

**Curiouser and Curiouser:  
Inviting performance.  
Reflections on hospitality, transitions and  
pedagogy.**

**by  
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B.F.A., Simon Fraser University, 2001

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

in the  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is informed by my experience working with grade 7 fine arts students to create, rehearse, produce and perform an original play. I used performative inquiry as the lens through which to conduct and reflect upon this research. I consider the place of hospitality in education and ask questions about student and teacher responsibilities in teaching and learning. I consider agency and voice for adolescents and wonder about how to encourage students to practice these skills both in school and in life.

**Keywords:** Performative inquiry; arts education; drama; pedagogy of hospitality

## Dedication

*To my best and most important teacher, my mother, Nan Wardrop. Your love of learning and of family has had a profound and positive (pheeew) impact on me and on everything I do. I could not have written this thesis without you.*

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# Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Partial Copyright Licence .....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
Prelude .....	ix
<b>CHAPTER 1: INVITATION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE AUTHOR’S DILEMMA .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: WHO AM I? .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: THE PROCESS .....</b>	<b>15</b>
The Close Reading and Groundwork .....	27
Writing/Creating .....	30
Auditions .....	40
Rehearsal .....	51
Transitions .....	54
Scheduling .....	57
Performances.....	61
Post Mortem .....	65
<b>CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>70</b>
What is Performative Inquiry? .....	70
Performative Writing.....	87
<b>CHAPTER 6: MY STOPS .....</b>	<b>93</b>
Stopping Stone: The Queen’s Way .....	95
Stopping Stone: Close Reading .....	99
Stopping Stone: Filling In the Script .....	102
Stopping Stone: Audition Process .....	105
Stopping Stone: Brit and Mallory .....	110
Stopping Stone: The Rehearsal Process Question ‘What Do I Do Now?’ .....	112
Stopping Stone: Transitions .....	114
Stopping Stone: Sitting in the Audience for the Performances .....	117
<b>CHAPTER 7: TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF HOSPITALITY .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8: RABBIT HOLES .....</b>	<b>135</b>
Emerging From the Rabbit Hole .....	135
The Next Rabbit Hole.....	139

**REFERENCES ..... 144**

**Appendices 151**

Appendix A. Curious? Play Script..... 152

## Prelude

When I lie down in the soft grass  
I remember

I am cradled by all the world  
I am safe in its arms  
I am present here in this moment for a reason  
(or without reason but with purpose if I choose it).  
In this grass, I am held by loving arms  
I am released from holding my head,  
From the pains and strains  
Of my daily comings and goings.  
When I lie down in the soft grass  
I remember that I am able  
That I don't have to be able  
and that the grass will be here again tomorrow,  
no matter what happens to me today.

I remember  
To breathe  
To be  
And think  
I remember that I am whole  
And that if I am welcome nowhere else  
That here, at least, I am warmly held.

When I lie down in soft grass  
I feel it on my back  
Caressing my bare neck  
And I remember that this is my place,  
A place filled with potential  
And filled with nothing.

A place to fill with dreams and ideas.

I remember  
That it has been too long since I last lay down  
Gave up control to gravity  
And let her bear my burden for a time.

When I lie down in soft grass  
I feel silly  
And worry about the bugs crawling on me.

I remember  
I am larger than most other creatures here  
And because of that,  
I owe those creatures all the space and protection I can provide.

When I lie down in soft grass  
I listen to what the world has to tell me  
(instead of hearing all the things I tell myself)  
and maybe I am freed of something  
and maybe I am more tied into something.

I remember  
That I am not alone  
And that I am totally alone.  
I remember  
That I am here.

When I lie down in soft grass  
I wander down paths  
And seek inspiration  
Hope that there is something  
That calls,  
That demands my attention,

That draws me to it.

I remember

That I am responsible for making the work

For being open to it

For listening to the voices that might guide me,

Mislead me,

Mistreat me.

When I lie down in soft grass,

I lie down in soft grass

And I remember.

## CHAPTER 1: INVITATION

Alice: Oh! Why, what peculiar little figures! Tweedle Dee...and Tweedle Dum!

Tweedle Dee: If you think we're wax-works, you ought to pay, you know!

Tweedle Dum: Contrariwise, if you think we're alive you ought to speak to us!

Dee & Dum: That's logic!

Alice: Well, it's been nice meeting you. Goodbye!

Dee: You're beginning backwards!

[...]

Alice: I'm very sorry [...] but I must be going.

Dee & Dum: Why?

Alice: Because I am following a white rabbit!

Dee & Dum: Why?

Alice: Well, I- I'm curious to know where he is going!

Dum: Ohhhh, she's curious! Tsk! tsk! tsk! tsk!...

(Geronimi, Jackson, & Luske, 1951)

I am inviting you to join me, to follow the white rabbit, curiosity, to follow my words on a journey. I am hoping you will listen and ask questions and wonder. I am extending you this welcome into my world and words and am hoping you will accept my offer of hospitality.

This offering is not the conventional hundred-page thesis complete with literature review, methodology, data and findings that a reader might expect. Such a thesis would not adequately reflect the emergent learning I experienced with my students, nor capture

the moments of recognition that evolved through the work of writing this thesis onto these pages.

Curriculum educator and writer, Lynn Fels recognizes “the impossibility of writing [her] experiences within the confines of conventional academic text, [she] decided that the integrity of [her] research required another academic language, another way of writing understanding”.<sup>1</sup> To address that impossibility, to be sure there was a language in which to communicate authentically the experiences, learning and wonder, Fels suggests performative writing.<sup>2</sup>

The process of writing this thesis mirrors the process of the work that was done, that is being written about. The work I did with my students was performance; I investigated this work through a performative inquiry lens, and it seems only logical then, to write the results and learning of that work in a performative way.<sup>3</sup> The performative aspect of this piece is meant to be engaging and appealing, so that any reader may feel the resonance of it, and recognize the learning and experience, as I did, as I inquired into my work. There were moments of exhilaration and joy and of despair and confusion

<sup>1</sup> From unpublished preface to Fels’ doctoral thesis (1999/2012).

<sup>2</sup> In her article “Performing Writing”, Della Pollock explains performative writing. “At the brink of meaning ... writing as *doing* displaces writing as meaning; writing becomes meaningful in the material, dis/continuous act of writing. Effacing itself twice over – once as meaning and reference, twice as deferral and erasure – writing becomes itself, becomes its own means and ends, recovering to itself the force of action. After-texts, after turning itself inside out, writing turns again only to discover the pleasure and power of turning, of making not sense or meaning per se, but making writing perform: Challenging the boundaries of reflexive textualities; relieving writing of its obligations under the name of ‘textuality’, shaping, shifting, testing language. Practicing language. Performing writing. Writing performatively.” (1998, p.75)

<sup>3</sup> Cancienne and Snowber (2003) ask: “How do we write performance?” and “How do our performances write us?” (p.239)

during the process of the work I did with my students as well as in the work of writing this thesis. Performative writing, through the lens of performative inquiry<sup>4</sup>, allows expression of these moments, of these awarenesses, of these trials and tribulations.

My journey into this work began some time ago<sup>5</sup> and I was not prepared for where it would take me, nor for what would be revealed as I took it. I am wandering, like Alice in the looking glass, having stepped through to the other side of the mirror, making my path as I write and I hope that you will join me. At times, during the process of writing and performing a theatrical piece based on Alice in Wonderland with my grade seven students, my understanding came clearly, in whole pieces while at other times, only fragments were revealed and so this writing follows that same pattern. Much of the writing is performative—as I seek to catch ineffable, elusive moments and performance in words.

“Performance’s inability to be captured or documented within the reenactments promised by the copy is part of what makes it, per force, face the impossibility of seizing the Real.” (Phelan, 1993, p.192)

<sup>4</sup> I chose performative inquiry as the vehicle for researching and documenting my work despite so many other ways of working with theatre and education; George Belliveau’s research based theatre, Johnny Seldana’s ethnotheatre and ethnodrama, Kathleen Gallagher’s research in performance ethnography among others. Since my research is focused on pedagogy and learning through theatre I chose performative inquiry.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the scholars who have influenced me directly are Maxine Greene (1995b, 2000), Dorothy Heathcote (1984), Cecily O’Neill (1995), Gavin Bolton (1984, 1992), Joe Norris (2009), Jonothan Neelands (1984; 1998), Lynn Fels and George Belliveau (2008), Patrick Verriour (1994), Carole Tarlington and Wendy Michaels (1995).

I want to express my emergent understanding: my wondering, my insights, my falls and my questions. It is my hope that you will follow the words and understand them as they play themselves out for you. If performance is my theory, research, and practice, how then might I incorporate performance in my writing? “Might my work perform on a page? And is it possible to invite you, the reader, into moments of performative and curricular interstanding?” (Fels, 1999/2012). I am giving you this work in hopes that you will work on it as it will work on you.

I am sharing what I believe are critical moments with you, the reader, in hopes that you might come to understand what I have learned and experienced as I endeavoured to create and perform a play with my grade seven students. In this Wonderland into which I tumbled, I have encountered myself as educator, researcher and writer. I do not know everything there is to know about these moments that I am sharing. I can not write them out so that they are experienced anew but in writing in this form, in this way, I come closest to performing my text on the page; I am as close as I imagine possible to an embodied, performative text. It is no small challenge, and no small gift, to write and think and inquire in this form.<sup>6</sup>

I have written in the ways that best reflect my moments, the small performances that played themselves out on the journey of the creation of a show, with my students, and the creation of this thesis that allowed me to reflect on that process. There is

<sup>6</sup> There is significant scholarly research being done that engages writing as a way to explore embodied experience, thought and inquiry through various forms of performative writing. See, for example, Carl Leggo (2004, 2010), Ronald Pelias (2004), Celeste Snowber (2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2009d), Jana Milloy (2007).

poetry<sup>7</sup>, there are contractions, there are fragments of understanding, there is rhythm<sup>8</sup>  
and rhyme and there is space and time in these words.

I invite you into this work as I invited my students into the work that serves as the basis of this thesis—with an open heart and a desire to lean in. So please come in, and make yourself at home.

<sup>7</sup> Poet and curriculum theorist, Carl Leggo suggests “Poetry is one more way of questioning and reconstituting our knowing and becoming and living in the world.” (2004, p. 4)

<sup>8</sup> Leggo points out that “rhythm is the relation of part to part and of parts to the whole. It is balance, the flowing of blood, breath, breathing, not breath-taking but breath-giving. Rhythm is the measure of speech, of the heart, of dancing, of the seasons, knowing the living word, the energy of language to inscribe, inspire hope, even in the midst of each day’s wild chaos.” (2004, p.7)

## CHAPTER 2: THE AUTHOR'S DILEMMA

At this hour what is dead is restless and what is living is burning<sup>9</sup>

Leaves raked high and piled  
The smoke rising up from this  
Vegetative funeral pyre.  
Smoke  
White and heady  
Full of lost days  
Time  
And change  
Enters my consciousness.  
What is this yearning  
And why is it here now?  
Changing of seasons  
And of thoughts  
And of words  
And worlds.  
A moving on,  
A changing of place  
And time.  
A new beginning  
And yet so much the same.

<sup>9</sup> This is a line from Li-Young Lee's poem *The Hour and What Is Dead* (1990) which I used as a prompt for writing my poem.

Before the burning  
I wanted to jump in  
To play in the pile  
To throw up my arms  
And dance  
And remember  
And make anew.  
I wanted to feel the soft  
Giving in of the leaves under my feet,  
To smell the wet musty  
Of the fallen,  
To find some of that  
Crisp crunch of dry autumn.

For now  
Though  
All that is left of this great pile is  
Smoke  
And burning  
And a yearning  
For something else.  
A marking of the passage of time  
A moment  
That is not a moment but really an eternity.  
An event that happens time and again  
Ever repeating  
Ever changing.

What is dead is restless  
These moments  
The thoughts about what and how it was  
And the way it moves me to do something else  
To write about it

To share it and have it known

(and maybe recognized by others).

Perhaps they will see themselves reflected and need to take action

Perhaps they will feel unsettled

Perhaps they will find that unsettling unnerving and be moved to do,

To say

To sing

To dance

To ask

To give voice and body and soul

To the questions and presences that appear.

To be brave and risk

To open up to the possibilities that belong to this place

This place of let's go together

Let's be here and see and taste and learn.

## CHAPTER 3: WHO AM I?



“Multiple me”. Amanda Wardrop, 2012, mixed media.

‘Who are *you?*’ said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I— I hardly know, sir, just at present’

(Carroll, 1998, p.40)

I am Alice  
falling through a rabbit hole.

I am Alice  
landing in a strange land  
populated by strange creatures.

I am Alice  
not scared but curious.

I am Alice  
following the path that is before me and  
making the path I want to take.

I am Alice  
forever the wrong size  
stuffed in tea pots and lockers,  
too big for *my* clothes and *their* buildings.

I am Alice  
struggling to understand what needs to be done.

I am Alice  
mistrusted, dangerous, unknowing, alone  
until trusted, safe, knowing and held close.

I am Alice  
wearing a blue dress.

I am Alice  
yelled at by the Queen of Hearts  
mocked by her cronies.

I am Alice  
having to slay the Jabberwocky  
and I don't know what it is  
and I don't know if I can  
and I don't know that I want to  
and I don't know if I will.

I am Alice  
and I think I like that just fine.

I am a mother teacher partner player actor.

I am silly and serious

and if you ask my students—

I often make sound effects.

I am bold and scared

and if you ask my children—

I laugh at weird times.

I am an incorrigible educator

(who educates

even those citizens of the world

who seem to need some direction

when living their lives

outside of my classroom

even though they probably don't want it).

I have sense of whimsy

and a ridiculous attachment to honouring arts' ways of working.

I am an optimist,

a believer in possibilities,

a curious and engaged me.

wayward teens

fight instigators

unsafe decision-makers

hate perpetrators

A big ideas girl

(who sometimes ignores the details)

who will always choose to

follow what she thinks is right

over

following what she's told to do.

Teaching

Teaching what?

Teaching questions

Teaching desire to know  
Teaching the rules so that you can break them  
Teaching to transgress<sup>10</sup>  
Teaching to egress  
Teaching with passion  
Teaching from the heart and liver and kidney, not always the brain.

I teach what I thinkknowbelieve is important  
Not the date that Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue,  
Not the three causes of the Second World War (just three?),  
Not the table of elements as being something to memorize.  
I teach what I thinkknowbelieve is important  
The power of words, bodies, beings  
The power of curiosity  
The power of doing and being and thinking<sup>11</sup>.  
I teach what I know is important  
How to ask questions  
How to look you in the eye and know I've done right by you  
How to stand up and wave my arms and jump about when that's what's  
needed.  
I teach what I know is important  
On this day  
In this room  
With my students.

And when I hardly know  
Who I am  
Because I am different from the 'I'

<sup>10</sup> Title of bell hooks' book (1994)

<sup>11</sup> See Fels (1995). Learning viewed through a lens of enactivism comes from a place of "knowing doing being creating".

Of moments ago,  
Different from the 'I'  
In some other situation,  
Then 'I' hardly know with trepidation  
And fear at times  
(yes, fear).  
Then I feel I will know again,  
Sometime  
And even if I do not know again,  
The world will not cease to be,  
I will not cease to be.  
This hardly knowing  
Allows space and time for  
Looking in the tilted<sup>12</sup> looking-glass  
And perhaps seeing myself someone else  
Reflected back at me.

I walk into my classroom holding precious attention  
I try to honour that attention.  
I ask them to listen and ask.  
I ask them to ask and listen.  
I hope that they leave changed at the end of the day,  
at the end of the week,  
at the end of the year.  
Changed, so that they may asklooklisten,  
So that they may wonder and wander,  
So that they may notice their own paths  
And choose to make them, or follow the already present paths.

<sup>12</sup> "What about the idea that art is like a *tilted* mirror, one that gives off different recognitions as opposed to the usual reflections, predictable images." (Paley, 1995, p.157)

I worry about their friendships  
and their choices (and their choice of friendships).  
I ask them to share their stories,  
And I love to hear them speak those stories  
I get lost in their words sometimes,  
And they in mine (if I've done a good job).

A pedagogy of 'know thyself' to know others  
A pedagogy to navigate these waters.  
A pedagogy of care and concern  
A pedagogy of hospitality and trust  
A pedagogy of questions  
A pedagogy of invitation (sometimes some coercion but only on bad days)  
A pedagogy of working ethically (even when we stumble, and stumble we do).  
It all sounds so serious—and the work I do is serious  
But this 'seriousness' is not what it sounds like in my classroom.  
It sounds like us talking  
It sounds like us taking time to look at what we're doing and why  
It sounds like us trying and failing and then trying again.  
It sounds like me apologizing because I was wrong (and them waiting for the punch-line that doesn't come).  
In the classroom it is laughter and tension and joy and hard work  
(and even boredom at times).  
It is making something from nothing  
And maybe nothing from something.  
It is inviting attention,  
Theirs and mine.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PROCESS

In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for a way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well.

Either the well was very deep, or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her, and to wonder what was going to happen next.

(Carroll, 1998, p.10)

During the 2010-2011 school year I taught grade seven in a Fine Arts program at an elementary school in the lower mainland. I was hired as a drama specialist and so in addition to being responsible for all the usual curriculum and subject matter, I was to deliver a drama program to the grade fours, fives and sevens with two weekly periods of approximately an hour per session. I took a leave from the Vancouver School Board where I taught grade seven late French immersion in a school I loved, with a teaching partner I could not have enjoyed more. I had no reason to leave the position I was in except that this Fine Arts position fell into my lap through a confluence of events and seemed to be the ideal situation for me: I was completing my courses for my Arts

Education Master's degree, I relish working with the grade sevens and the theatre facilities at the school are of professional quality. I could not say no, even though I understood that the particular group of students and parents were not the most accommodating with whom to work. I knew this was an opportunity not to be missed.

I thought I was going to walk in with drama games, activities and structures and see what the students would take away from participating in playbuilding, roleplay, improvisation, voice work, some physical training and whatever other activities we would do as the year progressed. I thought it would be fairly straightforward. Of course, as soon as I started and there were students in the flesh and not just in my mind, and me standing there in front of those flesh students, I realized that there would be no linear correlations to be made, that my research was going to be just as complicated and multidirectional as my teaching, as my students' learning, as my own learning.<sup>13</sup> I would like to say that I knew somehow that it would be like that, but I cannot. I was being naïve, I was hoping that it would be simpler than it was.

I was also confident that we would cover 'curriculum' in the drama studio. I was convinced that I would be able to use the time and space and atmosphere of the drama studio to teach my students Social Studies, Science and English; that I would be able to check off some of those pesky PLOs<sup>14</sup> in an active, engaged and imaginative manner. I found that this particular group was not ready to engage in exploring curriculum through

<sup>13</sup> Celeste Snowber (personal communication, April 27 2012) connects this multidirectional teaching/learning to "body pedagogy" because we are required to enter into this kind of work with our whole body and often "think with our feet".

the arts, probably more importantly for me, that is not where my skills (nor my passion) lie.<sup>15</sup>

I realized after our first few days together, that we were going to have to work on being human beings, together, who would not hurt each other and then maybe we could learn to be people in a space together who could learn about each other and ourselves and then maybe we could learn to be people in a shared space who could support and care for one another, and then maybe we could learn to be individuals who could work together to create something greater than anything we could ever do on our own.<sup>16</sup>

Tim Rollins (as cited in Paley, 1995) suggests that working together in true collaboration is difficult work: “Deep collaboration compels us to see ourselves through others. Truly collaborative works of art are commitments in time and space, cause and effect at once, even a form of love.” (p.55) This was a kind of work that would take us some time and groundwork to be ready to engage in as a group. Joe Norris (2009) states it slightly differently:

<sup>14</sup> Prescribed Learning Outcomes, as set out in the BC Ministry of Education curriculum documents.

<sup>15</sup> There are so many wonderful and effective ways to work with curriculum and drama: Patrick Verriour (1994), Carole Tarlington (1995), Lynn Fels and George Belliveau (2008), Dorothy Heathcote (1984a; 1984b), Gavin Bolton (1984, 1992), Jonathan Neeland (1984, 1998) among others.

Group work isn't easy. Creating a common product can be a difficult task.

The act of negotiation is a mastered art, and the ability to merge one's own vision with the disparate visions of others requires a unique balance of personal integrity and humility. (p.39)

As a group we would have to commit substantial time and energy to creating an atmosphere that would allow for and support this kind of trust, which would lead to this kind of collaborative work. We would need to learn how to work together, collaboratively, creatively, with care and compassion.<sup>17</sup>

With each new beginning, whether creating a new play or a new unit plan or starting my teaching year with a new class, I return to a naïve state believing that this project, this work, this encounter will follow a plan and a schedule and will play itself out in some kind of predictable way. I have come to understand that it is from this state of naïveté and trust that I must begin the work, that starting from any other place is impossible. And so, I started the year in that naïve place of confidence, believing that it would be easy to teach the students some of the skills and craft of theatre and that, in

<sup>16</sup> Max van Manen speaks of lived experience as a necessary and important way of learning. He describes learning as "becoming full of the world, full of lived experience." (1990, p.32). The curriculum described here is a 'lived curriculum', as distinct from 'curriculum as content'. This idea is elaborated upon by Ted Aoki as he writes about the lived curriculum as being "the more poetic, phenomenological and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and languages people speak and live." (1993, p.261)

<sup>17</sup> This once again, is the lived curriculum as contrasted by the curriculum as content definition of curriculum.

turn, they would be ready to learn them, that there would be some kind of base on which they would be ready to build. I quickly became aware that I was sorely mistaken. The students had virtually no experience with the idea that acting entailed decision-making, nor that the most important skill in theatre is to clearly communicate your message to your audience. We had no shared language of theatre and so we had to start from the very beginning. Yet these were students who had had Fine Arts training throughout their elementary school years and they objected to being taken back to the beginning, to being treated as if they knew nothing about the craft.

“You poor thing.”

“Someone did tell you what kind of class this is, right?”

“I’m just saying, make sure you have someone else sit in on any and all parent meetings.”

“There are some really lovely kids in there, really.”

“There’s a good reason that the last teacher left as this group was coming into grade seven.”

“It’s just one year. The grade sixes are lovely.”

Yes, this was one of *those* classes: a class with a reputation, the kind of class that makes teachers want to take a leave of absence, a class that causes almost all the adults involved with it to groan when they speak about it. When I took the position I was warned. When I met my colleagues for the first time they gave me pitying looks when told which class was mine. Many of the students were regulars in the office. Mostly it was for minor offences but there were physical brawls that landed them in there also. A significant number of them had been involved in ‘bullying’ incidents both as perpetrators

and as victims. Their parents were in the office almost as often as the students, demanding punishment of children other than their own while fervently arguing their own child's innocence. The hallways were often abuzz with gossip and hurtful words between parents. My class felt more like a detention hall, the desks occupied by young offenders, staring me down, waiting for a sign of weakness. Perhaps, though, that was just my metaphorically prone imagination surveying the challenge...

"Theatre is a place for harbouring fugitives"<sup>18</sup>

These young offenders  
(unaware of their real crimes,  
too often shielded by their parents,  
uncomprehending the serious nature of their present state)  
are sentenced to a year of service  
of learning  
of trying  
and of failing.

These young offenders  
(various in their needs and issues,  
concerns and problems)  
are placed in my care,  
are my responsibility  
to rehabilitate

<sup>18</sup> Mark Fearnow writes "Theatre is a place for harbouring fugitives" in his book *Theatre and the Good: The Value of Collaborative Play* (2007). The poem that follows was written using that line as inspiration.

to retrain  
to release into the community.

These young offenders  
(some hardly offensive at all)  
are hardened  
after years of blind and deaf punishment,  
rewards and empty praise.

These young offenders  
(all victims of circumstances and afraid of what the world will dole out to  
them)  
shuffle into my room  
unsure.  
Many heads down  
Afraid to meet what they see in my eyes.

I greet them,  
Welcome them into this space  
This place.  
I demand they meet me here.  
I invite them too,  
But the demand is made.  
I have the power of the law on my side,  
They have only the power of their will  
(and the long arms of their parents).  
I know I am right in this at least though.  
I know that they will meet me here.

I may be the jailor  
But I am also the social worker,  
The drug counsellor  
And the therapist.  
I am the one

To decide the course of action  
And the one to deliver the (ever eroded) services.

I planned on continuing my research for this thesis<sup>19</sup> in my new position and was excited by the prospect of having so much time dedicated to drama each week, with access to and use of an amazing drama studio. I decided that as a group, my grade seven students and I would create, write, and perform a play based on the 2010 film *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Tim Burton. It would be a great opportunity to introduce, practice, and put to work theatre skills. This play creation process would allow me to make connections between the drama skills and activities and the soft skills and new understandings my students would gain. I was taking my cue from Marie Moll, the director of Shooting Back, a program through which youth from disadvantaged areas work with cameras to shoot images and then exhibit them. Moll states that her goal is not to train youths to become professional photographers, but rather to offer them the opportunity to try an artistic activity they would not normally have access to experience. In offering such opportunities to students there is hope that the participants will express something about themselves and what matters to them, and thereby possibly learn something about themselves. There is also the possibility that some of what they learn about themselves through engaging in the arts permeates into other aspects of their lives (Paley, 1995). This was the thought and hope that underpinned my decision to choose to work on a playbuilding project with my students.

Curiouser and curiouser

She grabbed me by the throat, the ear, the heart, the mind  
I could have been frightened (and maybe I was)  
I could have been excited (I know I was)  
I could have chalked it up to a fun movie,  
With great visuals,  
But I didn't because she grabbed me.

I was held,  
I watched, barely breathing  
Feeling ridiculous that this movie  
Could hold me  
So tightly  
For so long.

Long after the credits rolled,  
the lights turned on,  
After the floors were washed (if they are ever washed),  
After the reviews were written and forgotten,  
She made me wonder and ask.

She was curious  
And then curiouser and curiouser.  
She asked the questions and let the answers be what they would be.

<sup>19</sup> Initially I planned to conduct my research in the French Immersion teaching position that I left for the Fine Arts teaching position. I was interested in investigating what might emerge when teaching and learning through theatre with grade seven late French Immersion students.

She was just a character  
Words on a page  
Images on a computer screen  
But she made me wonder.

Curiosity and the cat,  
This cat was smiling  
And disappeared,  
Not dead.

Why Alice in Wonderland? My first answer is “I don’t know.” I saw the movie in late spring 2010 and I responded to what I had experienced with such energy and pure joy that I was overwhelmed (and so were my mom and my husband who saw it with me and then had to tolerate my ramblings). I was in love. I arranged to take my class to see the film (even though I was not teaching my own English language arts and so it was a bit of a stretch to justify it as a field trip) and could hardly contain my glee at being able to share it with my students and then even better: to have them discuss it with me and to create responses to it themselves.

Although I had read it as a child, I had not been a fan of the Alice story prior to seeing this film. Somehow the film spoke directly to me and made my head spin. I knew I had to do some work with the themes, the aesthetic, the poetry, the beauty and the grotesque-ness of it. I did not think these thoughts in words or even images as much as I simply knew them, felt them. It was not until considerably later that I even started to see what those elements were that excited me so, to be able to break them down and see what it was that held my heart. As I looked ahead to my year teaching in the Fine Arts

school, I revelled in the idea that I could work on an adaptation of the film with my students—that I would have the time and permission to create a show.

After watching the film, I re-read the books by Lewis Carroll, watched the animated film, immersed myself in The Jabberwocky poem, dove into the critical readings of the work, and even pursued as much information as I could find about both the author and the girl Alice. Despite my newfound passion for the story, I found I was no more interested by the original story than I had been the first time I read it. Some of the key intangibles from the film that ignited my desire were missing. The screenwriter (Linda Woolverton) had done an incredible job of weaving the strands that ultimately created such powerful work, that everything else was left wanting.

So again, why Alice in Wonderland? I learned as I worked on the play and through this writing that I was inspired by this particular film in part because I believe Alice operates from a place of curiosity. This is shown in so many beautiful ways throughout the film including her fall down the rabbit hole and upon her arrival in Wonderland. Alice is not screaming and scared; she approaches the situation with seemingly detached interest as if she has a puzzle to put together or a code to crack as opposed to falling down a hole and landing in a strange world.

Another reason I was tied to the film was Alice's unwillingness to simply submit to the roles she was assigned. She recognized what was given to her, examined it and then chose whether or not she wanted to play out the role. This mirrored my relationship with the world of institutions and I was overjoyed to see a strong female character who was written to mindfully decide what she wanted and what she did not.

I knew that my process and product, in going about creating an original piece of work based on Alice in Wonderland, were different from what had been done before, but I was somehow unaware of how very different they were. Previously, the drama specialist in my position had annually paid for the rights to a show script that had been reworked for student actors (but was still the original story, with adults as the main characters) and included any music and choreography that would accompany the work. The students expected to audition for specific roles and then rehearsals would begin.

The parent group was accustomed to being asked to contribute to the show and did not know how a production could be successful without their work. I did not ask the parents to help at all. I realized after the production that I should have informed the parents about the process and why I did not ask for their help to make it more possible for them to feel included without actually having to have them directly involved in the show.

I came in with expectations that changed dramatically by the second week of school as I recognized the specific challenges and strengths of this group and this situation; the parent community held on to their expectations with iron fists. They were used to big musical productions to which they, the parents, would dedicate hundreds of hours building elaborate sets and sewing beautiful costumes. That the script was written for adults, that often the content did not speak to the students, that the music and dance were preset, that the students had no hand in creating the total production, was no problem for the adults involved. They would be able to congratulate themselves on a job well done and 'ooh and aah' at their works, and the work of the students. The performers would be overshadowed by the pageantry.

It was important to me to work in a way that valued process over product; a position which seemed to be counter to the emphasis placed by the teachers in the position before me. The previous years' expectation was really of a shiny product; a big performance, with clear stars, and much parental involvement. I was committed to a different ideal—one that better reflected my pedagogical philosophy. The administration in the school was supportive of me and my stance, in regards to the importance of process, but it was a challenge to garner support from any group including the students. I was also unwilling (maybe mistakenly) to invest much time in rallying support from the parents and other teachers. No one had any experience working within this paradigm and so it was stepping into the unknown for everyone. There was a distinct unwillingness (or at least a discomfort) to jump into the *I don't know*, the *let's see what comes to be* on the part of the parents which was, at times, reflected in the students. The students though, had direct contact with me and so were better able to trust in the process without necessarily really understanding it.

## **The Close Reading and Groundwork**

The preliminary work on the show began in earnest January 2011. I could not wait to get started and had trouble containing my excitement over the upcoming project. We began by doing what I termed a 'close reading' of the film upon which we were to base our show.

“This is going to drive you crazy and I promise that we will watch the movie without stopping after we watch it this way.”

My students had no reference for this kind of work (which was a theme that repeated itself over and over again over the course of the school year) and so did not

truly understand what I meant when I told them we would be stopping the movie more than we would be letting it play. The opening shot of the film is a night shot of the tower in London that houses Big Ben. I stop the DVD and ask the students what we learn about the story in this very first shot. Some groan and others are intrigued. The next moment we move through the air into the residence of our main character, but it is not her we see at first, it is instead a meeting that includes her father and some other men who are clearly discussing business. I stop the DVD again and ask the students the same question.

“What do we learn from this shot?”

“Are you really going to do this the whole way through the movie?”

“Yup.”

This was a true introduction to the way in which we were going to work on our show, which was our ultimate goal. It was imperative to me that the students start considering the details and layers of work that go into a piece of art so that they might be able to incorporate those ideas into their own work on our show.<sup>20</sup> We discussed the visual elements, the themes, the colours, the script, the character choices, the movements, the score, everything we could see and hear as well as everything we felt.

“I never saw that when I watched it last time.”

“Me neither—how cool.”

<sup>20</sup> Maxine Greene writes about criticism as a manner of paying attention to the work that is similar in fashion to my drawing my students' attention to specific details in the film. She states “the point of “doing” criticism with respect to specific paintings or plays or poems or works of music is to point towards and highlight certain aspects of those works people seem not to have noticed in the process of attending.” (1986, p. 58)

The students continued to be excited by the work as well as being frustrated by it. They were unaccustomed to having to consider details at this level of interrogation. I asked them to consider the choices that were made by some other artists, to see every moment as an opportunity to choose. It was an eye-opening experience for all of us. We were practicing new skills and we just as often stumbled as we succeeded. But what was important was that we were doing it together and the students really understood that I was learning with them, from them.

Our close reading became a process of investigation, an opening up of spaces to ask questions. The idea was that by practicing this process of interrogating choices made by the director, screenwriter and/or actors during the film, the students would be more skilled at considering alternatives when we started working on our show. As the students were unfamiliar with this way of working, they required a lot of support and coaxing on my part and a lot of risk taking and trust on theirs.

After this close reading, we watched the movie from beginning to end without pause. My hope was that this would let them integrate the pieces once again and see the work as a whole but with a greater appreciation of, and eye for, the artistry of the movie.<sup>21</sup>

“You wrecked movies for me! I can’t ‘just watch’ a movie anymore.”

“Sorry about that.”

<sup>21</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, Erica Grimm (2012) speaks of the importance of learning to see in the visual arts: “honing and expanding one’s perceptual capacities is a crucial part of what visual artists do. Aesthetics, especially from a maker’s vantage point, entails, as Baumgarten first envisioned it, a progressive sensitization and honouring of sense perceptions.” I ask my students to learn to see in a like manner in order for them to become more adept art makers.

We discussed the idea that everything in a piece of art is a choice and that the artist decides what to include and how to include it based on what will best communicate her message. Interestingly, we had had many discussions during class about this kind of thing as it related to interpersonal relations. This class struggled profoundly with communicating in a reasonable, responsible and clear manner. Their struggle to communicate and how to help them be more efficient and proficient communicators became what I was most interested in investigating and understanding. I wondered (and still wonder) if the students would be able to practice decision-making and communication skills within the world of theatre/drama and then apply those practiced and considered skills into their regular, or street, lives.

## **Writing/Creating**

The next step we took (more of a giant leap than a step, really) was to start the writing in earnest. I knew we would be battling time to get the show written and rehearsed in time for the show week and so we had to jump right into some scene creation. I was really hoping that the students would need very little input from me, that they would be able to write the show and that I would simply weave the pieces of writing together.

“Alright guys, we need a scene like the one from the movie where the main character is making a decision in a public setting.”

It took some false starts (okay, a lot of false starts) for me to understand that the students needed significant structure to be at all successful in scene creation. The first attempts at scene creation were neither as sophisticated, nor as well developed or insightful as I had hoped. This is a scene written by one of my students. It was written

before I understood how much structure my students required to write the kind of scene that we would ultimately include in our show. I have reproduced it as it was written by the student.

The Big Decision

*Place-Hannah's house*

*Phone-Bring bring*

Other-Hello Hannah this is the Semi Soccer Club

Hannah-(*thinking*) OMG!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Other-We have been watching you play and would like to join the gold 1 soccer team, we will give you one week to decide

Hannah-okay, okay, thank you so much I will get back to you on that

Hannah-(*sits down on a chair with the phone still in her hand thinking*) OMG!

I don't know what to do.

*Night time*

Hannah-(*in bed*)(*thinking*) I don't know what to do, that is a lot of soccer I don't know if I want to do that much????

Sound-clunk clunk

Hannah-what's that sound (*go to window and look out*)(*see rabbit*)

(*FALL out window!!!*)

*LAND IN WONDERLAND!!!!!!*

It dawned on me that I owned fifty percent of the problem, as I had not given the students the enabling constraints<sup>22</sup> that they required (that all artists require). I learned

<sup>22</sup> The term enabling constraints comes from complexity theory. Fels describes enabling constraints as parameters that simultaneously limit and permit interactions (2009). These constraints may describe relationships, environments and ways of functioning within the world of the performance.

slowly that I needed to break down the scene from the movie into pieces and vocabulary that the students would understand. Peter Brook suggests, "If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound. If what you want is for the play to be heard, then you must conjure its sound from it" (1968, p.38). I might draw a parallel to working with students; sometimes they will not make a sound either (or that sound may be hard to recognize as meaningful) and then that it is my work to encourage them into sound that is present and understandable.

My own perceived inexperience with writing a show, or perhaps more precisely, to be the main writer for a show, made me question myself, and my decisions, time and again. I kept hoping that I would be hit by a lightening bolt of inspiration and instantly know what to do, how to write the show. My experience writing has always been writing in collaboration with other artists and I never chose to be the one who had to determine the structure, readily giving credence to my perception of others as being more experienced and knowledgeable. Writing with students was something entirely different: they assumed I would actually do all the writing and I assumed they would. It would have been funny to see this unfold from an outside perspective but it was at times difficult to live through. I was forced to live in the *I don't know* and see what would crystallize,

become clear as what was important, what images/themes recurred during the process.<sup>23</sup>

I was facing my own critical demons, taking risks, being unsure, but this was not a time to share my own doubts and fears with the students. Normally I would take my uncertainty in how to write the play as an opportunity to model risk taking, living in the *I don't know*, and trusting my work/knowledge/experience. However, I decided that the students would simply be more unsettled than they already were, knowing that this play creation process was the first time I was responsible by myself to create the structure. I was performing the role of a more experienced writer because I felt that was what my students needed, but I felt like an imposter—I was unsure of where we were going and what exactly we were doing but it was my job to lead them regardless. Peter Brook (1968) suggests that this is the same for a director—that directors learn the way as they go also.

I was floundering and felt scared. Being scared made me stop and think instead of just ploughing through. I realized that there was already a structure that I could follow; I could use the flow of scenes from the film, that the screenwriter had provided me a structure. It was perhaps a cop out of sorts. It was also exactly the support I needed to be able to communicate clearly for the students what work needed to be done and how

<sup>23</sup> The *I don't know* could be associated with the liminal, interstitial space, or in terms of performative inquiry the “edge of chaos”. In this case however, it is slightly different, as it is a stance that I am taking with my students within this emergent liminal world of Wonderland and to engage with them in our explorations. Within that edge, that marginal space of ‘not knowing’, I ask myself and my students *what if?* –it is a place with potential for deep teaching and learning.

to include it in the show. I do continue to feel that I should have figured out a structure for myself, however I also recognize that we were working on an adaptation and that fact allows for (even perhaps encourages) borrowed structures. I am slowly learning to take moments of heightened emotion as markers, as proverbial road signs.

The first scenes I asked the students to write were the opening scenes of the play—the scenes that would set up the world of the play that exists above ground, not within Wonderland.

“So, what are the important elements in these scenes?”

“What do you mean?”

“I like it that Alice isn’t wearing a corset and stockings and that that bugs her mom.”

“Can we do a scene where Alice sings?”

Eventually I supplied the key elements<sup>24</sup> to be included in the scenes as the enabling constraints<sup>25</sup>, the information to help them write coherent, interesting scenes. The important elements for the introductory scenes were: a) that there was a life altering decision that had to be made, b) that the decision was presented in a public forum, c) that the character had to know that there was a certain option that was the socially expected answer and, d) that the character had to escape from the decision.

<sup>24</sup> Although my students felt at times that the structures I was imposing on them for the scenes made it more difficult to write, I believed that they would in fact facilitate the work. Dorothy Heathcote speaks of the value in having a form with which to work (and then also to choose to work outside of it, or through its destruction) “There is also the confidence of making the form work for you, revealing how those rules, which seem so limiting to the inept player, help to release the brilliant player. When a class can take liberties out of knowledge rather than out of ignorance, we can rejoice.” (1984a, p.95)

<sup>25</sup> Enabling constraints is a term from complexity theory in education. See Fels, 2009.

I had decided prior to writing with the students that we would have a number of roles that would be seen as 'leads' in hopes of engaging the largest number of students possible with significant roles. In our show, which we titled *Curious?*, we had five students in the role of 'Alice'. It was also important to me that the students play characters who were similar in age to themselves, so that they could portray those characters with some semblance of experience and understanding.

Trying to engage the students in the decision-making as much as possible, I asked them to brainstorm with me some possibilities for occasions that would create the kind of situation that would be conducive to our purpose. We came up with a list that I wrote up on the white board and then, in a very democratic way, the students voted on their favourite scene ideas. The five scenes were: 1) choosing to live with mom or dad, 2) choosing to go to hockey school or ballet school, 3) choosing between going to high school with friends or take an opportunity to go to a prestigious private school, 4) deciding whether or not to intervene in a moment of bullying, and 5) deciding whether or not to submit to a medical procedure in order to help a sibling. Next, I asked my students to get into five groups to improvise one of the scenes from the list.

"You have fifteen minutes to come up with a scene to present. Please make sure that you include all the important elements."

The scenes were rough; the characters too close to life but there were some gems that appeared because we were working in this way. The students allowed themselves to do and say things that they would not have, had they had more time to prepare the scenes over a longer period of time. Each scene was improvised and then presented five or six times by five or six different groupings of students, each time starting from scratch, before we would move on to something else. This multiple

attempts approach created myriad opportunities for each student to try representing the issues, characters and scenes from a variety of perspectives. The draft nature of these scenes created space for happy accidents.

One of my favourite moments (and a lynch pin for the set up of the main character Ally) was one of these happy accidents. The group of students had created a scene in which the character called Ally had to decide to live with either her father or her mother. The parents had thrown a party (creating a large audience for the decision) during which Ally would be presented with the situation and then have to make her choice. The mother character in the scene was speaking to the Alice character and said “we express our feelings through parties”. This was not what the actor had planned on saying, but it was a phrase that rang true, and funny, and play-able. I laughed out loud at the moment and recognized it was an important line to keep in the show. The scene in the final version of the play was based on this idea.

Interestingly, we worked on one of the introductory scenes time and again and yet each time it would fall flat—there was no truth to it. The scene about submitting to a medical procedure to the benefit of a sibling was difficult to grasp and the students had no real life experience on which to base this scene and they had difficulty imagining what this might look like. After battling with the scene for weeks, I decided begrudgingly to try something else in its stead. I was reluctant to give up on the scene since the students had voted on it, worked on it and seemed committed to it. However, it was clearly not

working for us.<sup>26</sup> The students were relieved when we decided to switch it out and try something else; they seemed however, ever untrusting, not sure that we would be able to come up with a worthwhile scene with which to replace it.

At the time in class, we were often engaged in work around social media and what was and was not appropriate, what would put the students at risk, what was hurtful and destructive as well as what was positive and appealing about these forms of communication. I decided to try a scene that would have a virtual audience (to meet the criterion of the decision being made in public) and use Facebook-like posts and responses for the decision scene. The class easily came up with a scenario that could play itself out on-line and the scene was written/created in a matter of minutes (and in fact in the manner I had hoped all the scenes would be written). The students each wrote a one-line reaction to the situation and then we chose the lines that were most fun to say/play. It was in deciding to let go of a scene that the students had chosen that a brilliant scene, one which truly reflected the student experience, was created. The students were elated that the scene was created so easily and felt true ownership of it (and in fact congratulated themselves heartily for their accomplishment).

I doggedly held on to the idea that the students would write the scenes and that I would simply have to figure out the transitions (weave the scenes together) and smooth out any wrinkles, until Spring Break (which was mid-March). At that point, I understood that I would have to write the show based on what I had seen them improvise and

<sup>26</sup> Snowber suggests that "the artwork often has a life of its own, and the artist's task is to listen to where it is going." (2009a, p.2)

present instead of having them do the actual writing. I was saddened that the show would not be ‘theirs’ in the way that I had imagined. My idea from the outset was that the students would feel that this show was theirs from beginning to end. I was afraid that it would not work that way once I put the words on paper. My students however, had been asking me to step in and do the writing for well over a month. They did not believe that they would be able to write a show with which they would be happy—they had no experience being entrusted with such a task. This simply added to my dismay at having to author the piece but I recognized that there was no other choice given the time constraints and the pace at which things were progressing.

I spent hours over the break considering the structure of the film, looking at the sparse notes I had taken during the presentations, and writing the show with what I had taken away from the improvised scenes. During the process of writing, I noticed my tendency to imagine the scenes set in a school. As grade seven students, my charges were preoccupied with thoughts of high school and how it would be the same as and different from elementary school and as their teacher, I believed it was my responsibility to try to help with that transition. It became obvious to me that what was ‘Wonderland’ in the film should be a high school in our production. In keeping with my desire that the students play characters close to them in age, the characters who inhabited W.L. High primarily needed to be older students, not staff.

By the time we were back at school I had a draft of probably three-quarters of the show. There were scenes I had added which we had not improvised and so I left them unwritten until we had had the chance to try, as well as there being scenes that I was simply not able to write until we had made some more decisions about what was happening for the characters. We read the incomplete draft out loud in class and I asked

the students to listen for word choice that did not sound/feel right, for character traits that were lost over the course of the piece, for flow and for any missing elements that they believed were important. The students shared copies of the script and I encouraged them to write notes into them, to highlight, to scribble—anything that would help them add to the script and to edit it.

I realize that this was a very difficult task for my students. I had written this piece and they, for the most part, liked and respected me; it seemed polished (they received the script, photocopied from their teacher) and they were accustomed to taking what was given to them without asking questions or being asked to think critically about the material. It was like pulling teeth at first to have them speak about the script and do some editing work. Eventually, after much support and many reassurances, they were able to make suggestions and ask questions which demonstrated insight. The students were quick to point out that often their ideas fell on deaf ears and they expressed surprise at how willing I was to listen to their suggestions and incorporate their ideas into the script to improve the piece. I was desperate to have them involved in all aspects of the show and so to have them do some editing was wonderful. Editing is also a fantastic way to think about the story in another way, from yet another perspective.

As with every subject and material, some students were more adept at improvising, writing and/or editing. I had a number of students who were able to make many additions and some who said only that the script was 'great'. But all the students seemed concerned that there were still some scenes that I had not written. As we worked on editing and as I was planning what auditions were to look like, I tried to finish those scenes. Eventually I enlisted some of the more comfortable writers to help fill out the scenes. I gave these students very clear constraints and they wrote wonderfully well

together. The scenes still needed work but at least I was not writing from scratch, and at least some of the students were in fact writing.

## **Auditions**

I was very worried about the audition process; what should it look like, what was the most 'fair' way to do them, what should I ask of them, what other adults should participate, and how to consider their desires? There were more students wanting lead roles than there were lead roles.

It was important to me to consider which students would benefit from having specific roles. I saw the production as a way to offer some otherwise unavailable opportunities for growth and learning to some of the students who needed it the most.

"She's totally the Mad Hatter."

"But she can't be."

"Of course she can."

"The Mad Hatter is Johnny Depp. He's a he."

In the writing of the piece, I tried to leave the characters' genders unspecified but my students found it difficult to buy into that notion. The characters that were male in the film were male in their minds despite my will.

"She's going to be one of the 'Alices'."

"Why?"

"Cause she's blonde."

"That's not how I cast."

As part of the audition process, I asked the students to create a list of the characters they most wanted to play in order of preference. Very few students included characters of gender not their own.

In preparation for the auditions, we decided as a group what roles were large enough or popular enough to warrant being auditioned for and which roles we could assign as we rehearsed. We had read the script and the students were familiar with the roles and had clear thoughts about which ones they wanted to play. For the audition, I asked the students to prepare a small piece of text to perform. They were welcome to choose an excerpt from our script or use something that they had already worked up, or lyrics from a song—it really was not important to me what they chose, as long as they chose something, and prepared it.

The auditions were held over two days to make sure that any student interested would be able to participate without running into scheduling conflicts. In an effort to put them at ease the students came into the studio in groups of four or five of their choosing. I asked each student to perform her piece and then to do it again incorporating some suggestion from the auditioners.

### The Audition

Auditioning is hard.  
I hate the audition.  
I hate being seen,  
Being watched with a critical eye.  
Seen for who I am and who I am not.  
As I watch you audition  
I feel your breath catch in your chest  
and your heart pushing against your ribs

I understand the fright and the flight.  
I know the pleasure at an audition well done  
And the anguish of one gone awry.  
*And* (because I learned a long time ago that *and* is better than *but*—it adds to, instead of taking away from)  
You need to know that I want you to succeed.  
I want to see you do your best.  
I will say thank you when you're done  
And I will mean it.  
Thank you for showing, for sharing, for breathing, for trying, for risking.

### The Reminder

We are kind to each other  
(Has to be said out loud and repeated often).  
We will applaud each other's work  
(to be sure that we are appreciated and practice appreciation).  
We won't cut each other down  
(we have too much practice at that already).  
We will remember that it takes guts just to walk in the door.  
We will risk and support risk  
We will be present and encourage presence.  
We will find a way to be here together  
Where we don't know  
And we can open to chance.

I invited (in fact, begged) a colleague to sit in on the auditions with me in order to avoid having either students or parents suggest that I was casting based on some kind of favouritism rather than on 'merit'. This colleague was well known and respected in the school community, had never taught this group of students (so would have been seen as impartial) and had a theatre background. Other teachers in the past had had a fair bit of

unhappy parental noise about the auditions and later the casting decisions and so I very much wanted to buffer myself if at all possible.

There were some lovely surprises during the auditions: one girl prepared a Shakespeare monologue and performed it with grace, another worked up a piece from Jane Austen and showed a mature understanding of the character, and one girl with considerable learning challenges performed with unparalleled commitment. One of the girls walked into the audition and was truly present in the room for the first time in the whole year. She was available and aware of herself in a way I had yet to see from her—she had finally arrived (and what a place and time to arrive!). To watch these individuals walk into the room, so nervous despite their preparation (and mine), and perform with such ability was a remarkable experience. I was seeing flowers bloom in front of my eyes, it was what I longed for every day as a teacher.

There were also some disappointments, and I was upset by them. I wanted my students to show me their best, to wow me. Unfortunately there were students who did not prepare themselves at all, students who did not even show up for the auditions but who claimed to want large roles, students who performed their way through the day all day, every day, but not when it counted. We had structured generosity into the auditions: the students knew exactly what to expect, we encouraged them through the audition, we asked them to let go of trying to memorize text and communicate content instead. I was disappointed with myself that I was unable to support every child into a successful audition experience. I did keep in mind what I had seen them do, in terms of performance, in class but felt also that there had to be some validity and some reason to have held the auditions. I also wanted to honour the students who put in the work in preparing for the audition.

“Kevin’s mother phoned to say that he did not have an opportunity to audition.”

“That’s interesting.”

“He should be allowed that chance.”

“Yes, and he already has been. However, I will arrange something else with him anyway.”

(I love this kind of conversation with administration.)

Kevin arrived two minutes before class started. He wanted to audition (the day after everyone else had) but had not made any kind of arrangement with me when he could not attend either of the two scheduled audition times. We had decided that he could audition in the morning before school started so that I would have time to finish casting and allow everyone’s nerves to settle. Kevin was one of those students who was sure of what he wanted, and in this case he wanted a big role. He had told me previously that he had plans for acting as a career and that that was why he came to this program. I asked the other teacher who had sat in on other auditions to join me, and she very graciously did, although it was hugely inconvenient. Kevin was rushed and nervous; he was having trouble remembering the text he had memorized and was embarrassed that he was coping as poorly as he was. I asked him to try delivering the text (or the content of the text because I was not really worried about the word for word memorization of a text) in a different way and he struggled with the direction. At the end of the audition, Kevin seemed to feel disappointed and angry with himself and I was underwhelmed and surprised by his lack of preparation and an unfortunately unimpressive performance.

Looking at my class list, the students’ requests and the character list I came to the conclusion that I needed to discuss some of the casting with a couple of the students. I had these conversations despite having decided that casting was the one aspect of the show from which I thought it would be best to exclude the students. I believed that they would have had an even more difficult time than I had being

reasonable (to avoid the word objective, as this kind of process is not objective at all). However there was one situation in which I thought it better to involve the students in the decision: there was a fairly small role for a secretary and there were two students who were desperate to play it. I pulled the two aside and asked them what they wanted more; to share the role between them (we would add a couple of lines to beef them up a little) or to keep it intact and have just one of them play the secretary. They took some time to discuss the issue and came to me together with their decision, which was to share the role and so could I please write a little more for them.

I loved this interaction (between the two students but also between the students and myself)—these two students were not the most present in class, not students who shared their thoughts and feelings much, but they really took the time to discuss my proposal, and to decide that it was more important that they both got what they wanted than that one get a larger role. There were moments like this one, when I thought my students might be learning about how to function as a community.<sup>27</sup> It also tickled me that one of the students in question was a physically imposing young man—he was easily half a foot taller than I am and was street wise beyond his years. What a lovely juxtaposition: this boy had had difficulty in the past working through conflict verbally, but in this situation was able to express his thoughts and desires clearly and effectively. This young man was sufficiently committed to the role to compromise for it.

<sup>27</sup> “To educate for the mode of associated living that is called community, teachers must think about what is involved in inventing the kinds of situations where individuals come together in such a way that each one feels a responsibility for naming the humane and the desirable and moving together to attain them.” (Greene, 2000, p.274)

A second casting decision that impacted significantly on the script was that I decided to increase the number of 'Tweedles'. In the movie and so in the script originally, there are two but working the numbers and the requests, it only made sense that I make them triplets instead of twins. I was quite happy to change that as I prefer threes on stage, but the students again seemed surprised by my willingness to make the script work for us, not to be too tied to the words on the page. The young women who played the triplets were physically dissimilar and were quite worried at first that the audience would question the authenticity of their being triplets. So we discussed and practiced techniques that would help the audience buy in and help the roles be fun for them to play.

It was interesting to me that these processes that would seem to be distinct (casting and writing), were clearly not distinct in practice. It was important to me that I try to keep everything as open as possible to change as suggested, played out, hinted at, by the students. And so the script remained somewhat un-fixed throughout most of the process. It was trying at times for me as well as for the students but worth the trouble as far as I was concerned.

Casting the show was a challenge (so many students, so many hopes, so hard to choose) but I was fortunate enough to be able to talk it out with my colleague. My heart broke for the students to whom I was not able to give the roles they wanted and it was a frustrating puzzle fitting the others into roles they desired and to which I believed they were suited. I wrestled with making the decisions and placing the students in their roles and I was keenly aware of the consequences of my choices. What I found so distressing was that I felt this group was desperately in need of being valued and that I was really letting some of them down by having them in the smaller roles. Picking the characters

the students would play touched on all of my own insecurities as an actor and as a person and in a lot of ways went against my belief that students should be valued for what they can contribute, not faulted for what they cannot. Despite having created as many large roles as possible, I felt I was defaulting on some of them, as they had been defaulted on so many times before.

I cast the show as a teacher, not just as a director.<sup>28</sup> It would have been far easier to do had I been willing to disregard the potential for growth and greater learning that I saw as part of the process of the show. I was aware that this was more than a show in an elementary school—this was the culminating piece for a group of students who saw themselves as being disadvantaged and who were not functioning at all well socially. I had dual goals in mind: a solid production and the well being of my students. This more than doubled the difficulty because I was not willing to have a production that was not well done, the artist in me would not allow that, and I was not willing to sacrifice the potential for change in my students.

Once I had sorted the students into the roles it was time to share my thoughts with them. They were chomping at the bit to know and it did not feel honourable to make them wait but at the same time I was afraid how the students and their parents would react to the information. And so I prepped the students. I am sure they were sick of my

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Heathcote speaks of the dual roles of teacher and theatre artist: “I am primarily in the teaching business, not the play-making business, even when I am involved in making plays. I am engaged first of all in helping children to think, talk, relate to one another, to communicate.” (1984a, p.92) This primacy of the teacher role is what became clear to me also as I cast the show.

pussyfooting around (there were a good number of eye rolls as I started into my mini speech about how to handle the news) but they were mostly good-natured about it anyway. They were excellent in front of me about the roles they were assigned and handled the elation and the disappointment surprisingly well.

Despite my heartache at casting, for the most part it was fairly clear who should have which role, especially the largest roles. The mid-size roles were the hardest to decide (the largest number of students performed in this kind of mid-range in the auditions so I was left to make the decisions on my own) and the smallest roles we assigned during rehearsals. For the five Alices (the lead roles) I chose three girls and two boys only one of whom had had a large role in a previous production. I think the youth were somewhat surprised by some of my choices but not one of them questioned my motivation, nor my casting decisions (I did, but they would not have minded that). I mostly cast these roles by the students' work during the auditions—they had done their homework and had performed really well.

Within the Alices, I was most excited about the girl who would play Ally.

“Brit’s what?”

“She’s playing one of the leads.”

“The leads?”

“Yes.”

“I have goose bumps. You don’t understand. I’ve worked with her since grade two. She wouldn’t go into the classroom, I spent hours with her in the hall every day, coaxing her in. You don’t understand. She wouldn’t speak, she wouldn’t participate, even last year.”

The SEA (Special Education Assistant) was right, I did not understand. I experienced a super capable, engaged student: a child who was ready and wanting to

take on new challenges. I knew this child had a designation (as highly anxious) but I had never observed any displays of anxiety from her.

“I know that sometimes you feel overwhelmed by things in the class and outside of it. Let me know as soon as you start having those feelings and we’ll figure out what to do that will be best for you. Do you think you’re able? If not, let’s figure out some other system.”

This was a child who, throughout the play and after, would bring in items that had some connection to the work we were doing, she was always on hand, ready to do what needed to be done; be it writing, or rehearsing, or helping someone else with lines, or taking notes of the props/costumes we needed. She was the example to follow. She worked on her part at home, not just at rehearsal. She was a professional.

I was also so pleased to be able to cast Mallory as the Red Queen. I worked with this girl who, at twelve years old, was easily six feet tall, beautiful and thoughtful and kind but she was also broken by years of feeling unsuccessful. She struggled with dyslexia and had almost never felt comfortable with her strengths because she was overwhelmingly defined (by herself as well as by others) by her deficits. We had read the script in class and she wanted to read the Red Queen role at that time and she did. She struggled through it, asked for help reading and did an incredible job of it. The others were surprisingly supportive of her and were patient while she stumbled over the words. It was also she who, in audition, was committed to her performance to such a degree that when she forgot the text, she improvised with the content. It was remarkable to see her work in those ways and be so very successful and rightly proud of her efforts and accomplishments.

“Would you be willing, interested in doing some of the choreography for the show?”

“Yes. What do you want?”

“I don’t really know. I’m not a dancer or a choreographer. We need two pieces for sure: the Tea Party and the battle scene at the end between the football and ultimate teams.”

“What music are you thinking?”

“I wasn’t thinking about music. I am no dancer and I really am lost here. We will need to have a couple of different pieces within the battle and then something really fun for the Tea Party.”

“I have this song...”

I asked her to choreograph the dance pieces as she was an accomplished dancer and she came to every rehearsal with energy and commitment. She was a little taken aback when I asked her and, at the same time, was also thrilled to accept the challenge. She came in to rehearsal two days later unable to stop talking about the music and the moves she had already decided on. She asked for help extending the choreography and so garnered help from some of the others with substantial dance training. She taught the whole class the dances; a girl who had been constantly made to feel inadequate and less valued than others because she struggled enormously with reading and writing was finally seeing herself as productive, competent and successful.

“Thank you for letting Mallory do the dances. I can’t tell you what an impact it’s had on her.”

“She’s fantastic and she really wanted to.”

“She’s up late at night and talks to us all the time about the show, the dances, her role, the rehearsals. She’s a whole different kid.”

(It’s nice when parents see that what you’re doing makes a difference.)

It was really my hope that my students would see themselves as capable and have the experience, through building and performing a role, which would allow them to practice competency. I assigned the roles, crossed my fingers, and started the rehearsals.

## Rehearsal

“Thank you for sending me the script.”

“Of course. I really wanted another pair of adult eyes to see it before the performances.”

I had been remiss, I felt I should have sent the draft to the administration at the school well before we started rehearsals but the script was ever-changing and slower and more difficult to write than I had anticipated.

“I only read the first quarter of it.”

“Oh.”

She was busy. I understood that but it made me a little nervous that she had only read the first few scenes. They set up the ‘real world’ and most of the play was set in the altered world of Wonderland.

“I found it difficult to understand.”

She had theatre training, was a performer. How could she not understand? I did come to realize that the show was written within an environment and that without having participated in the creation and groundwork that it could be difficult to place yourself within the world of the play. I had, however, expected more as she was a performer herself and should therefore be familiar with scripts and what they might look like. Of course, looking back at it, I can see that because I included virtually no stage directions nor description as introduction to the scenes, the script on the page could be very challenging to read. It was on purpose though; I had very consciously decided not to include these descriptions and prescriptions.

Despite our best efforts, the script was still incomplete (I was not at all sure how to end the show, what the battle would look like and how the story in Wonderland would

be resolved) when we began rehearsals. This was a source of great concern and stress to the student actors. I knew I was pushing them and that they were uncomfortable but I also knew that we needed to keep moving in our work and that the end of the script might be easier to complete while working, that some of the action would be clearer once the show was on its feet. I was actually far less concerned about the fact that the script was incomplete than by the fact that I was not at all sure how the rehearsals would go and what the work the students would do would look like. I had been somewhat disappointed by the work done and considered complete on classroom assignments but tried to remain hopeful about their work ethic for rehearsal and performance. These were after all students who for the most part had been in the Fine Arts program for a number of years and that, in and of itself, should be cause for hopefulness.

The show was scheduled for performance for the first week of May leaving us approximately a month and a half for rehearsals. I had given the students a copy of the (still change-able) script and asked them to paste it into a book leaving space to take notes about their blocking, gestures, intentions, inflections and thoughts throughout the rehearsal process. (I had a hard time not crying/laughing when some of the students didn't quite manage to paste in their scripts in the right order and had to peel the pages off to try again.) This was the lion's share of the bookwork we would do for this piece and so it was important to me that they have at least this little piece of work to do on paper.

To help the student actors have business to do on stage and to help them imagine their characters more completely, I started the rehearsals with a guided image river that walked them (as their characters) through a day and that had them discover physical images and gestures that came from what they imagined about a day in the life. Once again, the students were not really expecting the gestures that they came up with

and thought I was out of my mind asking them to look up, see a gargoyle and then become it. They could not imagine how or why they would ever incorporate such an extreme body position into a show and yet they followed me through the visualization and even acquiesced when I asked them to use the gestures in rehearsal. I wanted the students to move away from believing everything they did on stage had to be realistic and to see that there were interesting possibilities in trying new techniques. It took a lot of coaxing on my part but to give them credit where credit was due, they followed me and tried to do what I asked.

The large majority of rehearsals took place during school hours and so I had to have work for the students who were not part of the scene we were working on and I had to make sure that the students with the largest roles would be able to complete the work assigned. I had come up with some projects that they could mostly work through on their own or with their friends but these were not my shining moments as a grade seven teacher. However, the work we were doing on stage (and in the halls and wherever else I could have students work on scenes) was hugely important and they were learning a lot from it. I felt torn all the time and yet had committed to the show and was still responsible for all my other 'teaching' responsibilities. It was a ridiculous juggling act with balls falling on the floor only to be picked back up again and thrown into the air once more.

"What should I do now?"

"I don't know."

"No, I mean what do you want me to do on the stage."

"Yes, I know that's what you were asking but I don't want you to do anything specific on the stage. I want you to do what your character would do in this moment in her life."

(They really hate it when I say stuff like that. They don't like it when I won't give them straight answers. They don't like it when I won't show them the gesture to do, the way to move, the place to be on the stage. They don't like having to sift through the possibilities and try one out.)

I wanted to make sure that the student performers would not get stuck playing out stage directions that I had written. They were already working very hard in an unfamiliar field. They had some experience learning lines and reading scripts, taking on characters that were built for young actors, and imitating the director, but deciding how to portray a character without something to emulate was already pushing them. I did not want them to rely on words I had written in italics into the script. I wanted them to do the work, to understand, see and do what needed to be done to set the scenes up for themselves. I wanted them to discover the stage business that made sense for their characters.

The students had a very hard time understanding that I truly wanted them to take the reins and make the decisions about what should be done on stage. They were desperate for what was familiar to them but I would not let them depend on me in such a manner. There were many times when it would have been so much easier for me to tell them what to do, to make the decision but I felt that would not have been honourable. The integrity of the experience and authorship was in the exploration and creativity of and by the students.

## **Transitions**

A transition in a play is the time during which the scene changes. *Curious?* was full of transitions that required us not only to change the physical scene (set pieces, etc) but also to change the tone and atmosphere as we moved from situation to situation.

These transitions were challenging for us and had to be negotiated and renegotiated many times over. Often transitions make or break a show. When you lose your audience in transitions, it is virtually impossible to get them back. I should maybe have tried to craft the show in a way that avoided transitions as much as possible but I did not. It was important to me not to simply side step the difficult aspects of plays (and life<sup>29</sup>), therefore I committed us to working through the challenge of transitioning in full view of the audience. As a result, we had to work very hard on creating transitions that added to the show instead of being purely functional. This way of working was new for the students: they were accustomed to a blackout during transitions and so found it challenging to see the transitions as integral to the show.

“Who is responsible for moving that block?”

“I think it was Kyle.”

“Kyle?”

“No, it’s not me. I asked Will to do it instead.”

“But Will is already moving another block.”

“All hands on deck! Let’s move through this transition again. Please write this into your scripts.”

The show was an ensemble piece and only worked when the students worked as an ensemble and problem solved as an ensemble which was exceedingly challenging for this particular group. I felt like we blocked and practiced the transitions a million times and each time it was as if it was the first time we blocked it. It was maddening. And not

<sup>29</sup> Snowber suggests "part of attending and listening to our bodies is coming to accept our in-between states, our imperfections, even our discomfort with what is there." (2009b, p.31) If we are able to listen to and lean into what happens in the in-between states (our transitions) there is the possibility of learning there.

just for me, a number of the students were able to see what I was trying to do and saw the value in the work during the transitions. We had to create an environment that valued all aspects of performance. Many found it difficult to understand that it was just as important to move the blocks that constituted the set as it was to memorize and perform their lines. I had to stretch their concept about performance and production value. I was hopeful that my students would be able to make the connection between valuing transitions in our show to valuing transitions in their lives. Additionally, learning to value transitions might enable my students to perform them with greater grace in the show as well as in life.

“Will, what’s going on? It feels like you’ve been withdrawing from life at school. I’d really like you to pick up this role; I’d like to have you engage again.”

“I don’t want the role. It’s too much.”

“Can I ask why not?”

“I’m just feeling a little overwhelmed.”

“By what?”

“My mom and I are fighting a lot these days. And I don’t feel good about it.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Have you told your mom that it’s hurting you to fight with her?”

“No.”

“It’s a thought, you know.”

(Another one of those tricky balls I was juggling. I couldn’t ask him to do more, he already felt stretched and yet I desperately wanted him to buy in, to reap the rewards available to him as part of the show. It made a difference to him that I asked what was going on and if I could help as he then started committing to the work in which he was already engaged.)

## Scheduling

I had scheduled the performance dates for *Curious?* in the fall, in concert with the other Fine Arts teachers. We had been careful to spread out the performances/presentations so that our students would face the least conflict and so that we could use the rehearsal spaces to our best advantages. Of course, at some point later in the year, the major dance festival dates were changed (pushed later into the year to accommodate Spring Break) but no discussion about scheduling happened after that. As we approached the new festival dates (and the ramped up rehearsal schedule for our drama production) I was faced with the decision to either push ahead and honour the performance dates we had set in the fall, or to change the dates and have potential for other scheduling conflicts but at least have more time for rehearsal. I also had to schedule around an international professional conference at which I was presenting in Cuba (where I was presenting a workshop on integrating the art into the classroom, practicing what I preached and preaching what I practiced). I was the White Rabbit in conflict with Time and Time definitely had the advantage.

As a teacher I am so often pressed for time, unable to squeeze in enough time for the various curriculum subjects (not to mention the lived curriculum that insinuates itself into every moment, every day). This dilemma over scheduling was another instance where there simply was not enough time to accomplish what needed to be accomplished but I was unwilling to let the play and performance remain only partially completed. With other projects I am willing to haggle for time, and there is very rarely an instance when the work absolutely needs to be presentable for a specific date. More often than not, the deadlines that I set out are malleable, I have room to change and accommodate, but with a public performance, I did not have that flexibility.

I consulted with anyone and everyone about what to do. I felt trapped in a no-win situation. It felt like a cop-out to change the dates (important to honour the commitment and there are always unforeseen consequences) and yet changing the dates was the best choice in terms of usable space, time to rehearse and creating the best possible performance. It did mean however, that the students would be left to rehearse with a TOC (Teacher-On-Call) for the week prior to show week. I had to do what I could and then leave the students and the show in the hands of someone else, who did not know how I worked, nor would she be familiar with the show. In the end I decided to push back the show by two weeks and have someone else run show rehearsals while I was in Cuba 'building bridges through the arts'.<sup>30</sup> I had to double cast one role as one of the students was not able to perform both days due to a prior commitment but all things considered, it was a fairly small price to pay to better honour all the work we had done and would do on our show.

Before leaving for Cuba I felt that I had the show in a pretty good place and that what would be most helpful in the week I would be gone would be to have the TOC run the show from beginning to end as many times as possible; the scenes themselves for the most part were mostly coming along nicely and the transitions were slow and could use the repetition that runs provide. The teacher who replaced me was very familiar with this group of students and had some theatre experience herself. She had worked with this group many times for over three years. We met to discuss what could be done while

<sup>30</sup> The conference was designed as a means of sharing arts practices from our classroom with colleagues teaching in Cuba. We were building bridges between the countries, between the teachers, between subject matter and the arts.

I was away and she even sat in on a rehearsal before I left so that she had an idea about how I was handling them. I was unhappy leaving the students and the production but was also unwilling to give up on my professional development opportunity in Cuba.

I returned to work the Monday before the Wednesday performances. I arrived at school early to give myself time to deal with the issues I knew would have surfaced during the week of my absence. This was a group that I just barely managed to stay on top of while I was in the room but as soon as I stepped out, things would begin to unravel. Any time I was away (even for just a morning or an afternoon) I would have fall-out to deal with and most often it involved the parents as well as the youth. I knew I would have to address the social issues that would have arisen before being able to properly focus on the show and what would need to be done in order to be prepared for performance.

Although I wanted to believe that because my students had work to do and a performance to focus on and so would not make unfortunate choices, I was anxious about how their week of rehearsals without me had functioned. I wanted to trust them, I wanted them to succeed and had told them so before leaving. I came to understand that I could trust them when we were working on our play but that outside of that particular world, their interactions and decision making skills were difficult for them to manage.

“So I started by writing it all down for you but figured that really it would make more sense to talk to you about it.”

(Oh no, not what I was hoping for.)

“Kyle and Anthony had a fight during rehearsal. I was working on a scene with some other kids and the two of them had an argument about what each of them was supposed to be doing. And then it deteriorated and they ended up shoving each other. I filled the principal in on what happened and Kyle’s mom called to say that Anthony always does this and that Kyle now has no role in the show and so will not be performing in it.”

(What? You've got to be kidding me. This is insanity. And this is just one issue on the list of things that 'broke' while I was gone.)

"Can you tell me about what happened last week?"

"I was supposed to be the guy who threw garbage on Will's head in the show but Anthony just took over."

"Were you there, did you get up when that scene was being rehearsed?"

"Well no, but I was supposed to do it."

(Right, of course.)

"None of it would have happened if you were there. You wouldn't have let it."

(I was happy to know that my students knew that I wouldn't tolerate that kind of behavioural garbage but I still had to deal with the emotional fallout<sup>31</sup> as well as the practical implications for the show.)

We ran the show through that Monday. I was a wreck; it looked like we had rehearsed once or twice, as though we had put in just a few haphazard hours of work into this piece. I know that this kind of rehearsal (one that makes you wonder why you are doing this at all) occurs at least once during any process, but to be facing that rehearsal two days before performance, with a group of student actors who were often unable to see past their own desires, was frightening. I walked into the staffroom at recess to air some of my frustration: I could not contain my emotions; I needed to release them and I did not want to have my students experience that.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to walk out for a moment."

"Why?"

"I can't communicate reasonably right now and need to step out."

<sup>31</sup> The living curriculum, or those issues and ideas that arise from working with a group of individuals, can be most challenging to address. I own that work with my students though, and believe it to be the most difficult to engage with and the most rewarding to have done.

(I walked out of the rehearsal space, took some breaths, worked on phrasing and then headed back in.)

The next run through was much improved and I started to see the show we had been rehearsing. That did not mean that I was at all certain about what the performances would be, but I had done everything I could do and I had to support them as much as I could and then to let it be what it would be. Norris suggests that when working on a production, “as with any working team, one can expect moments of tension and times of elation” (2009, p. 25). We certainly did, and often these moments of tension and elation came hard and fast, one on top of the other.

“This is your show. I have done what I can and now it’s up to you to make it work, to give it away, to make it play. I know you can. Everyone wants to see you do your best work.”

## **Performances**

We had five performances over three days. Tuesday was our dress rehearsal then Wednesday and Thursday we had afternoon and evening performances. The students were nervous and excited (as was I, but perhaps my excitement was more tainted with trepidation than was theirs). I had decided not to call the show (work behind scenes during the show) and so I sat in the audience for each performance. It was so hard to sit there and watch the students do what was theirs to do, without any ability to help them make it the show they wanted it to be. At the same time, I had asked them to give the show away and they did and I had to do the same. I had to trust in the work that we had done and in the students’ desire to perform the show they wanted to perform.

In demonstrating my trust in them and their work, I was living what I believed to be perhaps the most important skill I want students to learn with me. This trust is not

always simple to cultivate and there were many times during which I was not sure I would manage to cultivate it yet I was committed to having it flourish in/for/with this group.

I had several people comment that they were amazed that I sat in the audience and really trusted the students to do their work. That I felt I could and should (and in fact did) sit in the audience and relinquish any control I might be able to exert on the performance once it started was out of the ordinary. It did not occur to me to sit backstage, to problem solve for the student actors during the show. This was their work and it would be what it would be. I had faith that they would perform and perform they did. Of course there were moments during which I held my breath, when I was worried that they wouldn't be able to solve the problems that happen during performance, but it really was not up to me at that point to interfere. I was committed to having my students own their learning and this was a way to show them, to have them experience that unadulterated ownership, not just have it be lip service.

The performances were perfect: flawed and different each time, but the students owned this work in a way I had never seen them own anything before. They were engaged and elated, they continued to make choices and try different things within the world and work of the show. I was so pleased for them that they pulled it off and pulled it off brilliantly.

“That was the best show I've seen kids do here.”

“Wow, the kids really did a good job.”

“The kids did all the work?”

“How did you manage to get these kids to create this?”

“They did it. They really did it.”

I got to see these individuals who had so much difficulty interacting with each other pull together to create something collectively. I felt honoured and I was proud of what we were able to accomplish. I was also worried that this would be it, that what they learned and took away from this process would be limited to these performances and that they would not see themselves differently ever after, which was what I wanted for them. I wondered (and continue to wonder) if they were changed by the process, what they learned, and what they accomplished together and individually.

Some perform themselves  
Unable to see the script, to let go of it  
To wish it well on its adventure.

Some hold the script and wish they could let go  
Desperate to do something new but held back.  
Open at least to the possibility of change  
Taking first steps to the letting go  
Maybe learning how by watching others.

Some perform who they want to be  
Embrace the script  
Take what's of value  
And send it flying out the door  
To make their own paths,  
To perform the script that emerges,  
That is meaningful for them in the moment.

I didn't tell them what to do  
I didn't plan for every possible 'mistake'

I wouldn't do their work.  
I had faith, I had hope, I had trust  
I believed they could and would.  
I sat in the audience and watched.  
It was their show.  
Theirs to play,  
to understand,  
to share,  
to own,  
whatever that would look like.  
They did not know  
could not know  
or understand  
or live  
until they did.

So often he  
(that one student who dared)  
gave me that look  
The look that said  
"You are mad,  
Mad as a hatter."  
I could not have worked in any other way.  
I didn't know it wasn't normal.  
I didn't know I wasn't supposed to do it this way.

An invitation, not a summons.  
What if  
What if I've made a huge mistake?  
What if I can't hold this together?  
What if this is a terrible show?  
What if there is nothing to gain from it?

What if I ended up with this great project, this great show

But it was by accident and not design?  
Is it then still valuable?  
Did I do it or did it do itself?  
Did they learn what I wanted them to?  
Did I?  
Does it matter?  
They learned something, something valuable mostly, maybe.  
Maybe not.

## Post Mortem

After the run, I asked the students to gather their thoughts about the process as a whole.<sup>32</sup> We struck the set (cleaned up the performance space by removing set pieces and props) then headed outside with our scripts and notes about the show. It was a beautiful day and we sat in a circle and I asked them three questions to get the conversation started: what worked, what didn't work and what would you do differently? My students were getting used to the ways in which I worked and so understood that I really wanted them to talk to me honestly about the process and their feelings about it.

<sup>32</sup> The post mortem process is designed to encourage reflection on the work completed. I use it as a tool for learning about what worked and what did not so as to try to be more effective the next time. Dorothy Heathcote suggests that "reflection about work is one of the best ways I know to elicit trust, for I can stop work in order to show enthusiasm, to challenge, to demand more, and to show my own involvement as well as my non-interest in value judgements." (1984a, p.92) Fels and Belliveau (2008) consider the importance of reflection and debriefing also: "performative inquiry invites us to reflect on our responsibilities, our choices of action, the influences on us that led to these choices, and the consequences of these actions, as well as to consider what we, and those with whom we are working, might have done differently, and how we might now proceed" (2008, p.37)

“You didn’t tell us what to do. It was weird.”

“You didn’t say: ‘If this happens, then do this’, which is what usually happens. You told us that was our job. You expected us to deal with whatever happened during performance.”

“I think you’re lazy (*laughs*). You always made us make all the choices.”

“But there were some things we didn’t get to decide.”

“It was *our* show.”

It is a performance  
One that is played out  
In countless ways with  
Thousands of performers every day.  
It’s a listening to,  
An ignoring of.  
A bleak and barren landscape,  
A fertile and lush jungle.  
The players and the play  
Continuously rewriting each other  
Unsure of the direction.  
Needing support and understanding,  
Most often encountering  
Ignorance, judgment and condemnation  
From those on the periphery.

It is a performance  
And an inquiry.  
Looking for ways to improve,  
To touch,  
To communicate  
My most important message  
(which changes and shifts with time  
and place and person).

It is a performance.  
A show.  
We will show you what we learned.  
Will you understand?  
Are you ready to understand?  
We are and aren't.  
We are bold and brave  
And timid and unthinking.

It is a performance.  
I will prove to you that there is value.  
However backwards my route  
My words.  
The process brought us here,  
To this place of understanding (interstanding, outstanding,  
betweenstanding).  
The process allowed us to see,  
To hear  
To do and learn.  
The performance also allows us this  
But differently.  
There are few who comment on the process,  
Who dissect it  
Deem it a success or a failure.  
But many who have words  
To share,  
To launch,  
To impose  
About the actual factual performance.  
The curtain and lights  
Costumes and cues  
Performance.  
The do or die  
The 'but you should have seen the set last year'

Performance.

It is performance.

And they did perform.

They performed

And they learned

That they could perform

And that it wasn't up to me to fix any mistakes

That they would have to count on each other

And themselves,

That they'd have to be aware

Alive

Alight

Alright.

They performed a show

That they'd learned

And rehearsed.

They also performed themselves

In a new way

With new words

And challenges and successes.

They performed a show

Without safety wires attached to their harnesses

Except those they created themselves.

It was theirs to own

Theirs to blow up, give away, love, hate

Want for it to be something else.

It performed them.

They were changed

(even if the change is so far unremarked).

They were played by the words

The gestures  
The stories  
The discoveries  
The hard bits  
And the soft underbelly.  
They were performed  
And were profoundly altered.  
They were awash in new waters  
New ideas  
New ways of relating.  
They became painfully aware of  
Decisions and choice.

And me, how am I changed and which questions do I ask because of my  
experience? What choices am I making? What is it that my students have said? What is  
it that I've heard? Am I ready to learn from this?

## CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

### What is Performative Inquiry?

LORD ASCOT:	Charles, you have finally lost your senses.
A COLLEAGUE:	This venture is impossible.
CHARLES KINGSLEY:	For some. Gentlemen, the only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it is possible.
A COLLEAGUE:	That kind of thinking could ruin you.
CHARLES KINGSLEY:	I'm willing to take that chance.

(Burton, 2010)

We're falling down, falling down, falling down  
And I want you to notice  
To see what is falling with us  
Take a moment  
And feel  
And listen

This is what it's all about  
This is what performative inquiry is

We're performing 'falling down the rabbit hole'  
And we're wondering why on earth (or in a hole)  
A piano is falling with us.  
We are hoping to understand what we can learn

From noticing this piano  
From being struck (but not really struck)  
By this piano

We notice that the soundtrack has changed,  
The whistling has given way to a roaring,  
And we wonder why  
And what can we learn  
About noticing and wondering.

Why performative inquiry?  
Because  
Because I say so and  
Because I know so  
Because I see that we are performing  
And are performed  
We are in these places of learning and doing.  
Because we can be stopped  
And we can stop and we can understand that  
Stopping and thinking can allows us to stop and think some more.  
Because performative inquiry says *yes let's!*  
And means it  
Because it matters that it's about pedagogy  
Because I can learn it and teach it and try it  
And so can they  
So can the kids (because, yes, they are kids even when they won't  
acknowledge it)  
They can learn and teach and try performative inquiry  
And my job  
The job I choose  
Is to have them learn  
And then let them go  
So that they can learn on their own terms,  
In their own ways,

For their own understanding.

When teachers and students engage in performative inquiry we open up spaces to learn. We open up the possibilities for understanding while we work, and then again after we have done the work because we think back on it, we reflect; we want to see, experience, feel, recognize something in the work, in the moment. Performative inquiry is “an action site of learning and inquiry” (Fels & Belliveau, 2008 p.35). This action site is large enough to accommodate a great variety of activities and understandings. When I lean in to performative inquiry and try to understand what it means, I come to see it as a place where we research about what we learn and experience as highlighted by what moments speak to us most loudly.

Performative inquiry has the capacity to hold tensions and to allow the researcher to do so also. This methodology is in relationship with pedagogy and, as Fels and Belliveau state, there is recognition that “learning cannot be scripted but emerges in the interactions between those engaged in inquiry” (2008, p.35). This inquiry asks not only the researcher to recognize what emerges, but also asks that the students take the risks and to be open to the possibilities that performance creates: “it is *through performance* that cognition or learning is realized” (Fels, 1998, p.8). Fels writes,

Performative inquiry as a research methodology and action site of learning is a collaboration among researcher and participants, engaging our bodies, imaginations, individual and collective experiences and narratives, feelings, memories, biases, fears, ambitions, judgments and prejudgments, hopes, and desires—simply who we are within co-evolving contexts and environments in relationship with others.” (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p.32)

This kind of attention to interactions and interrelations is what I want in my classroom. To meet the expectation that students and teachers might learn in their classrooms requires an understanding that all of these things influence what is learned in any given day.

bell hooks states that “teaching is a performative act.” (1994, p.11) Here, then, we can imagine that there is the performative act of teaching, there are performative acts of play creation, rehearsal and performance that are all at play in this process. This methodology makes sense for me as I am pedagogically engaged—I teach and need to use a methodology that speaks to teaching and learning as a whole experience that honours the diversity of thought, experience and understanding that is part and parcel of education in the public school system.

Performance, as understood by Fels is “dancing on the edge of chaos” (1998). In applying the etymology of the word performance, it is possible to view the concept of performance as through form and simultaneously, through the destruction of form. It is working within the form, as well as the disruption of form, the interrupting habits of engagement, that we are able to come to new action (knowing, doing, creating, being) (Fels, 1995, 2012). Performance is experienced in the imaginative as well as the lived worlds of experience and those experiences inform and perform each other.

Inherent in performative inquiry is a practice of reflection, of paying attention to what happened as well as what did not happen during the performance (in whatever form the performance took). “In performative inquiry, we realize our journey/landscape through performance and then map - recognize our explorations through discussion, reflection, remembering, writing, re-imagining.” (Fels, 1998, p.5) Integral to this process of reflection is the idea of the *stop* and what it might ask us to consider.

In practicing performative inquiry we must attend to the *stops*. The idea of the *stop* in performative inquiry came from Fels' reading of, and working with the concepts from David Appelbaum's book *The Stop*. The *stop* is an awakening of the conscious mind to what is happening in a particular moment; it is a step in the process of becoming more aware and thus attentive to one's choices of action. Fels describes a stop as a tugging on your sleeve "a moment of listening" that encourages you to pay attention to the moment as a potential action-site of learning (Fels & Belliveau, 2008). This tugging can be ignored of course, but when one pays attention to it, there is much that can be gained. A *stop* is a call to attention. It is about recognizing that there are moments inside larger moments that have something to tell us and inside which we are able to learn. The *stop* is integral to performative inquiry; it is a moment when we are called to attention, when we are asked to see something for what it is, for what it is not and for what it might (or might not) be. "A stop is a moment of recognition that becomes our moral and communal responsibility to attend to as individuals, educators and participants" (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p.37). When I recognize those moments, I learn something about myself, my process, the people with whom I am working and their processes. These *stops* come from a moment in which we see with a new perspective, that we call into question what we know and understand (Fels & Belliveau, 2008). They are not necessarily moments of immediate insight, not the bright, bold *ah-has!* but rather a hole to peer into (and perhaps fall down) and uncover something lurking in the shadows, or beyond.

Stop  
And listen.  
The voices and the silences

Have something to say:  
Something urgent,  
Something quiet,  
Something different for me than for you.

I stop  
And sometimes am stopped.  
The moment becomes highlighted  
(underlined, **bold-ed**)  
and asks to be noticed.  
So I notice  
And I know something new.  
But sometimes I don't know,  
Certainly not right away  
Often it takes time to have the ideas seep into my brain,  
Into my consciousness,  
Into my words and deeds.  
A slow understanding  
A creeping realization.

The stop is another way of making me think about what's happened.  
It's another word used to touch the intangible.  
It's another tool in the shed that gets pulled out when the weeds grow too high.  
It's another way to try to let you see, let you live something else maybe in the same way I do.  
The stop is my reaching out to you and hoping that your hand is outstretched too.  
I've stopped. Have you? Are you willing? Ready? Able?

The stop is a way of getting curious  
And following a new path  
Maybe even making the path in walking  
(choosing the path for yourself).

What has called me down this way?  
Encouraged me to see something again?  
Most often, I couldn't tell you even if I wanted to.

Stop comes before jumping in with both feet  
(and yes, you should jump feet first, it's safer—smaller risk of serious injury).

Stop comes before insight.

Stop comes before asking more questions.

Stop comes and I know I have more work to do.

I'd like to ignore it at times,

I'd like to pretend it didn't exist

(I am sure some philosophers would argue that it didn't)

but I know better

and so will have to look into it

and wonder and wander.

(Ah yes, that idea of paths and walking again—it keeps coming up  
doesn't it? Makes you stop and wonder doesn't it?)

The *stop* moments that I encountered throughout the two processes of doing this work (the play creation and performance, and the writing of this thesis) were varied and abundant. In the first part of the work I expected to learn a lot about what can be taken from working in drama that can be applied to daily living and so, imagined that *stop* moments would mostly happen outside of the creation/performance. What I have learned so far from this entire process is much more about what I teach and how than about what the students take away from our work together. The *stop* moments have therefore been otherwise than I first thought they might be.

Interestingly, I found that the moments were not always clear to me at the time, but rather from a distance that allowed me to see the moment with another moment's perspective. Often it was in discussion about what I had done and what I had learned

that I realized there had been a *stop*. In a way then, perhaps some of those moments are somewhat different in my conception—they are not all moments in the moment, but some become so, once revisited and reflected upon. These small insights are most available to me once I am on the outside of them. In the moment itself I am too far in, too much engaged with the here and now to tally them. It is through this dialogical process that new performative moments occur. Varela (1987) suggests that we make a path in walking and then turn to see where we have been, which twists and turns have laid themselves into our journey, and that it is from this vantage point that we are able to reflect upon the particular path we have made. Fels (1995) refers to this same process of reflecting upon experience and the emergent learning as mapping-in-reflection, that it is in considering the bends and turns in the path we have created that we are able to see moments and places from our journey more clearly.

Being aware of these moments as they happen is a skill that I continue to work on and is, as of yet, one that I have not spent much time on encouraging in my students. It is all too easy to become trapped in the action of doing and miss all that we can learn by being fully aware and active in the present moment. *Stop* moments are perhaps accessible, discrete units that would allow for student understanding of what is being asked of them, and therefore it might be easier for students (and educators alike) to handle, as opposed to other reflective practices and models.

Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, complements Appelbaum's *stop* nicely. When we are *stopped*, especially perhaps in education, there is a very real possibility that we are stopped by the unexpected arrival of one of our students. Fels describes Arendt's natality as "a rebirthing of the possibilities that is humankind, an opportunity to reclaim what has been lost, to celebrate what might become" (Fels, 2012). Gordon

(2001) suggests that it demarcates the moments in our lives during which we try to answer the question “who are you?” which is what Arendt argues is the basis of all action. Being aware of the possibility of these moments of natality is a practice I am embarking on through this research. Creating opportunities for my students to arrive in newness in any given moment means that I must not only strive for the environment that allows the space (and grace) to be born anew but that I am called also to respond to these arrivals with hospitality. Not only is the student arriving, but it is in the relationship, the encounter, the interchange that I may come anew to my practice as a teacher (and host). And the questions that relationship requires then arise in the presence of those who come before me: who am I? who will I become in the presence of you who comes before me? what action shall I take? And so is born a pedagogy of hospitality.

Another concept that resonates with performative inquiry and its practice is Maxine Greene’s concept of wide-awakeness. Greene suggests that being wide-awake allows us to see other possibilities for our world and for ourselves, “to tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real” (1995b). Fels says “to be wide-awake, then, is to be mindful of the stops that occur in our everyday pedagogical experiences” (2011). Greene sees wide-awakeness as a means to have students (and teachers) pay attention to what is it that happens in our daily lives and see it for what it may be, to re-engage with the world, not sleepwalk through it. She hopes that “each [student] stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility.” (1995b)

Curriculum studies author Gene Diaz writes about living aesthetically in response to Greene’s wide-awakeness; she describes a practice of being aware of the beauty (and aesthetics) in her work as teacher. She posits that “intense aesthetic perception

derives from an awareness of the sensations of living and an appreciation of being alive. Teaching the arts and aesthetic experience engages the senses in an exploration of possibilities.” (2010, p.92)

Snowber echoes this paradigm in her writings about an aesthetics of every day life; she suggests that “living aesthetically is intrinsic to what it means to be human on this richly textured earth. It is an attentiveness to the extraordinary in the ordinary, which has the capacity to expand our seeing, thinking, and being” (2010, p. 115). If it is possible to bring attention to our daily experiences in a manner that reflects our attention to aesthetic encounters, then it might be possible to function in more complete ways that encourage a larger manner of being in our world. This possible increased awareness may lead practitioners (students and teachers alike) to stop or be stopped more frequently and in stopping be reflective and consider their actions, interactions and relationships more often.

Fels (2011) interweaves the concepts of the *stop* (Appelbaum), wide-awakeness (Greene), and natality (Arendt): “Through being collectively wide-awake and attentive to these stop moments, new understandings and renewed possibilities of action emerge.” It is this interaction between the concepts that, in part, makes it exciting to work with performative inquiry. In the dynamic environment that is a classroom, there is always something happening and using this trio of concepts to examine those goings-on allows for a large space for understanding, and a wealth of moments upon which to reflect.

Within performative inquiry, for me, are contained two other important concepts: the *what if?* and the *I don't know*. Fels (1998) writes of the *what if?* in regards to performative inquiry; that it is a way into the work, that it is an opening through which we

are able to enter into the possible worlds, the not yet known worlds that are explore-able if and when we enter in. Fels has said that performative inquiry is in part asking the question *what if?* and seeing what comes.

The catalyst for inquiry may be a question, an event, a theme, a feeling, a piece of poetry: a phenomenon which we explore through questions:

*What if? What matters? What happens? So what? Who cares?* These questions are not separate from the action but embodied within the action-interaction of performance. (Fels, 1998, p.5)

Clearly, there is a form within and through which we begin our work but the idea at the heart of it is to allow ourselves the room to play and see what boils up. There are often unexpected moments, insights and understanding that arise from this kind of work. I worked from this place of *what if* to create the show with my students and I am working from this same place to write about my experiences.

This *what if*-ness is very much a way of working that is arts based because, as artists, we continually ask ourselves *what if*. *What if* I draw a straight line instead of a curving line? *What if* I tried it without this instrument? *What if* I used this piece of research for inspiration? This is what making art is made of; this asking and trying and seeing what comes to be and how well it communicates our message. Working with *what if?* is also very much situated within the realm of curriculum studies in the guise of the liminal space, the third space, the interstitial, the place of unknowing, the

improvisational.<sup>33</sup> It is a matter of working with an openness to not knowing, to not predicting, all the while relying on the skills and practices that have been honed by the teacher/artist.

So then, not only is engaging with the *what if?* a way that artists work, it is a way in which students and teachers can also work. It takes strength and courage of course, but it is possible. Additionally, incorporating the *what if?* into classroom activities and experiences builds curiosity into the structure of the work—we can't help but get curious and follow our thoughts and bodies into places we would not otherwise experience. This structuring in of curiosity into everything we do in classes is integral to creating real learning opportunities. The IRPs<sup>34</sup> are full of words that could be made to come off the page if we were willing to (and supportive of) risk taking in this manner. *What if* opens up possibility and questions and allows us to be and do as we would like.

*What if* I start,  
And try,  
And know not why.  
*What if* I ask you a question  
To which I have no answer.  
*What if* it goes well?  
And *what if* it doesn't?

<sup>33</sup> Snowber believes that "[dance improvisation] is a way of discovering that which we know and that which we do not know" (2009c, p.95). There is a site of possible learning located within improvisation.

<sup>34</sup> Integrated Resource Package; the BC Ministry of Education's documents that delineate the curriculum for the K-12 system.

*What if* I fall through that rabbit hole  
Without being afraid and screaming the whole way down?  
*What if* I consider it to be an adventure?  
Are you game?

*What if*  
Lets us be courageous  
And bold.  
*What if* says it's okay  
To turn left instead of right.  
*What if* encourages *why not*  
And *what will happen*.  
*What if* demands you do your work  
And then let it go.  
*What if* asks you to be present,  
No wimping.

I'm gearing up—  
Work in hand  
Nose plug—check  
Swim cap—check  
Gloves—check  
Flippers—check.  
Ready to go, about to dive in when you grab my hand.  
Are you sure you're ready?  
Have you plotted your points on the map?  
A back-up plan?  
A back up plan for the back up plan?  
No?  
Then you must be crazy.  
Where's your parachute?  
(I don't need a parachute underwater)  
Where are your safety goggles?  
(This isn't a science experiment and we're not playing floor hockey)

What if something goes wrong?

EXACTLY.

What if something goes wrong?

How wrong can it go and what does it mean to 'go wrong'?

*What if* there is no 'wrong' and all I can do is right

In some way

For something

For someone?

So let me go.

Allow me to jump in.

Find the courage to support me

As I wade through the unknown

So it can become the somewhat known.

Be scared, yes.

Those who are not scared

Are not thinking.

But do not let that fear guide you,

Make you hold on to me,

Stop me from trying.

I have felt that fear

And when I give in to it

I am half living

Half teaching

Half learning.

Just a shadow of who I am when I am diving in.

Hold the light for me,

Help me see,

Call words of encouragement

And laugh when things go sideways

But do not hold me back.

I am ready to live in this 'I don't know'  
I am ready to lead in this 'I don't know'  
I am ready to learn in this 'I don't know'.

So then, for this particular journey, we started with: *what if* we create a play together based on Alice in Wonderland? We had many more *what ifs* that came up along our way: *what if* there were five 'Alices'? *What if* Wonderland is a high school? *What if* the Mad Hatter were female? *What if* the characters were all close in age to the actors? *What if* all transitions were done with the lights on? *What if* I did not tell you what to do but instead insisted on you owning it? *What if* I sit in the audience and let you give your show away?

Many times I thought that I should take the easy route and do the work for them: the students wanted me to write the show without them, the students wanted me to tell them where to stand on the stage, what to do with their hands, how to say their lines, what their costumes should be, and I would not. *What if* this is your show, your work and I only do my job as director?

But *what if* looks scary. It looks like there is nothing to hold on to, like you are in free fall and do not have a parachute. There is risk involved in *what if*. But the risk is not that you will get it wrong but more that you just will not have anything at all. As long as there is commitment to the work and the participants are engaged, the work will be 'right' and fruitful and worthwhile.

And then, there is also the idea of living in the *I don't know*. During my theatre training at Simon Fraser University with Marc Diamond and Penelope Stella, I was introduced to the concept of living in the *I don't know*. The idea is to linger in a place of

not knowing, allowing yourself the space not to settle on an answer immediately, to get comfortable asking the same question time and again and then simmering in the answers that present themselves. It is an extended inquiry that is surprisingly difficult to pursue as most of us are accustomed to working within the “first person to get the answer wins” paradigm.

The idea of living in the *I don't know* is a cousin to working within the frame of the *what if*. If we are able to be comfortable without having all the answers at the outset, then we are able to generate new ideas as we go. The *what if* allows us a beginning that is somewhat undirected and the *I don't know* allows us to continue in that vein.

Both concepts are integral to fostering the curiosity (which could be considered more an investigating or continuing consideration of ideas and concepts) that is so important for me. The *I don't know* encourages us to sit with the questions we have for a longer period of time than we are used to—especially with the instant access to information (and answers) we have at our disposal. When we are forced to sit with a question we are more likely to come across a greater variety of answers. This greater variety means that we have a larger pool from which to choose and therefore we are more able to choose the ‘best’ for the particular situation. Taking more time with a question also allows us to come up with some solutions that are not part of our stock answers—it pushes us to think differently. Kashdan (2009) speaks about the issue from a different perspective cautioning us: “we need to be wary of the need for certainty. Seeking certitude can cause our beliefs and decision making to crystallize prematurely, and the resulting reluctance to consider new information can hurt us in the long run.”

(p.25)

There may be some discomfort in this place of *I don't know* for many of us; we are so accustomed to searching out the answers immediately and holding those answers helps us feel sated. If we are too comfortable, we may not feel it necessary to push ourselves to greater understanding. The discomfort associated with this extended period of time without concretizing an answer is a great place for learning. Peter McWilliams tells us that “comfort zones are most often expanded through discomfort” (1994, p. 287) and Todd Kashdan suggests that “resisting our opposing craving for certainty, we discover that the greatest rewards come when we question authority, question the status quo, question our beliefs, and question everything.” (2009, p.7)

I am brought back to ‘the edge of chaos’, that liminal space, in discussing the discomfort that may be present when working with the *I don't know*. Engaging in work within that marginal (yet generative) space of possibility requires phenomenal trust in the process within which we are working, in the others who surround us in the work and in our own abilities to toil, to grapple with the unknown, the almost known, the might-or-might-not-be-known.

I **don't** know

I don't know what I know  
Until I have looked around,  
Peered into the dark spaces  
And examined my findings.

I don't have just one answer  
I ran into too many possibilities to know which one is right  
Or best or good  
Until I try them out,  
Wear them around the house  
Like a pair of new shoes.

I don't know what it is  
That I want to know even.

I don't know

I don't **know**  
I don't know what is right  
I feel it.

I choose to use performative inquiry (with the *stops*, the *what if?*, and the *I don't know*) as the lens through which I examine my work because it speaks to me. I created a show with a group of grade seven students and there was much performance involved throughout the process and product. The space for inquiry in performance was present in the final performance of the show, but also in the improvised scenes that led to the show, also in the moments when we were discussing what could and should be done, and also in the moments of quiet reflection that I imposed on my students. Because of the ways in which I ask myself and my students to work, performative inquiry is a natural choice of methodology and the way that allows the work to speak best for itself.

## **Performative Writing**

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

(Carroll, 1998, p. 190)

This articulation  
This putting down of thoughts  
On paper (or screen)  
This wording of  
The work,  
The experiences  
Has sharpened my thoughts.

I have become aware  
Of the questions  
Of more questions  
To ask  
And then to search out some answers.  
A little bit of knowing is dangerous  
As it leads me to know more of what it is that I do not know.

This process  
Has brought to me  
Ideas and thoughts  
Frustrations and clarity  
And more muddiness.  
But as I sift through my thoughts  
And look anew at my year of work  
(at my years of work as they filter through this last one)  
I see more and ask more and want more  
To be able to tell you  
To explain to you  
To have you understand  
(really understand, not just nod your head in agreement understand)  
what it is I do  
what it is I value  
and why.

I am starting to have words  
In my mouth  
In my head  
In my hands  
To manipulate  
And own and give away  
That might tell you a story.  
Maybe this story will lead to one you know,  
To one you've heard before  
Or one you've told before.

As these words leave my lips  
And fingertips  
And enter into your ears and eyes  
They leave traces  
To be tracked, sniffed out  
By others later.

In the writing of this thesis, there was the work that I did with my students and then there was the work of actually writing the thesis onto paper. To mirror those dual strands of work, there was the performative inquiry that was the methodology for the research and then there was the performative writing<sup>35</sup> that I engaged in to “perform on the page” (Fels, 1995). Fels (2012) writes,

Furthermore, performative inquiry invites performative representations of the learning that has emerged so that the reader may also experience the

stop. This writing may incorporate poetry, stories, personal anecdotes, reconstructed narratives, as well as include inventive playing with language, time sequencing, lay-out of text, use of metaphors, images and/or other media, so as to evoke feelings, memories, recognitions, new interstanding. The reader or viewer enters into the telling as it unfolds as a co-performer, recalling his or her own experiences, coming to his or her own questions and insights, and through engaging, recognizing the learning offered.

Writing this thesis became an action-site of learning and offered me the opportunity to begin to reflect on moments with an altered perspective. The writing itself created space and time to consider what I had experienced working on the play with my students. It was only through the writing (and subsequent reading) of this thesis that some specific learning emerged: it became clear that there was a thought-thread woven into the text that suggested a pedagogy of hospitality. Had I not written performatively, that thread may not have surfaced.

Breaking up the prose with poetry and dialogue would, I hoped, encourage readers to pause, to take a moment to place themselves in the text, and therefore to

<sup>35</sup> Performative writing echoes many methodologies including narrative inquiry, poetic inquiry, embodied forms of writing, autobiographical writing.

allow them to experience a *stop* also.<sup>36</sup> Articulating my thoughts using poetry allows me to more closely express those thoughts/feelings/understandings that are hard to write in prose.<sup>37</sup> Carl Leggo, and other artists working with poetic inquiry have suggested that poetry allows for different insights and understanding—that what we learn about any subject is altered when we use poetry as a means of writing up our 'results'. Many scholars<sup>38</sup> inquiry and performance is embodied in their writing, as explorative expressive action-sites of learning. I am combining those ways of writing that help me perform my learning, drawing on those aspects that most support my emergent and emerging understanding.

I found that I needed an entry-point to my writing and beginning with poetry offered me that. When I was able to put words to the page as poetry my more natural rhythm, was engaged and I was expressing what I felt, and what I knew and what I needed to say. I trusted that the form could hold whatever would come. It also allowed me to write without my usual critic's loud voice in my ear so that I was able to put words to paper. Poetry, with its undulations, sound play, flexibility and rhythm exposes thoughts differently than does prose and is frequently closely tied to emotions—it speaks to and

<sup>36</sup> Carl Leggo speaks of the difference for the reader between prose and poetry: "Where prose is often perceived as a transparent window on reality, poetry is opaque. Poetry invites readers to slow down. Poetry invites us to listen. Poetry is a site for dwelling." (2004, p. 9)

<sup>37</sup> Leggo cites Canadian poet John Steffler. Steffler asks (as cited in Leggo, 2004): "What, ideally, can poetry offer that other types of writing cannot offer, or at least not so directly or purely? It seems to me that at its best—and this is what we search for in poems all the time—poetry approximates, through the powerful use of language, our fundamental, original sense of life's miraculousness, its profound and mysterious meaning." (p.7)

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Sameshima & Leggo (2010), Pelias (2004), Snowber (2009a, 2009b, 2009c 2009d).

from the heart. I often wrote the poetry in response to a *stop* moment only to find that the poetry exposed ideas I had not consciously recognized previously.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, including dialogue of stop moments allowed me to enter the moment from within; I was able to place myself in the action as it happened but removed in time. This process created the opportunity for me to see the moment both in the time of the moment and in the time of reflection. It also allows the reader to step into the moment which encourages different engagement with the text than does prose.

<sup>39</sup> "Writing does not enable the writer to hammer down secure truth; writing enables the writer to explore possibilities for meaningful living in the world." (Leggo, 2004, p.5)

## CHAPTER 6: MY STOPS

HELEN KINGSLEY: Where's your corset?

*She pulls back her dress to see bare legs.*

HELEN KINGSLEY: And no stockings!

ALICE: I'm against them.

HELEN KINGSLEY: But you're not properly dressed.

ALICE: Who's to say what is proper? What if it was agreed that "proper" was wearing a codfish on your head? Would you wear it?

HELEN KINGSLEY: Alice.

ALICE: To me a corset is like a codfish.

(Burton, 2010)

As I make my way through this Wonderland, this place of odd creatures and uncertain times and places, I am held in some moments; I stop and linger. There were many *stop* moments in the process of play creation, rehearsal and performance as well as in the writing of this thesis as I engage in 'mapping as reflection' (Fels, 1998). I am extending an invitation to you to stop along with me, to see what there is to discover when we lean into a moment and reflect on it. These *stop* moments have called my attention for one reason or another and have opened up the possibility to see my students, myself, the process and work with new perspectives. These *stopping* stones on the journey are moments that surprised me, that offered me something to play with, to dissect, to wonder about, and I am eager to share them with you and in so doing, find myself thinking individual *stops* through more thoroughly as I work to articulate them.

Something held me there  
In that moment  
Tied to a particular thought,  
Mood,  
Place.  
Something told me not to let it slip through my fingers so easily  
(Grains of sand through the hourglass)  
A moment  
An invitation  
To breathe  
To see  
To be.

I was unprepared,  
Caught halfway between thought and word,  
Feeling and action.  
And the image was clear  
And I was left,  
(no words in my mouth)  
trying to understand what  
why and when,  
to understand  
what about this moment  
was calling me  
to re-member myself.

A moment of interaction  
And I am held, embraced, caressed.  
Looking for answers and finding more questions.  
Maybe one day, I'll turn around and catch my reflection unaware.

## Stopping Stone: The Queen's Way

'I don't know what you mean by **your** way,' said the Queen: 'all the ways about here belong to **me** — but why did you come out here at all?' she added in a kinder tone.

(Carroll, 1998, p. 142)

One stop (that was really more like a number of small stops) on this journey was my encounter with parental and student expectation that there would be, and should be, a big musical production as a culmination of elementary school in the Fine Arts program. I realize now that I should have foreseen that this simmering expectation, this desire, would be as far-reaching and deep-seated as it was, but I did not properly imagine how rooted it was in the consciousnesses of the families in the program.

“So, what kind of shows have you put on before?”

“How many actors do you usually work with?”

“Do you work professionally in theatre?”

“I’m sure you’ll let us know soon what show you’re planning so we can get on it.”

“What shows would I have seen you in?”

Questions of this ilk were what I was asked the first time I met with the parents as a group. I was surprised, not so much by the questions that they asked, but more by the questions that were missing. Not a single question was asked about my teaching, my experience in the classroom, what my goals and hopes were for the year. Meet the teacher night always puts me a little on edge—what if the parents don’t like me? Think I can’t do my job? Question my ability to adequately teach their children? It is worse of course in a new school, in a new district, with people who don’t know anything about me. I needn’t have worried too much. My year began the way it would continue; with what

seemed like great interest in a final show product and little concern about teaching and learning.

“I heard you’re doing Alice in Wonderland!”

“Well, yes, but—”

“We have the script for that. We did it maybe six years ago? I can get it for you if you’d like.”

“Um, thanks, I wouldn’t mind seeing the script but—”

“We have lots of other great scripts. There was this one...”

“Thanks but I don’t... we’re not doing a play from a script like that. The kids and I are writing a show together.”

“So just the Alice in Wonderland script then?”

“Sure, I guess, I wouldn’t mind taking a look at it.”

“I’m sure we have the score and the CD too.”

“That’s okay, just the script would be great so I can get a sense of what the shows have looked like before.”

“My favourite was really when they did The King and I—the costumes were amazing.”

I ended up in this kind of conversation over and over again; I would try to describe the process that I was planning on using (or was using, depending on the timing of the conversation) and felt like I failed miserably. It was as if I had said nothing at all, or worse, that I had said I was really eager to crack open the script, score, and CD, for our big musical production. It surprised me that I was unable to communicate effectively about the process, that some of the parents seemed unable to grasp that there was more than one way of working in theatre, that what I was trying to do was incomprehensible.

I thought it might be easy enough to have students and parents see and get excited about a different kind of process, of work, but I was mistaken. They held on to what they knew and had seen and were not very interested in considering alternate

possibilities. It was easier to have the students understand since they were part of the process from beginning to end, they were in the room working with me. I laboured at the beginning of the year to be heard but by the time we were actually working on the show I no longer had the energy to explain (and my explanations weren't getting me anywhere either).

From *Curious?*

(*Chista, our Cheshire Cat, and four Alices*)

Chista: Where are you going?

Alexandra: We're not really sure.

Chista: Not sure? Well then, I'm not sure how I can help you.

Alison: You're going to help us?

Chista: Oh, yes.

Alvin: And what's that going to cost us?

Chista: Not a very trusting creature are you?

Alvin: What, of everything that's happened today, would lead me to be 'very trusting'?

Chista: What a funny group you are.

Alan: We're not really a group.

Alexandra: We all just seem to have landed here at the same time.

So what? I have learned that we hold on to what we know. I have learned that I need to replace one way of working with another; that it is often too much to ask that people close their eyes and jump down the rabbit hole with me without knowing what awaits them at the bottom. Few people are ready to give up what they know without having something else with which to replace it.

These seem to be forbidding times, as our expectations, beliefs, and past training and abilities call for a stretch not all of us are prepared to make. Most particularly, many of us feel as though the old ship is being destroyed or taken away before the new ship is ready to sail. (Caine & Caine, 1997, p.14)

I learned (from a distance, not at the time) that I need to be generous about time, and understand that it takes time to process and make sense of different ideas, of different processes. I expect to extend that courtesy to my students but do not expect to do this for their adults, which is perhaps unfair of me. bell hooks (1994) reminds us that “shifting paradigms or sharing knowledge in new ways challenges; it takes time for students to experience that challenge as positive.” (p.42) Peter Brook suggests that we need to be able to commit to an idea but also have the ability to re-evaluate our stance, to change our perspective.

For a point of view to be of any use at all, one must commit oneself totally to it, one must defend it to the very death. Yet, at the same time, there is an inner voice that murmurs: “Don’t take it too seriously. Hold on tightly, let go lightly.” (1987, xiii)

We do tend to commit ourselves to our ideas and letting go is difficult, maybe especially so when we are being asked to let go by someone else, not because we are looking for the change ourselves.

I learned that I need to be able to articulate what it is that I do so that, at the very least, there is understanding and that maybe, at best, there is excitement about what we may do. C.S. Peirce (as quoted in Postman & Weingartner, 1969) indicates “that it is

wrong to say that a good language is *important* to good thought, merely; for it is of the essence of it.” (p.123). Maybe when I am able to communicate what it is that I do, then I will be able to share that process, however reduced, with individuals who have no frame of reference within which to examine it. I may be able to dive into the *I don't know* of a process that someone else suggests, but I cannot expect that same abandon from others.

When it has always been the Queen's way, and not anyone else's, it is hard to imagine it could be another way. I am fortunate in my theatre training to have been encouraged to consider a variety of possible worlds and ways.

## Stopping Stone: Close Reading

From *Curious?*

*Taryn (our Red Queen and Quarterback), Cheerleaders for the football team, Blotch (our Stayne).*

Taryn: They all look to me for everything, like they can't think for themselves.

*(Cheerleaders nod and agree.)*

Blotch: They look to you because you are so enigmatic.

Taryn: The next one of you who fumbles is off the team!

Cheers: Off the team!

Taryn: *(Reaching for her water bottle.)* Do I have to do everything myself? What is going on here? Blotch, what has happened to my vitamin water?

Blotch: I'm sure I know nothing about your water.

Taryn: Run in! Run in! Which one of you snivelling, incompetent, greasy fingered sloths drank MY vitamin water? From MY water bottle no less?

*(The cheerleaders follow Taryn down the line making nasty comments as they go.)*

Player1: Not me.  
Player 2: Me neither.  
Player 3: No QB, not me.  
Player 4: Wasn't me.

*(One player indicates to Taryn which player drank the water.)*

Taryn: I will enjoy having your jersey washed, pressed and passed on to a player who truly deserves it. I will not tolerate mediocrity!

Cheers: Not tolerate mediocrity! Uh-uh, uh-uh!

It was not a conducive atmosphere in which to engage with a new way of watching a film; I was having my teaching evaluated (since it was my first year in this district) and so I was there, the vice-principal was there, and the principal was there. The principal was unknown to the students as she had just been transferred in, and the only regular dealings my students had with the vice-principal were not usually of a positive nature. However, this was the next step, the next thing to do and so we would try it.

The close reading of the film was successful (as in, it was not just me who wanted to stop and point things out) beyond my dreams. I had hoped that the students might be able to ask me to stop the DVD at times to point out some detail, but these students, after a bit of a warm up, were very watchful, very attentive and very observant. They understood what it was to read a film the way we most often read novels.

“Wait! Go back a sec—did you see that?”

“Notice the shapes on the castle—all hearts!”

I was so excited as the students took over, as they asked me to stop and start the film, as they added to what I was seeing and had seen. Despite the groans over stopping so

often, they were amazed at themselves and what they could discover when asked to work like this.<sup>40</sup> They wanted to do nothing else; partly because they thought they were getting away with something as we were ‘just’ watching a movie and partly because it was annoying to them that we would have to put this work on hold for recess and lunch and other ‘subjects’.

“You wrecked me!” Once introduced to the idea that there was more to be seen than what we immediately grasp, the students took it home with them and watched movies at home in that way. It was a whole new way of seeing for these students and it was evidence in some way that they understood what the work was all about, that they had internalized some of these ways of working and seeing. We got curious about what we could uncover, what we could dig up in the film. Kashdan suggests that “curiosity offers a gateway to creating profound intimacy, insights, and meaning in life” (2009, p.5). Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we were able to consistently include that curiosity and meaning making into our work in the classroom?

As I challenge myself and the students in these ways, are they engaged? Wanting to work? Embracing the work there is to be done? Brook suggests that, “work attracts work” (1987, p.14). Once engaged and working, we are more invested in working and often find more work to do. I am trying to create the environment in which they want to work. “Curiosity is the driving force behind finding and creating small and sustainable pockets of meaning.” (Kashdan, 2009, p. 38) Perhaps, this small opening up

<sup>40</sup> Greene suggest that is important “to strike a delicate balance between helping learners to pay heed—to attend to shapes, patterns, sounds, rhythms, figures of speech, contours, lines, and

of curiosity can lead to further forays in the future? “If we are aware of and receptive to our curious nature, we can catch serendipity.” (Kashdan, 2009, p.19) Catch serendipity! Maybe by starting in these small ways, maybe by introducing some of these thoughts, we make ourselves available to catch serendipity.

## Stopping Stone: Filling In the Script

From *Curious?*

*Ally (an Alice), the triplets are her siblings, her mom and dad, and partygoers.*

All: Surprise!  
Ally: What?  
All: Welcome home!  
Ally: Home?  
Triplet 1: Home.  
Triplet 2: You know, domicile/  
Triplet 3: the place you live/  
Triplet 2: with your family (*indicating self and siblings*).  
Ally: What is going on? This is not my home, what are you talking about?  
Triplet 1: Weren't you listening?  
Triplet 3: We just told you/  
Triplet 1: You're going to be living here/  
Triplet 2: with us/

so on—and freeing them to perceive particular works as meaningful” (1995a)

Triplet 3:       and dad/

Triplet 1:       for good.

Dad:             We've been working on this for a while now. We wanted to make sure that we had considered all the options, weighed them out, wrote lists of pros and cons, we even spoke with a risk management consultant. The probabilities prove that this is the most likely way that we will achieve a positive outcome.

Mom:    Look honey, you know how hard it is for this family to say things, and we thought that this would be the best way to let you know... It's just easier for us to express our (*uncomfortable saying the word*) feelings through parties.

Ally:         (*to her mom*) Yeah, mom, I know but this is insane! Who does this? The "I'm so disappointed with your report card" party was bad enough, but this? Are you kidding me?

"It's just easier for us to express our feelings through parties." This gem of a line was invented in a moment of stress—the original line was forgotten and the actor was already part way through saying it before she realized it wasn't what she had meant to say—but it was perfect. The line was a one-off, a mistake, and yet it contained a whole story about a family and how it functioned. This was a *stop* moment in the moment; I knew there was something there that I wanted to honour, to engage with.

We had opened up the *what if?* and this absurd family was an offspring of that inquiry. That this one line could give birth to a whole scene (a whole reality within the play) was phenomenal for me. It was quintessentially what I hoped this process might foster—collaborative script development, built line by line, as we worked on the themes and with the characters that presented themselves to us. This was the kind of serendipity that we were able to catch (Kashdan, 2009) due to the process we were creating. It was a *stop* for me because it was a small moment that could have been insignificant, that could easily have been ignored because, it was really just a 'mistake'. However, because the process contained enough space for each of us to contribute, and we were wide-awake, listening for, watching for moments, we were able to catch the

moment and let it inform the character of one of the families of the show (and perhaps add flavour to the show as a whole).

“I know you said we were going to write the script, but the scenes are way better when you write them. We suck.”

It was hard work getting my students to write; they were more comfortable creating scenes on their feet, improvising them, than writing. I felt it was easier having them create characters that were more fun to play when they were in fact performing, than when they were writing. I hoped that the open spaces in the script would be filled in by the students and their writing. Most of the students seemed reluctant to fill in the blanks in the script, but were very comfortable doing so for worksheets (which I rarely, if ever, had them fill out). I suppose the script blanks felt much larger than those on paper (and there were no ‘right’ answers for a script, the way there are for worksheets).

“Umm, Mrs. Wardrop, there are some scenes that aren’t written.”

“I know.”

“But what are we supposed to do about that?”

“Well, we’ll just have to write those scenes as we can, as we go along.”

“Aren’t you worried that they’re not done?”

One of the obstacles to getting the script finished was my desire that the students be the authors of our piece. Finally, as push came to shove, I had to conceptualize the word ‘author’ more broadly; I might have been the one who actually wrote the words but those words would have been born from the work I saw them doing on the scenes. This opening up of the concept of authoring was a *stop* moment. C.S. Peirce would probably agree that this altered understanding of the word was important to my process as he stated that good language is the basis of good thought. Postman and Weingartner suggest that “when the teacher assumes new functions and exhibits different behaviors,

so do his students.” (1969, p.38) So, perhaps, as the students saw me working differently from the way I had, they saw the possibility for themselves to work differently also. It was a stretch for me to accept that new definition as equally valid but it was the definition that became workable. I was able to adapt and change along with the process; it worked on me as I worked on it.

## Stopping Stone: Audition Process

From *Curious?*

*Katya (our White Queen and captain of the Ultimate Frisbee team) and team members.*

Katya: Great job everyone. We played a strong, foul-free game and really, what an amazing song we came up with at the end. I am so proud of us.

*(Players high-five and congratulate each other.)*

Katya: So let's get this practice started. Who'd like to run this one? Or should we just let it evolve naturally?

*(Nods and yeses from the players. They start running around to warm up, at a jog, chatting and laughing as they go.)*

Katya: Be careful, you don't want to hurt yourselves, or really the grass either—tread lightly, tread lightly!

*(They set themselves up in a stack and then start running. Katya plays with them encouraging them to pass to all players, be kind, use their strengths. They come up with a cheer, line by line with different players contributing bits and pieces as they perform it, set to the tune of 'Frosty the Snowman'.)*

You did a good job  
But we did a good job too  
We threw a disk  
And we sort of missed  
And that's why we lost to you.

You did a good job  
But we did a good job too.  
We felt alive,  
And we did high fives,  
Threw a flick and a hammer too.

You did a good job  
But we did a good job too.  
You made some plays  
Without delays  
And now we salute you!

I wanted every student to have a successful audition and so did everything I could to enable them. I felt that I could support them through the process and that that would help them see themselves in a positive light. Meaghan walked into the audition and I stopped.

She entered into the space  
And was actually there  
I saw her eyes  
I saw her seeing me.  
It was first light  
The first time  
I'd seen her,  
The first time  
In seven months  
That she appeared and asked to be seen.

There she was.  
Present  
Wanting  
Engaging  
Being.

She was there  
She was finally there  
And I got to see her,  
I was allowed to know her  
In a different way  
In a different place.

Honestly, I had never seen her before, this girl who was standing there, performing, she'd never been in my class before. I would not have imagined it. Yet it happened. It happened and I was glad for the happening, glad for the opportunity to know anew, to meet this child. Arendt's words flew off the page and into my throat—here was this girl, being born in this moment. Will this presence last? Will this young woman come away from this differently than she came to it? Will this moment be a child of duration (Milloy, 2007)?

Jana Milloy (2007) speaks of a moment as being “a child of duration” meaning that any one moment may last forever, that what happens in this moment might resonate long after this present becomes past. This speaks to why it is so important for me that I lean into the *stop* moments and ask myself what it matters and what I can learn about my teaching, my performances, my life. If this fleeting interaction can in fact last, then I must invest in it with everything I have. Arendt (1961), it would seem to me, would add that it is important that I lean in but without imposing—that to honour the child and the situation, it is my duty to let the moment and the child bring what they will, not prescribe what they should.

I find myself in this moment aware of what it means to be responsible for students in my care, under my 'tutelage' and am a little awed by that responsibility. If indeed moments are children of duration, then I am forever tied to the moments I have with these people and that is enough to immobilize me, permanently. Yet, I do not allow myself that immobility. I persist. (Why? I've never really been able to sit still. I love challenges. I think I can do something to make a situation better. I can control how I react to situations and so will choose not to be paralyzed.) I need to stop and recognize, I need to engage and re-engage, to attend and to attend to, I need to offer my own willingness to witness and hope that there is some understanding of what that means at some point in the duration.

There was also Kevin. Kevin who wouldn't, couldn't? Kevin whose mother stepped in to ask for more consideration, Kevin who defaulted time and again over the course of the three days of auditioning. I felt I had supported him, encouraged him but when he was late for the audition time that I had arranged with him, as a courtesy, I had had enough and was not as generous as I could have been. I was upset that his words and his behaviour were not aligning. I was stretched. I still said yes but said it more begrudgingly than I should have. I decided that I had to let him 'fail' in this moment and then live with the consequences of that 'failure' which was to have a significantly smaller role in the show than the one he (or his mother?) desired.

I do not like to turn my back, to close the door, but, at times I feel I have to, regardless of my inclination. I know that there are lessons to be learned from not getting what you want, not doing the work you want to do, and I wonder if Kevin learned something. I know that I have to accept that I cannot support every child through whatever work we might be doing, but that I will do what I can to have them succeed. I

was not able to give him what he needed in those moments to create the world he wanted to create and that is hard for me to accept.

Did Kevin arrive and was I simply too wrapped up in how I wanted him to arrive that I did not see, would not see, that he came as he could? Was my vision clouded so thoroughly that I was unable to see that this was how Kevin was able to be present? Arendt (1961) might suggest that it is important not to tell our new arrivals what to do (and therefore who to be) and to give ourselves over to that which might be. Perhaps I was too committed on Kevin's part to a certain path as being *the* desirable path. Or is it possible that he was not yet ready to play a role? Was he not in a position in his life to be willing to expose himself in the way that auditioning requires? Was the desire never really his, but instead his mother's, and was simply echoed by this child?

How many other students do I fail to see? How often do we not see them as they are for wanting them to be otherwise? How many of them only partially arrive, keeping themselves guarded? Do some of them fail to make an appearance at all? What can I do to have them feel comfortable appearing? How do I allow myself to be seen by them? What conditions stop us from being present to and for each other? What variables do I need to include in these seemingly impossible calculations? What is that would have allowed us to be more available? I do not know. I do not know how to make changes, other than to attend to the moments as they come, to ask questions when they do not come, to remind myself of my desires as a teacher who wanders this way.

## Stopping Stone: Brit and Mallory

From *Curious?*

*(The five Alices are speaking)*

- Ally: Enough. I think we've all had enough. So what are we going to do?
- Alvin: Do? Are you kidding? I'm done. I'm not doing anything.
- Alan: Mercury said that we were supposed to go find Katya.
- Alison: Do you always do what people tell you to?
- Alan: You ever do what people tell you?
- Ally: You're not helping.
- Alexandra: I think we have to go get the Mevepe. What if it's injured?
- Alan: It's not a creature, it's a thing Alex.
- Alison: I think she's right though, we need to go get it and Mercury.
- Alexandra: How are we going to find them?
- Alvin: We don't really have to find them—we know that they're on the football field with Taryn.
- Ally: And it'll be a piece of cake walking onto the field, picking them up and walking away, I'm sure.
- Alison: Nothing's been a piece of cake, not even the thing that was supposed to be cake.
- Alan: This is where in the story Alice decides that it's up to her to decide. That she's tired of being questioned, inspected, stuffed in lockers and told what to do.
- Alexandra: She makes her path.
- Ally: So?
- Alan: So, are we making our own path or what?
- Alvin: Definitely what.

*(The Als give him a look.)*

Alvin: Right, I knew you guys wouldn't go for that.

Alan: Who's up for some football?

My two girls, broken for many years in different ways, who found space and occupied it with grace and commitment and love and curiosity, were the bearers of perhaps the most important *stop* for me. It was through them and their work that I saw what I had hoped for (without knowing that was what I was hoping for). These two lovely spirits who longed to be seen were finally seen.

For bell hooks "school was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself." (hooks, 1994, p.3). This had not been the case for these girls; school had become the place where they were most heavily entrenched in their descriptions. It was through the process of working on the show (at school), they were able to re-invent themselves.

From the goosebump-inducing conversation with an SEA about Brit and how she (mal)functioned to my moments of sharing with Mallory's mother, to watching Mallory and Brit enter the rehearsal space with confidence and joy and worth, it was clear that these girls, working through this process, were becoming otherwise than they ever had been before in the school environment. Both girls had had difficulty feeling successful in the school environment; one cobbled by anxiety and the other by a severe learning disability. Neither fit the profile of a 'good student' and consequently had little experience with joy and pride in the academic world (even such as it is in elementary school). These two who had never practiced leadership were leaders, these two who had rarely felt successful and competent were shining and moving through with ease, these two who had been written off were writing themselves back in, in big bold letters across the stage.

I was amazed watching these girls. I learned from this experience that I need to open up spaces and invite students into these spaces, especially those who feel they have never been invited in before. I need to hold open these spaces (wedge myself in, push on the edges with my knees, elbows, whatever it takes to keep it ajar) so that the students can walk in, pull themselves through on hands and knees, sneak in when they think I am not looking. I need to let them know (in a million ways) that they are welcome and well come because they will come in eventually and in that eventuality lies a gift: they see themselves differently, I see them differently, I see myself differently.

## **Stopping Stone: The Rehearsal Process Question ‘What Do I Do Now?’**

From *Curious?*

*Abby (our version of Absolom, the caterpillar), and the Alices.*

- Abby: Those who are lost seldom know they are lost until they are found.
- Alison: Thanks Yoda.
- Abby: A great master. One who knew a lot about himself and those around him.
- Alan: But he is just a character from a movie—not a real person.
- Abby: Real. Something pretty important to you yet you seem to have a hard time differentiating between ‘real’ and ‘dream’.
- Alison: What do you mean by that?
- Abby: What do you think I mean?
- Ally: I hate it when my mom answers a question with a question.
- Alvin: That’s ‘cause it’s not really an answer.

Abby: Of course it's not. It's not my job, or hers, to tell you the answers. It's my job to ask you the questions. Finding the answers within yourselves is your job.

Alan: Great, another super helpful answer.

Alison: This is kind of like talking to a fortune cookie.

Abby: This has been a journey for you. You have learned, you have chosen. It is time to do it again.

Ally: But it's so much easier when the choice is made for you.

Abby: Is it?

"What do I do now?"

"Where am I supposed to be?"

"It doesn't say in the script what I'm doing in this scene..."

"How should I get on stage?"

"What should I do with my hands?"

"Can't you just show me what you want me to do?"

No, no I cannot just show you what I want you to do. I don't know what I want you to do other than that I want you to perform. I want you to think. I want you to make a choice (I may disagree with your choice, but you needed to have made one). I want you to be bold and try and risk.

These interactions (being asked to tell my students what to do) called my attention because they were so often repeated; it became clear to me that my students were uncomfortable taking responsibility for themselves as actors on the stage and that I had to commit and recommit to asking them to do so anyway. I came away from these moments knowing that I had support my students into making decisions for themselves and yet feeling their resistance and being aware of how much easier it would have been to 'just tell them what to do'. I had to trust that they would find their way and I, mine. I

learned the importance of asking more of my students than they seem willing to give, or think they can.

I endeavour to provide my students with both skills and invitations that will allow them to be successful. I want students to learn self-sufficiency, self-regulation, and to have a clear sense of responsibility for themselves. bell hooks writes about this issue as “striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world.” (1994, p.15) I want them to get curious and work through so that they understand their work, their curiosity, their purposes. Kashdan (2009) believes that our curiosity has as a goal to add to our knowledge, skills and competencies which allows us to know ourselves and others better, to handle daily challenges more gracefully, and to better cope with chaos. I hope that they come away from working through a process like this with more skills for living in the world than they started with. I am not sure that they all do (in fact, that any of them does) and so I reflect on our experiences and invite them to reflect also as a means of evaluating the worth of our efforts.

*Each moment a child of duration:* I have to do my best in this moment and hope that they are able to take something away with them. I can only work to give them the tools and skills and practice and then I have to trust that some of that experience will linger, and be heard, felt and remembered at times when they might have something to offer.

## **Stopping Stone: Transitions**

*From Curious?*

*Abby, our caterpillar, and the Alices.*

Abby: This is the end of this life for me.  
Alvin: Are you dying?  
Abby: No, I am simply transitioning from this life to another.  
*(Als clearly have no idea what she's saying.)*  
Abby: I'm going to University. I'm no longer going to be a  
highschool student, I'll be a psych student at SFU.  
Alexandra: Oh well then, good luck!

Transitions are hard  
They're messy.  
Challenging to choreograph.  
Difficult to weave into the pattern of the show,  
To make integral.  
And yet,  
For me,  
There is beauty there  
In that grey space  
In that neither here nor there location.

As grade sevens, my students often see themselves as situated on the brink of transition; from children to teens, from elementary to secondary, from oldest to youngest, from routine to unknown. I asked my students to pay attention to their transitions, to take notice and think about their experiences of their transitions. Becoming adept at transition takes practice and mindfulness, and I asked my students to try to understand some of the skills and attention required to manage the transitions in their lives. Transitions occur within a liminal space, the edge of chaos, where significant learning often lives.

I then asked my students to pay the same kind of attention to the transitions in our play. We practiced our show transitions, we talked about how hard they are to master, we stopped and looked and listened, we choreographed and re-choreographed,

we rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed and transitions continued to be a thorn in our, collective, side.

It was a year of transitions for me also, more so than any other in my teaching career; I changed teaching positions and districts, I became pregnant with my third child, I embarked on an international professional development process, I wrestled with what was important about teaching and learning.<sup>41</sup> There were many times when I would have liked to be able to set out the transition, to rehearse it until I had it down pat, until it was completely repeatable. Of course the transitions did not even play themselves out along the lines I might have expected, let alone the ways I would have written them into a script, and so I had to remind myself that living in the *I don't know* is not as scary as it seems, that transitions are part of life, that transitions make or break a show and that it was up to me to decide which it would be.

“Why can't this transition just go the way we planned it, the way we rehearsed it?”

If only I could answer that question. I did ask it and would have loved to be able to just transition the way I had planned, but I couldn't and neither could they. Why do transitions knock us off our feet? Why when we have transitioned once well, can we not necessarily repeat that performance? I see, sitting here at my kitchen table now, that there is much

<sup>41</sup> Snowber speaks of transitions and our desire to transition with ease and yet we are not always able: "they are small urgencies, but they press into time a different way, beckoning me out of the sweeping of a tender moment in order to embrace another moment. There will be another surprise in that time, if only I can shift with ease, with openness. But I seldom do"(2009b, p.40).

to be said about the transitions in the show and the transitions in our lives. What is a pedagogy of transition and what could be learned from such a pedagogy? Would it be related to Hannah Arendt's concept of natality as transition is related to becoming? What might a pedagogy that acknowledged and recognized transitions look like? Perhaps it could be conceived of, and practiced as part of a pedagogy of hospitality: a hospitality that would encourage and allow individuals to dare to transition thoughtfully and in the presence of others?

Maxine Greene's (1995a) idea of wide-awakeness, Barba's (1995) noticing that in order to walk we must step out of balance, Applebaum's stops could all play in my musing also; when we are transitioning, we might be at a point of imbalance, which often increases our awareness (and our panic). In these moments of transition might we be more acutely aware of what we are trying to do, what we are not able to do, and what we aspire to do? Our transitions could be woven into the script, could be made integral to our performance, could inform us and our audiences or, alternatively, we could build in blackout cues, and transition in the dark, unseen and unseeing.

## **Stopping Stone: Sitting in the Audience for the Performances**

From *Curious?*

*(The five Alices speak as one character)*

Ally:	Ok
Alan:	Ok
Alvin:	Ok
Alison:	I get it.
All:	I'm Alice and this is Wonderland.

Alison: I mean it's obvious: the fall, the room full of doors, the weird people, but really?

Alexandra: This is the wonderland I get?

Ally: I don't deserve this.

Alan: And why are there five of us?

Alvin: Maybe I won't have to slay the JBW.

All *(except Alison)*: Maybe Alison will!

Alison: I don't like being told what I have to do.

Alvin: Why me?

Alexandra: Why here?

Ally: WHY WITH THEM????

Alison: Whenever Alan opens his mouth he sounds like he ate a dictionary and is burping up words.

Alan: Alexandra probably thinks this is a pleasant school trip.

Ally: Alvin worries about, well, EVERYTHING.

Alvin: Alison makes smart aleck remarks every step of the way.

Alexandra: Ally's just so, you know...

All: This Wonderland sucks!

Alexandra: I want the talking flowers.

Alison: I want the crazy Duchess and the baby that turns into a pig.

Alvin: I want the predictable end of the story.

Alan: I want to play flamingo croquet.

Ally: I want Johnny Depp.

All: I want to go home.

*All at the same time:*

Alvin: I guess I'll just sit here and rot.

Ally: The coach is gonna put me at the bottom of the pyramid!

Alexandra: I think I like Abby the best so far.

Alan: Isn't Alice a girl? I'm not a girl.

Alison: Shouldn't I be wearing a blue dress?

Others gaped at me for watching the show from the audience. They told me they thought I was crazy (but it was too late, I'd already done it), they asked me what I would have done if it had ended in disaster. It was a *stop* for others and I heard it loud and clear that they thought it should be a *stop* for me also. While my students performed their show, while they gave it away, I did so also—I sat in the audience to watch them. I did not know this was such an amazing thing, I did not realize that others would not do this. I sat in the audience where I could not help, I could not prompt, I could not fix problems or have any impact on the performance at all. I did what a director does; I trusted my actors. I did what I thought a teacher should do; I trusted my students. I did what I felt was right.

“But what if something goes wrong?”

“What if no one moves the block from the tree to the throne?”

“You’re sitting in the audience? Who is backstage running things then?”

“What are we going to do if the curtains get stuck again?”

“How can you be so calm sitting here, where you can’t intercede if they need you?”

“Who’s going to make them be quiet in the wings?”

“But what if something goes wrong?”

“I’ve worked in Fine Arts schools for decades and have never seen the teacher sit in the audience.”

“Mrs. Wardrop, aren’t you *supposed* to tell us what to do?”

“Aren’t you worried they’ll make mistakes?”

“Who is going to make sure they do what they’re supposed to do?”

“Are you sure this is a good idea?”

“But what if something goes wrong?”

“It’s your show. You’ve done the work. Help each other out.  
Remember to make the other guy look good. You will find a way to deal  
with anything that goes wrong. I know you can.”

I asked them to give it away  
I reminded them that they had done all the hard work  
And now it was time to play.  
The show was theirs  
To do what they would with.

I was petrified in the audience—  
Could they and would they  
Share their work, share their best work?  
It was hard and wonderful.  
I winced and smiled,  
Laughed and enjoyed.  
I was breathless  
At times by the amazing work they shared  
And at times while I held my breath and hoped they would get through the  
scene.

But I sat in the audience  
Too far away to prop them up  
Too far away to help.  
But I sat in the audience  
Close enough that they knew I was there  
Close enough for them to feel my presence  
And hear my laugh  
And know that I was pulling for them.

I sat in the audience  
Knowing that they would do it

That they could do it  
And that I had done everything I could  
That it was their show  
Their work  
Their mistakes  
Their performance.

I loved it. I loved it. I loved it.  
I **saw** those kids  
Those young offenders  
Those actors  
I **saw** them  
And I knew they had done it.  
I knew that they had reached out and grabbed  
What was theirs to grab.

They, these funny, difficult, needy, lovely, broken and mended,  
Delicate and solid kids,  
They took the ball  
And ran with it.  
They celebrated unbirthdays,  
They shut out their Red Queens,  
They made their own paths,  
They fought their jabberwockies—  
Even if only for the duration of the performance.  
They were their own Alices.

I learn that I trust my process and I trust my students with my process. It is important to me that they see themselves as competent; able to handle whatever might happen during performance. I know they will do their work. I know that they will do their best to live up to the expectations I have of them, and of their work. I assume they will be present, they will show themselves, they will be seen anew—they may well be born in a

moment on the stage or maybe in the wings as they struggle and shine and own their work while they give it away. Ron Scapp (as cited in hooks, 1994) suggests that students “have already been trained to view themselves as not the ones in authority, not the ones with legitimacy. To acknowledge student responsibility for the learning process is to place it where it’s least legitimate in their own eyes.” (p.144). What can we do then, to encourage students into taking responsibility and, in fact, seeing that as a very legitimate locus of responsibility for their learning process?

Shoshana Felman writes about responsibility as “response-ability” (Felman & Laub, 1992). If we were to re-frame responsibility in that way, would these students be more able to accept that they themselves are the most legitimate locus of responsibility for their learning? What if our students were able to see themselves as ‘able-to-respond’ and understood that ability as a means of gaining agency or voice. If an ability to respond and engage allowed them to take the lead in their interactions with others (especially with teachers and in relation to their learning), how might that effect their functioning?

Fels asks that same question in a slightly different way:

How might we find the courage to bring forth ourselves anew in the presence of others? How do we interrupt the ceaseless unfolding of known narratives that so cripple our children, our sons, our daughters, and learn how to write new narratives as guided by their presence? How might we come to mindful action so that we may co-create the as yet unimagined narratives with those who arrive in newness in our midst?  
(2012)

And what is my 'response-ability' as a teacher, as (often) the only adult in the room, as a mother? What does it look and feel like? Greene suggests that

the new educator must be awake, critical, open to the world. It is an honor and a responsibility to be a teacher in such dark times—and to imagine, and to act on what we imagine, what we believe ought at last to be. The new educator can be an initiator of new beginnings; and to act at a beginning is to move towards possibilities, to live and teach in a world of incompleteness, of what we all are but are not yet.” (2005, p.80)

These students who struggled so much at the beginning of the year, simply to be in a room together without hurting each other, had come to a place where they were able to, not only create a play and perform it, but to do so with pride in their collective effort. They were able to perform themselves differently and therefore perform their interactions differently. They were able to break form, to destroy it, to come to a new place of being and interacting. I was also able to interact with them in new ways as they, and I, were being born anew in this action site of learning. We were able to co-create new individual narratives that intersected and impacted the development of our group narrative.

The cathedral walls speak in tongues  
Incomprehensible to those unfamiliar with this place,  
The cathedral walls speak in tongues  
Rasping  
And hard to understand  
And yet something draws me in.  
I yearn to feel included  
To find my role

within this flock of devoted  
lambs.

I laugh as I write lambs,  
They are not lambs,  
Every one is a wolf  
In disguise,  
Looking for the easy prey  
Disappointed and overcome with giggles  
When they discover the other wolves' secrets.

This is not a place of quiet worship  
It is an arena:  
Where competitors are pitted,  
Where the audience's reaction decides life and death,  
Where great dramas are played out  
Where participants learn about themselves and their true natures.

These lambs have been sheared too often  
To stand by and be fleeced again  
Without complaint  
Without being heard.  
They bleat and kick  
Making it hard to pin them down  
And have your way with them.

The cathedral walls speak in tongues  
So we learn the rituals,  
The vocabulary,  
The ways and the moves  
To understand.  
Then we live the words  
As only someone new to them can;

Never deviating from the narrow confines of the original thought.  
Then a whisper might slip into an ear.  
There is form,  
There is choice.  
We can break the rules,  
Redefine the words,  
Understand anew.

This dangerous  
(and completely harmless)  
whisper  
moves through the flock  
sometimes falling on deaf ears,  
sometimes on violent ones,  
sometimes on ears thirsty for this knowledge.

This dangerous  
(and revolutionary but commonplace)  
whisper  
has entered into my consciousness  
has taken root  
and at times consumes my thinking mind.

This dangerous  
(and necessary)  
whisper  
is no longer a simple whisper for me.  
It is a battle cry  
A lullaby  
Something to be repeated  
And repeated  
And repeated  
And repeated  
And repeated

Until it is fully known and  
Fully lived  
And fully forgotten.

I must look for opportunities for my students to perform their death-defying feats  
without me as safety net.

## CHAPTER 7: TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF HOSPITALITY

Red Queen: And WHAT is this?

White Rabbit: It's a "who", Majesty. This is...um

Red Queen: Um?

Alice: From Umbradge.

Red Queen: What happened to your garments?

Alice: I outgrew them. I tower over everyone in Umbradge. They laugh at me. So I've come to you, hoping you might understand what it's like.

Red Queen: My dear girl. Anyone with a head that large is welcome in my court. SOMEONE FIND HER SOME CLOTHES! USE THE DRAPERIES IF YOU MUST BUT CLOTHE THIS ENORMOUS GIRL! (To Alice) You'll be my new favourite.

(Burton, 2010)

I am exploring and practicing (in a very literal definition of practicing—full of off notes and poor rhythm as well as moments of delight) a pedagogy of hospitality. Trust is a critical component of this pedagogy—without trust it is virtually impossible to create the hospitable environment in which I want to work and in which I want to offer work to my students. I am coming to realize that inviting youth in to engage, and live, (and eat and cry and laugh) with me is vitally important to me and with any luck, to them. I endeavour to create an environment into which my students are willing to enter and to engage with me, with each other, with our emergent, co-created curriculum and with our world. I learn that I must trust my students and accept their hospitality in return. I want to explore this

give and take, this reciprocal involvement that hopefully allows for growth and understanding in all parties.

Molly Quinn, curriculum studies scholar and author, asks us to consider hospitality and its place in education. She suggests that there is often “no room in the inn” of education and that therefore hospitality is not offered or experienced. When we open ourselves to hospitality “we also risk ourselves before the other, to transcend ourselves or perhaps to come to know ourselves, to be born anew.” (2010, p.106) Quinn’s discussion of Derrida’s complex and conflicting definition of hospitality plays resoundingly in my thoughts. I am intrigued, plagued and held hostage by these ideas. Derrida remarks that hospitality is equally related etymologically to host, hostage, and hostility: “we also are through hospitality called to wait for, and wait upon, the other, as *hostage* of sorts, subject to the visitor who comes—invited *or not*” (2010, p.106). I wonder if this particular kind of hospitality, extended both to ourselves and to others, could serve as a means to create an atmosphere in which more of us would be able to appear, to be seen, in the classroom.

The hospitality that I seek, that I attempt to extend, is a hospitality to *the other* as a whole being, not just the easiest personality traits and the best behaviours.<sup>42</sup> I have recognized the need to accept my guests as they come and to try to warmly welcome them into the spaces that we inhabit together. Snowber reminds us that “it is through

<sup>42</sup> Heathcote believes that “most schooling [...] prevents [students] (those who conform at any rate) from having much opportunity to ask awkward questions about society, morality, values, purposes and laws.” (1984, p.178). When I invite the whole person in I am referring to the one who does ask those awkward questions.

opening a hospitable space to our students that the dialogical process of listening can occur. This generative place can be one where the individual listens to the life that wants to be lived within him or her" (2009a, p.4). It is a challenge and a gift to create a space where students (and teachers) have the possibility to listen to themselves and perhaps to begin to hear those things to which they are otherwise deaf.

JoAnn Phillion suggests that "the stranger needs to be welcomed and nurtured, and love is needed in these encounters" (2010, p. 120). It is a difficult time to speak of love in our relationships with students and yet loving our students is vitally important. Leggo asks "how do we promote a vocation of teaching that enters into relationships of love seeking the value, the merit, the significance in students, filled with hope that they, too, will seek the value in themselves, and one another, and us." (Sameshima & Leggo, 2010, p.76) Indeed, how do we? In opening ourselves as teachers (and individuals) to the other, in offering hospitality to each other, might we encourage relationships with our students that allow for the recognition of personal value? Leggo also offers the idea that "love opens up spaces for learning, not only in the classroom, but in every moment of being." (Sameshima & Leggo, 2010, p.76) That love opens learning in every moment intersects with the idea of life long learning and is that not what teachers want for their students—to take what they learn at school into the rest of their lives? Is then, a

pedagogy of hospitality a liminal space, a space of transition, in which trust and hospitality and welcome are reciprocal responsibilities?

I am intrigued by Quinn's question "how can we welcome students into a home that is only partly a home/our own, where there remains a question as to whose home it is, whether home or hotel as well?" (2010, p.104) How can I, as a teacher, create hospitality in a location that is not my own? My classroom is not my home, nor is the subject matter truly mine. "Are we not all visitors, or "host-ages," of the educational institution, subject to mandated curriculum labors unexpected, unprepared for, not our own?" (Quinn, 2010 p.104) I want to say that it is in welcoming in the individual students, as they are able to enter into the classroom, that I am able to negotiate some semblance (at worst) of a hospitable place. Extending these personal and individual invitations perhaps allowed some of my students to permit themselves to be vulnerable so they might learn: Brit and Mallory finding that there was space for them to function and even flourish in school, and Meaghan arriving when invited into the audition process.

Perhaps if I impose myself on the school as an unwanted guest demanding hospitality and then within that begrudging (or not) hosting, I labour to seek out and to create the places that will allow me to offer hospitable space to my students? Maybe in this way I can carve out enough room for myself and for my students. Indeed, perhaps this public struggle of mine might serve as a touchstone for my students when they will inevitably have to create spaces of their own within the institution. Given this situation of living and working and offering hospitality in spaces that are not my own, I find myself asking what is the nature of the hospitality that can be offered in my classroom?

I hope my toils in structuring generosity into our daily activities and interactions, that my work in trusting my processes and my students, that my endeavours in listening to and being present for my students, offer them some feeling of being welcomed in. As I repeatedly practice trust in them I am hopeful that my trust, which requires that I be vulnerable, wide-awake, deeply listening, and present encourages my students to trust also, and I am delighted when it seems that they do. I am opened up to new experiences as they are, and I am able to interact with them (and see myself) in new ways.

I want my students to see themselves as invited to the table. I want them to be prepared to offer and receive hospitality. I want to be comfortable doing so myself. In the light of the invitations, accepted and declined, it is my hope that they graciously and generously offer hospitality to others as well as to themselves.<sup>43</sup> I am reminded also that this extending and accepting of hospitality is a responsibility of mine, not only from a distanced position that is easily held when working with youth, but also from a position of proximity and listening and love.

Hospitable hostage host

To host and be hosted

To live and linger

<sup>43</sup> Snowber suggests that guests (even those who are uninvited) come to us in many forms and wonders "how can we lean into the invited guests of our lives whether that is people, experiences, illnesses, broken plans, or both the delight and limitations of our own bodies?"(2009d, p.121)

To be invited in to stay  
And to overstay that welcome.

The guest room  
Always space there  
Even when you are no longer a guest.

A space apart from the home  
Yet housed in that same place  
That same building  
That same heart.

Home  
And home away from home.  
This place where I work  
Is not my home,  
It is not for me to offer you  
Shelter here  
But I will anyway.

An interloper myself  
(a squatter, using the space  
while I can  
until someone evicts me,  
throws me out on my ear)  
I know what it means to  
Need to rest  
To enter  
And to feel at home.  
A place to take off my socks and shoes,  
To sit and stay.

And as I am host I am hostage  
And as I am guest I am unwanted, unwelcomed.

I invite them in willingly  
(my little delinquents,  
my students,  
my kids),  
With open heart and open mind  
I want them to come in  
And feel spurned,  
Unloved,  
Unworthy  
When they will not (and sometimes, some will not).

I impose on them too  
I ask them to receive my hosting of them  
I ask them to understand that I offer  
And insist on offering  
Even when they'd prefer I didn't  
When they'd prefer I was willing to leave them  
Outside.

But I persist  
I want them to take shelter  
And to share conversation  
And to sit at the table.  
And to break bread  
And to break tradition  
And to break out of the forms we know  
And to interrupt  
To interrupt  
To interrupt  
What needs interrupting  
And what doesn't need interrupting.

It is not a passive invitation  
And there are conditions  
And small print  
That small print changes  
It rearranges  
Itself on the page  
As you rearrange yourself on the couch.

I am guest here too  
You allow me to enter in  
To ask that you feed me  
And offer me shelter  
That you share with me  
Your space, time, desire, laughter, disgust.

I feel put-upon  
I hate that you won't leave when you're supposed to  
That you linger long after you should have gone  
But then I call you back  
I ask you to stay  
And invite you in again.

You have the power to bestow the title of host  
You can turn away  
And tell others not to come by this way  
Not to stop at this place  
And then this inn will be empty  
No guests  
No host.

## CHAPTER 8: RABBIT HOLES

### Emerging From the Rabbit Hole

'Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is "Who in the world am I?" Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!'

(Carroll, 1998, p.17)

As I emerge from this Wonderland and come up through the rabbit hole, am I changed? Yes, I am, like Alice was before me. Yes, I am, as I hope my students are. Yes, I am, as I should be. I fell down the rabbit hole with intention—I wanted to learn something from this adventure and I tried to be guided by my curiosity as Alice was when she encountered her friends and foes and even herself, during her uncovering of the upside down, inside out world of Wonderland.

Am I any more, or any less, the girl who would accept Hamish's marriage proposal? What is the proposal that is put to me? What is it that I will choose to accept or decline?

Moments of falling

Falling down a debris-filled hole

Having to find my way through locked doors  
Changing sizes to better fit through them.

Moments of being stuffed into teapots—  
Asked to do only what was done before,  
Pigeon-holed,  
Asked to conform to the spaces occupied by previous occupants.

Moments of finding my feet  
Getting the lay of the land  
Encountering the inhabitants  
Unclear at times about my allegiances.

Moments of facing fears  
And believing in impossible things  
Moments of abandoning reason  
Wielding a sword  
Doubting my readiness to use it with skill and precision.

These moments have shaped me  
Have spoken to me (and for me).

I stand here with more words in my mouth—many are strung together with  
question marks as final punctuation—words to describe what I did, what I want, what I  
hope for and desire.

I stand here with fewer words in my mouth—they have migrated onto these  
pages—I am no more sure of what I know, only what I don't.

I am emboldened  
I want to do more of this opening,  
This inviting.

I want to encounter more children in the realm of theatre  
I want to coax them out of the corners  
And see them in half-light and full spot light.

I am humbled  
I can only do this  
When and if my students allow  
If they accept my invitation  
If they present themselves.

How has my pedagogy changed? Hopefully I am more aware of moments as they happen, of saying yes when I feel like saying no, of trying no when I feel like saying yes. I would like to say that being aware of Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, I will be more present to who is presenting themselves, when, and maybe that I will be more available to present myself anew to those who come before me also. bell hooks suggests, "most professors must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit." (hooks, 1994, p.21) And so, I have my practice set out for me, a simple plan to be wholly present.

I have renewed energy for holding open space and inviting students in, encouraging them to come as they are, as they want to be, and as they would have me see them be. What other ways can I use to have children enter into the work? How else can I support them (and let them support me) in the work? Arendt (1961) asks us to consider our actions in relation to and in relationship with, our students.

And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, not to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking

something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p.196)

I still want to know if they take these moments with them. I still want to see if the process changed them, and I still know that that is something that only time will tell. I will have to wait and see and even then, I'm unlikely to know. I have to live, hopefully, in the *I don't know* space for the answer to my question. These students who touch my heart and my mind, who occupy space with me, who stay with me long after they leave my classroom, rarely return to share stories of success and defeat. (Although, some have, and I revel in their stories, anew and am honoured that they seek me out to share a moment, a performance.)

I wonder if some of my students who find their voices, who come away changed are not always happy for it. Can it be difficult for them to have participated in these ways and then not to have that opportunity later? bell hooks' students suggest that it is not always an unmitigated gift and that they struggle with how to bring their experience from her classroom into other classrooms: "You've taught us how to think critically, to challenge, and to confront, and you've encouraged us to have a voice. But how can we go to other classrooms? No one wants us to have a voice in those classrooms!" (hooks, 1994, p.149). Do we emerge from the rabbit hole, having lived our adventures in Wonderland only to return to the scene that has seemingly remained unchanged? Do we have the courage to present ourselves anew in this place that perhaps desires us unchanged? How will we choose to present ourselves and how will we be accepted?

## The Next Rabbit Hole

It'll be no use them putting their heads down and saying "Come up again, dear!" I shall only look up and say "Who am I, then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else."

(Carroll, 1998, p.19)

I am returning to my teaching position in French Immersion that I left for the Fine Arts position. I am looking forward to the challenges and students that await and I wonder how what I learned will translate into this new/old environment. I recognize that it might not be the simplest task to weave in what I have learned and the ways in which I want to work into this other environment, with its particular constraints, atmosphere and expectations.

bell hooks recognizes the difficulty in working in somewhat unconventional ways, "my point is that it takes a fierce commitment, a will to struggle, to let our work as teachers reflect progressive pedagogies." (1994, p.143) I wonder if it is possible to engage the whole school community (teachers, administrators, anyone who offers direct service to students, students, parents, etc.) in dialogue about progressive pedagogies. If we engage in this discussion, we would be able to start to see some other pedagogical possibilities, some other ways of working, learning and sharing. We could create a different atmosphere in the school community and encourage that community to reflect on what matters. I would love to open up that *what if?* and see what comes of it.

I wonder how I will be able to be the changed person I am in this place. What difference does it make that I was away, I was learning and teaching elsewhere and else-wise? How will I bring with me the Wonderland of there to the Wonderland of here?

I am not Alice  
I was sure I was  
The curious one  
The main character in the story  
The little girl who gets to adventure  
and be brave.  
But no, I am not Alice.

I may be every other character,  
Every other situation  
But I am not Alice.  
The kids are Alice  
And I want them to be Alice.  
I want them to see and do and live curiously  
I want them to understand that they have choice  
And that all they have to *do* is be willing.

Willing to fall down the hole,  
Willing to see it as adventure  
not disaster  
Willing to smile and be unsure and try to make sense of this very  
confusing place.

I am not Alice.  
I am too old,  
Too sure of breaking rules  
Too passionate that it is up to them  
To change the world  
(or at least examine it).

I am white rabbit  
Running through the yard in my top coat  
Drawing their attention,  
Leading them down an unknown path

To find themselves before a hole.  
Some of them fall in,  
Not paying attention and not stopping in time.  
Others peer in carefully from the side  
At a safe distance and call down with questions.  
Others creep slowly to the edge and then,  
Looking in,  
Hoping to make sense of what they've seen,  
Come tumbling down.

I am the Queen of Hearts  
Enforcing my rules,  
Beheading anyone who does not comply.  
(Perhaps they all of a sudden think about those rules and what they're  
good for?)

I am the blue smoking caterpillar  
Some smoke  
Some distraction tactics  
But at the heart of it  
Asking them if they know who they are,  
If they can name themselves.

I am the Cheshire Cat  
Appearing and disappearing  
At the most (in)convenient times  
Pointing the way (or not)  
Asking if they know where they want to go  
My smile lingering long after  
Our exchange is over.

I am the White Queen  
Suggesting, perhaps,  
Quietly and kindly, without imposing

That they might be the ones to slay an old foe  
But that they must choose  
As they will be fighting tooth and nail  
Against fang and claw.

I am the Mad Hatter  
Singing songs with made up words,  
Wearing many hand-crafted hats,  
Celebrating unbirthdays  
Bending and breaking the rules,  
Whispering and screaming truths and untruths,  
(half truths and third truths too)  
Inviting them to my party and hoping they'll stay awhile.

And so I might be these people for them  
I might encourage them  
I might, if I am so lucky,  
Influence them as they move through the world.  
Helping along these 'Alices',  
Equipping them with the skills and the tools,  
The beliefs and the experiences  
To be and choose and learn and fight and question  
And celebrate and sing (and Futterwacken vigorously!).

And, ok, so maybe I am Alice,  
For me, on my own journey.  
I am Alice:  
Curious  
Making my own way  
A strange girl in a strange world.

There are so many people here  
And so many people with my best intentions in mind  
And so many others who are desperate to stop me

To put up barriers to my progress  
To use me as a pawn and push me across the board  
Happy to sacrifice me for their own gain.  
And sometimes it's hard to tell who is who.

I have to hope that my students,  
My kids,  
My charges  
See themselves as the main character in their lives  
And that they approach the world with open minds  
And open hearts and open eyes.  
I have to hope my students see me living in these ways,  
Being my own Alice  
And encouraging them to do the same.

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## **Appendices**

**Appendix A.**

**Curious? Play Script**

## **Curious?**

Adventures in a Wonderland based on the 2010  
Tim Burton film *Alice in Wonderland*.

Created and written by Mrs. Wardrop and her grade 7  
students, 2011

## Characters:

The Alices

Ally: Popular girl

Alan: Nerd

Alison: Smart Aleck

Alexandra: Innocent/airhead

Alvin: Worrier/pessimist

Ino: White Rabbit Gr 10

Suri: Mallyumkin Gr 10

Doris/Donald: Dodo Gr 10

Twill: Tweedle-Dee Gr 10

Twel: Tweedle-Dum Gr 10

Twall: Tweedle Gr 10

Mercury: Mad Hatter Gr 12

Taryn: Red Queen Gr 12

Katya: White Queen Gr 12

Blotch: Stayne Gr 11

Chista: Cheshire Cat Gr 12

Abby: Absolem Gr 12

Ally's mom

Ally's dad

Ally's triplet sibs

Brittany

Scott

Sandra

John

Lacy

Principal

Alan's mom

Alan's dad

Alvin's friends

Alexandra's friends (5)

Bander

**Scene 1: Big decision Ally**

*Ally and her mom arrive at doorstep of Dad's place.*

Mom: Ally, really, stop fidgeting, it makes you look ridiculous. Stand up straight. What's wrong with you today?

Ally: Nothing.

Mom: Nothing?

Ally: Nothing.

*Mom looks at Al.*

Ally: It's just that I had that dream again.

Mom: You know, really you're too old for this. You'll be fine.

Ally: I guess.

Mom: Everything will be fine. Now, chin up, pip pip, carry on and all that.

*They knock on door. Door opens and they step through into a surprise party.*

All: Surprise!

Ally: What?

All: Welcome home!

Ally: Home?

Holly: Home.

Molly: You know, domicile/

Dolly: the place you live/

Molly: with your family (*indicating self and sibs*).

Ally: What is going on? This is not my home, what are you talking about?

Holly: Weren't you listening?

Dolly: We just told you/

Holly: You're going to be living here/

Molly: with us/

Dolly: and dad/

Holly: for good.

Dad: We've been working on this for a while now. We wanted to make sure that we had considered all the options, weighed them out, wrote lists of pros and cons, we even spoke with a risk management consultant. The probabilities prove that this is the most likely way that we will achieve a positive outcome.

*Ally is out of sorts and having trouble processing all the information.*

Mom: Look honey, you know how hard it is for this family to say things, and we thought that this would be the best way to let you know... It's just easier for us to express our (*uncomfortable saying the word*) feelings through parties.

Ally: *(to her mom)* Yeah, mom, I know, but this is insane! Who does this? The “I’m so disappointed with your report card” party was bad enough, but this? Are you kidding me?

Dad: This wasn’t part of the plan. The plan indicated that she would be happy, although somewhat uncomfortable. This is not ‘somewhat’ uncomfortable as far as I’m concerned. Why aren’t we following the plan?

Mom: You’re supposed to feel happy or at least, well, well welcomed.

Ally: I don’t.

Mom: You’re embarrassing us with this display of emotion. You need to stop before there’s too much damage done, before there’s no way to save face.

Ally: I’m not the one who planned a “We decided you should live with your dad” party. If you don’t like my reaction, maybe you should have included that ‘variable’ into your calculations.

Dad: Your things are all in your room. I even had it painted your favourite colours, why don’t you go take a look at it? Put your things down.

Ally: I don’t have any ‘things’ to put down dad, and even if I did, I’m not sure this is where I want to put them.

*Ally looks at the guests then turns and walks out the door.*

## **Scene 2: Big decision scene Alison**

*A hallway in a school*

*Brittany: leader of the pack*

*Scott: tweedle dum*

*Sandra: tweedle dee*

*John: insecure, looking to prove him/herself*

*Alison: bystander*

*Lacy*

*We see Lacy trying to negotiate the hallway. Alison is sitting off to the side, doodling in a book. The pack is standing blocking the entire hallway, laughing etc.*

Scott: Did you see what/

Sandra: she was wearing today?

Scott: Doesn't she know/

Sandra: anything about/

Scott & Sandra: anything?

John: Yeah, she's so, yeah, whatever.

Brittany: Why are you even wasting your time thinking about her? Where are we going this afternoon?

John: *(to Brittany)* Where'd you like to go?

Brittany: Somewhere different.

Scott: Somewhere fun/

Sandra: where we might run into Connor?

*Brittany gives Sandra a nasty look.*

Sandra: Um, I didn't mean..., I was just kidding, *(Is flustered and bumps into Lacy who happens to be trying to squeeze through at just the wrong time.)*

Scott:           *(to Lacy)* What's wrong with you?

John:            Don't you know how to walk?

Sandra:          You totally bumped me.

Scott:            You made her look stupid.

Sandra:          Nobody makes me look stupid.

Alison:          *(Under her breath)* Except yourself.

Lacy:            I was just...

Scott:            No one cares what you were just.

John:            No one cares about *you* at all.

Sandra:          What kind of idiot are you anyway?

Scott:            Don't you see that you're not welcome here?

John:            She probably can't see that, she probably can't see anything at all. Have you seen those glasses?

Brittany:         Why are you even bothering?

Scott:            Clearly, *it's* not worth our time.

Sandra:          Clearly.

John:            Yeah. *(She shoves Lacy.)*

*Lacy looks down and then at Alison.*

John: What an idiot.

Sandra: She can't even walk down the hall/

Scott: without falling.

Alison: *(Again, mostly to herself)* Really? I thought this kind of drama was reserved for afterschool specials. Maybe this is just another one of my wacked-out dreams.

Scott: You better/

Sandra: get moving/

John: now before you do anything else stupid.

Lacy: Look, I wasn't, I'm not trying to

*Sara gives her an icy stare. The pack starts leaning in and are getting progressively more aggressive. Lacy looks to Alison again. Alison stands up and then freezes (waiting for Ino's appearance).*

### **Scene 3: Big Decision Alan**

*Year-end celebration and awards night at the local theatre.*

Principal: We really are so pleased to be able to celebrate so many amazing students and their achievements. Clearly, as we are already well into our evening's program, there is much of which to be proud, and proud we are. Another shining example of scholastic aptitude and perseverance is student Alan Blakely. He organized the chess club, is four-time provincial science fair winner, and has been on the Principal's list for perfect attendance since Kindergarten. Please, let's give a big Sheffield Elementary welcome to Alan and his parents.

*Alan walks up to Principal and shakes hands. Stands on 'stage' looking awkward.*

Principal: Alan, we have a special surprise for you this evening. We know that you will be as excited as we are about this!

*Alan is looking more and more uncomfortable by the moment. The secretary appears on stage and hands the principal a letter.*

Principal: We received this letter from the principal at Pacific Science and Technology Academy requesting your enrolment at their prestigious institution!

*Applause.*

Alan: But I didn't apply...I don't know....

Principal: We could hardly believe our eyes. It is unheard of for them to recruit, but you have been recruited!

Alan: Umm...It's quite an honour, I'm sure but I...well...

Mom: You don't look happy. This is amazing! This never happens! And it happened to you!

Dad: Really Alan, at least try to smile. Pretend if you have to.

Alan: It's just...I'm not...I guess I'm just a little tired, overwhelmed. I've been having that dream.

Mom: This is NOT the time to bring that up again.

Dad: *(to audience)* Alan is so pleased and shocked. He's having a little trouble finding words to express his great appreciation and excitement about attending Pacific Science and Technology Academy.

*Applause*

Alan: I, uh, need to get some water. *He leaves the stage.*

#### **Scene 4: Big Decision Alvin**

*Alvin: Responding to something someone has written on his Facebook page.*

*Logs into Facebook account. He looks at 'Notifications' and sees that a girl has posted on his wall and that there are lots of comments on this particular post.*

Alvin: What? You've got to be kidding me. This doesn't look good. *Reads the post.*

Original post: Hey Alvin ☺ I just really wanted to say I think you're really cute and that we'd be perfect together. Want to go see a movie or something?  
Message me back ASAP.

Comment 1: Awww, Alvin got a gf.

Comment 2: What?? Since when do you like him?

Comment 3: ROFL.

Comment 4: What's so funny?

Comment 5: Must be something wrong with her if she likes you Al.

Comment 6: Way to go bud!

Comment 7: So cute!!! ;) omg

Comment 8: Why'd you post this where everyone can see?

Comment 9: Yeah, that's stupid! Hahahahahahaha!

Alvin: No. No no no no no no. This is not happening. This is not good. This is not going to make my mom happy. How could you do this to me? You like me? This is how you show someone you like them? What is this world coming to? Everyone can see this, everyone can read this, everyone already has! Except maybe my mom. She hasn't commented—yet.

*Reads through posts again.*

Original post: Hey Alvin ☺ I just really wanted to say I think you're really cute and that we'd be perfect together. Want to go see a movie or something?  
Message me back ASAP.

Comment 1: Awww, Alvin got a gf.

Comment 2: What?? Since when do you like him?

Comment 3: ROFL.

Comment 4: What's so funny?

Comment 5: Must be something wrong with her if she likes you Al.

Comment 6: Way to go bud!

Comment 7: So cute!!! ;) omg

Comment 8: Why'd you post this where everyone can see?

Comment 9: Yeah, that's stupid! Hahahahahahaha!

Alvin:           What am I supposed to do? How do I respond to this? This, oh, I think I'm going to be sick. *Gets out a paper bag and starts breathing into it.* What a nightmare, only this one is real. I think I'd take the stupid rabbit over this any day. You are supposed to be my friends. How is this funny? How is this ok? Yeah, I know, I know.

*Alvin starts typing out a response then deletes what he's written. He does this twice more before getting up and walking away from the computer.*

### **Scene 5: Big Decision Alexandra**

*Alexandra enters her room holding onto a letter from a big hockey academy. She rushes to her bed where she rips it open and greedily reads it. Clearly she has been admitted to the academy and is overjoyed.*

*All her friends burst into her room wearing their ballet outfits. Alexandra quickly hides the letter from the hockey academy.*

F1:           Open your letter already! *(Handing Alexandra the letter.)*

F2: I'm so excited I think I might throw up.

F3: You are the only one left who hasn't read their letter.

F4: Come on, come on, come on.

F5: It's not like we don't already all know that she's in.

F1: Of course she's in; she's the best dancer.

Alexandra: Doesn't mean anything. I did that weird move when we were crossing the floor...

F3: They will love you, everyone loves you.

F2: Even when you do 'weird' moves.

F5: It's part of what makes you, you know, well, you.

F4: So, come on, you're killing us!

Alexandra: *(reading from the letter)* We are pleased to inform you...

*All friends start screaming, jumping around, etc. Alexandra touches the other letter and is torn.*

F1: You ok?

Alexandra: Yeah, I'm just, a little tired and um, yeah. *She begins to pull herself away from her friends and leaves the room.*

F5: No kidding.

F3: The Royal Winnipeg Ballet school!

F2&4: This is so exciting!

### **Scene 6: Following Ino**

*Ino arrives centre stage and presents him/herself to get the Als' attention. They are too wrapped up in their situation to notice; so Ino has to work harder and harder to get their attention. Finally, they notice and are intrigued and so follow him/her.*

### **Scene 7: The Fall**

*They fall through the physical 'steps' of falling. It is a series of tableaux.*

*They react to having had fallen and are getting their bearings.*

Als together: (except Alexandra) This is...

Alexandra: Hmm.

Alison: Strange.

Alan: Weird.

Ally: Random.

Alvin: Bad.

Ally: So I'm Ally.

Alison: Alison.

Alvin: I'm Alvin.

Alan: Alan.

Alexandra: Alexandra but my friends just call me 'Al'.

Alison: Right. So what do we do from here? *(Pause)* Any thoughts? No? I'm on my own? Ok. Well, I'm going to try to get out of here then. *(She starts trying the doors.)*

### **Scene 8: Arrival at W.L. High**

*The others move to lockers trying to figure out which one will open. Out of nowhere appear two secretaries.*

Secretary1: Welcome to W.L. high school. As new grade eight students you are entitled to these freshly printed welcome and orientation packages.

*There are no packages. The Als look at the secretaries and at each other not sure what to do.*

Alan: We're not new students.

Secretary 2: You look like new students, you sound like new students and you smell like new students.

Alexandra: Really? I thought I'd lost that new student smell.

Ally: I don't smell unless it's from something gross on my way down that nasty hole.

Alison: Nice.

Alvin: Is there any way to open these lockers?

Secretary1: Yes, of course.

Alvin: And...

Secretary 2: And what? Can you make this fast? I have to make a call.

Alison: What are the combos?

Secretary 1: They should be in your supplies.

Ally: We don't have any supplies.

Secretary 2: You should come to school better prepared.

Alan: We didn't exactly know we were going to fall down a hole and land in a school.

Suri: Are you sure?

Ino: Yes, I'm sure.

Secretary 1: That's what they all say. Hold on a sec, I'm on Facebook.

Alan: 'They all' who?

Secretary 2: The new grade eights. Tiresome group.

Alison: The combinations?

Secretary 1: You have to make yourselves small enough to fit through the door but big enough to turn the dial. There is no other way.

Alexandra: I can probably fit.

*Als look at Alexandra like she's crazy—there's no way she can fit through the door.*

Suri: But you brought down five of them.

Ino: Yes, clearly. I'm not going up there again. It's dirty and disgusting and no one knows how to do anything properly—they don't even have tea! It's all coffee this, decaf that, no foam, extra hot, half fat, extra flavour shot, tallgrandeventil!

Doris: No one is saying that it's easy up there but this doesn't seem right at all.

Alison: Right, make ourselves small and big? Like that's gonna happen.

Alvin: Yeah, I don't think that's even possible. This is so stupid.

Alan: But it's just a dream, right?

Ally: Right. So?

Alan: So anything's possible.

*Als look sceptical but don't know what else to do especially since the secretaries are not offering any help.*

Suri: Take them back. They should know this better. They should be able to do this right the first time.

Ino: It's been a long time for all of them, they may not remember themselves.

Twill: Could be they are/

Twel: could be they aren't.

Twall: Could well be.

Twill: Maybe they aren't/

Twall: maybe they are.

Twell: On the one hand/

Twall: But on the other/

Twill: On the other other hand.

Ally: Where'd these come from?

Alison: Cold Fries.

Alexandra: *(reading the card)* Eat me.

Alan: No way.

Alison: Dare 'ya.

Alvin: They're going to make you sick.

Alan: It's just a dream, how bad can it be? *(Passes them out.)*

Alexandra: On the count of three: one, two, three.

*They eat the fries and then grow. They look around; one finds a key on the top of one of the lockers.*

Doris: We should take them to Abby; she'll know what to do.

Suri: Yes, to Abby.

Ino: To Abby if you have no more faith in me than that.

Alan: Now what?

Alexandra: *(reading the card)* Drink me.

Alison: Bottoms up!

*They pass around the flat pop can. They shrink back down to be able to fit through the lockers. They come through the lockers into the space from which the others were watching.*

Als: Who are you and why are you looking at me like that?

Suri: The real question is who are you?

Als: I'm AI.

Doris: Yes, we know that, but are you *the* AI?

Als: Why wouldn't I be? This is my/

Alexandra, Alan: dream

Ally, Alison and Alvin: nightmare.

Alison: The right AI for what?

Ino: For the slaying.

Alan: The slaying?

Ino: Yes, that.

Alvin: Then no, I'm definitely not the right AI.

Suri: I knew it, I knew it. You never get anything right.

Ino: Give Al a chance. You don't know.

Ally: Give me a chance to do what?

Ino: To be the right Al.

Alexandra: I'm right.

Doris: Really, off to Abby.

Als: Who's Abby?

Suri: The 'one who knows' of course.

Ino: She's the peer counsellor.

Twall: She's Abby.

Twill: She's absolute.

Twell: She's a little strange.

### **Scene 9: Intro to football field**

*(Taryn the quarterback is running practice sitting on sidelines. Three cheerleaders are hanging around her, trying to make her happy.)*

Taryn: RUN! I said RUN, not walk, not jog, not skip to my Lou, I said RUN!

Cheers: Run, Run, don't skip, don't walk...

Team: Yes, QB. (*Running and bowing as they pass her.*)

Taryn: (*to Blotch who rubs her shoulders*) How is it possible that this all falls on my shoulders? You—off with your jersey! All we want is to be the best, the fastest, the roughest, the winningest team. To demoralize our opponents, decimate, obliterate, destroy, annihilate.

Cheers: Decimate, obliterate, annihilate. Decimate, obliterate, annihilate. Decimate, obliterate, annihilate.

Taryn: Higher! Is that really so much to ask?

Blotch: Not so much to ask, no.

Taryn: They all look to me for everything, like they can't think for themselves.

*Cheers nod and agree.*

Blotch: They look to you because you are so enigmatic.

*Taryn looks at Blotch and smiles lovingly.*

Taryn: The next one of you who fumbles is off the team!

Cheers: Off the team!

Taryn: (*Reaching for her water bottle.*) Do I have to do everything myself? What is going on here? Blotch, what has happened to my vitamin water?

Blotch: I'm sure I know nothing about your water.

Taryn: Run in! Run in! (*Waits an instant for the team to arrive then starts.*) Which one of you snivelling, incompetent, greasy fingered sloths drank MY vitamin water? From MY water bottle no less? (*Marches down the line inspecting each player.*)

*The cheers follow Taryn down the line making nasty comments as they go.*

P1: Not me.  
P2: Me neither.  
P3: No QB, not me.  
P4: Wasn't me.

*One player gives Taryn a look to show which player drank the water.*

Taryn: I will enjoy having your jersey washed, pressed and passed on to a player who truly deserves it. I will not tolerate mediocrity!

Cheers: Not tolerate mediocrity! Uh-uh, uh-uh!

Taryn: Blotch!

*Blotch violently pulls the jersey off the indicated player.*

### **Scene 9.5**

Alexandra: Where did they go?

Alison: If you two hadn't started your Star Wars talk we wouldn't have lost them.

Alexandra: Twell said that way, Twall said that way and Twill said that way.

Alan: Why don't we go the way we've been going the whole time.

Alexandra: That way then.

Alan: No, this way. Straight!

### **Scene 10: Intro to ultimate team**

Katya: Great job everyone. We played a strong, foul-free game and really, what an amazing song we came up with at the end. I am so proud of us.

*Players high-five and congratulate each other.*

Katya:           So let's get this practice started. Who'd like to run this one? Or should we just let it evolve naturally?

*Nods and yeses from the players. They start running around to warm up, at a jog, chatting and laughing as they go.*

Katya:           Be careful, you don't want to hurt yourselves, or really the grass either—tread lightly, tread lightly!

*They set themselves up in a stack and then start running. Katya plays with them encouraging them to pass to all players, be kind, use their strengths. They come up with a cheer, line by line with different players contributing bits and pieces. They then perform it.*

You did a good job  
But we did a good job too  
We threw a disk  
And we sort of missed  
And that's why we lost to you.

You did a good job  
But we did a good job too.  
We felt alive,  
And we did high fives,  
Threw a flick and a hammer too.

You did a good job  
But we did a good job too.  
You made some plays  
Without delays  
And now we salute you!

**Scene 11: Abby**

Abby:           *(looking at a list)* Who are you?

*They all look at each other uncertain how to start.*

Abby:           Who are you?

Alison:          I'm Alison.

Abby:           Al. Hmm. Come a little closer.

Alison:          Uh, no thanks.

Abby:           Not so much the Al I once knew.

Alison:          No, certainly not some Al you once knew.

Abby:           And the rest of you?

Ally:            Ally, of course.

Abby:           Al.

Alan:            Alan.

Abby:           Al.

Alexandra:      Alexandra but my friends call me Al.

Abby:           Al.

Alvin:           I don't really—

Abby: AI. (*Addressing all five*) So then AI, what is it that you want? You need to clearly define your desires, so you can write out a goal plan in order to more effectively achieve those goals.

Suri: Is it the right AI?

Abby: Certainly not *the* right AI.

Doris: Is one of them the right AI?

Abby: Retrieve the system of reckoning.

*Twill/Twall/Twell pick up Abby and one takes out the yearbook that she's been sitting on.*

Abby: Did I say you could touch me?

Twill/Twell/Twall: (*Getting out an annual/school year book out from under Abby*) The system of reckoning!

Als: System of reckoning?

Ino: The timeline précis of W.L. high school. It tells us of all events past, present and future. What is written here is imprinted on the souls of all those who pass through this place.

Abby: And?

Twill: (*reading from the book*) Most likely to

Twell: slay the JBW:

Twall: AL.

*Als go and take a look at yearbook.*

Alison: But that's just a yearbook.

Alexandra: And we all know that yearbooks can't tell the future.

Ally: There's no way *that's* what will be said about me in the yearbook.

Alvin: Unless we're talking Halo, you've got this wrong. I don't slay.

Alan: The chances of slaying are poor.

Alexandra: What's a JBW?

Ino: *(To Abby)* One of them?

Abby: One, perhaps.

Als: You've made a mistake.

Abby: No it's you who've made the mistake. What is in the system of reckoning is what is. As your peer counsellor I recommend that you start taking steps to know yourselves so as to better recognize the patterns and habits that prevent you from achieving your own/

*The football team comes running through the space. They are making a lot of noise. Bander picks up the yearbook and throws it to Blotch. They react as though they've just scored a touch down. Twell, Twill amd Twall are taken by members of the team and are carried off. Doris, Ino and Suri escape.*

## **Scene 12: On their way**

Alvin: Is this weird, or is it just me?

Alan: This is some bizarre dream.

Alison: More like a nightmare.

Ally: I wouldn't know what you're talking about.

Alexandra: I kind of liked that Abby girl.

Alison: So, if this is my dream, who are you and why are you here?

Alvin: I was wondering the same thing about you.

Ally: Just shut up, both of you.

Alan: I wouldn't have said that.

Ally: No, obviously, because you didn't say it, I did.

Alexandra: There's no reason to be mean.

Alison: It must be one of those dreams that just keep going around and around in circles.

Ally: You have those too?

Alexandra: Who doesn't?

Alison: No one else I've ever asked.

Alvin: I don't ask much but no one else I know either.

Alan: Me neither.

Alison: Seems a little strange to me. Five of us, all Als, weird dreams.

Ally: Don't compare yourself to me.

Alexandra: I think it's kind of nice.

Alan: What are the odds of this happening just by chance?

Alvin: I don't think there are odds for this kind of thing happening at all.

### **Scene 13: Chista**

*Chista appears out of nowhere.*

Chista: Where are you going?

Alexandra: We're not really sure.

Chista: Not sure? Well then, I'm not sure how I can help you.

Alison: You're going to help us?

Chista: Oh, yes.

Alvin: And what's that going to cost us?

Chista: Not a very trusting creature are you?

Alvin: What, of everything that's happened today, would lead me to be 'very trusting'?

Chista: What a funny group you are.

Alan: We're not really a group.

Alexandra: We all just seem to have landed here at the same time.

*(Chista disappears to then reappear somewhere else.)*

Chista: How very interesting.

Alison: Where should we go?

Ally: You seem like someone in the loop, you might know a good place to be...

Chista: Ah, yes, I suppose I could take you someplace.

Alexandra: Someplace sounds lovely!

Alvin: Someplace sounds no different from this place.

Chista: Oh, but you haven't seen Mercury then?

Alan: No, we haven't seen Mercury.

Chista: Well then, we must go someplace. Coming?

#### **Scene 14: Tea Party**

Mercury: Al! It's you! It's all of you. It's been so long. Come, come, come.

Suri: What, without an invitation?

Mercury: There is an open invitation for Al. Don't you look different.

Alison: From what?

Mercury: The last time of course.

Chista: Your fries are stale.

Mercury: All this time and that's what you have to say?

Chista: What else should I have to say?

Mercury: Something about the state of education these days?

Ino: Not much of a party you've got going here.

Mercury: True, true enough. Come, let's feast!

Alison: Feast? We've landed in medieval times now?

Alan: Doesn't look much like a feast to me.

Mercury: No? Maybe it's a little less than you're used to but I think it suits us quite well. I've just the thing. *(Gestures to sound booth to start music.)*

*Dance/movement piece moving around the table, playing with the food/drink. Some joy in it but it is off kilter. It ends with the arrival of Blotch. As she approaches, Mercury stuffs the Als into lockers and then stands in front of the doors. Chista disappears, Ino and Suri are fidgety and act strangely.*

Blotch: Always on a 'spare' I see Mercury.

Mercury: Spare, yes. Spare tire, spare break, spare pair.

Blotch: As usual, totally lost and gone.

Mercury: *(sings a little tune)* Lost and gone, lost and gone, lost and gone.

*Ino and Suri join in the song until Blotch cuts them all off.*

Blotch: The Als. We know they're here and we know about their date to slay the JBW. You wouldn't know anything about them now would you?

Mercury: Know? No. No how, no way, no sense.

Taryn: *(calling from off stage)*: Blotch!

Mercury: *(to Blotch)* Cold fry?

*Blotch gives Mercury a dirty look, then turns and goes.*

### **Scene 15: Escape One**

*The Als come out of the lockers.*

Alvin: What is the deal? Why is everyone so wrapped up in us slaying this JBW?

Ally: I am not slaying anything.

Alexandra: I'm Buddhist; I am to harm no living thing.

Mercury: *(to all)* Is that so?

*A series of tableaux of some of the terrible things Taryn has done to W.L. High.*

Ally: Yeah, we get it.

Alison: But what are we supposed to do about it?

Mercury: The JBW. It's all in the system of reckoning.

Alvin: The yearbook? Really, we're supposed to trust what some high school editor wrote in a yearbook?

Alan: Why not, right? Can it get much weirder than it already is?

Ino: There's one more thing—you need the Mevepe.

Suri: Yes but you can't really imagine that they will be able to get that, can you?

Ino: No, but we have to try don't we?

Suri: I don't trust you and your trying very much. You're the one who brought down these five Als, not just *the* Al.

Ino: I know where the Mevepe is kept. Bander has it in his locker. It won't be easy to get.

Mercury: They're coming back—go! Run, go now!

Alexandra: Where? Where do we go?

Mercury: To Katya and the grass field!

*Mercury starts shoving them, trying to get them going. As soon as they start to move she starts creating some commotion to block the football team from accessing the Als. They are stopped but grab her and carry her off.*

### **Scene 16: Rant**

Ally: Ok

Alan: Ok

Alvin: Ok

Alison: I get it.

All: I'm Alice and this is Wonderland.

Alison: I mean it's obvious: the fall, the room full of doors, the weird people, but really?

Alexandra: This is the Wonderland I get?

Ally: I don't deserve this.

Alan: And why are there five of us?

Alvin: Maybe I won't have to slay the JBW.

All: *(except Alison)* Maybe Alison will!

Alison: I don't like being told what I have to do.

Alvin: Why me?

Alexandra: Why here?

Ally: WHY WITH THEM????

Alison: Whenever Alan opens his mouth he sounds like he ate a dictionary and is burping up words.

Alan: Alexandra probably thinks this is a pleasant school trip.

Ally: Alvin worries about, well, EVERYTHING.

Alvin: Alison makes smart aleck remarks every step of the way.

Alexandra: Ally's just so, you know...

All: This Wonderland sucks!

Alexandra: I want the talking flowers.

Alison: I want the crazy Duchess and the baby that turns into a pig.

Alvin: I want the predictable end of the story.

Alan: I want to play flamingo croquet.

Ally: I want Johnny Depp.

All: I want to go home.

*All at the same time:*

Alvin: I guess I'll just sit here and rot.

Ally: The coach is gonna put me at the bottom of the pyramid!

Alexandra: I think I like Abby the best so far.

Alan: Isn't Alice a girl? I'm not a girl.

Alison: Shouldn't I be wearing a blue dress?

*The AIs are each lost in their own thoughts for a moment. Then they start to look at each other.*

Ally: Enough. I think we've all had enough. So what are we going to do?

Alvin: Do? Are you kidding? I'm done. I'm not doing anything.

Alan: Mercury said that we were supposed to go find Katya.

Alison: Do you always do what people tell you to?

Alan: You ever do what people tell you?

Ally: You're not helping.

Alexandra: I think we have to go get the Mevepe. What if it's injured?

Alan: It's not a creature, it's a thing Alex.

Alison: I think she's right though, we need to go get it and Mercury.

Alexandra: How are we going to find them?

Alvin: We don't really have to find them—we know that they're on the football field with Taryn.

Ally: And it'll be a piece of cake walking onto the field, picking them up and walking away, I'm sure.

Alison: Nothing's been a piece of cake, not even the thing that was supposed to be cake.

Alan: This is where in the story Alice decides that it's up to her to decide. That she's tired of being questioned, inspected, stuffed in lockers and told what to do.

Alexandra: She makes her path.

Ally: So?

Alan: So, are we making our own path or what?

Alvin: Definitely what.

*The Als give him a look.*

Alvin: Right, I knew you guys wouldn't go for that.

Alan: Who's up for some football?

### **Scene 17: Arrival in Taryn's field**

Taryn: YOU USELESS WIDE RECEIVER!! LEARN HOW TO CATCH A BALL!

Player 1: I'm sorry... sorry. I tried my best.

Taryn: YOUR BEST ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH!! GO TO THE LOCKER ROOM, YOU'RE OFF THIS TEAM!!!

Player 1: *(Walks offstage, sees the Als)* Don't even try...

Ally: Try for what?

Alison: Try out for the team, you idiot.

Alvin: Balls are scary and tackles hurt!

Alexandra: I don't like this.

Taryn *(spotting the Als)*: WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU AT MY PRACTICE??

Alan *(noticing the huge T on Taryn's jersey)*: Uh... I'm Teddy, yeah Teddy...

*Taryn nods her head, letting him know that he got it right.*

Ally: My name's Tiffany! Totally Tiffany!!

Alexandra: It's uh... umm... T... Tessa?

Alvin: Theodore! *(Holding on to the "ore »)*

Alison: My name originated in Greece meaning 'Blooming' and it is Talia.

Taryn: I DIDN'T ASK FOR A DESCRIPTION, I DON'T EVEN CARE ABOUT YOUR NAMES. WHY ARE YOU HERE?

Ally: We were told to come here-

Alan: *(Interrupting Ally and giving her an you-almost-blew-our-cover- look)* We want to join the team!

Alvin: 'Cause I totally like getting tackled and hit with balls. Don't you Teddy???  
*(Gives Alan a look)*

Alison: We all love football; we were the best players at our elementary school. Weren't we everyone?

Alexandra: How do you play? –

Alison: Oh ha ha! Tessa you are so funny!

Alexandra: I get it from my Daddy! Tee hee!

Alan: So are we on the team or not?

*Als look at him unhappily.*

Taryn: Yes my lovelies! You're all on the team! Who plays wide receiver?

Cheer1: I bet it's you, you look like a wide receiver to me.

Alison: You wish you were a tight end.

Cheer 2: Are you the fullback, halfback or the hunchback?

Alexandra: All three.

Cheer 3: This one looks too soft.

*Taryn gives the Cheers a look.*

Als: I play wide receiver.

Taryn: Great! You're my favourites already. *(Turns to team and says)* TEAM, I NEED VITAMIN WATER! GET IT NOW AND SOME FOR OUR NEW WIDE RECEIVERS!!

*Players scatter off, taking their orders.*

Taryn: Now come with me I'll show you to the locker-room so you can get properly dressed. Hello Mercury THESE are our new players. Favourites, *(to Als)* this is our mascot; she has so much SPARE time with all her SPARE BLOCKS she is our mascot!

*Mercury looks up at Als and then looks at Taryn and growls.*

*Taryn smiles at Mercury and then ignores her. She sits, making herself comfortable in the locker room. She gestures to the Als that they should sit. There isn't really space for them to sit and so they look around and try to squeeze onto benches, etc.*

Taryn: Oh, you have to see the latest in entertainment! Weirdoes! Weirdoes! Come, do one of those funny little song and dance numbers for us.

*Twill, Twell and Twall come out and see the Als who gesture to the triplets not to say anything. The triplets shove each other a little.*

Taryn: Well? Get on with it.

Twell, Twill, Twall: *Do the cheer that the team made up earlier.*

*Taryn watches them, then stands up.*

Taryn: I'm bored. *She gets up and walks out of the room.*

### **Scene 18: Escape from Taryn's court**

*The Als are looking at the lockers trying to find Bander's.*

Blotch: What are you still doing here?

Ally: Working on some plays, you know, for the game.

Blotch: I'd like to see some of those plays.

*Alison hands Blotch a small whiteboard with some plays drawn out on it.*

Blotch: I'm not sure Taryn would take kindly to you planning her moves for her. Although, these are bold plays.

Taryn: *(from offstage)* Blotch!

Blotch: That's her now. I'll show her these.

*Blotch exits taking the plays with him. Bander walks in as Blotch exits. He walks directly to his locker, opens it, and then sits on the bench in front of it. He makes animal noises: grunts, growls, snorts, etc. The Als are desperate to see inside his locker but are trying to be nonchalant about it. Ally approaches Bander and tries to make nice but doesn't know where to start and so gives up. Alison approaches him next, being buddy-buddy with him to no avail. Finally Alexandra approaches him hand out as if he were a dog. He makes and keeps eye contact with her.*

Alexandra:     *(as if speaking to a dog)* You're a good player, aren't you Bander? Yes, yes, you are. You are a very good player.

*Bander looks at Alexandra and smiles. He starts becoming animated.*

Alexandra:     They don't treat you so well here, do they? No they don't. They don't love you as much as you deserve to be loved. Do you want to come with me? Do you? Of course you do. Why don't we go for a little walk? You'd like that, wouldn't you Bander?

*Bander nods and gets up to follow Alexandra out of the room. The Als set Alvin watching at the entrance to the locker room as lookout. As soon as Bander is out of earshot, the Als start pulling all sorts of nasty smelling and nasty looking stuff out of his locker looking for the Mevepe. They look at each piece trying to decide if it is the Mevepe. Finally one unearths the trophy; they look at it and come to the realization that this is the Mevepe. They also find the system of reckoning.*

Alan:            So now all we need to do is find Mercury. Oh, and find Alexandra and her new pet.

Alison:          I am sure that Mercury is in one of the lockers.

Alan:            But which one?

Ally:            There are so many!

Alvin:          Hey guys? Maybe this key will help...

All:             *(except Alvin)* Where did you find that???

Alvin:          On the floor...

Alison:         We'll start trying the different lockers.

Alvin:          This one's not it.

Alan: Great, we'll keep looking.

Alvin: I think I found it!

*Everyone runs to locker. Alvin struggles to open it, so Ally grabs key, and opens it.*

All: MERCURY!!!

Mercury: I knew you would find me. I can always depend on the new grade eights.

*They get Mercury out of the locker and start calling quietly for Alexandra. She returns with Bander.*

Alan: You ok Alex?

Alexandra: Yeah, I'm great. Thanks.

Alison: So, your friend, is he, um, coming with us?

Alexandra: Well I can't exactly leave him here to fend for himself now can I?

Ally: No, that might be cruel or something.

*The Als take off together for the grass field.*

### **Scene 19: Arrival in Katya's court**

*The group arrives at the practice field and are greeted warmly by all Ultimate players.*

Katya: You've arrived!

Alan: Yup.

Alexandra: *(Handing over the MVP trophy)* We think this is yours.

Katya: I am happy to have it back again, yes. It makes it possible to defeat Taryn and her Terrors. Thank you, thank you very much for bringing it back to us.

Alison: Why do you need it?

Katya: It is ours, you see. Taryn believed that if she had it, she would have control over the field by having the most valuable player on her team.

Ally: But it's just the trophy, it's not the player.

Katya: Things aren't always what they seem.

Alvin: That's for sure.

Katya: Now all we need is a champion.

*The Als look at each other and Katya uncomfortably. Finally Alvin speaks, trying to take the pressure off.*

Alvin: How exactly is the MVP award trophy going to make it possible to defeat them?

Alison: Doesn't seem like much of a weapon.

Katya: Maybe not, but I am sure you will find it sufficient.

Alison: Me? I never said/

Katya: No, of course. None of you have. This is a decision you have to make. No one else can make it for you. You will be the ones to face the JBW and you are the ones who will have to decide.

*The Als are uncomfortable again and excuse themselves from the field.*

## **Scene 20: Chat with Abby**

*The Als place themselves in the space needing room to think. Bander comes with Alexandra who absentmindedly 'pets' him while she thinks. Abby brings attention to herself and her position when she speaks.*

Abby:           You seem unsettled.

Alvin:           That's for sure. My stomach's been upset since we got here.

Alan:           I don't think she was talking about your digestion.

Alvin:           Right. Sorry.

Abby:           Is there something bothering you?

Alexandra:     There's lots that's bothering all of us.

Alison:          No one wants to slay the JBW.

Abby:           I see.

Ally:            No, I don't think you do see. We're the ones on the hook for killing this thing.

Alvin:           It's not like we don't want to help but this seems a little extreme.

Alison:          I think we're all ready to wake up from this dream.

Abby:           It seems to me that you've just found yourselves.

Ally: I don't really think I was lost in the first place.

Abby: Those who are lost seldom know they are lost until they are found.

Alison: Thanks Yoda.

Abby: A great master. One who knew a lot about himself and those around him.

Alan: But he is just a character from a movie—not a real person.

Abby: Real. Something pretty important to you yet you seem to have a hard time differentiating between 'real' and 'dream'.

Alison: What do you mean by that?

Abby: What do you think I mean?

Ally: I hate it when my mom answers a question with a question.

Alvin: That's 'cause it's not really an answer.

Abby: Of course it's not. It's not my job, or hers, to tell you the answers. It's my job to ask you the questions. Finding the answers within yourselves is your job.

Alan: Great, another super helpful answer.

Alison: This is kind of like talking to a fortune cookie.

Abby: This has been a journey for you. You have learned, you have chosen. It is time to do it again.

Ally: But it's so much easier when the choice is made for you.

Abby: Is it?

*Pause.*

Abby: This is the end of this life for me.

Alvin: Are you dying?

Abby: No, I am simply transitioning from this life to another.

*Als clearly have no idea what she's saying.*

Abby: I'm going to University. I'm no longer going to be a highschool student, I'll be a psych student at SFU.

Alexandra: Oh well then, good luck!

Abby: Thanks. To you too. *She gets up and leaves the Als to think.*

### **Scene 21: Chat with Mercury**

*Mercury enters the space.*

Alexandra: I'll miss you when I wake up.

Mercury: You really think this is just a dream? You don't remember anything from before?

*The five of them speak at the same time:*

Ally: How do you know?

Alexandra: What do you mean?

Alvin: From before?

Alan: Before? You mean...

Alison: This is so familiar but...

*Speaking as one:*

Alison: So this is

Alan: real?

Ally: You are actually expecting me

Alan: to slay the JBW with my own two hands?

Alvin: What does this say about my mental health?

Alison: But it all seems so

Alan: unreal.

Ally: How am I supposed to kill a real thing?

Alexandra: with a real life?

Alvin: It was bad enough when it was just a dream.

Mercury: We will be there with you when you defeat the JBW.

Ally: We who?

Alex: What if we're too small—what if it's too big?

Alan: What if we can't slay the JBW?

Mercury: You can.

Alvin: I can't even imagine it being possible.

Mercury: But you already have.

Alex: Today's been a big black hole of big decisions.

Alison: Maybe we're not the right Als.

Mercury: But just maybe you are.

## **Scene 22: The Battle**

*On opposite sides of the stage the two teams are preparing for battle. The football team is being noisy and aggressive. The ultimate players are stretching and seem quite calm.*

Katya: All we need is our champion.

Mercury: I am ready.

Ino: I am the better choice.

Suri and Doris: I am the one and only.

Katya: The 'system of reckoning'?

Ino: *(reading from the book)* Most likely to

Suri: slay the JBW:

Doris: AL.

*The ultimate team is disappointed, the players are looking around hoping for the best but unsure. The Als enter into the space, carrying the Mevepe clearly ready to take on the JBW.*

Taryn: Charge!

*Katya nods at her team that moves forward into battle.*

*The battle ensues, with the Als eventually looking like they will slay the JBW with the Mevepe but change their minds and hand it to them instead.*

*JBW takes trophy and becomes part of the Ultimate team.*

Taryn: (to JBW) Traitors! How could you do this to me? I've won you more trophies than you could ever have won on your own. (To the team) This isn't over! Attack!

*The team members take off their pads and join ultimate team. Bander and Mercury take Taryn and Blotch and stand them in front of Katya.*

Katya: For the crimes you've committed against the community of WL High you are hereby banished from any and all fields of play.

Blotch: (pulls on a tie-dyed bandana) Katya, I've always admired you and your generosity. So, of course, I would be happy to join your team.

Katya: I owe you no kindness. Away with you both!

*Mercury and Bander lead them away.*

### **Scene 23: Goodbye**

*Katya wipes sweat off the JBW and hands the Als the cloth with the sweat on it.*

Katya: Thank you. You have no idea what this means to us. This will get you home safely.

Mercury: Will you leave so soon?

Alvin: Yes.

Alan: We won't forget.

Mercury: No, neither will we.

Ally: It's been interesting.

Alison: That's one word for it.

Chista: I'll be seeing you someplace.

Doris: I'll miss you very, very much.

Twill/Twell/Twall: Group hug!

Ino: (to Suri) I told you so!

*Suri shrugs.*

Mercury: There is always an open invitation for Al.

*The Als are not at all sure how to use the cloth with the sweat to get home. They look to Katya who mimes washing her face with it (and then shivers). The four react and start wiping themselves with it.*

#### **Scene 24: Up the hole**

*The Als go through the falling tableaux in reverse.*

#### **Scene 25: Resolution Alexandra**

*Alexandra comes back from WL High knowing what she wants to do.*

Alexandra: Guys, I need to tell you something.

F1: You've already booked your flight?

F2: You're leaving next week!

Alexandra: Uh, no. I won't be leaving.

F3: Of course you'll be leaving.

F4: Just not yet, right?

Alexandra: No. I don't think you're hearing me. I'm not going to Winnipeg.

F5: Are they opening up a school here?

Alexandra: No, I'm not going to go to the school. I'm going to play hockey instead.

All: What?

Alexandra: Yeah, I got accepted to play hockey, so I'll be doing that.

F2: If that's what you really want to do.

F1: We'll support your decision.

F4: That's your choice.

F3: Good thing I've still got the receipt.

F5: Who will help me practice?

*They hug.*

## **Scene 26: Resolution Alison**

*Alison comes back from Wonderland and finds herself back in front of her locker. The four bullies are still bullying Lacy, and it has escalated. Alison stands and watches for a moment.*

John:           You're a loser!

Scott:           You stink!

Alison:          Lacy.

*There is no response to Alison calling Lacy's name.*

Sandra:         I can smell you from here.

Brittany:        Do you even know what deodorant is?

Alison:          Hey Lacy, I've got a question.

*No one seems to know how to handle this. This makes the group stop momentarily and so Lacy removes herself from the situation and walks toward Alison.*

Alison:          Hey Lacy, you're a gymnast. I've been having trouble with my cartwheels, could you give me a hand?

Lacy:            *(taking Alison's cue)* Sure I'd be happy to help. Let's find some space.

*The two walk off together leaving the others on stage.*

John: Wow, I wasn't done yet.

Sandra: I hadn't even made fun of her shoes.

Scott: Did you see how dirty they were?

Brittany: Yeah and so last season!

### **Scene 27: Resolution Alan**

Mom & Dad: Our son! (*hugging*)

Mom: I am so proud of him. (*Turning to audience*) He is just so overjoyed he needs a glass of water to calm himself.

Dad: He will be back momentarily.

Alan: (*Returns to stage*) Sorry about that.

Principal: Ahh... Alan! What will you be doing about this grand opportunity? We all are so excited to hear what you have to say.

Alan: Er.. Hello. I... I am Alan. This is an unbelievable learning experience but I... I just can't do it.

Principal: Alan, this is a chance of a lifetime and you're turning it down?

Alan: Yes, well, I am so grateful but this is just not what I want to do with my life. It's not my dream!

Principal: I see and what is your dream?

Alan: To be a champion ping pong player!

Mom & Dad: PING PONG!?!

Dad: I always wondered what you were doing in the basement! ALAN, *(pause)*  
I am proud of you.

Mom: I am too sweetie! Let's go home and celebrate.

*(All three walk off together.)*

Principal: Well that concludes our awards night. Not quite the grand finale I was expecting but regardless. Thank you so much for being here to celebrate with us on this most momentous occasion.

### **Scene 28: Resolution Ally**

Molly: I'm tired of/

Holly: waiting for/

Dolly: Ally.

*Ally enters.*

Ally: I've made my decision.

Molly: So what will/

Dolly: it be then/

Holly: Ally?

*Dad comes closer to Ally, leaning in for a hug looking excited. Ally takes his hands.*

Ally: Dad, I like you and your house (*under her breath*) —except for my room, the colour is so last season—but I just can't live with all four of you. I'm sorry.

Holly/Dolly/Molly: Hey!

Dad: This isn't part of the plan, this is definitely not part of the plan.

*Mom walks in holding a tray of food.*

Ally: I'm going to come home and live with you.

Mom: But, I was going to rent your room out.

Ally: Ummm, what?

Mom: The "We need a little bit more money so we're renting out your room" party is scheduled for next week, to give you a little time to adjust.

Ally: Excuse me?

Mom: Nothing, honey.

Dolly: You know/

Holly: what this means/

Molly: right?

Mom: A "You're coming back to live with your mom" party!

Ally: Really? Seriously? I'm just going to catch a taxi home.

## Scene 29: Resolution Alvin

*Alvin walks into his room and takes a look around. He moves towards his computer and then sits in front of it. He takes a minute just sitting there.*

Alvin:           What if we get too close too soon? What if she finds some other guy?  
What if I start crying? And then can't stop and get dehydrated and die?  
*(Pause)* What if she expects me to kiss her? I've never kissed a girl. Does  
kissing come naturally? How else am I supposed to learn? *(Pause)*  
Enough. I'd already decided. Ok, I'm good.*(Starts typing)* A movie sounds  
good ☺. And the rest of you: SHUT UP! Share.