* (p.21)

So Jack, have I finally managed to *justify the appropriateness of the methodology to the nature of the enquiry* to your satisfaction? Can we now move on to the question of whether I've shown evidence of a critical review of appropriate literature.

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 its 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 person's 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 openendedness, 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 (Shobbbrook, 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, it's 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.

SHOW EVIDENCE of the SYSTEMATIC COLLECTION of VALID DATA

In your letter (5 Sept 96) you say "Don't be put off by language. Any police officer needs to collect valid data on which rests the evidence related to charges. The evidence needs to be collected with care and needs to stand up to the test in court. This is no different from the academic criteria we can apply to your dissertation."

You're right that, since first coming to the university in 1991, I have systematically collected copies of letters between myself and others as well as some taped conversations and my personal notes or diary entries. It's now possible for me to look back over them to see themes that have stayed with me, not least my concern with criteria for judgement and forms of presentation! Within those documents are my repeated attempts to explain my ideas, my written representation of my emotional reactions to events, my search for knowledge and understanding, and an indication of the educative relationship between you and I.

In the later letters I can see that I've incorporated points from the earlier ones but often in a slightly different way, in that my ideas appear to have been re-considered. I've "wondered" about a lot of things. I've responded to your suggestions, using them to build upon or question my own interpretations, threading them into my own writing or allowing them to influence me. Other times I seem to have overlooked your advice, consciously ignored it, or even challenged it!

I want to spend a moment thinking about what is valid data. I remember coming to the university one day to speak to a director of studies at the time when I had finished my modules and needed to sort out who was to be my supervisor for the dissertation. The director of studies appeared very keen to help me and I was grateful for the suggestions he gave. However, I remember him saying that whatever I chose as the topic for my research, I should cut it down to a tighter focus because experience had shown him that many students tried to do too much. He also advised me to be very strict with the data I collect and not to fall into the trap of collecting too much.

I went away quite bemused in the knowledge that I'm like a squirrel, I'm a collector, I can't throw anything away if I think that it might come in useful one day, so as you might imagine, my study has gradually become more and more cluttered. I couldn't see how I could be ruthless with possible data when I didn't know how useful it would be at some later stage. (It's amazing that my loft hasn't collapsed under the weight of all the "stuff" I've collected over the years that "might come in useful one day"). So my systematic collection of letters (dialogue) wasn't so much intentional as just the way I am. The point I'm trying to make is that I didn't know what would be "valid" at the outset. I didn't know at the outset that this was to become a discussion on our correspondence and the university criteria.

You mentioned evidence that needs to stand up to the test in court. In my opinion there is a difference between evidence for court, and evidence for an educational enquiry. My experience is in the criminal court where the case has to be "proved beyond reasonable doubt" and where a person might be found guilty and indeed in some cases go to prison. This suggests to me a much more final result that comes from the evidence, as opposed to the tentative nature of an educational enquiry which has the potential for further dialogue. In the criminal court there is the feeling of winning or losing rather than taking part. In the civil court the rule is not so strict in that they work on the "balance of probabilities" but nevertheless there is still this feeling of a battle to be fought and generally there is an aggrieved person or group.

On the other hand there are similarities in that I believe you're asking me to "make a case" by presenting the evidence and explaining its relevance, in order that my case in turn can be answered. In some respects I find this quite difficult as generally I view evidence as being something that is concrete rather than a process that is still progressing and transforming through the current letter. Despite this, I do believe that through my bundle of dialogue, and in particular through this current letter I have shown you a dialectic enquiry in action and I have made out an argument for the possible acceptance of correspondence as a valid means of enquiry and presentation.

With my police head on, I immediately think of the new Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. Amongst other things, the Act deals with the disclosure of material by the prosecution to the defence. In assessing the implications for the police service, Phillips (1996) says,

*"In general, the Act does not make a significant difference to the responsibilities of the prosecution in providing the defence with **case papers** (my emphasis). Disclosure under the act concerns the obligation of the prosecution to provide the defence at various stages with **material which does not ordinarily form part of their case** (my emphasis)." (p.22)*

The material not forming part of the case is referred to by police officers as "unused material".

As with police evidence, educational enquiry has unused material in the form of field texts. Marion Blake refers to this when, in her reply to Plummer et al (1993), she says,

"And when it comes to writing up the research text it is by and large the researchers who determine inclusion, emphasis, meaning and significance. That time and space between "writing it down" - the field texts - and "writing it up" - the research texts - fascinates me." (p.23)

In widely publicised cases, such as that of Judith Ward, the prosecution were criticised for not disclosing to the defence all of the evidence that they had in their possession but didn't intend to use. Had the jury been aware of the content of this unused material, they might have come to a different verdict as it might have thrown doubt on the case. As you might imagine, during the course of a police enquiry, there can be a tremendous amount of unused material, for example, from all the blind alleys that we've gone down before charging the accused or just the odd little notes we may make on a scrap of paper. In response to these criticisms, we got to a stage whereby we were becoming bogged down by the amount of material that we were listing, copying and disclosing to the defence. In contrast, they weren't required to tell us anything about their defence. With so much material disclosed, they had the opportunity to fashion their defence around the information that we provided for them and to use it to cast doubt on the case regardless of whether they originally had a defence at all. The new Act replaces the wide-ranging disclosure with two more narrowly defined tests. The gist of the new tests are that (a) the prosecution has to provide the defence with anything which might *undermine* the prosecution's case, and (b) the prosecution must disclose anything which might *assist* the defence, but this second test is only applied after the defence has set out where they want to take issue with the prosecution and the reason.

This disclosure of prosecution unused material seems to have a different purpose to the disclosure of data in an educational enquiry. In the criminal court we talk of "*proving* a case beyond reasonable doubt" whereas in an educational enquiry I seek to "*contribute* to the dialogue" which in turn keeps it going. Can you now see why I'm sometimes a little

confused when you talk about evidence. I think that perhaps you come from the angle of seeing data in terms of its truth which might be different from its value as proof or as a contribution. I'd suggest that this is something that we could explore further at some time. As I've been writing, it's just struck me that when I used to conduct interview skills training, I used to tell the class that our overall aim was to find out the truth and not to prove a case; but by having a prosecution case and a defence case on opposing sides of the court we're led into viewing justice as the need to prove our case.

Once again I think that I've gone way off track and in fact I'm feeling quite tired of "justifying" and "showing evidence", so Jack I need to revert to something that's less business-like so if you don't mind I'll just go and sit in the garden and whiz through the other criteria as quickly but naturally as I can.

From your letter, I understood you to be saying that I had *shown evidence of the systematic collection of data*, but that you wanted me to emphasise some things. Haven't I already done that in the previous two sections of this letter and if so then can we move on?

* Note: See also pages 69 - 75 for further discussion on validity; including *ironic validity* (Lather 1994), dialectic validity, and authenticity.

**SHOW EVIDENCE of an ABILITY to
INTERPRET, ANALYSE and EVALUATE the data**

Well Jack, here I am, some hours later having consumed a large glass of wine and snoozed on the patio all afternoon. I needed that break, but was much too lazy to go on one of Judi Marshall's bike rides! Mind you, even though I was dozing in the sunshine, my brain was still in top gear and I couldn't wait to get back to writing my letter to you. At last this criteria business is becoming interesting.

I go back to your letter of 5 September 1996 again to find that you suggested I could emphasise how I've demonstrated a high ability to interpret (make sense of), analyse (use some form of categories), and evaluate data (judging the quality and effectiveness of what I'm doing) in relation to the features in the literature to which I most closely relate. I'd listed those, in a bundle of papers that I sent you last September, as issues such as:-

- case study and self study
- reflective practice
- the integration of personal life with professional practice
- the admission of emotion into research
- forms of representation
- tentative style
- dialogue and dialectic enquiry
- confidence in personal knowledge
- contradiction
- holding together diverse and multiple ideas
- freedom and justice
- responsibility and integrity
- kindness, sensitivity, and caring
- spontaneity and informality
- practice before theory
- learning from experience
- doing the right thing in the circumstances
- being involved in the research as opposed to being outside it

I added that I did not feel comfortable when I read literature that seemed to me to rely upon:-

- rigour
- action planning
- judgement
- criteria
- rules and conditions
- systems
- procedures, methods, and structure

However, what I'd like to do is address this in an introduction to my dissertation, as I feel that might provide the necessary "signposts" for my audience that I've been told have been missing from my accounts to date. That said, I'd like to suspend this one and refer you to the introduction when it's eventually written. I also feel that when I start drawing conclusions acknowledging the limitations of the study, my abilities to interpret, analyse, and evaluate may become more apparent to you. However, I feel I must point out that any interpretation, analysis and evaluation of an account such as this must be seen as tentative and probably temporary.

* Note: See also pages 72-73 for further discussion on interpreting, analysing, and evaluating data in a dialectic account.

**DEMONSTRATE a COHERENT APPROACH, CLARITY of THOUGHT and
QUALITY of ARGUMENT**

You said that I have demonstrated a coherent approach and clarity of thought but to some extent I have to disagree with you on this one.

I would say that it has become increasingly coherent and clear over time but I don't think this has been the case throughout. By the very nature of my enquiry there has been emergent thought and chaos.

If we are taking coherent to mean consistent, then yes I've been consistent to the point of being stubborn, in that I have stuck with my determination to conduct my enquiry in a manner that would fit with my life, would be enjoyable, and would be presented in the most authentic way I could manage.

If we are taking coherent to mean easily followed, then I'm concerned at a possible lack of coherence because of my difficulty in presenting an argument which is jumping about all over the place in order to try to make sense of the data as it arises. We have to bear in mind that we have travelled this path together and therefore there are what you call tacit understandings between us that others haven't been privy to. Having said that I do feel that my arguments about the use of dialogue are finally falling into place.

These coherence and clarity of thought issues have bothered me all along because I believe them to be areas where my type of dissertation, which shows both the dialogical and dialectical nature of my study as it takes place, could be subject to strong criticism. Coming back to the CARN Critical Conversations (1993) - I said I would - I want to refer to Rosemary Crowe's response to the paper by Gill Plummer et al (1993).

Her response was interesting as she didn't seem to me to immerse herself in the dialogue. In effect much of what she wrote appeared to me as an academic reply in that it analysed and reviewed the earlier arguments but it added little to them and I felt that she wasn't fully convinced of the possible value of letters as research in themselves.

She seems to consider informal letters as inadequate for a research report, for example, she observes,

*"It is also fair to say that in some more informal types of writing the ideas are **less articulate** (my emphasis); in many cases they are **"being worked through"** (my emphasis). Nonetheless, they are important and can stand up also as **part** (my emphasis) of a formal presentation of research theory and ideas but they are different." (p.19)*

Furthermore she says,

*"The content, reason and format of those letters are important, but if they are to add to the body of knowledge in their **less than perfect** (my emphasis) academic form then they must be "admissible evidence" which may well be able to say something that a formal essay or formal oral presentation may not." (p.20)*

I'm still wondering at what stage I can consider my letters to be sufficiently coherent and clear for an unknown recipient to be able to follow them and understand me. At the same time, I wouldn't want my letters to be so clear that they leave nothing in the air, there needs to be an element of puzzlement, and a feeling that there's more to the story and it will all come clear in the next instalment.

I got quite stuck on your suggestion for the quality of argument. You said "*In relating the 18 qualities (now shown on page 42) to your learning you can fulfil the criterion about the quality of argument.*" I'm not sure of how to do this. I've already said "*It would seem that the literature to which I most closely relate is that which deals with such issues as: case study and self study, reflective practice, the integration of personal life with professional life, etc. etc.*"

Are you simply asking me to say that I don't just relate to this literature, but it's more than that, it's what I do and how I learn? That seems to be too simple, you've never made things that simple for me! It's like asking the letters to speak for themselves. I almost feel obliged to go over the literature and my writings again to try to "prove it beyond reasonable doubt." Perhaps my introduction, when I write it, will improve the quality of my argument. Gosh, haven't I got high expectations of this promised introduction, I do hope I can come up with the goods.

I'm still not sure whether I've been able to *demonstrate a coherent approach, clarity of thought and quality of argument*, but I'm going to start on the next criterion. I've reached a stage where I want to get on and finish this letter and post it off to you. I can't wait for you to read it!

**RELATE the SPECIAL THEME to the WIDER FIELD of EDUCATIONAL
KNOWLEDGE and CONTRIBUTION to
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

At this juncture I really must bring in your living educational theory, not least because I guess you've been wondering if I was ever going to do you the courtesy of dwelling on it for a while. I'm including the text from one of my earlier attempts to construct my dissertation (Spring 1996) which might remind you of my efforts to understand your living educational theory. This is what I wrote:

-----X-----

Working out what "I" was, especially with regard to Whitehead's "living educational theory", had been on my mind quite a bit. It was one of those theories that I'd think I'd got it and then I'd wonder if I really had.

I believe that I tend to unconsciously store up a great deal of information but don't necessarily understand its relevance to me at the time. Then all of a sudden it takes on a meaning, integrating with the vast body of knowledge that I have. However, I might inadvertently give it a different meaning to the one that the originator intended, perhaps because I've reached the same point via a different route or because my existing body of knowledge is different. I look at the world in a different way. Whatever the reason, I believe that the meaning of a piece of information can differ from one person to another basically because their lives differ. When I read someone else's ideas I try to understand what their ideas mean to them and how that differs from my understanding.

One incident in particular comes to mind whereby I'd been reading about living educational theory and suddenly thought that maybe I was coming close to understanding Jack Whitehead's explanation of it. It was during one of my many previous attempts to write my dissertation that I excitedly wrote to Jack about my feeling that education should be lived and not talked about:

Letter written 27 November 1994

Dear Jack,

....I'm sure you'll realise this is "emergent thought" but I realised that I too had used the phrase living education. No doubt I'd got it from you, but I had written it with my own meaning, a meaning that I understood. Up until now I had been reading your phrase and interpreting the word living as used to describe education or educational theories, which for me was quite abstract. I couldn't see how an educational theory could be alive in the sense of living and breathing as it's only people, animals, plants etc that live. However, my use of the phrase refers to a person living education as opposed to, for example, writing about it.....

I have started to write about combining my educational development with my personal development. Again I think this is relevant as personal development involves the living person whereas education has often been something that is hard to grasp and is more a concept or something to be talked about rather than lived. For me the education is demonstrated in the life. As I live my life, so I am becoming educated. A process rather than a product. I take part in my own education therefore, I am living (this thing which is known as) education. The education may be seen in the changes in me, my behaviour, or my attitudes etc. Of course the education may not be seen by others but it might still be there, for example, different levels of thinking or increased knowledge. But it is not education that is living, it is me. I am living education.

I cannot see educational theory as something that can in itself be classed as living and I think that perhaps I differ from your views on this point. My reason is in my understanding of the word theory. For me a theory is a statement and it stands alone. It is something to be applied when required.

However, your ideas have helped me to have the confidence to describe and explain the process of my educational development. That in itself can be as valuable and useful as theories, or perhaps it can often be even more useful. Being enabled to see the route that another person has taken and to see what happened along the way gives a situation much more meaning for me. It says "This is what I do and this is why I do it".

Even as I write I'm open to accommodating your living educational theory but at the moment I'm still milling around in my mind. It's as if I'm trying to grasp something but it's still flying about and won't yet be pinned down. Mind you it's not a problem as it'll still be flying about there tomorrow - isn't learning strange! I feel that you are showing people how to learn from experience rather than telling them, and I think that perhaps this helps my creativity. I'm beginning to think that I, through being at the centre of my education could describe living education and could use that description and explanation to develop and articulate my own theories.

I could go on but I have to admit that it's taking me round in circles, so I'd rather stop and let this sink in. This is getting too deep for my present understanding so I need to go back to safe ground!

Now Jack I don't want a long reply at this time, because my brain needs to settle, but I would be interested if you could confirm whether we have a similar understanding and where we differ. I hope that in my dissertation I'll be able to show you how I came to my present understanding of living education. Hopefully I'll find time to pop up to Bath to see you in the not too distant future, so maybe your reply could wait till then (that's if it's OK with you).

*With kind regards
Hilary*

Reading this letter again reminds me of my urgency in writing to Jack, although I was quite prepared to wait for an answer. In fact I think I was almost afraid that he might confuse me with some "academic" language. Just getting my thoughts down into the letter was useful to me and I was pleased when I received Jack's prompt but simple reply....

*Initially I was going to re-produce Jack's letter within this text, but then I decided that **his** letter does not explain **my** understanding of **his** theory. My understanding of the word theory was quite set in terms of propositions but I am now using a definition of theory as simply "a system of ideas explaining something" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1982). I have read Jack's letter several times but I still feel that I cannot accurately translate his explanation into my form of language.*

What I can say is that he is looking for a description of my life accompanied by some explanation for my actions based on my values. He is also looking for my intention to improve my practice or to live my values more fully and an action plan that might take that forward. Crucial to this are the contradictions that I experience from within. This does not produce a theory that has a clear beginning and end and I would suggest that it produces something that can never be pinned down as it's always part of an ever changing picture. A re-construction or transformation of ideas is constantly taking place.

-----X-----

I know that you've explained your theory to me many many times, but I never feel that I've quite got it. Despite that, I actually believe that what you say about it is true and valid. I suspect that I've demonstrated your living educational theory in my account but I can't define it. In your letter to me of 26 January 1997 you referred me to the Hockrill Lecture (1996) on The Spiritual and I want to mention this here. The paper provides six aspects of the spiritual, the second of which is - Dynamic. Could it be that because living educational theory is dynamic I constantly feel that I haven't got it when really I have. In the lecture, Priestley says,

"The spirit denotes life. The traditional images of the spirit are those of wind, fire, running water and many others. They cannot be arrested without ceasing to be what they are. To freeze the spirit is to kill the organism. ... To define is to put sharp edges round a blurred idea, to arrest motion, to stop the ballerina in mid pirouette or the orchestra in the midst of a concert. It is akin to asking a child on a stormy day to go out into the playground and to collect a jar of wind, to cork it and to bring it back into the classroom for analysis. There can only be one outcome, namely the assertion, "there is nothing in it". ... The wind, the fire, the rushing stream must be felt, they must be assessed by their consequences."

I wonder whether I have been trying too hard to "see" and "define" your theory when all along I have been "feeling" it. I have been understanding it but I just can't find words that fully explain it.

To quote from the letter that you sent me dated 31 November 1994 (even though I said in my previous text that I wouldn't re-produce it and there's only 30 days in November) you said,

"The reason I have argued is that these theories are "living theories" is that the explanations are not only embodied in the individual's form of life but they contain an intention to create something in the future which is based on that person's goals or values and which is contained in an action plan. So the individual's living educational theory is an explanation which makes sense of the present in terms of an evaluation of the past and an intention to change some aspect of their practice or the world in the future."

The explanations which make up living educational theories combine both values and conceptual forms of understanding. I find the experience of "I" as a living contradiction helpful in insisting that the "I" appears in the account and that the meaning of the values which constitute the explanation, emerges over time in action, as the individual shows what it means to try to live their values more fully in their practice. I liked what you said about combining your educational development with your personal development. I do see these as intimately related because your values do permeate both your personal and professional life. I wonder if this helps you to see why your own educational theory can be represented in a living form which is embodied in your form of life. Do let's talk soon.

Jack"

I have a problem with your sentence that says *"but they contain an intention to create something in the future which is based on that person's goals or values and which is contained in an action plan."* Some time ago I told you that I relate to the literature which deals with spontaneity and informality and I do not feel comfortable when I read literature that seems to me to rely upon action planning (see page 42). I think I can now explain this by saying that I see my life as having elements of spontaneity and surprise which do not follow any sort of action planning, they just happen. I don't feel able to claim that I have *an*

intention to create something in the future, unless of course that something is a better life for myself and others with greater knowledge and understanding. I certainly don't action plan for it but instead I just try to live up to my values. Therefore if I have shown you my living educational theory, it is not reliant upon an action plan, it is reliant upon living my values more fully. Gosh Jack, I think that's cleared away another stumbling block. Go and treat yourself to a pint, I think I can hear your laughter!

DRAW JUSTIFIABLE CONCLUSIONS ACKNOWLEDGING the LIMITATIONS of the STUDY

These are only *tentative* conclusions but nevertheless I like to think that I've justified them throughout my letters. I'm going to address issues concerning the *dialogical form of my enquiry* - my use of correspondence as a means of enquiry - and the *dialogical form of my presentation* - my presentation of informal correspondence with its original content and style - under combined headings. My reason for this is that I believe these two aspects of my research are inextricably linked. The features that have made correspondence attractive to me are in many ways the same features that has made them unacceptable to the academic community. However, it is the inclusion of these features that tend to align me with the action research community as opposed to other groups of researchers.

Correspondence in the form of letters between friends can include all or some of the following features:

Expressions of Emotion - There is no doubt in my mind that my letters to you have shown my emotions, for example in the letter commenced on 2 July 1995 I expressed anger and shame. In other letters, such as the one dated 21 August 1996 I expressed sadness followed by a request for a little more light-heartedness. I can gain support from writers such as Dadds (1995a and 1995b) for my view that emotion should be admissible in an educational enquiry especially as it adds reality and richness to the account. Of course there is the opposite view that there is no place for the researcher to show their emotions.

Reflection - In reviewing our past correspondence and mulling over ideas the reflective nature of our correspondence can be seen, for example, where I include an extract of the text from a previous attempt to construct my dissertation (see pages 45 to 46). Here the process of reflection is made clear; a process that is one of the principles of action research (Winter, 1989 p.39) and offers a way forward for practitioners when faced with messy indeterminate situations or when developing their art (Schon, 1987 p.3).

Dialogue - This could be included as a part of other categories that I've listed here, but I've identified it separately on purpose. I want to emphasise the dialogical nature of our letters as a specific reason for allowing our correspondence into the enquiry and presentation. I'm afraid that there could be researchers who promote the value of dialogue in an action research approach and yet they fail to show the audience that very dialogue, but instead present either assertive or defensive statements. That's the type of dialogue that I've been trying hard to avoid.

Invitation to give interpretations and guidance - This can be an express invitation to the recipient to give their interpretations of, or guidance on, the topic under discussion but it can equally as well be an implied invitation. The style of language and the relationship between the parties can have an effect on whether there appears to be a genuine invitation and the response to it. In our correspondence, the fact that there has been a formal tutor/student relationship and a continuing flow of letters, sometimes including obvious questions, coupled with the style and language used, I have almost expected some sort of guidance or interpretation without necessarily asking for it. Furthermore, it seems to me that amongst my friends there is a natural tendency to answer letters but particularly if they indicate any extremes of emotion such as troubles or joys.

Attempts to rectify misunderstandings - This includes attempts to share understandings, achieve compromises, find common ground, and (to use your word) tease out meanings. For my example of this I use our constant to and fro about the question of the dreaded criteria.

Gestures showing sensitivity, warmth, and caring - I feel that these are important, especially when there is a relationship to maintain, but I think it goes further than that; I like

to think that those gestures are genuine as opposed to merely a professional necessity. When I ask you about your trip to Chicago or you respond to my telling you of my mother's death, those gestures are more than simply courtesies. It could be said that those exchanges shouldn't form part of the enquiry, but if you accept my view that my epistemology (it's that word again) is closely connected to my life, then the events which give an indication of life and values, can properly be included. I've referred back to your letter to me dated 26 January 1997 where you point out that I make a very powerful statement in saying that you need to see my dissertation in the context of a person who is trying to explain her theory that educational development can almost be considered synonymous with the progression of life itself and therefore to understand my educational development, you have to understand my life.

Personal and professional issues - I'm one of those people who always mean to write to friends but never seem to find the time, so as Christmas approaches, I'm frantically catching up on them all. The contents tend to consist of whatever I'm thinking about at the time which are usually greetings, personal matters concerning myself and the recipient, a few words about the weather, and an enquiry after their health, only occasionally do they include comments on my professional life. In our correspondence the focus has been much more on the professional as well as the personal side to my life, but the thing that's been consistently on my mind is this integration of the personal and professional. Here I can turn to Trapedo-Dworsky & Cole (1996) and Marshall (1995) for acknowledgement that an educational enquiry and its presentation can include both the personal and professional. As I've alluded to above, the inclusion of the professional in my case is only really as part of me as a person.

I want to interrupt my list of features associated with our letters for a while to describe something that happened yesterday, and only a matter of hours after I'd excitedly phoned you to say that all was well with my writing, in fact I think I said "It's brilliant!"

After I replaced the phone I nipped out to post a card to my friends, as I'd forgotten to send to them for their 20th wedding anniversary the previous day. I should have remembered as I was one of the bridesmaids, but I'd been too engrossed in my writing to think of anything else!

Anyway, when I returned home I went to sit in my garden and found myself in tears as I thought of my late mother. It was quite amazing when I think of the sudden switch of emotions. However, they weren't really sad tears, they were just emotion. What was going through my mind was the way in which I'd learnt from her. I don't remember her ever talking about values or about wanting to be a good person and yet that is how she lived her life, lived up to her values. It made me realise what a wonderful achievement that had been, no formal qualifications, no talking about it, no researching it, she just did it.

I then thought of another woman I knew. I met her through my work but the whole story is quite a long one so I won't tell you about how we met here. Anyway she was an elderly lady and we began to correspond, there was something in her that I respected. She used to write the most marvellous letters, with vivid descriptions of everyday things like the flowers in her garden and making jam for the church bazaar. However, I didn't know her background and it wouldn't have been right to have asked, she just told me what she wanted to and vice versa. When she died, only a few years ago, I received a telephone call from a woman whom I didn't know, but who told me that Aleen had left instructions that I was to be informed (she'd always struck me as a very organised and thoughtful person). The woman and I chatted for a while and I asked what Aleen's background had been. The woman, I would imagine in her 50's or 60's, told me that Aleen had been her school teacher,

a wonderful teacher that she'd kept in touch with ever since. Somehow I already knew that Aleen was a wonderful teacher.

With these thoughts going around in my mind, I dropped off to sleep on my sun lounger. I know I had a dream but I don't know what it was. When I woke up I knew that I understood living educational theory a little better although I can't explain what I mean. I also knew that I understood my life a little better but again I can't explain it. I'm almost afraid to claim that there was something spiritual in what had happened. It was as if, by thinking about my mum and Aleen, small pieces that I know about them, I'd been enabled to gain a better understanding. Ben and I had a conversation a little while ago when he told me that he found something spiritual in people, and I think I began to understand what he meant.

The story doesn't end there. I was working on this letter late into the evening, and as I did so, a niggling headache gradually became a thumping one. I was on this section trying to "draw justifiable conclusions" and organising it under various headings. I was somehow feeling tense and becoming more impatient and frustrated as the evening wore on, although I also felt that I wanted to get on and finish this.

The incident of the afternoon was still on my mind as I sub-consciously tried to make sense of it. Eventually I went to bed, not knowing whether my headache was due to my extremes of emotion, the product of too much wine with my lunch, or frustration with my writing.

When I woke this morning I still had the headache, thank goodness for aspirin, and I realised that, apart from any other possibilities, I had been trying to fit my writing into neat boxes again which had been contrary to the way things happen and the way I make sense of them.

I had assumed that you would be looking for analysis in the form of categories, such as those I've begun to list, together with the evidence to support them. In trying to provide that, I'd stopped enjoying writing to you, it was becoming a chore and an academic exercise. What I should have been doing was allowing my stories to speak for themselves, in their story-like form.

I believe you to be interested in truth Jack, but I feel that by making my account fit into categories, I've been re-arranging truth rather than allowing the truth to reveal itself as it unfolds. You touched upon this in your letter (5.9.96) when you said, "You can explain how your diary/letters were collected and how your concern for truth (no different from that in your daily practice) was applied to the recording of this data."

Now I'll return to my list of features somehow feeling that now I've got my concerns about boxes and categories off my chest I can, by way of contradiction, use them to help "draw justifiable conclusions".

Descriptions and stories - Doesn't the above true story speak for itself.

Indications of attitude of mind - Throughout my letters I feel that my attitude of mind has been apparent but that it has also changed. One moment I've wanted to give up all thought of a dissertation, then I've slipped back into making myself prepared for such an academic challenge. The thread that has been there all the time has been that determined search for understanding and need for dialogue of some form or another.

Subjectivity and bias - This is one that lets me down in academic terms doesn't it. But then I think we have to look at the purpose of my enquiry which again involves this search for understanding. If this is to be a highly contextualised enquiry then there is bound to be

subjectivity and bias as part of that context. It's through recognising that bias and making it explicit that I am able to come to a greater understanding of my real situation. I was interested in a CARN critical conversation between Marisa Vorraber Costa and Bram Jansen. In her reply to Bram's response to her original paper on her work in Brazil, I believe she makes some important points about why she doesn't worry much about method when sometimes all she wants is a safe method to guide her to the right decision or way to go (Vorraber Costa, 1995). Although she is not specifically talking about subjectivity or bias, she does give me a clear idea of why it would be appropriate in her case to depart from what I see as the rules or controls of research. She talks about the meaning of action research in the First and Third Worlds and says,

"This does not mean that the method is not important, rather that its steps are permanently changed and even subverted, due to the weightiness often presented by the day to day problems of life in a suburban school of the Third World. Most of the time I feel as you do - a researcher who can assist them in solving the practical problems with the help of science. But I succumb when faced with that reality which absorbs me and embraces me completely, body, mind and soul. I leave everything aside and engage myself in helping them solve the concrete problems which, almost always, require a "struggle" against very powerful forces. I would say that reality itself and its circumstances impose themselves on the method, changing it so radically that it would be impossible to return on one's own steps. These are serious confessions for a researcher; don't you think? The truth is that sometimes I feel even slightly ashamed when I try to be a bit orthodox. It is as though academics should be ashamed of treating that harsh reality as it would any other. On such occasions I let things flow naturally, and it appears to have worked. Important problems are solved even without a previously existing plan. It is as though teachers respect me because I respect the circumstances of their world. All I have said so far means that I would not manage to reproduce a usual methodological sequence which we might have employed in research. Possibly the proposition I might formulate would be - circumstances determine the trajectory of research." (p.67)

I would like to reproduce more of her words here as they have such meaning but I'll leave you to read her story for yourself. She ends her point by saying that her action research project has specific aspects which transform it into a hybrid method, which she believes enriches and broadens the possibilities of action research. Although I couldn't compare my situation to hers, she gives me a reminder that I can get too hung up about whether or not something can be considered valid research, when I should be thinking more about the values that underpin it. My letters are littered with subjectivity and bias, but despite this I feel that I've actually achieved a greater understanding.

My list continues but I find it quite wearing to try to explain the features in detail, so if you don't mind, I'll give you the rest of the list now and perhaps over time I'll be able to explain it more fully:

Accessibility

Freedom and responsibility

Sense making

Connection - a sense of community, spiritual

Information

Confessions and reconsiderations

Vulnerability

Open-endedness - Often there is a feeling of taking turns to write

Questioning

Tentativeness
Holistic content
Context
Supportiveness and reassurance
Enjoyment and fun

In addition to the above features, I would say that our letters have had the following extra features:

Educational
Improvement of practice
Living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993)

Search for knowledge and understanding - Whilst I did not set out with this as my explicit intention, indeed I didn't really know my intention, I do feel that the letters themselves have highlighted my search for knowledge and understanding. This, together with the features listed above such as open-endedness, tentativeness, and questioning is what has made it a dialectical enquiry.

LIMITATIONS

I could talk of limitations of the study with reference to a criticism of action research on grounds of its lack of generalisability, but this study never set out to produce generalisable results. I might claim relatability on the grounds that if I relate to people like Dadds (1995a & 1995b), Marshall (1995), and Plummer et al (1993), then perhaps they and others will relate to my work. I feel I have acknowledged that the tentative findings of my study may be limited, not least because it falls into the realms of a type of self-study and others may not accept the authority of my personal views. However, this is not a document that seeks to provide an authority. It is a document that seeks to promote and progress the dialogical nature of correspondence.

Up until now I feel as if our letters have provided a private practice ground in which to explore ideas and quietly learn the "art of the dialectician". I imagine that it will be very different when a letter such as this is made available to the wider audience. One thing that I have never asked you, and I suppose it's because I took it for granted that we would eventually discuss the issue, is whether you would want your words re-produced and interpreted through the medium of my letters. Up until now our letters have been private or at least reserved for a small committed audience, but what happens when one of us decides that we'd like to put our correspondence into a bigger arena. Such a study demands a tremendous amount of trust. I've been fortunate in having a tutor who would write to me in the style that you have, but that in itself may be a limitation of the study, and finding further participants may not be easy.

If this correspondence were to reach a larger audience, what would be its potential value? Well, I actually think that its value may come from its dynamic qualities. This is not a piece of research to be applied but instead it is provided as an example of my living educational theory, still in process, which may help others to also reach new understandings.

One of the main problems I've faced and not yet resolved, is how to retain the informality of my dialogue, in particular my correspondence, but at the same time enable it to be educational. It's a case of keeping the balance between the different purposes connected with different types of letters. To turn that around, the question may be "How can I improve the educational nature of my correspondence without losing its natural qualities?"

It seems to me that, due to its dialogical and developmental nature, my correspondence goes through emergent and chaotic stages, and it would be too risky for me to make it public at those times. I have to protect myself when feeling especially vulnerable or unsure of myself. That is a limitation of my enquiry because it prevents the dialogue upon which the enquiry depends. In practice there is a long period when I am testing out ideas and reliant upon trusted friends before allowing myself to be challenged. This demands a lot of patience from all of the parties involved and the courage to enter into the field of risk (Winter, 1989 p.60).

I feel that over a period of time, I've gradually been able to find a means by which I could put into words my appreciation of the dialogue to which I've been a party. The most obvious next step for me would be to use this more in my life as a police officer in order to improve my practice in that specific context. In other words, I might be able to improve my understanding of police issues through the educational use of correspondence or other forms of natural dialogue.

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.

AND NOW TO THE POSTBOX

Jack, do you mind if I forget the wretched dissertation for the last few sentences and finish my letter with no thought of the dreaded criteria.

Last week I watched a video called "Babe". It was about an orphaned pig who found himself on a farm where he got to know the other animals, especially a sheepdog that looked out for him. Babe wanted to go out into the fields with the sheepdogs but was told that he couldn't because he was a pig not a dog. To cut a long story short, Babe ended up helping to herd the sheep and indeed he eventually won the sheepdog trials. The way he did it wasn't by nipping at the sheep's ankles and shouting at them like the dogs, but instead he politely asked them to move along and into the pen, which to everyone's amazement they willingly did.

Surely if a pig can herd sheep by communicating with them in a different way, then I can converse on an equal footing with the academic community whilst maintaining my own sense of integrity. I recommend the film and I'd be fascinated to hear what you think about it if you get the chance to watch it.

Well, I think that's about all I can muster for now. This has been the longest letter of my life and I'm absolutely drained, but it's been such fun. I've had you in my mind throughout and can picture the points at which you'd laugh and despair.

I'm sorry its come to such an abrupt end but you did say that you'd like me to get it posted to you as soon as I could. Anyway, as I read it over, I found lots more that I want to say, things to clarify, points to re-consider, and so on, but I haven't got enough time at the moment - I'll have to save it up for later.

I do I hope you've enjoyed reading this (and I'm sending a beaming smile with it). See you soon.

Hilary

P.S. *"The fact of story-telling hints at a fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there is perfection there is no story to tell". (Okri, 1996 p.22)*

AT LAST! SUBMISSION OF MY DISSERTATION

6 June 1997

I feel that I should mention the tussle that continues between Jack and I whereby he has encouraged me to explain my life as a woman in the police service and I have resisted this. We seem to have reached a truce as we both appreciate the account that I have written here in which I have focussed upon criteria for judgement rather than policing. However I have to agree with him when he says, *"I think your story of your professional life in police service would be a most interesting story and make an important contribution to professional knowledge. I'm not in any way saying that this is the dissertation you "should" have produced. I don't believe this. I think you have produced your dissertation in your way and I'm delighted with it. I love the way you say:*

"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 work in at this time."

In bringing this account to a temporary halt in order that it can be judged in terms of the University criteria, I want to add that Jack's interest in my professional life as a police officer has continued to niggle away at me. I do sometimes feel that I haven't presented myself as a true "action researcher focussed on improving practice" and that my living educational theory hasn't adequately explained my professional life.

I believe that in correspondence I have found a form of representation that is authentic and reminds me to keep the other person in mind. However, I am now more inclined to make my work in the police force a greater part of the subject matter for any future account but I was interested to read a letter in my Police Review magazine this week which said;

"One way for a senior officer to really gain street credibility would be to write a best-selling biography revealing the state of the service when they joined, the obstacles they encountered while attempting to achieve changes for the better and the steps they took to overcome them.

In recent years, there has been a definite dearth of such tomes, the exceptions being those by John Stalker and Alison Halford, both of whom were, funnily enough, boat rockers in their own way whose careers came to premature ends." (Kenny, 1997 p.21)

I wonder whether this is a warning to me of the risks that go with such an exercise.

I am currently working on a project in which I am promoting the concept of "Professional Conduct" *within* my force, particularly with regard to the way that we behave *towards each other*. I feel sure that in this work I am seeing the relevance of what I have learnt through writing this dissertation but I am not yet ready to make it public. Perhaps after a while I shall be able to share that with you. Despite my not making it public at this time, I intend to continue to develop dialogical and dialectical approaches in my own field of influence within the police service.

I have been accused before of leaving my readers hanging, with no real ending to my assignments and failing to draw together the loose ends. I actually believe that it would be wrong of me to summarise and conclude my account in some nice neat way. I've given you my intentions for the future and, who knows, they may turn into another educational research enquiry before too long. My current enquiry has not ended but it continues on beyond this dissertation.

I do hope that you can now understand my belief that *"enquiry is not just for professional practice, it has an effect on my whole life,"* and that you can now see my dissertation *"in the context of a person who is trying to explain her theory that educational development can almost be considered synonymous with the progression of life itself and therefore to understand my educational development, you have to understand my life."*

At last, I am ready to submit this dissertation to you.
With best wishes

Hilary

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**POSTSCRIPT, OR SHOULD IT BE
"THE START OF SOME MORE DISCUSSION"**

28 September 1997

Dear Reader

I'm assuming that by now you will have read my dissertation. Hopefully it will have struck a chord with you in some way or other which will have caused you to think. Since I compiled my dissertation or, to be more precise, perhaps I should say lived it, time has gone by and the dissertation writing stage was reaching an end, but now I've had to think and write again.

After I handed my dissertation to Jack earlier this summer and he gave his initial reaction which was very positive, things went quiet for a while on the dissertation front. You could say that I was sitting back and relaxing but anyone who knows Jack will know that it wasn't to last! He was bound to give me something else to think about and true to form he did - two weeks ago. Well, as you might imagine, I got into quite a panic as I knew that there was very little time or opportunity left for me to address his points before the dissertation had to be submitted for assessment. I'd been particularly busy at work with deadlines coming up which I had to meet so I couldn't take time off to concentrate on the points he made.

Now I was being asked to think about "validity" when the major thing on my mind was getting a discipline file put together so that the matter could be cleared up as quickly as possible for the officer involved. Validity was a new priority that somehow had to be fitted in and addressed. My reaction was to spend last weekend writing yet another letter to Jack as I thought through the issues involved. This is what I wrote in the first part of that letter:

20 September 1997

Dear Jack

Well suddenly I find myself having to rush off another letter to you as the submission date for "that damned dissertation" looms up, and all as a result of your saying "we could strengthen it"! With limited time (I'm a very busy person you know), you've pushed me into getting my head around the question of "How can I explain that my data is valid and how should it be interpreted, analysed, and evaluated?" If only you'd mentioned this before. Do you sense just a slight degree of irritation in my voice? Oh well, that's life I suppose. I'm without my thinking time, but nevertheless, perhaps we can make a start. For the sake of the audience, perhaps I should say what's happened, - from my point of view.

On Sunday evening you telephoned me (14.09.97) to say that you'd been to the BERA conference and there was some very exciting work going on that you thought I'd be interested in. You also told me that you'd had some feedback on my dissertation. Both you and your colleague(s), had felt there were some areas that could be improved, namely the section that mentions evidence of "valid" data followed by the section on analysing, interpreting, and evaluating it (pages 72 - 78). I must admit that someone else also mentioned that she would like to have seen more "validation".

You referred me to Patti Lather's work on "ironic validity" (Lather, 1994) and suggested that my dissertation demonstrates this type of validity. You were right when you said that I'd find the language difficult - when I read a few of her words I knew that I would not have noticed her point for myself because her explanation is in a completely different language to

my own. Nevertheless, you were keen that I should study her words as you seemed to be able to see ironic validity in my dissertation. Furthermore, you thought that I could "strengthen" my dissertation by including this idea of ironic validity within my text.

Well I've thought about this and, whilst agree that this notion of ironic validity needs discussion, I don't believe that it should be inserted into the text but instead, I think that it should come here at the end. I'm conscious of your concern for the audience in wanting it to come earlier but, despite this, I still feel that it would be wrong to tinker with the text. And now for my reasons.

When you raised the question of validity I turned to Cohen and Manion (1989) for some ideas on what might be meant by the word "validity". However, I felt that they tended to describe validity more in terms of ongoing accuracy and consistency, rather than the opposite which I believe can be equally as valid. I did find that when considering accounts, they talked of them being "valid in the sense that it is appropriate in kind and, within that kind, sufficiently complete and faithful (p 253)". However, Cohen and Manion appeared to be coming from a different frame of reference than me.

I believe that my data has validity in terms of its authenticity. Jane O'Dea seems to suggest authenticity and truth as a way forward for narrative researchers

If narrative research is indeed to garner the authority and validity it seeks, narrative researchers cannot afford to skirt the issue of truth. Rather they need to situate their stated criteria clearly within the confines of "authenticity", connecting them thereby to that notion of truthfulness and honesty that authenticity entails. (O'Dea, 1994).

So let us for a moment consider the authenticity of my data. When I wrote my letter to you that now forms the main text of my dissertation, I never imagined any problem over the validity of my data. As far as I was concerned it was valid and therefore I didn't worry myself unduly about it. In my mind there was no question about it and, at that stage, I wrote all I wanted to say about it. But I was understanding valid in terms of being authentic and being presented with genuine intent.

In a dialectic account, which depends upon ongoing discussion and a search for knowledge, I feel that my data portrays my desire to learn, to share, and to communicate, but that is exactly what makes it valid.

Surely the fact that we have corresponded over a period of time is apparent by the very existence of the letters. In that sense the data is valid. The correspondence was constructed, and that in itself may perhaps cause some readers difficulty. However, I contend that it was honestly constructed with a sincere intent to communicate and thus contribute to my educational development and, in turn, educational theory. I do not intend to deceive, I would have no reason to do so.

Now comes the question of trust. In my opinion, trust is vitally important to an account based on communication between two or more parties where there are no absolutely correct answers. I feel that it is the trust that has maintained the relationship and enabled me to begin to reveal my educational development. We cannot always check out whether the other's point of view is correct and maybe we have no need to, because the point of view provides the basis of the dialogue and the vehicle that takes it forward. All of these assertions that we make are part of a rich and varied dialogical journey that we travel. However, there is a degree of trust and mutual respect that allow us to be truthful and to "get along". To speak with honest intent and integrity. I feel that the audience must judge

for themselves as to whether that is adequately represented from the holistic impression they get of my dissertation (or is the jury still out on that).

I cannot claim that what I say is universally true, all I can claim is that through our dialogue, I have tried to come to a better understanding and to improve my ability to explain my own educational development. The words I wrote some months ago were perhaps only true at that point in time. Since then, I've moved on and now I have a new discussion to progress with you.

That brings me back to my reluctance to insert the discussion on validity into the main body of the text. I believe that my text has validity because it's presented in the way that I originally wrote it. (Look at the title of the dissertation) To insert something now would falsify my original letter to you and would remove its value as genuine communication between you and I.

You might argue that it would be no different to my writing the dissertation again today, integrating this new information, but my thoughts, priorities, motivations, etc., are bound to have changed over time. So if I were to write to you again on the subject, the letter would now have transformed and would not be simply a copy of something that went before with just a few amendments. Things have happened in the meantime which have no doubt affected my perceptions and outlook on life. I have not been standing still or wrapped in some cocoon. I have been living my life.

Now I'd like to move on to the documents that you sent me this week relating to your presentation at the BERA symposium but particularly the pages that referred to me (Whitehead, 1997 pp 38-40). Immediately prior to your text relating to me came some correspondence between yourself and Pat D'Arcy. Then I appeared, closely followed by Mike Bosher. You'd accurately reproduced my title and abstract before drawing attention to the importance of criteria in legitimating claims to knowledge. You then wrote:

"In my judgement the draft thesis is of the appropriate level for the MA award. However, I want to help Hilary to strengthen the way she has responded to two of the criteria, related to validity and the ability to interpret, analyse and evaluate the data.

I want to do this by seeing if I can convince her, of the value of Patti Lather's (1994, p 40-41) view of ironic validity in understanding the dissertations contribution to educational knowledge, through the following response:"

You then wrote your response which was personally addressed to me - Hilary. However, by then I was already feeling as if I was being written about. It was as if "I" was lost. I'd been swallowed up somewhere between Pat D'Arcy and Mike Bosher. What was presented was an indication of a dissertation that could be "strengthened". It was no longer a communication between you and I in which we search for knowledge and understanding, but instead it had become a piece of writing to be improved and judged. It suddenly seemed as if you were writing for a different audience. You see I would rather not view my dissertation in terms of some thing to be strengthened, but instead I prefer to continue my search through the dialogue I have enjoyed.

*It wasn't until much later that evening that I even realised that you had addressed me directly in the subsequent paragraphs. It made me wonder how I should speak of other people and their work within my own text. The funny thing about all this is that your response to me was valid in that I believe you **genuinely intended me to see your response***

as being to me rather than about me. Whilst I value your genuine intent to help me, can you appreciate that subtle differences such as this have constantly given us new issues to discuss and thus the dialogue continues.

I digress, so let's now return to Patti Lather's ironic validity. She says,

Contrary to dominant validity practices where the rhetorical nature of scientific claims is masked with methodological assurances, a strategy of ironic validity proliferates forms, recognizing that they are rhetorical and without foundation, postepistemic, lacking in epistemological support. The text is resituated as a representation of its "failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach" (Hayles 1990, 261), an ironic representation of neither the thing itself nor a representation of the thing, a simulacrum. (Lather, 1994, p 41)

I would say that to some extent the decision on whether my dissertation fulfils her description of "ironic validity" depends upon what I claim the dissertation represents. If I claim, as you suggest, that it is my "best" representation to date of the "embodied knowing" I experience in what I do and how I live in relation to others, then yes I think it fulfils the criterion of "ironic validity". I do make that claim.

*However, I also claim that the dissertation represents my ongoing search for knowledge and understanding. I therefore say that my data (and therefore my dissertation) has a **dialectic validity** in that it portrays an authentic search for knowledge and understanding.*

*I don't know if there is such a thing as dialectic validity, I can't recall seeing it mentioned before. Nevertheless, if I had to label the type of validity (and you know I don't like labels) then I'd call it **dialectic validity**.*

Perhaps I should now ask how such data should and could be interpreted, analysed, and evaluated. I've looked back over page 42 and I think that maybe I can begin to make better sense of the lists that I made if I link them to these ideas about ironic validity (Lather, 1994), dialectic validity, and authenticity.

My first of two lists (see page 42) gives an indication of the features that I am happy to admit into my own correspondence (data). The list represents the way that I am able to progress. It helps me to accept and make sense of the features that crop up in my correspondence even though they may be features that are not acceptable in other forms of research. By accepting this style, I am helped in my quest to live up to my values and to know myself. When trying to interpret my letters, I do so in terms of the thoughts that they represent, my intentions behind them, the part they play in communicating with others, and their authenticity.

When it come to analysis, I don't think that this can be reserved for one specific section of the account. I say this because I have felt inclined to analyse in the course of my conversations and correspondence with you. It is not so much about analysing some final data to reach conclusions, as analysing my progress as I go along. Neither can analysis be in terms of finding correct or permanent answers. Instead the analysis is more akin to comparing my opinion to those of yourself and others (including the literature) in order to expand and develop my explanations. There may also be occasions when that comparison and additional flow of information leads to a transforming of my own ideas.

Lastly, how might I evaluate my data. My immediate response is to suggest that it should be evaluated in terms of whether it makes you and the wider audience think. Furthermore, does it enable us to maintain a dialectic approach to learning. The process of engaging in dialogue has certainly done that for me, and therefore I believe it to have been an effective means of gathering data as well as the data itself being a valuable representation of our educational relationship.

As you know, I've written elsewhere (see pages 53-54) about the way in which correspondence can be evaluated and so I won't dwell upon it here. I've now feel as if I've tired myself on the points raised at the beginning of this latest letter, so I'll move on to the audience which you mentioned in our telephone conversation this afternoon.

-----X-----

Reading over the letter again, I'm conscious that my "irritation" came to the fore and on reflection I would rather have kept it to myself as it wasn't Jack's problem, it was mine. Had I been in a better frame of mind perhaps I would have written the letter quite differently, but once it was sent then it was too late to change it and I could not retrieve it. I was caught between making no response to Jack's points and making a hurried unsettled response. In hindsight, maybe I would have been better to have waited but then the time for submission would have passed.

Since sending that letter, I have read Patti Lather's article several times which has caused me to think yet again (Lather, 1994). In addition, Jack has drawn my attention to a recent article by Elliot W. Eisner on the promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation (Eisner, 1997).

The problem I have with Patti Lathers article, is that it seems to be coming from a different direction to me and so I cannot be sure in my own mind as to whether we are on the same wavelength or not. I feel as if we may be heading in a similar direction but we're on different buses and going there for different reasons. I therefore feel uncomfortable in claiming "*ironic validity*". This is probably unhelpful when trying to locate my work and assess its validity but I'm afraid that I can't just make it fit. I'm wondering whether, although we're on similar lines, there is such a thing as "*unique validity*" which is linked to the context and therefore can never be quite the same as someone else's sense of validity. Despite my concerns, I do feel that Patti Lather's ideas can help me to explain my own thoughts on the subject.

Now I turn to Eisner's article (Eisner, 1997) based on his keynote address at the 1996 Conference on Qualitative Research in Education at the University of Georgia. He makes the point that "*...form and content cannot be disaggregated: How one writes shapes what one says.*" It greatly pleased me to see that he had retained the form in which his article was originally prepared, that of an oral delivery, firstly because that was consistent and secondly because I could easily understand it. He says,

"There is an intimate relationship between our conception of what the products of research are to look like and the way we go about doing research. What we think it means to do research has to do with our conception of meaning, our view of cognition, and our beliefs about the forms of consciousness that we are willing to say advance human understanding - an aim, I take it, that defines the primary mission of research." (Eisner, 1997)

He goes on to say.

"What we are dealing with is a conception of how meaning is made, and what shall count as knowledge or, to use a more felicitous phrase, how understanding is enlarged."

I then noticed a point which related directly to my own feelings on knowledge, (whatever that may be) in that I believe I have for some time been able to accommodate the idea of being on shifting ground. He says,

"We prefer our knowledge solid and like our data hard. It makes for a firm foundation, a secure place on which to stand. Knowledge as process, a temporary state, is scary to many."

He makes five points as to why we need new forms of data representation. In my opinion his explanation is worth reading in full but here I only give my summary of it. New forms can;

- 1 *Shape experience, enlarge understanding, and make empathy possible.*
- 2 *Provide a sense of particularity and dimensionality, which confer a sense that what is being portrayed is "real".*
- 3 *Provide "product ambiguity", in that the material presented is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity.*
- 4 *Promise to increase the variety of questions that we can ask about the educational situations we study.*
- 5 *Allow us to exploit individual aptitudes.*

On the other hand he talks of the perils (which I've summarised as follows). Alternative forms of representation:

- 1 *Can fail to provide the precision and reduced ambiguity required by conventional social science.*
- 2 *Can lead to a backlash from their use and need interpretation, particularly in terms of the context.*
- 3 *Are constrained by the publication system on material that does not take printed form.*

I can see why Jack wanted me to read this article, I felt as if Elliot Eisner was not only on the same bus but was also talking in a way that enables me to speak. It was as if he was suggesting that I stand on the edge and realise the possibilities that are there.

There is another article that I want to mention as I continue to consider validity. I read it a little while ago and was immediately interested in what the author, Stephen Rowland had to say (Rowland, 1997). I was fascinated by his references to videos and magazines of a sexually explicit nature which I must admit had me smiling to myself in amusement at the realities of life. Nevertheless I realised the relevance and serious basis for using these in his discussion, especially in relation to how we might inspire a love of learning.

Rowland was stimulated by a sentence in a dissertation which read *"I want to inspire in my students a love of their subject"* Rowland said of the writer,

".. he appeared to feel that his writing as a form of reflection upon his practice (and thus probably his practice too) did not give adequate expression to the values of love and inspiration which underlie his image of himself as a teacher. These were things of which he was unable to speak, except in this ironic post-script. While the study had sought to gain some critical purchase on processes of learning, his written reflections somehow failed to capture his fundamental value position. The erotic is special because it cannot be identified

with precision in the way a rational market-place demands. It is always immutable to measurement, always open to reinterpretation, potentially subversive." (Rowland, 1997)

He goes on to ask,

"How then are we to develop and represent a love of learning and teaching? How are we to resist "the clichés that cause the trouble", the explicitness which reduces the erotic to the sexy and learning to educational technology?"

He argues for a different type of language that resists positivist language and finishes his article by saying,

"- perhaps it is this sense of "joyfulness", risk and even playfulness, rather than a narrow concern for systematic method, which needs to be reclaimed for action research and writing. We may then rediscover the heart of our professional identity and resist the dreary oppression of this technical age. Love may then find ways to speak of itself."

I want to now return to the letter I wrote to Jack last weekend and to reproduce the rest of the letter here for you. When I wrote to Jack I didn't know that I would think yet again in time to add further to my comments and views. This is what I said to him then:

AUDIENCE

You asked me if I could speak more directly to the readers and we discussed the possibility of something at the beginning of the dissertation to prepare them for reading our correspondence. If you read from the bottom of page 1 to the middle of page 2, you'll see that I've already tried to do that, but obviously it wasn't enough.

*It was some considerable time ago that I began to realise that one day our letters may be made public and available to a wider audience. Therefore, although I have written to you, I have done so in the knowledge that someone else will see what I've had to say. I want to make it clear that they are letters that are now **intended to be read by a wider audience and they are no longer private**. They are **open** letters. I must stress that they were not written for rhetorical effect, but they represent that educational relationship between you and I which I have been keen to demonstrate, and in that sense, they remain sincere and authentic.*

I want my readers to feel comfortable and to understand that they have been invited in, that I know they are there, and that I would like them to feel involved in the construction of this account. It is perhaps unfair and inconsiderate to speak of the reader as some third party. You suggested that I should write to the reader but I have difficulty with this as I don't know who they are and I need to have someone in mind.

When I write to you, I take liberties and make assumptions because I have sufficient faith to know that, if I annoy you or disagree with you, we are capable of regaining the balance. That has taken time to develop and I feel it is not something that I can take for granted with the wider audience.

When I write directly to the reader, I almost feel as if I'm on show, presenting something. Therefore I find myself commentating to the reader on what has gone before rather than tentatively giving my emergent ideas for further dialogue. The whole nature of my conversation changes. It would be possible for me to easily alter the text, removing you as

an individual, but somehow I don't think that would be right, especially as much of the discussion has revolved around correspondence and its use.

If I was, for example, writing to you about my experiences as a police officer, it may be acceptable to alter the text for presentation. A possibility would be to make you a third party and write directly to the audience. Nevertheless, in this particular dissertation, as far as I am concerned, you are not a third party and never can be.

I do hope the wider audience can understand this and can see their position in context. They have only recently been allowed in but they are most welcome. They are reading a dissertation that has already been written, but from this point forward they can become involved if they wish.

At the beginning of this letter, I referred to this "damned dissertation", not least because I felt under pressure to produce something more. Instead of writing being enjoyable, it had once again become a chore, aimed at achieving an award. The strange thing about this is that I have known all along that I have written in a way that should encourage you and the wider audience to look for more rather than being satisfied with what you've got. A major part of my dialectic account recognises that the dissertation is incomplete and therefore the dialogue needs to continue. Despite this, I think I was allowed a certain degree of irritation given my sense of obligation and panic at the time constraint that I faced! Suffice to say that having undertaken the task, at last I feel a lot better and somewhat more settled.

Its been great to speak to you again this week, but I really must finish here if I'm to get this letter in the post this weekend.

Take care

Hilary

P.S. - Stories can drive you mad (Okri, 1996)

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It is probably obvious to you that I have reconsidered my position on whether I should write directly to the audience or continue to show Jack as the person I have "in mind". It is obvious because I am now writing to you, the reader, and not Jack, something that I had said that I wasn't ready to do. By making this switch, I believe that I have changed the nature of my letter to him (and indeed my whole dissertation) in that it has become data to be considered and talked *about*. The educational relationship between Jack and I still exists, but it is only represented as opposed to being alive and meaningful to me *within* the text.

Observers cannot see or know the respect that I feel inside. That relationship and especially its meaning and value now continues without saying. It is lived but cannot be *fully* represented in words. When I'm talking to another person, namely you the reader, for my part the communication changes because each communication is unique and the recipient is part of it. The communication moves to the audience as a whole and I find myself needing to begin a new dialogue.

You may be wondering why I decided to move on from my correspondence with Jack. Well it was soon after I had posted my letter of 20 September to him but as a result of him earlier suggesting that I might try to address the wider audience more directly. I suppose I felt like a 41 year old teenager being told by my parent that it was time to leave home. In other words I could venture out and spread my wings without being afraid of landing awkwardly.

My trust, appreciation and respect for Jack was firmly established and so I could turn my attention to others without jeopardising the educative relationship that I had come to value.

This decision to speak directly to the wider audience was a natural progression and an opportunity to test out my ideas with others. For me there is something very normal about this type of progression which gives a feeling of growth. However, it is coupled with a sense of nostalgia, letting go, and acknowledgement that individuals make up the important things in life.

I've reached a stage where I must bring this to a close, if only temporarily. I'm hoping that in the future I will be able to write to the wider audience but still keep individuals "in mind" and use a style which communicates directly with you, the reader.

Hilary

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