

## **ACADEMIC CRITICALITY ENCOUNTERS HARSH REALITY**

### **AND TRIES TO KEEP ITS COOL**

***Examining a twenty thousand word masters  
dissertation on the following subject.***

### **A divided village under the Israeli and the Jordanian governments**

#### **Note 1**

***I am placing this in the In Drafts part of my website partly to stimulate response and partly in order to encourage myself to make some progress towards completing the article.***

**The academic exploration of learning by educators is not always confined to what happens in the classroom. Contexts vary and may require us to make critical sense of a range of political issues. Why would we not? If, for example, two cousins are at schools on different sides of a wall erected in order to separate them we cannot write about their education and ignore the wall. Why is it there? Who put it there? Why is it maintained? Nor can we ignore the impact upon the cousins, their classmates, their teachers and the split societies in which they live and grow.**

There are times when the reality experienced by students severely tests carefully nurtured academic conceptual frameworks. I taught and knew the student whose work I write about here but did not supervise the dissertation. I was the second marker (why on earth we still refer to assessing as 'marking' I do not know). I intend, by the way, to use gender-neutral personal pronouns not only because I do not have permission to name the student or others I refer to but also because I am aware of how much worse life has become since 2004 for people in that village and for all people that try to achieve a degree of human normality in situations of constructed inhumanity. I do not wish to make it easy to identify anyone who might suffer as a consequence. I have not named the village for the same reason.

The assessment criteria mostly emerged from my experience as a schoolteacher, a public examiner and as a local education authority advisor

working on alternative and mainstream assessment and curriculum development. They became a key part of how we in the Education Department of the University of Liverpool interacted with full and part time tutors and with students. It was not a one-way process in which the University in its wisdom instructed tutors and students how to make sense of learning. Having initiated and written most of the assessment criteria and accompanying guidance I saw them as a language whose meanings could evolve because of that interaction: an inclusively and consensually grown language. Had I the opportunity I would have made changes both to the criteria and to the guidance in order to incorporate more of what had been learned from their development.

You cannot teach effectively if you detach the subject matter from the means by which you attempt to make critical sense of it. And, I believe, you are a lessened professional educator if you perceive your subject matter to exist apart from society.

Let me proceed criterion by criterion and try to show how they were used to engage with a subject that was not anticipated.

## Note 2

*Apart from CRITERION ONE what follows are merely the headings of the nine assessment criteria used at that time for a masters dissertation in education. As I proceed to work on the draft I intend to show how each one was and might be used: the kind of comments that were and could be made.*

### CRITERION ONE

#### Construction of a principled basis for enquiry

Examining the dissertation using this criterion it became clear that it was possible to do more inside a masters degree in education than might have been expected. A number of the themes of the complete programme came together. For example, there was an entirely appropriate use of comparison that enhanced the work and, most importantly, made readers aware of the political context of education. It would have been very easy to have allowed this dissertation to have concentrated on the emotional power of the subject and to have run away from the disciplined concern for due academic process. Looking at the notes of meetings with the supervisor it would also have been understandable if the dissertation had been overwhelmed by material. These things happen when you go into uncharted territory. There are risks involved when dealing with previously un-researched areas and unpublished material. There are benefits also and I believe that they were clear in this work and well founded.

### CRITERION TWO

**Construction of an appropriate literature base**

***To Be Drafted***

**CRITERION THREE**

**Identification and use of key concepts and general principles**

***TBD***

**CRITERION FOUR**

**How key concepts and general principles relate to evidence**

***TBD***

**CRITERION FIVE**

**Ability to relate, where appropriate, specific learning to global**

***TBD***

**CRITERION SIX**

**Development of a clear and coherent style, including the use of argument and use of pertinent examples**

***TBD***

**CRITERION SEVEN**

**Independent enquiry and thought**

***TBD***

**CRITERION EIGHT**

**Critical analysis and synthesis**

***TBD***

**CRITERION NINE**

**Ability to put forward conclusions and recommendation for policy and/or practice**

***TBD***

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

***TBD but you might guess that I proposed that a way be found to disseminate the work.***

**May 2004 (The original date of the assessment)**