

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.