LEARNing Landscapes Journal

The Role of Performances in Educational Practices

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Statement of Purpose

LEARNing Landscapes™ Journal is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the spring and autumn of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research, and practices in Quebec and beyond. We welcome articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work, and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

Review Board (Vol. 13)

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Diane Conrad, University of Alberta

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Abigail Shabtay, York University

Carolyn Sturge Sparkes, Memorial University

Sean Wiebe, University of Prince Edward Island

Editorial

> Performance privileges the fluid, ongoing, often contradictory features of human experience that resist reification and closure. It acknowledges that identities are always multiple, overlapping ensembles of real and possible selves who enact themselves in direct relation to the context and communities in which they perform. (Pineau, 1994, p. 15)

As I enter month three of isolation during the COVID-19 Pandemic, I am all too aware of varying types of performance that are emerging in our personal, professional, and social lives. The *LEARNing Landscapes* team had no idea many months ago, when the performance theme was chosen for this issue, how topical it would be. The forced pause that everyone is experiencing has changed us all forever. The digital world has taken on a new and heightened significance. It has shifted dramatically the way teaching and learning will look in the months to come and beyond. This transition merits careful consideration, particularly in terms of equity. Performance and the importance of embodied teaching and learning in education can be an illuminating lens from which to move ethically, equitably, engagingly, and successfully into the "new" reality. The contributions in this issue attest to the value and range of performance in education and illustrate with research, stories, and practices the inspiring and helpful avenues that have already been implemented by these authors.

The notion of liminality, or grey zone, referred to frequently in performance theory, pedagogy, and research, may be a good metaphor for our current experience—one that lacks stability, is unknown, complex, and contradictory (Garoian, 1999, p. 40). "For the anxious, the limen serves no purpose other than demarcating absolute value between conflicting opinions. For the artist, the limen is desirable" (p. 40) because it creates ambiguity and heightened awareness (Warren, 2007). How, then, do we take on the artist role and make this liminal space desirable and become more aware? Turning our attention to nature and the environment may be one such a way. The stark contrast between pre-COVID and current noise and air pollution levels are dramatic, as evidenced in Montreal by the silent mornings, the joyful songs of nesting birds, and in the sharpness of the cityscape. All are ostensibly attributable to the drastic decrease, in just two months, of smog and noise from jet streams, shunting trains, vehicular traffic, and constant urban activity. This April 2020 photo snapped by Gilda Lewis, friend and former educator, depicts the unusual clarity of the Montreal skyline at dusk. Returning to old ways post-Pandemic will not be the solution. It will require awareness and new kinds of performances.

Photo credit: Gilda Lewis, April 2020

This issue is dedicated to healthcare workers and all others doing essential work who continue to put their lives at risk to save the sick, help the vulnerable, and maintain the infrastructure necessary to limit exposure to the disease, allowing our privileged lifestyle to proceed. We are extremely indebted to them.

Invited Commentaries

We are delighted to include in this issue invited commentaries from New York, Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. The first of these is a virtual interview with **Richard Schechner**, Professor Emeritus at New York University. He shares his professional journey on the landscape of Performance Studies from the early days in the late 1960s until the present. His passion for performance was ignited in his childhood and blossomed into acting, directing, theorizing, and teaching. His path to performance theory was not a direct one, but, rather, culminated in the establishment of one of the first departments of performance studies at NYU in 1980. As he weaves together milestones in his illustrious career, he drops nuggets about performance like a trail of breadcrumbs in stories about his interactions with colleagues who helped shape his thinking and with students whom he challenged to take risks. He is modest about his accomplishments, which highlight his passion, creativity, adaptability, and depth of thinking. Dubbing himself a "philosophical relativist," asserting that truth is socially constructed, and always contested and temporary, and emphasizing how performance is fundamentally a rehearsal, never finished, he situates himself on this landscape and provides an important and contextualized backdrop for this issue. **Lynn Fels**, Professor at Simon Fraser University, "performs" her textual contribution as she walks through snow in the woods to a writing class she is auditing. She muses, at times aloud, about the profound influence some of her teachers and teaching moments had on her. As she trudges more quickly, she rants about the lack of materials, the decreasing budgets, and the resistance performance educators face. She wonders how performances can be sites of resistance to disrupt the scripts that "perform us." She lightens her step while "ghosts whisper" to her about her professional journey to performance in education. Poetically she reminds us that performance "calls attention to absences … shakes us awake … is an offering … reveals who we are…

embodies the heartbeat … nurtures … gives voice … makes walls … disappear." She arrives at the classroom door expectantly. **Joe Norris** is a Professor and Chair of Dramatic Arts at Brock University. His passion for performance emerged in elementary school and has continued since then. First as an actor, which he explains, "allows one to play different sides of the self" and later as a researcher, playwright, and director, because admittedly he is afraid of performing. He discusses his early experiences in performance research in the 1980s where researchers changed their field texts (data) into performances, which at the time were not considered portrayals of credible research. Subsequently, he became ensconced in the burgeoning field of arts-based research in the 1990s and went on to create "playbuilding" and "duoethnography" as forms of performance research that are dialogical and participatory in nature. He suggests that the challenges in this field are ego, which must be set aside, working with stakeholders that have different intentions and expectations, and learning how to both affirm and question the work. His pet project has been Mirror Theatre for which he has been the director for many years. This nonprofit organization has a board consisting mainly of students and a long track record of successful performances. With meetings every week, he likens this group to a family. His final words of advice are that, "performance research requires looking through multiple lenses" but then one should, "let the work speak for itself." Last, but not least, **Kristen Witczak** is a high school English and arts educator and administrator at Saint-Lambert International High School in Montreal. In this interview, Kristen enthusiastically discusses how her love of drama was ignited as a youngster when she first saw a production of *Charlotte's Web*, which led to a degree in theatre. However, after the feedback she received from the youth with whom she was working on a summer production, she decided not to attend the National Theatre School and instead became a high school teacher. The passion has never left. Her main goals in education are to inspire creativity and freedom of expression and to convince students that drama is for everyone. With interesting examples, she shares how she brings performance into both her teaching and administration. Not surprisingly, the ongoing challenges she faces are trying to ease the tension between the secondary core subjects and the arts and the need to convince colleagues and students to value the arts more fully. Her advice to other educators about drama is, "Just dig in and do it!"

Performing Research

In this very interesting reprint for which we are grateful, **Katherine Boydell** from the University of New South Wales shares how she has worked with a choreographer to translate her research data on early psychosis into dance. Her research findings are then performed in order to disrupt assumptions that individuals have about mental health issues and to give greater access to her work. **Esther Fitzpatrick** and **Alys Longley** from the University of Auckland share, using a critical, collaborative autoethnographic methodology, four narratives to illustrate how performative writing provides a critical, aesthetically appropriate, and generative approach for analyzing and representing stories. They highlight how the activities they conducted with students were subsequently translated into performative pedagogical writing practices. **Lynn Norton** and **Yvonne Sliep** from the University of KwaZulu-Natal describe how they use a Critical Reflexive Model to engage undergraduate students in performing their life stories for each other and in deconstructing forms of power that have influenced their lives.

Subsequently, postgraduation, they followed up with these students to explore the effect reflexivity had on them and to engage them in performing embodied representations of their reflections. Their research revealed not only changes in participant self-perceptions, but also underscored the need for communication, creativity, and space for voice to be critically reflexive. **Rebecca Sánchez** from the University of New Mexico discusses in detail how she reshaped qualitative interview material into a verbatim theatre performance to reveal the impact of a punitive, school grading agenda and the emotional toll it was taking on teachers in the southwestern United States. The performance was followed by a discussion with the audience. In addition to expanding the reach of her work by performing it, she was able to challenge assumptions and educational policy. **Anna CohenMiller** from Nazarbayev University presents an autoethnographic account of how she has balanced academic life with motherhood in this international setting in Kazakhstan. She shows through memory work how she frequently felt the need to obscure her role as a mother because of systemic bias she confronted. The implicit message she received was that she could not simultaneously and successfully balance her academic work with motherhood. This may resonate with other mothers in academia.

Performance in Higher Education: Research and Practice

Kelly Mancini Becker at the University of Vermont describes how she helps students who are education majors to use drama, dance, and music in their classroom teaching. She gives examples of how improvisation and playbuilding in her courses are vehicles for encouraging students to take risks and move outside their comfort zones. In turn, this helps to develop voice, listening skills, quick thinking, and problem-solving, even among her shyest preservice teachers. **Hetty Roessingh** at the University of Calgary discusses how she had her preservice teachers perform their lesson plans as micro-teaching assignments. The work was carried out in small collaborative groups. Individual reflections and instructor feedback followed the performances. This work addressed content, pedagogical and situated practice knowledge, and, over time, has helped these developing teachers to relinquish responsibility to the learners in their classrooms. **James Bernauer** at Robert Morris University shares how he included performances in a "flipped classroom environment" of a psychology course. Using a "Student-Centred Teaching and Learning Model," students created, presented, and portrayed visually with photos a performance-based "learning classroom" that incorporated the most important concepts of the course which the students had to defend. Bernauer argues that integrating performances is an engaging and effective way to facilitate cognitive and attitudinal development. **Maya Tracy Borhani** at the University of Victoria describes a "walk and talk" workshop she led at a conference where 15 participants walked to remote parts of the campus to observe their surroundings in detail, meditate, and write. Next, they created poems about these experiences of connecting to the land and finally produced tableaux to "perform" an idea from their poetry. The author found that these embodied experiences enhanced their understanding of their natural surroundings in intimate and imaginative ways. **Susan Browne** and **Marjorie Madden** at Rowan University share the detailed process they used with undergraduates in an honours literacy course to create "life history performances," which are dramatic performances based on "deep inquiry into literary characters" in a novel. The final performances were digitally recorded for further sharing. They posit that the life history process not only engaged the students, but also enriched

their reading, writing, dramatic speaking and use of digital tools. **John Hoben**, **Cecile Badenhorst**, and **Sarah Pickett** from Memorial University of Newfoundland analyzed the impact of a course evaluation questionnaire on teaching and teachers' perceptions and found that the evaluations shaped their professional identities. They wrote and shared individual, autoethnographic narratives of these experiences. The emergent themes showed that course evaluations are anxiety producing and perpetuate conservative pedagogies—micro themes of the existing "service delivery model of university teaching." By engaging collaboratively, they found themselves shifting from a culture of blame to one of resistance.

Performance Pedagogy in Secondary Education

Performance pedagogy "is more than a philosophical orientation, or set of classroom practices. Rather, it is a location, a way of situating one's self in relation to students, to colleagues and to the institutional policies and traditions under which we all labor" (Pineau, 1994, p. 130). **Madison Gaudry-Routledge**, at Corus Entertainment, and **Marni Binder**, at Ryerson University, explored how four experienced Ontario educators incorporated performance-based teaching practices into their high school classrooms. The work demonstrated that these practices enhanced reflection, empathy, and self-confidence among the youth. The performance experiences helped students to confront high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and a confused sense of self and provided an outlet for their feelings when topics addressed resonated with them. **Stephanie Ho**, an English Language Arts (ELA) high school teacher at St. George's School in Montreal and currently a PhD student at McGill University, discusses her own unique form of performance pedagogy which she grounds in Surrealism and critical, radical pedagogies. She explains how she proposes to create a context for "Surrealist imaginative play," which is, "imaginative play reflected in Surrealist pictorial art" [that demands] "a reorientation of mental thinking" (Matthews, 1991, p. 104). She suggests the use of found poetry and collage-making to explore important social issues, elicit critical discussion, and develop a sense of agency. She argues that these performative activities push the boundaries of curriculum while integrating important ELA skills. **Petryna Venuta**, a former high school English teacher who is now pursuing a PhD at McGill University, makes a strong and articulate case that, in the high school English classroom, students should learn by writing, not just by reading. She shares how her students rewrote scenes from *Hamlet* and performed these using multi-modalities with great success and engagement. She makes a strong case for this kind of creative writing and representing because it allows students to learn firsthand from authors to create powerful texts and, in turn, to think more critically about the texts that they read. **Sharada Gade** at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences draws on the Greek notion of *poiesis* (to bring something into being that did not exist before) in an improvisation which she used in a session with 60 middle school students at a one-week summer camp in Hyderabad, India, where she was guest lecturing. The focus of her session was on widespread social issues. Drawing on the work of Sarason, Eisner, and Stenhouse, she theorizes that in a sudden improvisation about how words become adopted into different languages, she broke the ice with the group and "pulled in" her audience (Sarason). As a result, she achieved aesthetic satisfaction in doing the work (Eisner) and enacted the role of "teacher as curricular change agent" (Stenhouse). She uses this example to show the interrelationships among practitioner performance, action research, and curricular change.

> The poetics of educational performance … privileges the creative and constructed dimensions of pedagogical practice. It recognizes that educators and students engage not in "the pursuit of truths," but in collaborative fictions—perpetually making and remaking world views and their tenuous positions within them. Educational poetics privileges multiple stories and multiple tellers as the narratives of human experience are shaped and shared by all participants in the performance community. Performative pedagogy supplants "information-dispensing" with the negotiation and enactment of possible knowledge claims. (Pineau, 1994, p. 10)

Performance Pedagogy With Young Children

Kathy Snow at the University of Prince Edward Island, **Noelle Doucette**, Culture and Community Coordinator in Potlotek First Nation, and **Noline Francis** at Potlotek Mi'kmawey School, share, with compelling visuals, a project they did with students in three split classes (grade four and five) to support literacy learning. The vehicle for this was Elder storytelling, which the students then portrayed as video performances. During "Tea with Elders," the children built strong relationships with and took responsibility for "their Elders" while listening to their stories in a process which reflected the storytelling traditions in this community. The students then created storyboards accompanied by drawings and were video recorded while performing their texts. They reviewed the videos with the Elders, added finishing touches, and launched them at a community event. The process strengthened literacy learning and ties to their Elder role models and made the stories much more meaningful to them. **Matt Yanko** at the University of British Columbia and **Priscilla Yap**, an elementary teacher, present six autoethnographic vignettes to show how first grade students explored the ecosystem of a creek near their school. The vignettes incorporated dance and music to illustrate in captivating visuals how these youngsters made meaning of their experiences using the performing arts. These authors discuss how constructivist and performance pedagogy scaffolded the development of mindfulness and social and emotional skills.

Please be safe and well.

LBK

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Winter's Walk: All the Light I Hold in This Moment

Lynn Fels

Abstract
How do we enlarge the space of the possible to encourage our students to notice the educational, social, economic, communal, and political scripts that perform us? Academic performance imagines new ways of performing research. Conventional academic performances have been interrupted. Be aware. We can never take for granted the performance that is us. I want to be awakened to the gaps and absences in the performances that our students offer us, as we create space for them to perform in our classrooms, on school stages, in our hearts. How might performance become an action site of resistance, of resolution, of advocacy, of invitation, of renewal?

In the midst of winter, I found within me an invincible summer. (Albert Camus)

Last Thursday, I followed a forest trail in Pacific Spirit Park to my writing class that I am auditing this winter. Karen Meyer is teaching the course, one she created years ago. This trail is familiar and unfamiliar. In the 13 years since I last taught at the University of British Columbia, deciduous trees have edged closer along the path, edging out the light. The girths of the redwoods have widened. Time weighs on the arcing snow-covered branches overhead.

My boots sink into snow.

As I walk, I compose the commentary that you are now reading. I practice openings, sounding words raw into the cold air.

How might I speak to the role of performances in educational practices?

I want to share with you all those who have reimagined the performance of scholarship, research, and teaching in ways that resonate with me. I want to introduce you to those whose words, teachings, actions have touched me; those who gave me permission to be who I am, as a scholar, an educator, a writer.

I remember Carl Leggo reading from *Growing up perpendicular on the side of the hill*. His voice rides the bumps and flights of images as wildly as the boy sliding on his toboggan in his poem. I confess to Carl that I had made a mistake, I had registered into two 601 seminars. He tells me there are no mistakes.

I remember Patrick Verriour, my thesis supervisor, leading a drama class. He asks us to position ourselves in relationship to an empty chair to illustrate high or low status. Standing behind the chair, I imagine myself to be a guard, protecting the king. The student standing on guard next to me is contemplating treason.

I remember Karen Meyer, whose class I am now trudging towards, she a science educator, and I, newly arrived in my graduate program. We dream new possible ways of teaching science through drama.

I remember our play, *Light Sound Movin' Around: What are Monsters Made of*? written by our students, which they performed for the elementary school children who walked up to the university in Jackson Pollack splashes of boots, raincoats, and umbrellas. The play features a six-foot tall pink bunny named Einstein who spouts scientific definitions of concepts he doesn't understand, and Wendy, a 10-year-old girl who puts into action the science of shadows to defeat the Monster. "I'm glad this play is about science," is overheard by one of our cast, words whispered by one young audience member to another.

And I remember the drama students in London, Ontario, with whom I worked to create a reader's theatre piece for the London International Children's Festival. Hundreds of children created masks of animals and birds, on picnic tables in the sunshine, and then slipped into the belly of the Story Dragon to perform, roaring and squawking the play into life.

Light fades, as afternoon falls into dusk. I check my watch and then lengthen my stride. I have forgotten the time required to walk the distance between home and the university. Shadows darken the path. I quicken my pace.

I want to rant and rage. The only light switch in my newly renovated classroom is outside the door. "Black out!" I shout, and students close their eyes. "Lights" I cry when the group is assembled and ready to begin their scene. Eyes open and close on my command. I am currently in negotiation for theatre lights. The black theatre curtains, dry cleaned and ready, will be hung back up on their hooks. All we need for theatre to exist, argues Peter Brook, is an empty space, someone to walk across, and someone to witness.

I am troubled. Arts programs, arts specialists, those of us who love the arts are an endangered species, disappearing as budgets tighten. Time and priorities shift. Does the burden fall upon artists and arts educators once again to prove the value of the arts?

I want to celebrate. I applaud educators and scholars who engage in arts-based research and its many forms and practices such as a/r/tography, poetic inquiry, performative inquiry, mixed visual arts media inquiry. Meghan Parker, an arts educator in a North Vancouver school, graduates with a nonfiction comic book thesis for her master's degree. Academic performance imagines new possible templates, new ways of performing research. Conventional academic performances have been temporarily (permanently?) interrupted. Be aware. Resistance to our free play in the academy lurks in the shadows. We can never take for granted the performance that is us. Stay tuned.

I want to be awakened to the gaps and absences in the performances that our students offer us, as we create space for them to perform in our classrooms, on school stages, in our hearts. How might performance become an action site of resistance, of resolution, of advocacy, of invitation, of renewal?

How do we enlarge the space of the possible to encourage our students to notice the educational, social, economic, communal, political scripts that perform us? And invite our students into performance so that we might hear their voices, their ideas, their passions, their concerns? Performance as creative action and offering invites us into shared vulnerability and creativity, as we enter into play to see what arrives. What is lost when we fail to invite our students into play? When we fail to play ourselves?

How might we learn to recognize and disrupt the scripts that perform *us*?

Madeleine Grumet[1] whispers, "Tread lightly, oh so lightly." And as the snow yields beneath my boots, I lighten my step.

Ghosts whisper in my ear as I lay down a path in walking. My grade one teacher, Mrs. Gorie, hands me the role of Miss-Polly-Put-the-Kettle-On for my first Christmas play. I fall in love with the boy playing the Mad Hatter, four grades ahead. In grade four, Mrs. Mayville announces that our play's leading actress, a girl in grade five, has the chicken pox. I am chosen and experience my first stage kiss. In grade seven, Miss Owen directs a 13-year-old Hamlet, awkwardly brandishing a cardboard sword, my braces glinting in the stage lights. So, not surprisingly, I fall in love with theatre, fail epically, and turn to education.

I learn to be a learner in the presence of children.

A child's tug on the sleeve. I am working with a grade two class to improvise the first scene of our play, *Jack and Jill and the Beanstalk*. Jill is Jack's sister. One of the grade two students balks. He doesn't want to be the cow.

> "But you can be any kind of cow you want!" I assure him.
> "Any type of cow?" I nod. He grins.
> Light enters the dark corners of his resistance.
> "I'll be a cow who plays hockey in the NHL. I'll bring my hockey net, and helmet and goalie stick…"
> *A cow in the NHL?*
> *How to respond to this child?*
> I hesitate.
> To say no would reinforce that I as director, have full authority.
> My script is what matters. There is no cow in the NHL.
>
> To say yes welcomes a child's imagination, passion, curiosity into play. Children bring forth new possible worlds for us to embrace…or refuse.
>
> The children eye me speculatively. *Whose performance is being judged?*

Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire encourages educators to recognize the expertise of lived experience. I look at the faces of my students, outside of school, they live their expertise.

Vancouver artist, Patty Fraser encourages community artists to listen to what is present in the room. I struggle to listen beyond my own doubts.

And philosopher, Hannah Arendt asks, *Who are you?*

Who will you choose to become in the presence of this child?

Tread gently.

Performance is not a tool, nor strategy, nor output, nor process, nor product.

Not walls of cement, but…the melodies of your temperatures.

Think of performance as verb and noun, creative action and offering. We perform and are performed by the environments and contexts within which we dwell. The arts invite us to perform ourselves into presence through a communal journey of inquiry, curiosity, resistance, (com)promise, and creativity. Performance calls attention to what or who is absent in the scripts that perform our lives.

Performance simultaneously offers and expresses who we are, who we might become, what matters, how we wish to engage in the world. Our actions are shaped by and shape the forms within which we engage. Just as a waterfall is shaped by the fall of water on rocks, so, over time, water carves its presence in the rocks. Performance shakes us awake like tremors in the earth, interruptions unsettle, disrupt, alarm, awaken.

We perform our presence in the presence of others, and in so doing, invite new possible worlds into being. Performance is an offering. A gift.

Hannah Arendt asks of educators if they love children enough to invite them into the world's renewal. Performance matters. How we perform and are performed requires scrutiny, a practice of noticing. *Do not*, as Maxine Greene, echoing Thoreau of Walden Pond, warns educators, *sleepwalk through your life*.

Performance reveals who we are, the choices we make, the context that informs us. Performance witnesses our fragilities, our willingness to risk, our failure to engage, our gestures of invitation. Performance in educational practices invites students to be creators, dreamers, makers, revolutionists. Through performance, educators may offer students opportunities to bring their voice into the conversation in ways that will enlarge the space of the possible, to express what matters, to imagine what has not yet been imagined.

Listen. Performance embodies the heartbeat of our lives, our struggles, our joys, our being impossibly regrettably human. The ephemeral temporality of performance speaks to our human condition. Performance calls us to remember our responsibility for the nonhuman, for each other, for our environment. Performance has the potential to nurture and give voice to how we might perform as citizens in today's world, and how our children may create and perform tomorrow's future.

Here is an offering. A performance. Created in the midst of winter by four women in my performative inquiry course. They disappeared around a corner in the corridor to create and perform a scene about exile, leaving home…. acceptance. I have called them back into the classroom. "Black Out!" Pause. "Lights!"

Lit by fluorescent lights, a woman sinks to her knees on the floor. Her head, shoulders, upper body are enveloped under a multicolored scarf. She sings in a language I do not recognize. A second woman dances, she embraces pain, she becomes flight. Another arrives, gestures towards the singing woman, then speaks directly to us, in a language I cannot translate, but I understand every word. There is urgency in her voice. Something must be done. And a fourth woman raps, anger interweaving the urgency of the third woman, the troubled gestures of the dancer, and the unfolding melodies of the first woman, who sings throughout, like the calling of a river. Witnesses, we are held in the tension of the unfolding scene.

And then, audience and performers, we arrive in silence. A lingering note holds the moment. The walls in the room have disappeared. *This too is possible.*

I leave the woods. I cross the campus and walk up well-worn steps into the Education Building, stomping snow off my boots as I cross the threshold into Karen's classroom. I arrive into community. Six of us—two professors and four graduate students—have come down the mountain, by car, bus, walking, to be here.

I am curious. How will Karen perform this class where we will be invited to interrupt the performance that is conventional academic writing? How might we understand performance in educational contexts? What is to be learned?

Karen welcomes us. She reads aloud from a children's story that she is writing. We lean into her words, as a new possible world is imagined into being. Here, in this moment, we encounter the performance that is education. A pedagogical invitation to shared vulnerability, imagination, curiosity. And as I listen, I awaken to the offering that is performance, as *each moment, a child of duration*, unfolds in our presence.

Note

1. Madeleine Grumet's invitation to "tread lightly, oh so lightly," was made during her presentation at the University of British Columbia in the mid-late 1990s.

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Lynn Fels is Professor at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada. Lynn has authored articles and chapters on performative inquiry, arts across the curriculum, and learning through lived experience. Recent research projects include mentorship, sense-making through play, and arts for social change. Lynn coauthored *Exploring Curriculum: Performative Inquiry, Role Drama and Learning* (Pacific Educational Press). She was Academic Editor of one of Canada's first open-access online academic journals, *Educational Insights*, which reimagines curriculum, research, and learning. Lynn is coeditor of *Arresting Hope: Women Taking Action in Prison Inside Out* and *Releasing Hope: Women's Stories of Transition from Prison to Community* (Inanna Press, 2015, 2019). She adores snow.

Playbuilding and Social Change

Joe Norris

Abstract

In this interview, Joe Norris reflects on his early experiences with performance and how he became involved with collective creations and playbuilding. His work has led him to develop and implement qualitative research methods using playbuilding. In his role as artistic director of Mirror Theatre, he has been the driving force behind numerous plays that inspire social change. He shares candid observations about the challenges of doing performative work and gives advice for educators wishing to pursue this kind of work.

How did you first get interested in performance and how has your career evolved since then?

In the summer after grade 4, the City of Halifax's recreation department had each playground put on a little scene from a larger play and I played the eldest son in Puss 'n Boots. What is remarkable is that this year, I hired a grad student to scan many of my old documents and we found the actual program from that event.

I find that acting helps me play other sides of myself that I don't normally play. I don't completely agree with the expression, "You walk in another person's shoes." I don't think you ever can because you don't have the same history. But what acting enables me to do is play different sides of myself.

My first experiences of acting were through the summers of grade 4 to 9. I played eldest son, Captain Hook, Chief Dogcatcher. I enjoyed that but when I went to high school, I was just overwhelmed with the experience. However, in grades 11 and 12 I was in *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Brigadoon*. I just saw *Brigadoon* again at the Shaw Festival and it was interesting how they changed the lines to make it politically correct these days. Again, I enjoyed the experience of playing different sides of myself. In university I did very little performing, but when I went to teach in a high school, I started to direct the high school students. And for a while working with scripted plays and amateur theatres fulfilled what I wanted.

Then I began to move into what was then called, in the early 80s, "collective creation," where actors went and researched things in communities and from that they wrote plays. I began to explore that genre, and my interest always was never to profess as much as to draw out, the one meaning of *educare*, to draw out for my students their personal meanings, but also to bring out a critical edge to everything we think. We began to create collective creations and when I started my doctorate with Sister Theresa Craig at the University of Alberta, my first doctoral class, I began to like the theory of voice and empowerment, but I asked, "Where are the examples in the curriculum?" Then I went back to collective creation and my whole doctoral research was observing a grade 11 drama teacher teach a collective creation course.

Again, my concern was where are examples of student voice? When I entered the university, I found that I began to use collective creation, but it wasn't legitimate at that time as a research methodology. After about five years when I had an opportunity with Left Coast Press to write a book, I debated whether I should go with them or with a theatre publisher. I went with Left Coast Press because I really felt it would be a good advocacy platform for others as well as to legitimize what we were doing as a research methodology.

As an arts-based researcher, you've developed the genres of playbuilding and duoethnography. Can you talk a little about these?

I distinguish playbuilding from ethnodrama. Both are legitimate, both have value and I'm not negating—I'm just highlighting differences. The playbuilding is more dialogic in two ways. It's a group of A/R/Tors—actors/researcher teachers—term used with permission granted from Rita Irwin et al. to adapt their version of a/r/tography, but with the A/R/Tors we are continually interplaying with one another. We recognize there are multiple perspectives. I think there is a high degree of humility in that type of process as you listen to someone who disagrees with you and find that both points have legitimation. So, it was dialogic in the way we analyzed, or I would say "mediated," and that's a term I've gone to now—similar to Gadamer's concept of translation—what we do is we mediate our research. We turn it into our own thoughts, we can use art, visual, sound, music, dance, theatre, all of those, to translate. I liked that playbuilding was dialogic. I think better in a room full of people than I do alone, so part of it is my own personal style. With ethnodrama, often what happens is it's a data collected in one style, a qualitative style, and then a playwright writes a play about that data. It's a very different approach. I would say based upon different degrees of participation, it is not as dialogic. With duoethnography, it is the same.

Many years ago, Rick Sawyer and I wrote a paper about sexual orientation and presented it a couple of times, one at Provoking Curriculum, and eventually someone said, "Well, what's your methodology?" I thought to myself: *I think we're inventing one.* The next few years we began not only to talk about this topic, but other topics and began to create a methodology and invited other scholars to join us. I just got an email yesterday from another publisher saying, "There's another book coming out on duoethnography, will you review it prior to our acceptance?"

Growing up, we were told never to use the word "I." It was always the distancing. And I always found that strange in my own particular preference and so it's exciting that we've changed from "I" to "We," and again recognizing that different people have different life histories. We have similarities and we have differences—how can we learn from one another? Just to bring a little bit of Lévinas' concept is that we would never really understand ourselves if we were the only entity in the universe. We need the Other to help us understand ourselves.

Can you describe a couple of your most successful experiences in performance?

I'm scared to death of performance. I have stage fright. I find in the last 20 years my work is more director than performer and then "joker." I really enjoyed the improvisation because that's the second aspect I wanted to mention if I could re-circle it just a little bit. The second part of the dialogic form is that we

give live performances to the audiences using Boal's concept of "forum theatre." We enter into dialogue with the audiences as well and we rewrite scenes and we create new scenes based on them. Most of my work has been director and, in Boal's term, *joker*. I find it very difficult—I know some professional actors do it, they can direct and act in a motion picture—I can't do that. I can't keep that split focus. But I would say my most successful, most moving, I would go back to *Brigadoon*. I walked out on stage and before they saw my plaid pants, they laughed seeing me poking through the door and obviously there was something about what I established with them that already brought an affinity. Then later on I said something like, "This Highland voodoo town makes no more sense to you than it does to me." Hearing the silence of about 1100 people was a magic moment, that I was able to bring people along with that particular story. I would say not necessarily successful as much as meaningful and impactful on me.

The other ones were actually probably post-performance: When a young woman in grade 8 in a town south of Edmonton came up to me afterwards and said, "Thank you. I thought it was going to be one of those plays that preached at us not to do drugs." She said something like, "Thank you for trusting us to be able to think through the situations on our own." One of the executives of the Students Against Drunk Driving in another southern Alberta town, came up to me after the performance and said, "Yeah you're right, it's not about preaching to them and telling them what to do, it's about helping them to think through the situations on their own." For me the performance was the post-performance reward that there were members of the audience, these were all volunteered, who really appreciated the dialogic style.

What challenges do performance educators confront in their work?

Number one, ego. I look at it in me as the chair of a department, but I find it in some of the work that I do, and I find it in myself. The way I say it is similar to when I talk about duoethnography and autoethnography and it's a semi-adaptation of Antoinette Oberg and others, is the way I phrase it: If you cast yourself as a hero or a victim, very quickly the audience is going to tire. That's where the ego rests. Yes, we are victims; yes, we are heroes, but I think that's the way we tend to our story; but I say let's cast ourselves as Frodo on a quest and let the audience determine where you are. Then that begins to remove the ego and helps you become a questioner, as someone who is lost. I think all good researchers need to be lost in the 'quest'ion and that's where the power of the (re)search is, in the struggle to find—not the answer—but the next new steppingstone or placeholder. So that's one.

Second, the challenges of working with stakeholders with a different pedagogical intent. I worked with an organization a number of years ago that were almost about to cancel a contract with us because they wanted us to do more of a presentation on "don't do drugs." They were really questioning our style until an intermediary came in and said, "No, trust Joe. We've seen his work and we know what happens." They were never convinced until they saw our first live performance with an audience. And again, there is a pedagogical difference between telling people what to do, and asking people, like problem-based learning, "What are various ways you can address this issue?" One of the things that I find is the challenge of, I think many of us would still agree, is that we're immersed in an outcomes-based curriculum that prescribe the answers. Therefore, the hidden curriculum of that is that, "experts know the answers; your job is to listen." When we work with certain groups who aren't that familiar with our work, that's what

begins to happen. There's that challenge of trying to turn it into a format that meets the needs of the stakeholders but has a pedagogical integrity to it. So that is a challenge.

The third one—and challenges are not necessarily bad things—is whenever you enter into a dialogue with an audience, immediately after your performance, is to be prepared for a roller-coaster ride as they begin to give their ideas. I would say the personal challenge is how to both affirm and question simultaneously. If all we do is self-reaffirmation, there's no learning that takes place, no (re)search.

It's more of, “Yeah, tell your story in a trusting place, but let's also critique it.” Working with people who are not familiar with the form, that can be quite daunting, and, at the same time, very successful over the years. That's a challenge that I love and I embrace, but it’s exhausting work.

You are the artistic director of Mirror Theatre. Can you tell us about this work?

It's very dear to my heart. Over the years I've probably worked with close to 600 different cast members as we interrogated a wide range of social issues, and played them into performances. Our theatre started very pragmatically. We were asked to be a keynote speaker at WestCAST (Western Canadian Association For Student Teaching) and they wanted to pay us and of course they wanted to give me the money. If they gave me the money, I would have to pay income tax on it just to pay for our lodging. So, we formed a not-for-profit organization. Most of the board members are student board members and, again, throughout the process they are learning aspects of governance from being a board member. And the board members make the decisions. The projects are brought to the board, debated and approved, sometimes with questions, and that's good, and then we move forward. Mirror Theatre has been an organization for and with students.

I've been the hub throughout the years, but the hub can't work without the spokes and the rim, and the rim can't work without the hub. I do recognize my sense of artistic and pedagogical impetus in the projects, but, at the same time, I do recognize that my research would be nonexistent without this large number of committed people. Even during this COVID-19 pandemic, at their request, we're still meeting every Wednesday night. We're meeting tonight online. We're going try our first online playbuilding project on the concept of time.

What's gratifying is that there's a number of people who enjoy the process and many of them over the years have said, “I feel like it’s family” every Wednesday night or Tuesday night, or whatever night. We look forward to meeting with one another and I would say it's not self-indulgent. Yes, it is; no, it isn’t. We get great pleasure from meeting with one another, but at the same time we enter a level of significance in our conversations.

Finally, what words of advice do you have for educators wishing to pursue performance?

I had an article come out years ago with one of the arts journals online (International Journal of Education & the Arts) and it talks about the use of the Great Wheel. And I use that based upon some writings from Paula Underwood. It's a way one can use the Great Wheel in various ways to help one understand themselves in the world. How I changed it was I put the four positions as: pedagogy, public, politics, and

poetics. While I would say there's more, these are four key ones that I found in all arts-based research. Sometimes the form is forced over the product. And sometimes the product is critiqued because of its roughness, but it's so effective pedagogically and polish would interfere with that pedagogy. This chapter was a response to being at conferences where a number of people were questioning the work—not just my work—but others' works in relation to how poetic it wasn't. I think there's many perspectives on that, so I think part of it is to recognize one's intent and does it meet that intent and the feedback you get from others that you were successful in that intent. Doing performative research and performative work I would say requires looking through multiple lenses. That keeps the work relevant and appropriate. I found from time to time we live in fear of what the critic may say—and we play for the critic, and I think that's a danger. Let the work speak for itself and find the integrity between the form and the content that plays and then let it be.

Joe Norris believes that play is a natural way of learning and that knowledge is co-constructed in the presence of Others. These underpin both his teaching and research practices. His book, *Playbuilding as Qualitative Research: A Participatory Arts-based Approach,* which received the 2012 Outstanding Book Award from the Qualitative Research SIG of the American Educational Research Association, describes his pioneering efforts with multiple casts of Mirror Theatre in Alberta. A second edition with Routledge Press will update with projects from Ontario casts. Examples of this work can be found at www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca. Along with Rick Sawyer, he has developed a dialogic form of narrative research. They have coedited a special issue of the *International Review of Qualitative Research* and have copublished four books on the methodology with *Understanding Qualitative Research: Duoethnography* receiving the 2015 Significant Contribution to Educational Measurement and Research Methodology Award from the American Educational Research Association's Division D.

Vignettes From a Lifetime of Studying Performance

Richard Schechner

Abstract

In this commentary, summarized from a recent interview, the author shares insights and memories from a career devoted to drama and performance studies. He enthusiastically recounts events, initiatives, and collaborations that have helped sustain his lifelong passion for performance.

Prologue: New York City, April 27, 2020

There is no darkness that doesn't have some light. It's very nice to be in a city where there is 60 to 80% less air pollution; where the sky is clear; there is very little traffic, you can breathe. When you go out in the morning and take a walk, the streets are pretty empty, but you do this dance if somebody comes near you, you move away.

The negative, of course, is that it's a night without a clear dawn in the sense that when it gets dark tonight at 7:30 or 8:00 pm, I know that at 6:30 or 7:00 am the light will come up. I'm not sure when the light is going to come up with this pandemic.

Developing a Critical Distance

As I got into my late teenage years and decided to go college, I saw myself at that point as a writer and literary person. My undergraduate degree was in English and Philosophy with a lot of Psychology. I started to do lots of writing during that period. I was at Cornell University at the daily newspaper, *The Cornell Daily Sun*, and I wrote for it intensively. When I was a senior, I probably could have stood to be editor-in-chief, but by that time I was more reflective, so I decided to become the editorial page editor, who oversees the opinions of the paper, and also I was a drama reviewer. This latter role allowed me to see lots of school plays—some I liked and some I didn't like—but I developed a critical distance.

Environmental Theatre

Later on, I became a director of East End Players in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a summer theatre where we did extraordinary plays: Sartre's *No Exit*, Ionesco's *The Lesson,* Ibsen's *Master Builder,* Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and more. It wasn't your normal summer theatre. I ran it for two years and we did some productions in what I later called "environmental theatre." For example, *Philoctetes* we did on the beach, and the boat with Neoptolemus and Odysseus arrives on the beach—and the audience is on the beach—and Philoctetes stumbles up and he's got his bloody rags and the flies are there because we used real fish blood, and they try to talk him into going back to finish the Trojan War.

Blessing of the Fleet

I did a master's degree in English, but I started to move over into drama, into theatre. I went to Johns Hopkins University for a year and then transferred to the University of Iowa. I was in Paul Engle's Iowa Writers' Workshop, which was a very fancy place and hard to get into. I thought of myself as a playwright and fiction writer and continued to write poetry, which I still do today. I was working in the Theatre Department at the same time and my thesis was a play called *Blessing of the Fleet*, which was about the fishermen of New Bedford, Massachusetts.

At any rate, I was writing plays and they were getting produced, and at the same time I was running this theatre. Then in November 1958 I volunteered for the draft, I went into the army. I could have avoided the draft; I was more than 24 years old. I already had a master's degree and I probably could've got a commission. But I did not want to be an officer. I wanted to be with people who were not of my class or background. I'm more or less middle- to upper-middle-class. Being a private in the army put me in touch with totally different kinds of people from those I grew up with, went to college with. I also directed a play in the army and very theatrical things happened there. But those are stories to tell another time.

Shifting My Focus

When I came out of the army in August 1960, I moved to New Orleans for reasons that were both personal and professional. I went to Tulane University and got my PhD in 1962. Right as I was finishing my PhD, they offered me a job to become editor of *TDR*—the *Tulane Dram*a Review at that point—*The Drama Review* now. There were 17 years when I wasn't editor, from 1969 to 1986, but I think if you add it up it's the longest editorship of a scholarly journal ever, about 40 years total out of a span of 67 years. Being editor of *TDR* and a professor of theatre shifted my focus from writing plays, poetry, and fiction to scholarly criticism and performance theory. I didn't stop doing creative writing, but I did a lot of the other kind of writing too. I put my creative energy into directing.

As a director I often rewrote, collaged, or adapted the texts I was doing. Sometimes people attacked me for this. When I did *Dionysus in 69*, based on Euripides *The Bacchae,* I worked with the company I founded in New York—The Performance Group—to make a new textual collage combining Euripides in translation with the performer's own experiences, improvised music, and audience participation. When I did *Makbeth* with a "k," I restructured Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and so on. Even as a director I was a writer. This kind of thinking influenced my teaching. As a professor, I wanted to apply the insights I was having into what constituted theatre. I had become very interested in ritual and wanted to apply that to my teaching and my directing. I wanted to be a "whole person" in the classroom as well as put "whole persons" on the stage. My works on the stage were radical and environmental. They involved audience participation, they were social, they had rituals in them, and they deconstructed and recombined texts. All these things which are so common now were not common in the 1960s and 1970s. Even before I moved to New York, I was doing this kind of experimenting. Nor was it common then to do "practice as research" in the classroom, to teach viscerally as well as intellectually.

Text as a Prompt for Performance

At Tulane, I was an Assistant and then Associate Professor of Drama. I was already teaching drama in the context of what happens when you embody the drama, and not simply read the text. And I always thought of the text as a prompt for a performance, and a performance as an illumination and version of the text. I never felt that the playwright’s words were sacrosanct. I felt that once the play entered into the process of rehearsal with the performers, you could play with it. Now certain texts, obviously, you’re not going to play with. If you’re doing Shakespeare, you should do Shakespeare. But even there, maybe not. Is *West Side Story* Shakespeare? Was The Performance Group's *Makbeth*? A couple of years ago I devised with East Coast Artists—another group I founded—*Imagining O* which conflated and combined *Hamlet* with a French erotic novel, *The Story of O,* and the experiences of the performers I was working with. At present, I am working on *Dark Yes*, which deconstructs-reconstructs Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Molly Bloom's soliloquy). In China, I directed *Hamlet* without changing the text, a Mandarin translation of the play.

A Different Type of Drama Department

When I moved to New York to NYU in 1967, I was brought there by Robert W. Corrigan, the founding editor of *TDR* and my dissertation director at Tulane. When Corrigan left Tulane for Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon University), I replaced him at Tulane. Then he went to NYU and became the first dean of the School of the Arts, which is now the Tisch School of the Arts. He asked me to be the head of Graduate Drama Department at NYU. I didn’t want to be the head. I’m not the kind of person who likes to be a departmental chair. Except for one year, I’ve avoided that. I suggested, and Corrigan agreed, to bring Monroe Lippman who headed the Theatre Department at Tulane to chair the Graduate Drama Department at NYU. Then over the next 10 years or so, I was one of the driving forces transforming this department into what finally in 1980 was renamed the Performance Studies Department.

Approaches to Theory and Criticism

We accomplished that by first bringing in Brooks McNamara, who like me had his PhD from Tulane. Brook's specialty was theatre history from the perspective of popular entertainments—from P.T. Barnum to music halls and Broadway. Then we hired Michael Kirby, a visual artist and performance artist who wrote one book about Happenings and another about what he called “the new theatre,” which included the kind of dance being practiced at Judson Church, postmodern dance. Kirby was a friend of Allan Kaprow and he introduced me also to John Cage and that whole world of performance art—though it wasn't called that then. A little earlier I read Erving Goffman’s *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The chapter on performance was extremely important to me because Goffman defined performance as any situation when people interact in ways that are to some degree prepared or rehearsed, even if only mentally. Goffman situated performance within a social, rather than, an aesthetic, realm. Goffman's work, along with my study of the Cambridge Anthropologists’ theories of the ritual origins of Greek tragedy, led me to publish in *TDR* in1966, the year before I came to NYU, "Approaches to Theory and Criticism." In that essay I theorize the broad spectrum of performance: play, sports, the performing arts,

popular entertainments, and ritual. I rejected the Cambridge thesis arguing instead that ancient Greek theatre emerged from the tension and confluence of play and ritual. I thought that "performance" was itself originary. "Approaches" set out the basic framework of what was to become performance studies. In the early to mid 1970s, I wrote a series of essays expanding on what I first explored in "Approaches." These key essays were collected in 1976 in my book, *Essays on Performance Theory*, which has been revised and reissued several times with the title *Performance Theory*. This book, and my 1985 *Between Theater and Anthropology*, contain the basic theories that have guided much of my scholarly work.

Collaboration With Victor Turner

Another decisive input came from my first reading and then meeting and working very closely with anthropologist Victor Turner. In 1969 Turner published *The Ritual Process* and in the early 70s, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*. These key works detail Turner's theories of liminality, communitas, and social drama. Turner and I met in 1976 when he invited me to participate in a conference he was organizing on ritual, play, and performance. Turner and I hit it off from the start. Our first meeting was supposed to be a half-hour beer, but it turned out to be hours of intense conversation about shared ideas. Being kindred spirits, we began a very deep collaboration that culminated in a series of conferences. That work is summarized in the book *By Means of Performance*, which I edited with Willa Appel. Turner and I continued to work together until his death in 1983. He visited NYU a number of times. Through him I met his wife, anthropologist Edith Turner, and many other deep scholars of performance such as Barbara Myerhoff, Paul Bouissac, Bruce Kapferer, Roberto DaMatta, and John MacAloon.

Between Theater and Anthropology

In the early-to-mid 1970s, I began a series of courses at NYU called "Performance Theory." I was following through on my work with Turner and his crowd. But also I was building on my work with the great Polish experimental theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski. Grotowski put into practice environmental theatre, performance theory, ritual, and rigorous performer training. Later in his career, Grotowski investigated "paratheatre," performance outside of the aesthetic realm. My performance theory courses were deeply tied into the investigations of Turner and Grotowski. Others too, of course, as I have indicated. But the work of these two geniuses was of inestimable importance to me. The format of the performance theory courses was that each term we would focus on a different basic subject, like "shamanism" or "ritual" or "play." It was never theatre, dance, or drama as such but performance—including the aesthetic genres—was always important. The course was "between": between theatre and anthropology, between art and ritual and play, between social life and artistic practice, between politics and performance. David Oppenheim, who was dean of the NYU School of the Arts at that time, encouraged me by giving me a budget for the course which allowed me to invite a different key figure each week. The guest would deliver a public lecture on Monday night and then meet with my graduate seminar class on Tuesday morning. That course morphed into the core of performance studies.

Don’t Reject Doing Something Because You Can’t Master It

Let me return to Grotowski. In 1967, I was among those who invited Grotowski to come to NYU and do a workshop. Because of my work on *TDR*, I had known Grotowski since 1963, although we met face-to-face only in 1966. When Grotowski came to NYU for the workshop, I insisted that I participate fully, even though I was a professor at that time and all the others in the workshop were graduate students. But I knew that to participate in something in an embodied way is how you can understand it most deeply. It is not so important that I master a technique, though that is a good idea if you have the time and ability. What is decisive is to “get” what is being taught viscerally. I say to people, “don’t reject doing something because you can’t master it, because even in failing to master a skill you will still learn a great deal about.” In other words, if a great chef says they want to teach you how to cook, don’t think that because you will never become a great chef you shouldn’t try to cook or learn as much as you can, even profiting from mistakes. Grotowski’s ideas on audience participation in structuring the space was very much in harmony with what I was doing. He felt that theatre performance was more than entertainment—it also had a ritual component and a deep learning performance. All this was very important to the formation of performance studies. And in the development of my theatre, The Performance Group.

Educere—To Lead Out Of

Let me go back to when I was a teenager. Perhaps the course that meant the most to me in high school was Latin. I studied it for four years. I never became proficient. But I learned a great deal—about language, Roman culture (and the Greek culture that stood before Rome), and about how to learn. Not as religion so much as about discourse, living, and the dialogic-Socratic method of learning. I didn’t like much of high school and I was a bad student to some degree, disciplinarily speaking. The other subjects never occupied my attention, but Latin did. The other great learning experience from my boyhood were the things my mother's father, Samuel Schwarz, taught me from The Bible and The Talmud. Education is a Latin-based word. It literally means to “lead out of” or *Educere*. What are you leading a person out of? At one level, of course, it’s chronological: you’re leading a person out of their childhood into adolescence or out of adolescence into early adulthood, and so on, throughout life if you are wise enough to keep educating yourself. At a philosophical level, education is not chronological. It's being led out of ignorance into knowledge, out of darkness into light. However, these matters are very paradoxical: the greatest thing you can teach a student is that they’ll always be ignorant and therefore they’re always in the process of learning and finding the light insofar as the light can be known. Finding the “truth” insofar as it can be known. I am a profound philosophical relativist. I think truth is socially constructed and that it is always contested and always temporary. That is also the scientific method. Science is a system of practice-thought where new knowledge replaces old, where all hypotheses are provisional; where even “proof” is not necessarily so for all times in all circumstances. Who would have thought that light bends?

Performance Is Never Quite a Finished Product

You've been successful as a teacher if the student comes out feeling comfortable about asking questions. And that's also what performance is, because performance to me is fundamentally rehearsing: a "finished performance" is rehearsals stopped at a certain point. A finished production is simply the time when you say: "Okay, I'm stopping the rehearsals; I'm going to open it at this point." It's not exactly like baking bread, which is very interesting. Because if you bake bread you have a recipe, prepare the bread batter, put it in the oven, take it out, and eventually eat it. However, I think performance is a bread that's constantly being *yeastified*. You keep adding to it, it's constantly rising, but it's never quite finished.

What Matters Is Achieving Harmony

I've also learned to listen. I like to listen and play with my students. Some part of the class will always be on our feet, moving, or singing. I might surprise a student or a class one day when they come in and I ask them to sing their reaction to a text: "How does it sound if you have to put a tune to it?" And they say: "What do you mean?" And I say: "I don't really know what I mean. What do you think I mean? Give it a try." And the worst that can happen is that their singing is terrible! Or dance a problem. I tell my students: "We're here for a few hours, so what's so terrible about 10 minutes of failure, what does it matter?" What *matters* is that you get that stuff between your ears and that stuff in your belly in harmony with each other. Or at least in conversation with each other.

Epilogue: Some Final Thoughts on the Pandemic

I do think we will come through this and hopefully we'll come to a more humane and better world because we'll realize our vulnerabilities and realize that we have to share, think, and act constructively for the future. I think that art, performance, and education have large roles to play because what goes on in the imagination is a prelude to what can go in concrete physical fact.

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Arts and Drama Education Is for All

Kristen Witczak

Abstract

In this interview, arts educator Kristen Witczak discusses her experience of teaching drama with children, adolescents, and adults in various educational settings. She shares her early motivation for becoming an arts educator and the moments in her career that nourished her passion for her work. She also outlines some of the institutional and cultural challenges that are prevalent for today's drama educators. Finally, she shares advice for young artists who are considering a career in arts education.

Can you talk about how you got into teaching and, more specifically, drama education, and what your current position is at Saint-Lambert International High School?

The story of how I got into teaching and how I became a drama educator are really one story and it's probably my favourite story to tell. When I was young, I loved going to the theatre and the first show I ever saw, my mom took me to a college production of *Charlotte's Web*. I was so enchanted with that and always was interested in pursuing the theatre as a hobby. In CEGEP I did a double degree in Liberal Arts and Theatre and eventually went on to do a theatre degree at Concordia.

By the time I was at Concordia I wasn't really thinking about teaching at all anymore. I didn't have any particular interest at that point in pursuing arts education, but someone I knew had contacted me saying someone they knew was looking for an assistant on a theatre project with children. The woman who was running the project was a teacher at the National Theatre School. At that point I thought, "Oh well, I'll go on to the National Theatre School, maybe, after my degree at Concordia; it can't hurt to go and be her assistant on this project." I showed up at an elementary school in Westmount on a Thursday afternoon; I was in my early twenties and still at Concordia at that point, and they were doing a youth production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I didn't really know what to expect, there were lots of small kids, they were really little, 9, 10, 11 years old. I went to the rehearsal and was assigned a group of kids to work with and was trying to help them out. So, I have all these little kids around me and they're asking for help and at the end of the rehearsal, time was up and I looked down and there were all these little kids around me at my feet and they all kept saying, "Miss Kristen, next week can you help me? Next week can it be my turn?" I looked down at the kids, looked back up, and I knew I was never going to go to the National Theatre School. I knew I was going to be an arts educator from just that tiny little moment. Starting with that experience, I ended up specializing my degree in teaching at Concordia. I taught a few semesters' worth of a class called *Theatre Performance for Non-Theatre Students*. I was teaching adults at Concordia, which was a huge, amazing learning experience. At that point, I had worked with young kids and had worked with adults. I felt like my personal interest might fall somewhere in the middle, which is how I ended up going back to school and becoming a high school teacher.

I started my career at a very large English high school on the South Shore and, when I was there, I was teaching drama primarily and was also the Head of Drama for a specialized program. I did that for four years. When my number came up for a permanent post, I was transferred to a much smaller school in the board, an IB school, and I've been there for about eight years. I've since become the IB coordinator and moved into a hybrid teaching and administrative role. So that is what I do now. I am the IB coordinator, I do some administrative support—sort of like a teaching vice-principal—and I also teach. I'm not teaching drama anymore, because the school is very small and if a group doesn't open, there won't be a class. When there is a group, I do teach it.

Can you talk about the philosophy you have that informs your teaching of drama education?

When I try to prioritize what I care about as a drama educator, the thing that really comes to mind is encouraging creativity and a freedom of expression with students. Having been a student of drama in the youth sector and eventually through my postsecondary education, there was a lot of focus on excellence, being the best, and auditioning well. As I have matured in my thinking about teaching, I really moved away from that kind of mindset and now think that drama education and arts education are for everybody. The kids who get the most out of those experiences are the least inclined to embrace it in a professional sense. If I had to get it down to one sentence, I'd say, "Arts education and drama education are for all." It's not about skill at the end of the day—it's about creativity and experience. Something really central to arts education and, particularly drama education, is working in community. And those are the things that at the end of the day I hope are coming through teaching and my curriculum that I design for my classrooms.

How does drama teaching inform your teaching of Secondary V English and vice versa?

Coming from a background of being a drama teacher, I feel very at ease embracing a more creative attitude towards assessment in my classroom. I really love to focus my own course design on performance-based assessment in a broad sense, not necessarily in a theatrical sense. My experience as a drama educator makes me very comfortable getting "outside of the box."

My favourite project that I do with students and, unfortunately, this year, we just missed it, with the schools being closed, but my favourite project that I do over the course of the year with my Secondary V drama is a kind of literature circle with modern drama. We set up the project so that every circle in the class is a little production company. They have to read the play and then design and plan a production, that they then pitch to me and the rest of the class for money—like a *Dragon's Den* of theatre. The students have really enjoyed that project the past couple of years. The things that come out of it are just amazing. My favourite component of that project is the design element; it's not even the "stand up and act it out" part, it's the component where the students take the text and then they design costumes or sets or even I've had music students compose music to go with the text. I find that project so *outside the box*, and so much fun. And the kids get to experience literature in a very different way than they would sort of in that like staid, book sense. A play is meant to be heard; a play is meant to get up off the page. I think this project lets them explore the text in its literary value, which of course is important for

their overall skills in English, but it also lets them get up and be creative, get out of their chairs and act it out a little bit. It's a lot of fun and I like the texts we do too. Over the years, just refining what we chose, trying to get the right kid matched to the right text. It's a lot of fun and a really alive process in the classroom.

As the coordinator of the middle years IB Program, do you find that you use some of what you have learned in performance art in this leadership position?

For me a sort of innate sense of fun and theatricality makes getting up in front of the staff a lot less intimidating. I really don't have an issue positioning myself in a little bit of a humorous light, which breaks a lot of tension and it's also hard when power-wise, it's lateral but responsibility-wise it's not. You really have to think creatively about how you are going to bring your colleagues to the work, how you're going to engage your peers and colleagues in a way that doesn't feel too hierarchical. I think that my creative style translates well when I'm working with my colleagues. I think that by taking a more colourful approach, it's disarming. That is the best way to put it.

Can you give an example of one time when you used your creative and more performance propensity to change something in a meeting or something among staff?

The first thing that came to mind when you said that, was something I developed in concert with one of our student services technicians once the evaluation was done, the visit was over: we wanted to vision individually as teachers, within departments and then harmonized all together to vision together. I needed to find the logical person to speak to about something like that. I knew I could lead it, but I didn't really know how to design it, so I sought out my colleague Patty. We developed a Wheel of Life template about all the different aspects of the program and ran with that with the staff. We were asking people about their values and what they cared about using the Wheel of Life as a measurement tool. It was a very qualitative way to be looking at a long-term plan for a school.

I remember feeling quite proud that we had taken a very creative tack on what could have been an extremely dry process. The other thing about that was that it didn't feel top-down, that it didn't feel like at the end of the day I knew what I wanted, and our principal knew what he wanted and those couple of very involved teachers knew what they wanted. It didn't feel as though we were just taking information in from the staff to check a box saying, "Oh, you were consulted, you were consulted." We actually did something with it. Looking at processes like that, creatively, can really help move things forward in an authentic way.

In the next question I was going to ask you about examples of your successes in drama education in terms of process or product. You kind of broached that from the leadership perspective. Can you add a little more to that?

The last time that I taught Secondary IV Drama was in the same year as the Stoneman Douglas shootings in Florida. My plan for that year had been to do a collective creation with students in a regular drama classroom, which was something I'd never tried before. A collective creation involves students coming together to develop their own piece of theatre as a large group, from the ground up. So, if you have a group of 30, you're doing a fairly large piece with that group of 30 where the students are choosing their own topic, researching, writing, developing their own piece.

When we first sat down to work on it, we brainstormed different ideas of topics we could pursue. The students decided that they wanted to pursue the topic of gun violence in schools. It was an incredible experience because as a teacher in that setting, you're only teaching the process. You don't have a very heavy hand in the product. Often kids want you to fine-tune the product, they want it to look good. The process—it's very difficult to get kids to value process, but in that kind of project it's all process. What the kids came up with at the end was just incredible. It moved me beyond what I expected could happen. I remember at the end they unfurled this giant banner and they had created a slogan that was written across this banner. The students had all portrayed multiple roles in the piece, so they had been police officers and protesters and students and teachers, and seeing them all up there at the end in their various costumes, some dressed up like a police officer, some the students, some the teacher, holding this banner together and they were making such a strong statement about putting an end to school violence. It felt important. And it felt like the students were actually engaging in something deeply meaningful to them. We had an audience of other students in the school to see it and it was a very powerful shared experience, to see something that was honest and also not polished, in the sense that you didn't want it to look perfect, you just wanted the kids to live it for real. When I think back on really powerful experiences, the collective creation is definitely one.

Can you describe some of the challenges you face in this performance art?

There are a few challenges facing drama educators specifically right now. Some are cultural and some are institutional. I think that there's often a sense of the priorities in a school being so firmly in one place: they need to pass their Grade 10 History, they need to pass their Grade 10 Science, Math, and with reason. As a language teacher I absolutely understand where we as core teachers are coming from when we make those kinds of statements, but I think that the more I continue looking at education as an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary space, the more I know that the arts have incredible value. Often, we make sense of the world, we make sense of science, we make sense of history through art. It's a vessel with which we understand what we're learning and can share what we're learning. On the institutional side, I think that one of the challenges is just creating that innate sense of value for the arts in schools.

On the cultural side, and I think that's almost more difficult, when you talk to people about drama education or you talk to kids about drama education, often they have a very narrow view of what that's all about and that translates to what kids want to do in the classroom. An example of that is that you get a lot of this *American Idol* culture around performing arts where you come into the classroom and the goal of a drama class for the students in their minds is to be at the front, making people laugh, getting a lot of attention. Breaking down that culture can be really challenging because from a classroom management perspective students with that attitude often take up a lot of space and when you try to work on those issues there is not a lot of broader parental or outside-the-school understanding of that's not what arts education is about. It's a really slow process to create a culture of a specific art in the school, be it music, visual art, drama, when there isn't a long preexisting culture already in place. It's an uphill fight for the first couple of years, I found, in any school, to have my perspective of arts education or my attitude towards arts education grow into something that's valued. It's not easy. It is really not easy because every year you have to start again with those 30 kids in your class who are saying, "Oh well, you know, I thought I was just going to be doing improv like *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* all day…for a year." And when you say, "Well we're going to be doing a mask unit, we're going to be doing a mime unit, and you're not going to be speaking for an audience at all," it's really hard to combat what the

students think it is versus what it is versus what it could be. You want to move with your students into that sort of space of infinite possibility and there's a lot of steps and hurdles you need to go through to get to that end.

What advice would you give to teachers wishing to venture into the era of drama education?

"Do it!" would be my first thought. I think that a lot of young artists who are in arts in postsecondary education think of teaching as a fallback. They think, "If you can't do, teach. Oh, I'll go out and audition for a few years and if that doesn't work out, I'll become a drama teacher." But if you have that fire in you and that passion for sharing what you know and giving kids opportunities to be creative, then that's why you should become a drama educator. Not because you went out there for a few years and it didn't work out but because you—to kind of reflect back on my own experience—look down on a group of kids saying, "Next week, can you help me? I want to do it too." Those are the moments that inform the right reasons to go out and do it. Teaching in the arts is an incredible gift that you give yourself as an artist, that you give to students as budding artists and it's the best job in the world to be in a creative space with children, whether you are teaching English and you are bringing your creativity to that, or you're teaching science and you're bringing your creativity to that. But if you have the skill and the patience and the love of sharing creativity with children, being an arts educator is the most wonderful thing that you can be doing with your life. It's a total, total joy.

Kristen Witczak, BFA, BEd, is an English teacher and arts educator with a background in the performing arts. She has a BFA in Theatre from Concordia University and completed her teacher training at OISE/University of Toronto. She is a teacher and administrator at Saint-Lambert International High School in suburban Montreal. She is also a proud member of the Narrative Inquiry Group. Kristen's research interests include performance ethnography, narrative inquiry, arts-based research, and self-study. She is looking forward to pursuing graduate studies in the near future.

1, 2, 3, Action: Using Performance in Higher Education to Develop Teachers and Learners

Kelly Mancini Becker

Abstract

This paper explores the use of performance in a college-level course that teaches education majors how to use drama, dance, and music in their instruction. Students engage in drama activities such as improvisation and playbuilding in an effort to experience firsthand the benefits of such practices for their future classrooms. The essay shares some of the students' experiences in this course. A common outcome shared is that the processes encouraged students to get out of their comfort zone, which they found beneficial to their learning. The essay examines how having students perform may help them develop as both a learner and a future teacher.

It is the final exam day for my course, "Integrating the Arts Across the Curriculum," which is being taught at a midsize land grant university in the Northeastern United States. The course is geared towards teaching future elementary school teachers how to infuse the performing arts into their instruction of the general curriculum. The room is abuzz. There is a group of students in multicolored shirts—each color representing a healthy food group. One cluster of students is putting the finishing touches on their paper plate masks, while another group is practicing their song one more time before they perform their piece. This is the final project for the course where they perform a piece based on their arts-integrated unit which integrates drama, dance, and/or music with a content area like math, social studies, or literacy. One piece is a dance performance that shows the life cycle of plants. Another is a play about important women in history where each student performs a monologue that they have written about an influential woman. One performance is a staged fairy tale based on a Cajun version of *Little Red Riding Hood* set in Louisiana. This group's unit plan focused on how fairy tales were adapted and interpreted in various parts of the world. One particular performance in this piece stood out. The student who played the role of the alligator—what the Cajun version used as the villain instead of a wolf—took the stage with ease. He adorned a paper plate mask he had made with big alligator teeth and a mischievous grin (see Figure 1). When Little Red Riding Hood asked about his great big eyes, he responded with a big voice and a hint of a Cajun accent: "The better to see you with my dear!"

I call attention to this performance because the student who played this role demonstrated the most growth of any of the students that semester. At the start of the semester, he hardly spoke in class and was active but reticent in other performative activities. However, by semester's end, he amazed us all by taking on this major role. This student could have easily chosen a smaller part in this final performance, but he took on one of the most challenging—the villain—and a comic character at that. This transformation from reticent student to lead actor demonstrates what can be gained when alternative

modalities are engaged in the learning process. In his final reflection, he shared how far he had come in this course:

> This was a lot of learning for me. I learned that I can go out of my comfort zone, and everything will be ok. Nothing bad happened when I challenged myself. The biggest challenge was getting over that battle in my head. Once I did that, it was easier.
>
> Looking at how much I struggled, that will do a lot for me when I am teaching kids who are struggling in the same way I did. I am sympathetic for that, but at the same time, I know it can be overcome and that it is just something that you need to ease into and create a community first. I am beyond grateful for how much you pushed me in this class to just go for it, because if you just let me float by, I never would have grown like this, and now that it's over, I really am proud of how much further I have come. I really didn't see this coming, and I am excited to implement this into teaching. This kind of stuff really does work, and I am glad I got to see it first hand.

Fig. 1: Student plays the role of Alligator in his performance of the Cajun version of *Little Red Riding Hood*.

As this student shared in his reflection, the use of performance had a profound impact on his learning. He was pushed out of his comfort zone and challenged in a new way. He also built confidence in himself

by overcoming some of his fears. This student also learned about how powerful performance can be for students in their learning process, which was something he experienced firsthand.

This final performance was an outcome of a course that integrated drama into classroom instruction. The use of drama in classroom instruction, what has been called "arts integration" or "learning through the arts," has been proven to benefit students in many ways (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007; Bamford, 2009; Hardiman, Rinne, & Yarmolinskaya, 2014). Elliot Eisner (2002), one of the leaders in the field, has argued that the arts are vital for students' cognitive development and thus need to be included in our teaching practices:

> *I argue that many of the most complex and subtle forms of thinking take place when students have an opportunity either to work meaningfully on the creation of images – whether visual, choreographic, musical, literary, or poetic – or to scrutinize them appreciatively. (p. xi)*

Over the past two decades, research has supported this claim, touting the benefits of arts integration on students' academic and cognitive growth as well as their social skills (Burnaford et al., 2007; Bamford, 2009; Hardiman et al., 2014). Recent studies have shown that integrating drama into instruction can affect student engagement (Miller & Bogatova, 2018) and academic achievement (Snyder, Klos, & Grey-Hawkins, 2014). Hardiman (2003), in her Brain Targeted Teaching Model that utilizes research in neuro and cognitive sciences to improve teaching, shares that drama, music, and the visual arts activate the neurotransmitter serotonin which enhances cognitive skills and retention. Therefore, using varied modalities in the classroom positively influences student learning.

While the impact of the arts on learning is well documented in K-12 classrooms, there is sparse research on the impact of arts integration in higher education courses. One relevant study investigated the impact of using theater techniques and performance in the exploration of issues of race in a college class. The researchers found that the use of drama, dance, and performance enhanced and deepened learning and facilitated communication, and that the use of these modalities, which required students to "step out of the comfort zone," acted as a key aspect of the learning process (Sharma, Catalano, Seetzen, Minors, & Collins-Mayo, 2019, p. 202).

Performance and Vulnerability

Getting students out of their comfort zone is one of the main aims of my course. Performing in front of one's peers and engaging in activities like drama and dance—processes that are not often included in regular classroom instruction—requires some risk-taking by the participant. Performing requires that you be seen and heard. You have to stand in front of your peers and be present in a more vulnerable way, maybe even act a bit silly. For the young man in my course, facing his fears and taking the risk of performing made a big difference in his learning and growth as a future teacher.

Learning requires similar "risks" and exposure. To be truly engaged in the learning process, students must raise their hand to ask or answer a question, which can feel intimidating or challenging for some students. Not only do they have to "take the floor" and have all the attention on them, but they might also expose

some lack of knowledge or offer an incorrect answer. In essence, students have to make themselves vulnerable.

Brene Brown (2015), the leading researcher on shame and vulnerability, defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (p. 34). Brown asserts that our ability to be vulnerable is essential to how we live, love, work, and learn: "learning and creating are inherently vulnerable" (p. 186). To learn you have to ask questions, admit you don't know something, or challenge ideas. However, the fear of making mistakes can hamper learning (Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Metcalfe, 2017). Interestingly though, research shows that "failure" or making mistakes can be beneficial in the learning process (Metcalfe, 2017) because when we face our fears and try something new, we build our confidence, which encourages us to take more risks in the future, thereby leading to ongoing growth.

How do we teach students to face their fears and take a risk in the classroom? Performance is one way to accomplish this as it provides a space to take the stage, to be seen and heard, and try new things. It functioned in that way for my student who took on the role of the alligator after a semester of easing his way onto stage.

The student who played the alligator in his final project also expressed that the experience of taking the stage and getting out of his comfort zone was going to benefit him as a future teacher. He suggested that because of this experience, he could better relate to students' experiences of struggle and perhaps better guide them through it. This arts integration course is geared towards preservice teachers. In the course, I model how the arts, such as drama, dance, and music, can be integrated with any content area. They have to sing, dance, and act and engage in the process of making art. This hands-on learning opportunity allows preservice teachers to experience firsthand how effective these instructional practices can be. It also, as I have discovered, is helping them develop some important skills that they need to be a good teacher, such as listening, vocal range, and quick thinking—all skills that are essential for participating in the performing arts.

Teaching as Performative

Improvisation is a performative artform that I utilize often in this course. One improvisation game that I use to teach the basics of improvisation is called: "I am a mustache." The game begins with one student taking the "stage" (an area we have designated as such in our classroom) and professing that they are something, such as a tree or a dog. They make a pose and say with a loud voice: "I am a tree." As other students hear the line, they may add to this tableaux by stepping forward and professing that they are something that connects to the original idea. For example, they might profess that they are an apple on the tree or a child sitting below its branches. When the idea is exhausted, a student will step forward to say: "I am a mustache," which signals that this round of the game is finished. In a particularly dynamic round recently, one student called out: "I am a dad," and another student stepped forward to profess: "I'm the Hawaiian shirt on dad."

This vignette demonstrates a few of the benefits of using performance to train preservice teachers. Many a veteran teacher will tell you that teaching is an "act," or that to keep students' attention you need to be an actor and perform. Liew (2013) explored the notion of teaching as performative:

> Emerging center stage is the teacher-artist performing in a classroom theater before a live audience of students. Like the theater actor, the teacher-as-performer assumes a stage persona, asserts stage presence, and communicates through verbal and nonverbal actions to engage—even educate—the hearts and minds of student-audiences. (p. 262)

But where do preservice teachers learn this skill?

Some research has shown that using the performing arts, such as drama, can be an effective instructional strategy for training teachers. Toivanen, Komulainena, and Ruismäki (2011) argue that good teaching requires confidence, creative passion, and rich interactions, all of which can be taught through dramatic means such as improvisation, role-play, and movement activities. Their research showed that drama was an optimal tool for training preservice teachers. Spielman (2007) demonstrated the effect of performing skits to prepare preservice teachers to teach math. Arslan (2015) studied the use of creative drama in preservice teacher training and its effect on problem solving. While she did not find a statistically significant relationship between engaging in creative drama and problem solving, she argued that this was in part due to the limited exposure of preservice teachers to creative drama. Arslan does however argue that methods inherent in creative drama follow a similar process to problem solving and thus provide a space to practice them. She therefore touts the benefits of using creative drama in teacher training and suggests more studies to investigate its impact.

Norris (2009) also demonstrated that theater could be a "powerful education tool," especially in training student teachers (p. 65). In his creation of the Mirror Theater, he engaged in theater techniques with college students and student teachers in an effort to explore issues of teaching. He used improvisation to create the plays as he believed that improvisation could be useful to "articulate their underlying beliefs through concrete representations" (p. 45). Norris created many pieces with students studying to be teachers about the fears and concerns regarding student teaching such as: "Teaching is Like an Old Sneaker" and "Post Practicum Depression" (p. 69). This process of collectively creating plays was proven to be a helpful process for preservice teachers as it encouraged meaningful discussions about teaching and the teaching process.

I have found that the use of performance, especially improvisation, has been particularly effective for developing preservice teachers' voice (volume and expression), listening skills, and quick thinking and problem solving. First and foremost, performance helps students develop their teacher voice. Encouraging students to perform regularly for their peers requires a "loud enough to be heard voice" because the act of performing requires this skill to be embodied. Not only does one need to be heard in the back of the house, but an actor on stage also depends on hearing the line prior to cue their next line. Using a variety of games like "I am a mustache" also encourages the development of an expressive voice. Dramatic play often includes a wide variety of roles to be played that requires students to explore their range, volume,

and expression. Performing in front of their peers and getting immediate feedback from an audience, fuels more rapid development in this area.

Because there is no set script for improvisation, the actors on stage need to develop some key skills to make it work; skills that are also vital for effective teachers such as listening, problem solving, and quick thinking. In a recent class, we played an improvisation game called, “one chair improv.” In this game, one student is seated in a chair and knows nothing about who they are, where they are, or what is about to happen. The student who enters the stage has made these decisions and enters the stage to begin a scene. It is up to the seated player to figure out the who, where, and what quickly, so that they can play along. In a recent iteration of this game in my class, a student entered the stage and asked the person seated where they had been on October 15, 2006 and why their DNA was all over the crime scene. The seated player had to quickly make up a story about why there was no way they were anywhere near the scene of the crime.

This game, like most improvisation games, requires students to listen effectively. You have to build on what the person says prior to you and align with the reality they have established. If you start planning ahead, thinking about what you are going to say next, you are lost. Once your partner says a line, you have to immediately respond, which takes some quick processing and thinking. Sound like teaching? Engaging in improvisation is an excellent training platform for teachers who have to think on their feet all day and respond to whatever students throw at them. Doing improvisation can be scary. It is clear in this students’ final reflection that going on stage and performing in front of their peers was very intimidating:

Fig. 2: Students partake in a workshop led by teaching artist Suzanna Olson at The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, using their bodies to re-create the setting for a folk tale.

> At the beginning of this course, I had a really hard time participating and being outgoing in class. I am usually someone who has a pretty hard time articulating my thoughts to a large group of people because public speaking makes me pretty anxious. This can be even harder for me when it involves having to be creative and think on my feet. I remember the first time we did improvisation, I thought it would be impossible for me to ever step up and participate….while it was hard for me to let go, and put myself out there, I did try to be more outgoing in my group. This was the first step in coming into myself as an artist. After that, I found myself slowly becoming more outgoing and participating more in class….through this class, at least now I know that if I work on it, and push myself out of my comfort zone, my anxiety surrounding speaking will be more manageable. Overall the biggest thing I learned from this class is to be more confident in my ability to speak in front of a large group of people. I was able to say what I felt, or perform without thinking about what everyone was thinking about me the entire time.

The act of performing helps to develop many skills in preservice teachers such as their teacher voice, ability to think on their feet, and listen effectively. It also provides a varied way to access and share learning, which may help improve the learning outcomes for college students.

Active Learning and Drama

K-12 educators work to differentiate instruction to find a variety of means to help students access learning. Active learning is a documented best practice (Hardiman, 2003). Research suggests that adding movement into instruction helps with retention and engagement, both key to learning (Hardiman, 2003). This is why I am teaching my preservice elementary education majors how to use such practices in their future classrooms. And while the benefits of such pedagogy are also improving the learning outcomes for my college-age students, it rarely finds its way into higher education. Fink (2013) argues that "information dump" is still the predominant teaching style in higher education classrooms that rarely include opportunities for problem solving, thinking, and decision making, which are all skills vital to post-college success in life and the workforce. Roberts (2019) argues that lectures still dominate in higher education despite our changing understanding of how college-age students learn:

> [Lecture style classes] stubbornly persists, despite a range of challenges. Such challenges include concerns that too many student learning needs are submerged to one pedagogy, that 2-hour lectures cannot match changing attention spans and that the idea of knowledge being imprinted onto passive minds in a dimly-lit room on a campus for 2 hours at a time is at odds with the kind of conditions needed to engage better student learning. (p. 63)

Nathan and Sloan (2005) make a strong argument for the need for alternative methods for educating college students. Their report suggests that due to the changing demographics of those who now attend college, we need to change how and what we teach in higher education. Students are not only coming in with a wider range of skills, but we need to educate students for future careers that are vastly different from that of years past that require skills such as creativity and collaboration. Sloan and Nathan (2005), in their study of the Boston Arts Academy, argue that this can be accomplished effectively using the arts.

The benefits of active learning in higher education became apparent in a recent class session on the use of drama to teach westward expansion. In this class, I took students through a process called playbuilding (Tarlington, 1995) to create a play about life on the Oregon Trail. This was meant to demonstrate to

preservice teachers how to use drama, music, and dance to create a play based on a specific content area to more fully engage their future students in the learning process. Not only is it a way to process what students are learning, which requires them to pull out the most important ideas in a reading, but it also provides a purposefulness to the work, as the goal is to create a play to share and teach others. To accomplish this task, students were put into groups, given specific readings focused on a particular aspect of westward expansion, and asked to develop a scene that shared the most salient information. As each of the groups performed, I was struck by what I noticed in my students. Many of the students who had hardly spoken up in class were all of a sudden acting, speaking, and fully active. It reminded me that no matter the age, students all have different skills and talents. The more we vary our instruction, the better it is for our students and for us as we learn more about how our students learn. In my student's reflection, it is clear that this experience made an impression on her:

> *Wait for the wagon, wait for the wagon!* That was the main verse of our first musical number in the westward expansion show we were making. Hoola hoops covered with a sheet were carried around to create a wagon, and the cute little wagon representation wove around and around the little room (see Figure 3). After the song, there were some one-liners, a few skits, and then a square dance. Interestingly, all of these pieces of the show had been produced through (what could be) a complete social studies lessons. My favorite was the one in which students read about various aspects of wagon life and then worked in groups to create scenes depicting what they had learned. My group had made a scene that demonstrated what items a family moving west via wagon might have packed back during expansion. I don't think I'll ever forget that barrels of water, lots of bacon, and various tools were among some of the key items to bring!

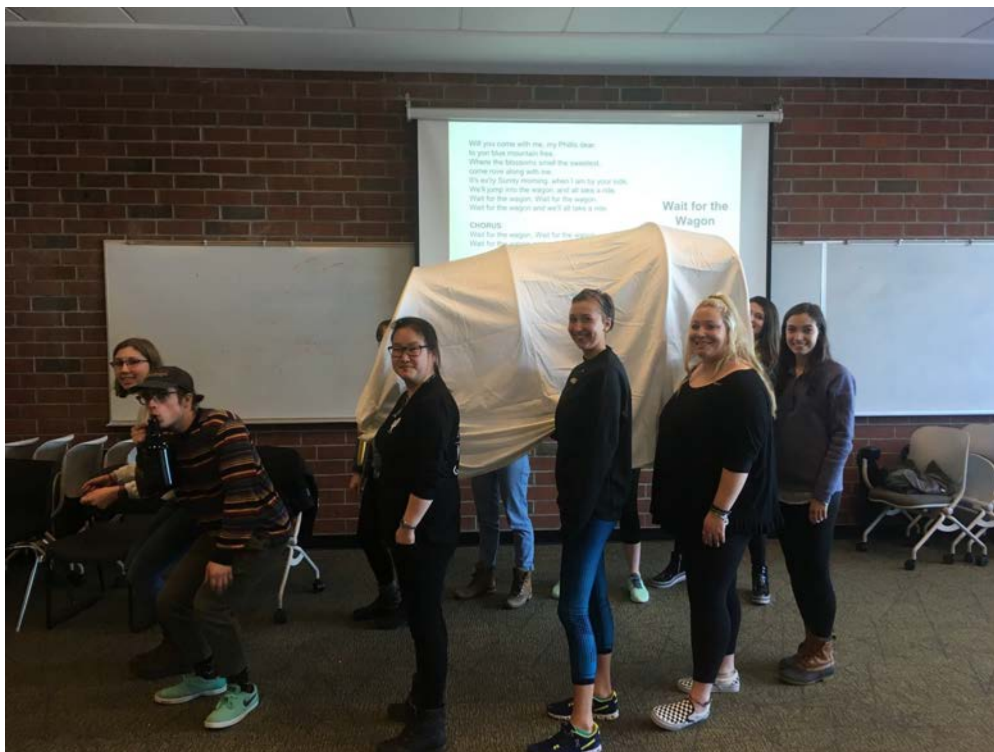

Fig. 3: Students use hula hoops and a sheet to re-create a covered wagon, while they perform a scene from the Pioneer Musical they create.

This student recounts so many positive outcomes of this arts-integrated lesson where music, drama, and active learning were used to engage with social studies content. She asserts that she will "never forget" the act of packing the wagon which they acted out in their skits. Retention is one benefit noted in arts-integrated learning (Hardiman, 2003). This lesson also required students to use critical thinking skills. They had to read firsthand accounts of some of the issues that pioneers had to face as they headed west, pull out the salient ideas, and decide on the most important information to share in their performance. Eisner (2002) argues that engaging in arts learning requires the use of critical thinking and Fink (2013) suggests that skill building in these areas are nascent in most higher education instruction. Students also had to find a way to take those main ideas and physicalize them. Performance, for Butler-Kisber (2010), is an "embodied, narrative way of understanding the third dimension" (p. 136) and a valuable tool for inquiry and meaning making. Creating scenes based on academic readings required some creativity and imagination, but also collaborative skills, which are both much needed 21st century skills. But what is most apparent from this account is enjoyment and engagement, which is a key ingredient in learning (Hardiman, 2003).

Stretched

The following is a one-word poem that was created on our last day of the course after students performed their pieces for their peers. The activity requires each student to share one word about how they are feeling. As this poem indicates, it is clear that students appreciated having performance as part of their learning experience. The word "stretched" resonates and to me is the main goal of any educational experience.

Closing Circle: One-Word Poem

Rejuvenated
Energized
Content
Hopeful
Engaged
Accomplished
Calm
Supported
Creative
Interested
Motorized
Connected
Excited
Inspired
Calm
Motivated
Excited
Jazzed up
Exhausted
Stretched
Determined

“1, 2, 3, action” is the chant I teach my students which we use to begin each performance. It signals that the actors on stage are ready and that the audience needs to prepare to be active observers. I have found that utilizing drama and performance in my teaching has been an effective way to engage my students in active learning no matter the age. It can be used as a tool to encourage students to process content by pulling out the most salient ideas, such as was done in playbuilding. It often allows for different students to shine in my class, perhaps students who are not as vocal in whole group discussions. Performance is a way to differentiate instruction and offers a varied way to access and share learning. Using performance, such as improvisation, to develop skills for my preservice teachers, encourages the development of their teacher voice, problem solving, listening, and quick thinking. However, the greatest benefit of performance comes from the demands it places on students to go out of their comfort zone and take a risk in a safe and controlled environment. It is critical that more alternative teaching styles, like the use of performance, find their way into higher education teaching practices, and continued research on its impact on student learning is pursued.

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Using Performances in a Flipped Classroom Setting

James A. Bernauer

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain how performances are used within a flipped classroom environment in a university educational psychology class. This instructional approach also incorporates the concept of "integrated assessment" where assessment and instruction are intimately connected. Examples of student-led instruction using performances are provided. Results of a teacher-developed assessment administered during the past several years to elicit student evaluations of these instructional practices have provided evidence that using this instructional approach is effective for most but not all students.

Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered Instruction

As I stood at the podium of a master's level class in Educational Psychology in 2013 lecturing students about how important it is to allow students to take an active role in their own learning, I stopped in mid-sentence because I realized that I was not practicing what I was preaching—and frankly, I was also sick of hearing myself talk! While I spoke about the need for more student-centered instruction, I modeled its opposite—teacher-centered instruction. It is to that particular moment that I can trace back my development of instructional strategies that are decidedly more student-centered.

As time moved on from this seminal moment, I began to develop instructional strategies that required a lot more up-front preparatory work but less "teaching" during the actual class session; rather, I found myself "facilitating." I found that sharing control of a classroom required that students be given guidance in advance of a class session so that they would be prepared to assume a greater ownership of their own learning. There was a need to develop strategies that balanced teaching and learning responsibilities between teacher and students that blurred the distinction between both teachers and students and teaching and learning. If we think of teaching as transferring an organized body of knowledge from teacher to learner, then indeed a sharp distinction can be made between teaching and learning. However, if we view learning as an active process of co-constructing knowledge and understanding and creating new and novel ideas and concepts, then all of us are student-teachers as well as teacher-students. In fact, we might even say that if there are 25 students in a classroom then there are potentially 26 teachers. During these past six years, I have certainly found that to be the case.

Constructivist Learning Theory and Flipping

Different learning theories have been developed to help us understand how we learn and, by implication, how we might teach (Bernauer & Tomei, 2015). The application of these theories is context-dependent on the content to be learned as well as the developmental readiness of learners. For example, Behavioral Learning Theory works great for tasks that are well defined such as learning to type or the alphabet. However, as the complexity of learning increases, we may find that cognitive theories are more effective. The learning theory that I have found to be most useful when teaching at the university level is Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT) that has its roots in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), Jean Piaget (1954), and John Dewey (1913), among others. In essence, CLT recognizes that each of us needs to "re-invent the wheel" in order to come to "own" knowledge and to create new knowledge. This constructivist approach is decidedly nonlinear at times, meaning that rather than viewing learning solely as a step-by-step cumulative process, it is also characterized by insights and intuitive leaps (see Polanyi, 1958). I also stress to students that facts in isolation are meaningless without contextual understanding. I demonstrate this by pointing to a glass that is filled to the halfway mark and ask the proverbial question whether the glass is half empty or half full. I stress that our assessment is influenced by considerations such as how thirsty we are, the scarcity of water, and so on. The physical fact of the liquid reaching the halfway mark is undeniable; however, these other considerations give cogency to responses. For example, 58,000 American military deaths in the Vietnam War can be considered large or small depending on our values as well as what we use for comparison, such as the Korean War (34,000 deaths) or WWII (417,000 deaths).

Based on the important role that Constructivist Learning Theory plays in learning, I tried different ways to meld this theory with creating a more performance-based classroom. I use a learning platform (Blackboard) to provide students with guidance for assuming more control during class time and to facilitate achieving desired course outcomes. Table 1 illustrates how two teams were guided to engage the class in learning about Behavioral Learning Theory. Each team comprises four to six students who know in advance what they are expected to do at upcoming classes such as in Table 1. This instructional process can be considered a type of "flipping" where homework becomes the focal point of classroom instruction, rather than a sidebar of instruction. The particular version of flipping I use is characterized by collaborative learning, student performances, and integrated assessment that has been designed to promote students' active engagement in their own learning.

Performances and Integrated Assessment

Performances span professions and subject areas and performance assessment can be used to evaluate products, procedures, as well as performances themselves (see, for example, Kubiszyn & Borich, 1993; Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, & Lindheim, 1987), although dramatization and simulation still seem underused in typical classrooms. Performances are often used to assess both preservice and inservice teachers (Castle & Shaklee, 2006), while how to analyze these performances in order to obtain useful and actionable evidence is sometimes a challenge (see Bastian, Lys, & Pan, 2018). Maxwell (2012) argues

that action research is related to authentic assessment in higher education for the professions including teacher preparation programs and concludes:

> In addition to the argument that action research is an appropriate part of the curriculum in professional education, the action research report was judged as an authentic task. It is especially appropriate as a capstone assessment, that is, as a culminating performance. (p. 695)

I have found this same kind of linkage among research, assessment, and performances in my own teaching and related scholarly inquiry.

Table 1 represents a recent student learning assignment for a class in Educational Psychology. I develop these team-based performance plans for classes in advance of the start of a new semester using Blackboard as the learning platform that students access prior to each class.

Table 1: *How Children Learn*

Topic: How Children Learn (Behavioral Learning Theory)

Team Preparation: 10 AM-10:10 AM

Team-Led Discussions:

Team 3: 10:10 AM-10:30 AM

Team 4: 10:30 AM-10:50 AM

Team 3 Tasks: (Try to integrate the Smartboard, YouTube videos, Maker Space, or other tools with your discussion!)

1. Narrator/Timekeeper: Tell us what we are supposed to learn based on pages 254-258 of our text, why it is important, and how it links to our assignments (Desk Drawer Reminder 2 (DDR-2); Critical Assignment (CA), Field Experiences (FE), team-developed Student-Centered Teaching and Learning Model (SCTLM), and our future classrooms!
2. Team: Can you dramatize the scenario found on pages 255-256 and point out to us what lessons we might learn from it?
3. Team: Could you explain to us “classical conditioning” and then ask the class to do the “Stop & Think” (p. 256)?
4. Team: Use the document camera to project the Guidelines found on page 258 and point out and briefly explain the three bolded headings. Then, how about dramatizing one example under each bold heading?
5. Team: How about asking one member of Team 1 and one member of Team 2 what they found to be of most interest?
6. Narrator: Remind us how what we learned connects to our future “learning classrooms” and DDR-2!

Team 4 Tasks: (Try to integrate the Smartboard, YouTube videos, Maker Space, or other tools with your discussion!)

7. Narrator/Timekeeper: Tell us what we are supposed to learn based on pages 258-264 of our text, why it is important, and how it links to our assignments (Desk Drawer Reminder 2 (DDR-2); Critical Assignment (CA), and your team-developed Student-Centered Teaching and Learning Model (SCTLM), and our future classrooms!
8. Team: (Stop & Think, p. 259): Project Stop & Think and involve the class in a dramatization about operant conditioning!
9. Team (pp. 259-260): Draw the Reinforcement sequence from page 259 and the Punishment sequence on page 260 on the Smartboard. Now explain the difference!!
10. Team (Fig. 20.1, p. 261): Project this figure and ask students to relate their own experiences about reinforcement.
11. Team: Based on pages 262-263, could you provide a brief description of the importance of "antecedents" in behavioral learning and then give a short example of Effective Instruction Delivery, Cueing, and Prompting? Try and get class members to join in!
12. Team: Choose one member of Team 1 and one member of Team 2 and ask them what they found to be of most interest!!
13. Narrator: Remind us how what we learned connects to our future “learning classrooms” and DDR-2!

Notice that the topic and allotted times are given first to help students link content to the realities of classroom learning, especially to that most precious of commodities—time. Students are also reminded to stretch their imaginations in terms of what modalities and instructional tools can be used to engage students in the discussion that they will lead including the Smartboard, YouTube, and objects that can be constructed in our Maker Space area. Students have also used glasses of water, corks, and pendulums in order to engage their classmates in learning in unique ways. The student-elected Narrator/Timekeeper plays a prominent role by pointing out the connections to assignments/assessments both prior to and following the student performance, which is consistent with the concept of integrated assessment. These assignments are designed to both guide student-led performances as well as to serve as additional reinforcement for what is being learned. The Narrator/Timekeeper is tasked not only with directing the entire "performance," but also with providing an "advance organizer" (Mayer, 1984) at the beginning of the session and also a brief recap at the end of the discussion. An essential part of both these components is connecting student learning to assignments. All assignments are given to students on the first day of class—there are no other assessments or tests. I make clear to students that, unlike midterms and finals, these assignments should be worked on *as they are learning* in class and while their team is preparing their discussions. I define this tight connection between assignments and instruction via team-led performances as "integrated assessment" (Bernauer & Cress, 1997) where students see that assessment can most profitably be seen as an integral component of instruction. Tasks were developed based on specific assignments (in this case DDR-2) with an emphasis on student-centered learning and performances. Table 2 displays DDR-2, which laid the basis for the performance tasks demonstrated by students in Table 1.

Table 2: *Desk Drawer Reminder*

Desk Drawer Reminder (DDR-2): Learning Theories, Multiple Intelligence, and Metacognition

My Future Classroom

Begin by briefly describing the classroom setting where you hope to teach someday in terms of location, grade level, and subject matter, and why you want to teach in this setting. Next, write something to yourself like "Sara, how is it going? How about remembering back to the theorists and their concepts that you discussed with classmates?" Then begin to develop your thoughts regarding the six questions below—this is what ***integrated assessment*** *is all about—connecting learning and assessment!*

Questions I Should Ask Myself

Your task is to respond thoughtfully to the questions below in relation to your future classroom setting. You know that students who feel cared for and are engaged in learning not only achieve at higher cognitive, emotional, moral, physical, and social levels, but also present far fewer "classroom management" problems—that is why you are writing this reminder to yourself!

1. What concepts related to intelligence as described by Cattell, Horn, Carroll, Sternberg, and Garner will I use to engage students in learning, minimize disruptions, and construct a learning classroom? (Module 11)
2. What concepts related to metacognition, learning strategies, problem solving, creativity, and critical thinking will I use to engage students in learning, minimize disruptions, and construct a learning classroom? (Modules 24-26)
3. What concepts related to Behavioral Learning Theory will I use to engage students in learning, minimize disruptions, and construct a learning classroom? (Modules 20-21)
4. What concepts related to Cognitive Learning Theory will I use to engage students in learning, minimize disruptions, and construct a learning classroom? (Modules 22-23)
5. What concepts related to Social-Cognitive Learning Theory will I use to engage students in learning, minimize disruptions, and construct a learning classroom? (Module 30)
6. What concepts related to Constructivist Learning Theory will I use to engage students in learning, minimize disruptions, and construct a learning classroom? (Modules 27-28)

I refer to this intimate connection between these learning performances and assessment as *integrated assessment* (Bernauer & Cress, 1997). I also strive to construct assignments with a perceived value and usefulness beyond a particular course, whether it is undergraduate or doctoral level, by designing them within the context of anticipated future professional roles. As you can see, the name of this assignment DDR-2 stands for "Desk Drawer Reminder" to try and help students see that what they learn today should be useful in their future careers in teaching, training, coaching, or any other profession.

Performances in Action

The class that has been referenced above in both Table 1 and Table 2 is an undergraduate educational psychology class comprising primarily Freshmen and Sophomore students who are in the teacher education program to prepare students to teach from preschool through high school, although there are typically a few students in counseling and other nonteaching areas. However, it is important to note that I use the same type of instructional strategy across subjects and levels, including a master's level course in learning theories as well as doctoral courses in qualitative research and statistics. It is also important to note that some of these courses are online while others are in the traditional classroom. While "performances" are not as pervasive in online course offerings, I still try to think of ways to include them and also maintain the integrated assessment structure.

Since performances can probably best be described using pictures as well as words, I have included several photographs that capture various kinds of student-led performances after first having obtained written consent from these students to include these pictures in any subsequent publications as well as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. It is important to remember that these "performances" are rooted in the goals and objectives of the course as described in the course syllabus and as operationalized by the team tasks as provided to students for the entire semester at the beginning of the course on Blackboard as exemplified in Table 1. These performances have also been designed not only to connect directly to assignments, but also to promote and facilitate both reflection and metacognition among members of student teams (see Kaplan, Silver, Lavaque-Manty, & Meizlish, 2013). The following photos were taken during a 15-week period, which was the duration of the educational psychology class. As described earlier, students know in advance what and when they will need to "perform"; in fact, they can review the entire 15-week schedule at the beginning of the course. I have found that it is extremely important to follow the advice of Cooper and Garner (2012) when trying to create a performance-based "learning classroom" by focusing first on developing relationships with and among students so that they feel a comfort level required to work closely together and to come and trust each other when they get in front of other class members. In addition to teams communicating and working together outside of class, they also have 10 minutes at the beginning of class (see Table 1) to finalize their discussions and dramatizations. Figure 1 shows two team members demonstrating how they might engage students in critical thinking using oranges to demonstrate instances of buoyancy.

Fig. 1: Using oranges to demonstrate buoyancy

It should be noted that unlike "presentations," the objective here is for teams to engage other students in performance such as this by asking questions of the class and encouraging them to participate in the performance. Figure 2 shows the "advance organizer" that a team used as a prelude to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of requiring memorization.

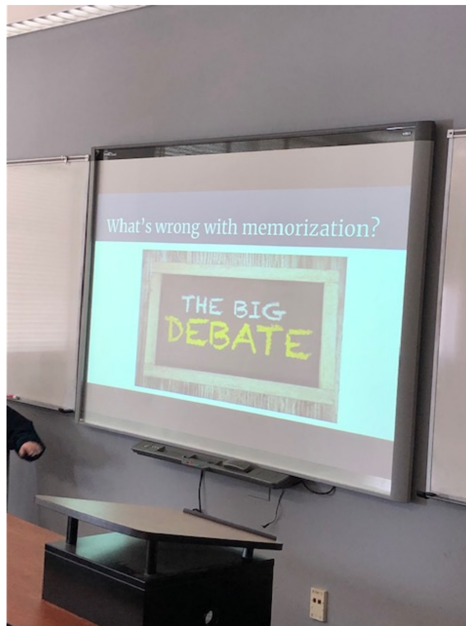

Fig. 2: Advance organizer

Because this debate had multiple participants, there were several instances of different students promoting their points of view. Figure 3 shows a particular instance where there was a great deal of humor and great acting in relation to whether we should promote memorization as a major component of schooling.

Fig. 3: Memorization as a component of schooling

Because student-teams are the heart of all learning activities, students spend a great deal of time between classes and also before each class discussing and planning how they will respond to their "script" (see Table 1). Figure 4 captures the members of Team 3 collaborating on their upcoming performance.

Fig. 4: Collaboration

One of the things that is sometimes overlooked in classrooms is the physical layout, especially in high school and college. Several of our classrooms have been changed so that the furniture is modular and easy to group and regroup depending on the type of performances. This is certainly true in teacher preparation programs where simulation is needed in order to show instances of effective teaching and classroom management. Figure 5 shows members of Team 4 demonstrating how they would start off the school year with clear rules and how positive and negative reinforcement can be used to promote student engagement.

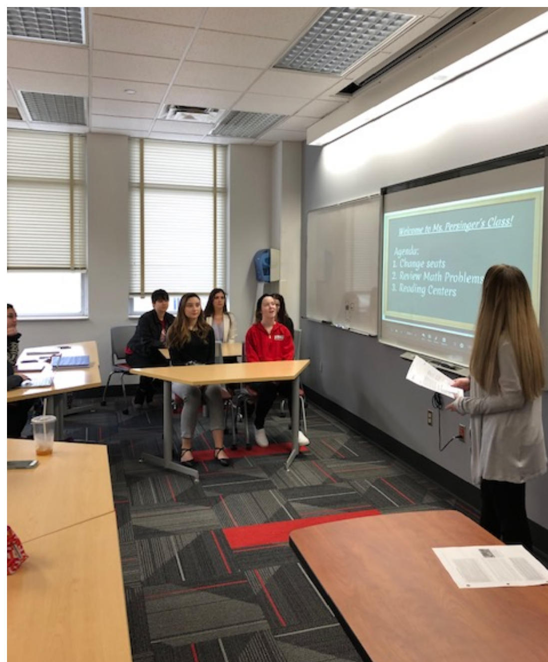

Fig. 5: Positive and negative reinforcement to promote student engagement

The advantages of modular furniture can also be seen in Figure 6 where three members of Team 3 are dramatizing the "Stop and Think" segment that was designed to ask a prospective teacher how she might use classical conditioning in the classroom. The narrator and the "referee" then engaged the rest of the class to build on her responses.

Fig. 6: Classical conditioning in the classroom

As noted earlier, teams prepare for their performances both in between classes and at the beginning of class. Figure 7 illustrates how Team 3 members used the time prior to class to finalize their performances, especially the roles that each member will play. Here again, the long tables were rearranged to facilitate planning among team members.

Fig. 7: Planning among team members

All of the performances illustrated here and those that were done during the entire semester were built around the idea of integrated assessment and a "learning classroom" versus a "managed classroom" as described by Cooper and Garner (2012) that is incorporated into all assignments such as Desk Drawer Reminder-2 (see Table 2). Teams routinely incorporate messages that capture the differences between the two types of classrooms (Figure 8).

Fig. 8: Differences between two types of classrooms

The critical connections between performances and assignments are also discussed or displayed at the end of each performance as seen in Figure 9.

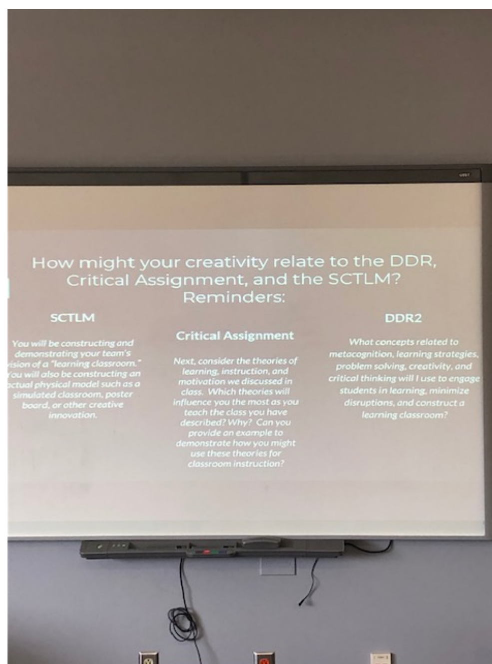

Fig. 9: Critical connections between performances and assignments

Product Performance

While the Desk Drawer Reminders (DDRs) and Critical Assignment (middle and last columns of Figure 9) are completed individually by each student, because they are intimately connected to team performances, they are also indirectly collaborative. I stress to students that this kind of problem-solving mirrors real life more authentically where the Vygotskian ideas of cooperative learning, scaffolding, and using "cultural tools" are quite evident (see Vygotsky, 1978). To an even greater degree, the "Student-Centered Teaching and Learning Model" (SCTLM) (first column in Figure 9) is a team assignment that was designed to give each team the opportunity and challenge to collaborate during the course of the term and construct a model that illustrates their perspective on the most important concepts that we discussed and to integrate these concepts into a visual model. Even though the SCTLM is not due until the end of the semester, I encourage students to begin planning and working on them early on as new ideas and concepts are discussed. Teams use their SCTLM as the focal point for their final performance while they explain what the model is intended to convey in terms of developing a learning classroom. Figure 10 shows Team 1 in action as they engage the rest of the class by explaining the rationale and concepts integral to their model for a 2nd-grade classroom while Figure 11 shows Team 2 as they describe their version of the SCTLM for a 4th-grade classroom.

Fig. 10: Student-centered teaching and learning model

Fig. 11: SCTLM for a 4th-grade classroom

In each case, the teams explained why they decided to construct their particular model and the reason that they included particular concepts into their models. Most students decide to construct some type of display using materials from our Maker Space, although I have had students write a script and dramatize it or produce a video. In all cases, the SCTLM is used to further try and connect theory to practice.

Performances and Evaluation

Performances have received a lot of attention across different fields and contexts (see Darling-Hammond, 2006; Davis, Montjoy, & Palmer, 2016; Galluzzo, 2005; Govaerts, 2016; Sambell, McDowell, & Montgomery (2012); Stosich, Snyder, & Wilczak, 2018; Struyven, Blieck, & De Roeck, 2014). Since performances are an integral component of the class described in this study, it is essential that these performances are included when evaluating course quality and outcomes. Our university administers a standard course evaluation that asks students to rate various dimensions of instructor, exams, and assignments quality from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"; however, these ratings do not explicitly refer to performances, but rather focus more on organization and clarity. Because faculty are also encouraged to conduct their own evaluations to determine to what extent students have achieved important course outcomes, I constructed my own "outcomes" evaluation, but also included a question on instructional practices as follows:

In relation to the instructional practices of flipping, integrated assessment, and dramatizations/performances, to what degree have you grown in terms of learning and a positive attitude towards teaching?

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
None	*Little*	*Some*	*Much*	*A Great Deal*

Can you comment briefly below how these practices have had an impact on your learning and attitude?

Over the past several years, approximately 90 to 95% of students have rated this question with a 4 or 5 response. While this average rating is gratifying, there are still those students who seem to prefer traditional instruction where the teacher delivers content while students dutifully take notes. Moreover, this is a source of both disappointment and concern since most of these students are preparing to become classroom teachers. However, I like to think that this is unfortunately based on their past experience with teaching and learning and that they will eventually come to the realization that such passive teaching practices do not motivate most students to want to learn and may also lead to early teacher burnout since not only do students get bored, but also teachers.

Conclusion

I have found that integrating performances into a flipped classroom environment can be an engaging and effective way to facilitate both cognitive and attitudinal development. Having "fun" in a classroom through performances and dramatization can also challenge students to continue to grow and learn. I cannot envision returning to the days where I "delivered" content primarily through direct instruction, whether I am teaching undergraduate students or doctoral students—I have seen too many benefits based on both my own observations and student evaluations. There is, however, always room for improvement and the best way to achieve this is asking for, thoughtfully considering, and then acting upon student suggestions. This kind of quest has resulted in continued motivation to learn for both students and teacher.

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Walking, Talking, Performing in Place: Learning from/with/on the Land

Maya Tracy Borhani

Abstract

This autoethnographic essay describes an ambulatory workshop with fellow graduate students, a walking tour to remote parts of campus where we paused to consider writing prompts and to create short performative sketches highlighting the nature of our relationships to the land around us. In this reflection on our "walk and talk," I consider how teachers and students co-create what we learn together, the mysteries of engaging in interactive drama and poetry methods, and the performative ways in which we might come to know the places where we live and work more intimately and more imaginatively.

> Too much thinking. Not enough loving. Too much writing. Not enough singing. And not enough art . . . not enough dancing, either, and telling and retelling how the world got made and who made it and why. We love those who give us all these things because they remind us that everything is alive. And thinking. Not just us. Not just animals and plants. The energies, too, are alive. They are the mysterious ones that select pure water from the ocean and form clouds . . . and bring it to our mountains so it can pour down in streams and rivers onto the plains and feed the plants and us. The world is alive and thinking and loving. These energies *inspire* us, they breathe into us not merely life, but meaning and art and love. If we listen. (Jim Watt, *The Crow,* February 2019)

What happens when we play upon the land, when learning arises directly from educational explorations in place? How can we encourage active witnessing and performative engagement with place, with the land we walk, work, and live upon? I am not an environmental educator, though I am passionate about taking students outside, off beaten tracks whenever possible, to hear, feel, sense, see, and breathe in the interrelated tonal, rhythmic, and visual symphony of earth, sun, sky, and sea. In my excursions on the land with elementary, secondary, and college-level students, we most often explore sensory impressions of the world around us, and inner contemplative spaces, through writing poetry, journal writing, and/or sketchbook drawing. There is no set assignment; rather, we take to the land to connect more deeply with everything around us, to draw inspiration from nature's palette, to reconnect with our own interiority, its unique voice, its innate wisdom. It's an experience with little direction, and no outward goal. The intent is connection with that place and with each other. Any writing that comes is a bonus. Our time spent dwelling outdoors is a way of being, of being-together-in-place (Larsen & Johnson, 2017), of listening and responding to the land that sustains us in our various communities.

My current place of work and listening to the land lies on southern Vancouver Island, in British Columbia. Immersed in doctoral studies at the University of Victoria, my research focuses on intersections of poetic inquiry and pedagogy, drama in education, and lifelong learning with/from/on the land in the places we call home. Therein, I would like to gratefully acknowledge, with respect, the Lekwungen and SENĆOŦEN

speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and where I am grateful to visit and work, as well as the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue here to this day.

This essay describes a participatory workshop I led as part of a 2019 Association of Graduate Education Students (AGES) conference at the University of Victoria, themed *Weaving Connections: Collaboration and Mentoring*. The "walk and talk" workshop was designed to connect participants (mostly graduate education students) with the land where we study, work, and play, and to explore performative practices there on the land, under cloud and sky, in hopes of generating new ways of seeing, being, attending, and experiencing ourselves in place.

I was interested in exploring simple performative methods in poetry and drama with my fellow graduate students (immersed in the mostly cerebral nature of their studies, as so many of us are), and the critical intersections of curriculum theory, eco-pedagogies, and poetic/performative inquiry as pedagogy and research methodology. I was curious if the students would give in to the simple "feeling" exercises I would offer, if shyness or self-consciousness would overwhelm some people, or if an inability to connect with the land (and its ceaseless performance amongst/with us) would paralyze the group. Furthermore, I was excited to play with Tim Ingold and Lee Vergunst's (2008) description of walking as a kind of "bodily performance" with a group of adult learners: "[W]alking comprises a suite of bodily performances that include observing, monitoring, remembering, listening, touching, crouching and climbing. And it is through these performances, *along the way*, that . . . knowledge is forged" (p. 5).

Before our walk, I asked the group to consider their impressions of "the narrative nature of our worlds" (personal communication, Margaret McKeon, March 27, 2018); what might that mean, and what might such a "narrative" look like, smell, taste, or sound like? This idea of narratives of/on the land—the earth—and by extension, our lives lived upon the land—is, for me, an ontological commitment and epistemological imperative, expanding the idea of "story" beyond that of the merely human, into other-than/more-than-human worlds, including that of the land itself. My own inquiries into such topics arise from the roots of my settler-immigrant descended presence here (a visitor to British Columbia, and a lifelong resident of Northern California) as well as from living in places within a (neo)colonial context that are yet experiencing (re)colonization while simultaneously working to decolonize hearts/minds/actions. As McKeon reminds us (personal communication, March 27, 2018), much has been written by Indigenous scholars and from decolonizing perspectives on the subject of our relationships to land, while less work has been undertaken by non-Indigenous scholars on this subject. My own interest in this topic arises from inspiration, and further questing, around ideas of relation and relationality, responsibility, and rematriation.

Furthermore, I have a passionate interest in cross-curricular/cross-fertilizing intersections between Western epistemological thought and Indigenous ways-of-knowing, between literary and oral cultures, between mythopoetics and deep ecology, between body/mind, heart/brain, and my own deeply rooted connection with and to the earth. The "walk-and-talk" method I undertook for this workshop is modeled on the idea of a walking methodology (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008), and the idea of paying close attention

as we go: a pedagogy of listening to, and learning from and with, the land (Chambers, 2008). When we listen to the land, we begin to approach, respectfully, the “wisdom that sits in places” (Basso, 1996), and to develop critical awareness (eyes, ears, senses, intuition) for other ways of knowing and being.

Why does any of this matter? How do such concerns intersect with the panoply of daily life, mundane concerns that overcrowd our hearts and minds, pressing demands that leave little time for contemplative walking and performative explorations on the land? What insights come while walking? What is the pedagogy of paying close attention? What can we learn from listening to the land? Can these insights be applied wherever we travel on this great earth, fostering an expanded praxis of stewardship and sustainable practices, ethos of care, conservation, and consciousness for all-ways-of-knowing? It’s my firm belief that, indeed, these insights can be extended outward into an over-arching ethos of care for the places we live—all over the globe—and thereby become a “lived curriculum” (Aoki, 1993) that can be shared, taught, and experienced by all. Practicing critical (creative) eco-pedagogical engagement such as this flows alongside, is akin to, the art of “living inquiry” (Meyer, 2010), or attunement to natural and material elements of the world around and within us. We *attend* to where we are, what is happening around and inside of us, how we feel, what we observe and sense. In attending, we attune. The minutiae are everything in this practice.

The day of the workshop dawned clear and sunny, a crisp spring day—perfect walking weather! We gathered in a large meeting room in the Student Union building, a surprisingly large group of 15 participants. We had only one hour for our walk, including three stops I had in mind, where we would explore place through performative and poetic methods. I had the walk—and stops—timed to a tee. I explained to everyone beforehand what our general game plan would be: we would stop to meditate, write, and to consider performatively some ways in which we might come to know the places where we work and play more intimately. I shared the quote from Ingold and Vergunst about walking as bodily performance, hoping to encourage and inspire such a sense of engaged performativity in our walk.

I asked the group, many of whom knew each other from their shared course work in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs, if they would please try to walk silently, attending to the landscape as we moved through it: I explained that this was integral to successful completion of the activities we would undertake later, as we would draw on observations and sensory impressions forged along the way. I encouraged them to listen and attend to minutiae, to the unseen; to look up, down, all around. I encouraged them to walk off the pavement as much as possible (and in fact, I led them in such ways, which I could tell confounded some); most of all, I strongly encouraged them not to talk to one another, but to walk in silence, observing and attending; listening, smelling, tasting cherry blossoms on the breeze, the bite of early spring air on the tips of noses, the distant call of a seagull, or crow’s strident cry.

As it turns out, my group of adult learners must have needed a different experience on their sojourn: instructions to walk in silence flew straight away on the first wisp of breeze to greet us as we stepped into the warm sunlight. I tried, once or twice, to encourage the requested silence, and the meditative attention it would encourage; but as experienced teachers know so well, sometimes it’s better to go with the flow

than to try and change the way things are, and such seemed to be the case with my happy (but chatty) group of graduate students.

Once I realized silence was not going to be the order of this burgeoning spring day, I reiterated aloud my hope that we might deepen our relationships to/with the land around us by focusing on our senses beyond that of sight alone, tuning into sound, smell, taste, and even touch, encouraging the students to interact with the landscape surrounding them as we walked. I was struck by how my group of student-walkers were dwelling more in talk than in meditative silence. Perhaps this was a sign that, as graduate students, we need *more* opportunities to converse and share with one another, including more such opportunities *outside,* and while *walking* and *talking* together. These are practices and ideas—praxis—that make sense to me: could it be that everyone feels a need for a practice such as this, a walking methodology with keen attention to the world around us that such activity affords?

In keeping with the change of lesson plan dictated by the group's tone and demeanor, I also changed gears, skipping our first "planned" stop: a short break in which to practice silent observation of the world around us. I'd hoped to have everyone close their eyes and listen to the sounds around them, to really feel beneath the soles of their feet, noting how the earth holds them up; what did they feel on their skin, and what did the sun warming their eyelids from within look like?

Onwards. Today's would be a more verbal observation of that world!

I picked up my pace and hustled them along to a spot far on the edge of campus, where the grass grows unmown, and the hillside slopes downward overlooking the glittering blue sea far below. There, under the sprawling branches of a newly leafed-out Big-Leaf Maple tree, we stopped, and finally, everyone was silent, catching their breath. I grabbed my moment to share with them the first exercise we would do in our performative exploration on/with the land.

We launched straight into our poetry-writing exercise. I'd brought along paper and pencils for all, and once everyone had gathered round, I read them a short poem by American poet and war-resistor William Stafford (1992):

Ways to Say Wind

Moves in the woods without
    touching the ground.
Crosses the mountains like a
    scarf between peaks.
From a flat and then kicked-up ocean
    creams along the shore.
Pummels clouds.
Lets a leaf come down in style.
When the sun goes down brings
    the first cold star.
Reminds the valley about snow.
When bushes move talks like

a rabbit.
Lost all night, calls for
friends-help-justice.
Remembers the dead.

At first, the assembled crowd is puzzled. I wonder if these metaphors, Stafford's excellent and sublime use of only *action* verbs to describe the many "ways to say wind," are "lost in translation" for the group of mostly nonnative English speakers. I, who have grown up immersed in the English poetic idiom, experience salvation with Stafford's imaginative comparatives, the voices he attributes to wind, and the creatures who hear when wind speaks. But are these images, in English, too metaphoric for newer speakers to properly comprehend? I am not an ESL instructor, so this moment in our workshop caught me off guard. Or, I wondered next—as is often the case even in native English-speaking classrooms—is it that I'm speaking poetically that is intimidating? This is a question for further study, suggesting ways in which we might use poetry, specifically, in ESL instruction, as well to the efficacy of promoting more poetic pedagogy in general.

However, as a poetry instructor, and despite such initial intimidations, I've never seen poetry *not* speak to its intended audience, in the end. One way or another. So, with that truism in mind, we pushed on into the "assignment." Normally—with grade school students—I ask them to make up their own version of *Ways to Say Wind*. I tell them they can pick anything they want to give voice to, with the only limitation being that it must be something in the natural world: wind, water, sky, sun, turtle, eagle, meteor, thunder. There is no fixed requirement as to the poem's length; the only "rule" is that, like Stafford*, they must use only active verbs*. No form of the verb "to be" is allowed. (Many balk at this instruction, at first! Then, their world opens up to them, with realization of the wealth of activity to be found in almost any other verb!) The natural element or creature they choose to describe must find *active* ways to move, think, speak, and exist: *pummel, move, call, remind, remember*, as Stafford intones. These verbs are evocative, and in their very stance of creating some sort of *action*, they are *performative*. This is one way to teach performative writing to our students. And I don't think William Stafford would mind that we are practicing this revered poetic pedagogy, known as "mirroring" or shadowing, with his fine poem.

This group of adult students, however, has other ideas about "ways to say" many things. I fear we've lost some of our inward-looking vocabulary through not having taken a quiet, meditative walk to our sheltering maple tree. Some students seem confused; instead of working individually, as instructed, they clump together in small groups, and nervously huddle over their pieces of paper. Moving among the groups, and sensing some discomfort with the assignment, I change the instructions: working together, I suggest, see if you can come up with the thing you want to describe (sunlight, wind, maple tree), and work together to find active ways to describe that object, to say its name. This suits them better, as a great sigh seems to escape the entire group. Our short time on this jaunt is ticking, and I hate to rush poetry, ever. But, after about five minutes, with incremental warnings in between, I stop them and ask if anyone would like to read some of their poem(s).

No volunteers. At first. Shyness, before finding one's voice, before performativity swells, before words for . . . water. A young man volunteers, and describes water flowing nearby—we can hear it, but not see

it from where we stand—the sound *is* like music, he incants. Good imagery, I encourage. Someone else describes the sun *drenching* our faces—good verb, I exclaim, well pleased with the creative use of an action verb. I share a line, to encourage others, and to remind us all that this is not an exercise in perfection, but rather in practicing acute attentiveness and in exploring language. Ways to say maple leaf: floats to earth in a slow sashay. A few more people volunteer their one-liners, which seem to be the norm, rather than whole poems built on an idea of scaffolding images. And that's fine. We didn't have much time to work on our poems, nor for me to provide individual assistance (as I would normally do in a smaller classroom setting). Still, the idea is to nurture comfort in thinking poetically, in seeing our world in these more performative ways: how do everyday elements, forces, things, act, do, and perform in the world and on us? When we play with our verbiage, we capture more accurately this delicate passion play of the world around (and inside of) us.

Next, it's time to move along in our walk, but we don't go far this time: just over to a large meadow to the east of our maple tree, with room to spread out and flat ground to steady our movements. By now, I'm teaching on my feet, the intended lesson plan long ago out some imaginary window in the vast, blue sky. I really want to play with the more experimental part of our brief time together—drama exercises. I'm used to teaching poetry, whether it goes "well" or language is stiff and stuttering; this is my first time leading a drama exercise on my own.

We were nearly out of time, time that was taken up encouraging the group to share their poetic insights. Yet, that was an important use of our time, important for the group to hear and revel in their own creations, and the knowledge that there is *no right answer* in poetry; all of their images had value and meaning. What happened next exceeded any hoped-for expectations, and (re)confirmed the value of *playing* performatively in all our educational endeavors.

I gathered everyone into a tight circle and explained the next step of our "walk and talk" excursion. The original intent of our final activity was to create three-part tableaux depicting lines from three different students' poems, moving between the three different "images" in a series of still-life compositions. Tableaux, "a key strategy in drama education . . . also known as still pictures, freeze frames, depictions, statues or sculptures, involve the dramatic elements of silence and stillness" (Prendergast & Saxton, 2013, p. 110), qualities I thought would blend well with the (intended) meditative nature of our walk, and images gleaned from that stillness and silence through the students' poetic lines. Tableaux work is very accessible and "safe . . . for generally unskilled participants" (p. 110), such as this group of non-drama students, although participants are typically advised they will have to hold a pose for a while, and so, accordingly, to be careful not to overly exert themselves in the postures they choose.

I asked the group to gather into threesomes, and explained the basic premise of tableaux: create a still image with their bodies to represent an idea, or an image, from their poems. In the interests of our waning time in the field, I offered them the original option to make up to three images (one from each of their poems), or to simply make one image together that they would hold for the group to view, while one of them recited the poetic line it expressed.

The importance of creating these simple tableaux cannot be overstated. At the root of performance is play (not a stage-play, but sheer child-like play, play for fun); without play in our educational processes, we let go the magic, the spark, the imagination. Citing Donna Haraway (2016, p. 56), Flynn and Reed (2019) note that, "Play is integral for reveling in embodied, more-than-cognitive ways of knowing and cultivating ecological imagination through 'attentive practices of thought, love, rage and care'" (pp. 134–135). All these emotions became embodied through the students' tableaux. (Unfortunately, I did not keep copies of the students' poetic lines, preferring to let them keep these for themselves; in the midst of our brief walk, there was no time to transcribe the lines into my own notebook. As much as possible, I have tried to describe the imagery of the lines, as expressed through tableaux.)

The first group chose to enact the original idea for the exercise, flowing beautifully between three separately composed lines of poetry (recited as they struck each pose): the sun shone like an orange fire; then a bird sang in flight; finally, spring grass sprouted in the field. The threesome stood with arms flung wide and outstretched, distinct flames reaching skyward, then shifted to wings of a bird in flight (one body in front, arms flung wide) with tail flowing behind (two bodies laid out on the ground behind her), before finally shifting to three crouched sprouts with hands waving above their heads. I was astounded at the astute interpretation of their poetic lines in tableaux. The group at large was delighted, as well. Others chose to interpret one line of poetry in their three-way tableaux: a star shooting through the sky; that distant waterfall we'd heard earlier (three sets of bodies, arms, legs, all flowing downward in the ripple of that liquidity); another bird, this one too close to the sun, three sets of arms echoing wings in flight, in varying stages of melt. As Augusto Boal says, quoted in Prendergast and Saxton (2013):

> Image is a language. All images also are surfaces, and, as such, they reflect what is projected on it. As objects reflect the light that strikes them, so images in an organized ensemble reflect the emotions of the observer, her ideas, memories, imagination, desires… (Boal, 1992/2002, p. 175)

Through their ability to take in this simple creative drama exercise and produce stunning, descriptive tableaux, I believe these graduate students came to understand the value of performative ways of learning and experiencing the world around them—cross-curricular ways outside of their respective fields of study, yet nonetheless useful, valuable even, for the expansion of their own pedagogic and epistemic hearts and minds. Walking, talking, breathing, and learning with and from the land all around us, we learned and practiced new (old) ways of noticing and attending; what ethnographer Tim Ingold (2000) calls a "sophisticated perceptual awareness," which in turn supported us in cultivating "a direct and sensuous engagement with the world" (Chambers, 2008, p. 121), as evidenced through the students' poetic lines, and their eager engagement with creating dramatic tableaux.

> When did our walk begin? When will it ever end? . . . Life itself is as much a long walk as it is a long conversation, and the ways along which we walk are those along which we live. . . walking is a profoundly social activity: . . . in their timings, rhythms, and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others. Social relations . . . are not enacted *in situ* but are paced out along the ground. (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008, p. 1)

I am coming to understand these acts in my own life, as an educational researcher, as both walking *and* dwelling methodology, where my creative "research . . . is embodied and performative; it requires us to

walk and dwell . . . [it] entails more than conventional participant observation . . . rather an attunement to the embodied landscape as a primary way of coming to know ourselves in relation to others" (Johnson & Larsen, 2013, p. 15), and in direct relation to those very places where we dwell. We come into being, into ecological imagination, into performative educational practices, when we understand that all living/teaching/learning is performative, and that our place on earth innately embodies each of our own performances there. In slowing down and choosing to take more (frequent) meditative *or* social walks in nature, in the company of others, in playful reverie in the world that is our home, we tune into the kinds of active verbiage—and living—that William Stafford models so well. We come into our teaching in performative ways, in language and in action. In our writing, and in enactments of our pedagogy, with our students in the field, and in our own scholarly processes, we contemplate and embody performances of place.

> In every performance, the three elements of place, the play, and the people (actors and audience) interrelate and illuminate one another in moving and provocative ways. Time allows these elements to coexist and converse, creating an experience that engages imagination and emotion in an intensified inhabiting of place. Unifying artistic, ecological, and historical sensitivity to a specific locale, [this] project fosters a richly embodied, lived experience of landscape . . . this heightened experience can lead to a new awareness of the natural environment and of our ethical responsibility to it. (Popov, 2019, p. 82)

This is one way to make room in our busy lives for deep (if momentary) engagement with the land where we live, work, and visit: On walks to work, on the bus while looking out the window, while noticing little things on the sidewalk, in the branches of the trees, above our heads in clouds rolling by, we're practicing close attention, and coming into literacy with the land. Take time for poetry (it's so personally and politically regenerative, as well as performatively enriching), and for *playing*: with drama, with each other, in a forested field where many other-than-humans will see, hear, witness, and be a part of this unfolding play of life on a turning blue-green marble, orbiting a faraway sun.

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Using Performative Art to Communicate Research: Dancing Experiences of Psychosis

Katherine Boydell

From "Using Performative Art to Communicate Research: Dancing Experiences of Psychosis," by Katherine Boydell, 2011. In Canadian Theatre Review, DOI 10.3138/CTR.146.12, pp. 12–17. Copyright © Canadian Theatre Review, 2011. Reprinted with permission from the University of Toronto Press.

This paper highlights a collaborative effort to bring art and science together. In the field of arts-based research, collaboration between social scientists and artists is critical.[1] Horsfall and Titchen state that "critical creativity as methodology disrupts traditional edges and enables participation of people in the research who are unlikely to engage in philosophical, theoretical and methodological study, but who can understand its assumptions through embodied experience … [It] opens up endless spaces for genuine democratization of knowledge creation" (156). It was this type of democratized space that we wanted to create. We believed that bringing artists and scientists together would contribute to minimizing boundaries that often exist between these two worlds. We found that our collaboration provided a chance for meaningful dialogue and partnership. Additionally, as Jones states, "reaching across disciplines and finding co-producers for our presentations can go a long way in insuring that, rather than amateur productions, our presentations have polish and the ability to reach our intended audiences in an engaging way" (71).

Participant observation field notes and audiotaped transcripts of individual meetings between choreographer and social scientist and between creative and research teams over a six-month period were used to analyze our interchange and document the ways in which the research and artistic teams worked together across very different disciplines to communicate research findings through dance. The unfolding process was characterized by ongoing negotiation to balance differing viewpoints and opinions regarding how to take textual data from young people experiencing psychosis and translate it into a performative form. This required a shift in thinking by the research team in order to provide the creative team with the space to (re)interpret the data in the form of movement and music. The choreographer and dancers faced an artistic challenge—to "perform" first episode psychosis in a way that captivated an audience and reflected empirical research findings.[2]

As an academic in the health sciences field, I have experienced repeated frustration with respect to typical forms of academic currency—namely, peer reviewed publications and scientific presentations—and the fact that they tend to reach only a very limited audience, primarily other academics. While this is important, there are many other stakeholders, including service providers, policy makers, families, patients, and the general public who need to be aware of the findings of our research. I am particularly interested in how the creative arts can be used in the design, process, analysis, interpretation, and communication of research results. Can critical research findings be elicited and portrayed through the arts? Can such portrayals promote useable knowledge and understanding? Gadamer stated that all

attempts at experiential knowing are aesthetically oriented (71), and it is only recently that the qualitative research literature has included artistic interpretation of data. An increase in arts-based approaches to research has been recently noted, largely in the educational realm and more recently, in health and social care. Both Norman Denzin and Kip Jones advocate for a performative model of social science and a reconceptualization of the relationship between performance and representation of academic research.

Hearing voices (l-r): Mariano Abarca, Lisa Collins, Nicola Pantin, Shavar Blackwood, Courtnae Bowman, and Jeff Dimitrou. *Photo by Ashley Hutcheson*

Photo by Ashley Hutcheson

The availability of "knowledge translation" funds from a research grant presented an opportunity to use the genre of dance to communicate qualitative research findings to multiple audiences. I believed that the choreographic and research processes were similar in terms of the essential role of interpretation. The intention was to use dance as a communicative tool for representing data on early psychosis and create an opportunity for people to become aware of psychosis in an accessible, creative, and thoughtful way, but also to provoke and perhaps disrupt the everyday assumptions individuals hold about mental health issues in general, and psychosis in particular. Young people told us that had they known that what they were experiencing may have been early signs of psychosis, they might have sought help earlier. They (and their families) identified stigma as a barrier to seeking help. Consequently, it was critical to the research team that research results be communicated beyond academia—targeting a broader audience, including young people, their families, service providers, educators, and the general public.

The anguish of psychosis (l- r): Courtnae Bowman, Lisa Collins, Mariano Abarca, Shavar Blackwood, and Nicola Pantin.
Photo by Ashley Hutcheson

The dance was based on a multiple case study involving an in-depth examination of the pathways to mental health care. It included sixty interviews with young people and their significant others (including parents, general practitioners, friends, psychiatrists, teachers, and case managers) involved in the pathway to mental health care, as well as related documents and observational data. Our findings[3] highlighted the complexity and connectedness of the family, school, community, and treatment system in the lives of young people. Results also depicted the illness experience in the pathway to mental health care. Although each person's pathway was unique, commonalities included: the difficulty in detecting psychosis by general practitioners, psychiatrists, educators, friends, and family members; symptoms of isolation and paranoia that prevented young people from disclosing their experiences and seeking help; the important role of the school; and the widespread shortage of knowledge about psychosis.

When we started to create the dance, we realized the challenge in taking the subject of psychosis and the genre of dance and combining them to communicate the experience of young people. Many discussions ensued regarding the ability of dance to explore knowledge physically, emotionally and mentally, allowing the audience to enter into the experience. Les Todres' work on embodied inquiry that attends to the relationship between language and the experiencing body is relevant here. Embodied research is based on the traditional phenomenological notion of the "lived body" and "lived experience" which suggests that knowledge has to do with lived experience. Embodiment is seen as an insightful and multidimensional means of linking body, movement, and force as embodied rhythms of how it is possible to be present, to live, to experience, to express and to understand individuals from many viewpoints and in particular contexts. Embodied inquiry focuses on the relationship between language and the experiencing body, and has the capability of highlighting the lived experience of individuals. Todres comments that it allows for "the possibility of going through the experience in a more enacted way", allowing participants to "come to understand the phenomenon in a more intuitive way" which "may provide further insights" (57).

The academic-artistic partnership was characterized by managing reservations and taking risks. The risk I felt I was taking as an academic related to taking on a novel form of knowledge translation. I took comfort in Carl Bagley and Mary Beth Cancienne's work, as they are among the few educational researchers who have represented research through movement and dance. Because of the recency and novelty of this approach, Bagley and Cancienne were extremely cautious and chose to choreograph movements that were mostly literal and that closely represented the words of their research participants. I was, however, prepared to take some risks in terms of moving away from solely literal movements. In this case, choreographer Siona Jackson was given explicit creative license to include movements that were not so closely tied to the data itself, but that reflected the emotions of young participants.

In order to work together and discuss the research findings in depth, the dance choreographer (and her creative team) became immersed in the data, consisting of anonymized transcripts and observational and reflective field notes. As such, they accessed case study summaries as well as some of the actual anonymized transcripts.

The experience of creating the dance highlighted the ongoing adjustments made as the choreography was scripted and ensuing interactions emerged between the creative and research teams. The struggle between the content and the aesthetic qualities of the dance was paramount in this process—the issue of balancing didactic and aesthetic claims. I questioned what may have been sacrificed for the sake of performance and the choreographer questioned what may have been sacrificed for the sake of the research. For example, would leaving the performance open to a greater level of interpretation result in a product that was less true to the research? We arrived at a mutual agreement that it was essential to maintain the integrity of the key features of the experience; however, the ways in which to do so were frequently ambiguous.

Tensions have been documented between the academic literature, educational needs of researchers who are developing arts-related health research projects for the purposes of knowledge translation, and the aesthetic requirements of these projects that make the work interesting, complex, and engaging.[4] This work requires a balance between personal engagement in the material, which often deals with complex and intimate lived experience, while remaining focused on the needs of the research project, including the systematic examination, analyses and interpretation needed for a rigorous approach to the work.

The creative team noted that a dancer needs to embody the material he or she performs or "translates" in addition to having an intellectual understanding. The research team realized that a dancer also uses his or her own personal experience in the portrayal of a character in order to relate fully to the dramatic material, thus contributing to the narrative research material.

Hope (l-r): Lisa Collins, Mariano Abarca, Courtnae Bowman, Jeff Dimitrou, Shavar Blackwood, and Nicola Pantin.
Photo by Ashley Hutcheson

When the choreographer asked me to share some of the themes that emerged—actual words or a series of words—to help convey the research findings to her and to inspire the choreography, I felt confident and trusted that she would represent the results that were emerging in a meaningful and evocative manner. I provided her with words that represented a dialectic, but occurred along a continuum in the stories of the experiences of young people and their significant others as they navigated and negotiated pathways to care. I felt that it was important that the isolation, the uncertainty, the fear, the hopelessness—but also the hope, the joy, the connection, and the moving beyond the illness—was highlighted.

Following an overview of psychosis and the field of early intervention, the research team highlighted the richness of the ten in-depth qualitative case studies. We talked about the complexity of the pathway, and the fact that although every young person's pathway was unique, there were common experiences across all cases. There was a great deal of help-seeking activity vis-à-vis subtle and not so subtle changes taking place (Boydell et al., "Youth Experiencing"). There were a number of persons and multiple systems involved in help-seeking activities; however, they rarely communicated with each other. There were many failed attempts at accessing appropriate services and supports and these efforts were conceptualized as "missed opportunities." We wanted these themes conveyed in the dance.

The analysis involved a narrative or dramatic coding of the transcripts[5] whereby text was identified to be used for particular narratives, or for informing character or scene development in the dance. This process helped to identify the segments of text that were used in the musical score accompanying the dance. The choreographer used a script as an organizational tool to track activity presented in the performance and provide a reference of what she was trying to convey. The script was required due to the multiple meetings, articles, and data summaries that were somewhat overwhelming. It helped to condense information into a story-like dance that would educate, rather than overwhelm, an audience. The challenge was to privilege the voices of the particular, lived experiences of psychosis, yet also to

emphasize the universality of the experience. The script marked out the location of the dancers and props (the bench), type of mood being expressed, musical and dancer cues, and emotion (such as heavy breathing). Once the basic script was established, there was freedom to layer the stories and the choreography. The script also served as a communication tool for the composer; the score was incorporated from the beginning, so that the ideas on the page inspired the music.

We agreed that it was possible to focus on the particular—the narratives of two young people with psychosis, as well as the universal—common themes across the descriptions of all pathways to care. For the particular narratives, the first focused on a young woman and her mother and the efforts made by others to help her in acquiring formal mental health care. The second focused on a young man, whose voice-over is worked into the musical score to convey to the audience what he was thinking as he experienced early psychosis—his confusion and withdrawal from friends.

Compassion (l-r): Lisa Collins and Courtnae Bowman.
Photo by Ashley Hutcheson

Research team involvement was crucial; it provided feedback regarding the way in which the performance was evolving and shaped the ultimate product. The meetings held between dancers, musician, choreographer, and research team offered a lens into both worlds—dancers were able to ask their questions about the subject matter and the research team could see the ways in which a thematic concept from the study was integrated into the dance movements. At an early rehearsal, the research team commented that the dance (as it was evolving) was too focused on individual psychology and needed to reflect the research findings (which indicated that the help-seeking process was not an individual decision making process, but that there were many significant others involved). The choreographic process then focused more on the relationships between young people with psychosis and the impact of others in their lives. For example, there was more interaction between the dancers: in one particular case, a young woman and her mother embraced each other while sitting on a bench. In another dance sequence, a young man and woman demonstrated their connection through outstretched hand movements. This process demonstrated aspects of the evolving perspectives on ways of presenting the data on youth with first episode psychosis.

In exploring the potential of alternate forms of representation to highlight the worlds we wish to understand it is important to measure audience response. In a transdisciplinary world, we operate outside traditional boundaries and disclose moments that may be hard to define or categorize by engaging with new experiences and improvising unconventional combinations of knowledge. The dance has been presented to a wide range of audiences including academics, service providers, policy makers, educators, students, dance choreographers, and the general public. Audience engagement and dialogue were elicited via in-theatre observation of audience responses, moderated post-performance audience discussions, audience feedback in the form of Post-it notes, and researcher field notes. Analysis of this data suggests that dance is an effective way to disseminate empirical research results and to enhance awareness and understanding of the phenomena being studied. It also highlights the importance of the aesthetic qualities and visceral impact of the performance.

Viewing the co-creation of a research-based dance allowed us to study the process of dance creation and its capacity to convert abstract research into concrete form and produce generalizable knowledge from empirical research findings. Thus, through the techniques of movement, metaphor, voiceover, and music, the characterization of experience in the dance was personal and generic, individual and collective, particular and trans-situational. The dance performance allowed us to address the visceral, emotional, and visual aspects of our research which are frequently invisible in traditional academia. This paper provides a detailed analysis of the processual and emergent nature of co-creating a research-based dance performance, while paying close attention to the unfolding of intersubjective and multiperspectival elements. By focusing on this form of knowledge production, we hope to inspire further research on the use of the arts as a mechanism of both knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination.

Notes

1. For more on the significance of collaborations between social scientists and artists, see D. Horsfall and A. Titchens' "Disrupting Edges—Opening Spaces: Pursuing Democracy and Human Flourishing Through Creative Methodologies" in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* (12.2 [2009]: 147–160) and Kip Jones' "A Biographic Researcher in Pursuit of an Aesthetic: The Use of Arts-Based (Re)Presentations in 'Performative' Dissemination of Life Stories" in *Qualitative Sociology Review* (2.1 [2006]: 66–85).

2. See K.M. Boydell, B. Gladstone, J. Addington, P. Goering, E. McCay, T. Krupa, E. Stasiulis, and T. Volpe, "Youth Experiencing First Episode Psychosis: A Comprehensive Examination of Pathways to Mental Health" in *Schizophrenia Research* (86 [2006]: S116); K.M. Boydell, B. Gladstone, and T. Volpe, "Understanding Help-Seeking Delay in First Psychosis Prodrome: A Secondary Analysis of the Perspectives of Young People" in *Schizophrenia Research* (86 [2006a]: S124); K.M. Boydell, B. Gladstone, and T. Volpe, "Understanding Help Seeking Delay: Perspectives of Youth Experiencing First Episode Psychosis" in *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* (30.1 [2006b]: 54–60); and B. Gladstone, T. Volpe, K.M. Boydell, "Issues Encountered in a Qualitative Secondary Analysis of Help-Seeking in the Prodrome to Psychosis" in *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research* (34.4 [2007]: 431–442).

3. See, for example, Julia Gray's "Exploring the Creative and Academic Tensions in Developing After the Crash : a play about brain injury—a research-based theatre project about traumatic brain injury" (MA thesis, York U, 2007); Kate Rossiter, Julia Gray, Pia Kontos, Michelle Keightly, Angela Colantonio, and Julie Gilbert, "From Page to Stage: Dramaturgy and the Art of Disciplinary Translation" in *Journal of Health Psychology* (13.2 [2008]: 277–286); and Johnny Saldana, "Dramatizing the Data: A Primer" in *Qualitative Inquiry* (9.2 [2003]: 218–236).

4. See B. Gladstone, T. Volpe, and K.M. Boydell's "Issues encountered in a qualitative secondary analysis of help-seeking in the prodrome to psychosis" in *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research* (34:4 [2007]: 431–442).

5. See Kate Rossiter, Julia Gray, Pia Kontos, Michelle Keightly, Angela Colantonio, and Julie Gilbert's "From Page to Stage: Dramaturgy and the Art of Disciplinary Translation" in *Journal of Health Psychology* (13.2 [2008]: 277–286).

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Life Histories Center Performance as Response to Text

Susan Browne and Marjorie Madden

Abstract

Based in anthropology (Cole & Knowles, 2001), life history inquiry into literature emphasizes deep understandings of literary characters that are expressed through dramatic performance. For teachers or teacher-educators, life histories offer a powerful teaching strategy. Life histories support locating readers in a particular pattern or "grammar" of events, situations, and goals while also revealing the subjective worlds of characters who are involved in such events. In an undergraduate Honors Literacies course, life histories performances in response to the young adult novel, *The Skin I'm In* (Flake, 1998), enabled examinations of the complex interaction of characters, their lives, and particular contexts.

> "It is in its potential to make 'imaginative contact' with readers that much of the power of life history lies. Life history can move people." (Sikes, 2006, p. 8)

Drawing on the field of anthropology and the work of Cole and Knowles (2001), life history inquiry into literature is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of literary characters through performance. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how characters walk, talk, and work within the particular worlds the author creates. A life history is a dramatic performance that is created based on deep inquiry into a literary character. In an undergraduate Honors Literacies course, life histories in response to the young adult novel, *The Skin I'm In* (Flake, 1998), enabled examinations of the complex interaction of characters, their lives, and particular contexts.

We use the term "life histories" to describe a space in which readers can make sense of the world through multiple modes of engagement with provocative texts. Life histories are a collaborative tool that helps readers understand and appreciate diverse human experiences as well as gain new and critical understandings about themselves and their world. Readers engage in creating, writing, and ultimately performing life histories. These life histories are written collaboratively and final dramatic performances are created live or as videos posted on websites such as YouTube. For teachers or teacher-educators, life histories inquiry emerges as a powerful teaching strategy that allows for inquiry into literary characters and the critical issues that surround them.

Life Histories as a Research Methodology

Although there is no research on using life histories as a literacy strategy for enhancing comprehension and character understanding, there is much research on the importance of life history as a research methodology. Two recognized ways that adults make meaning and better understand the world are through narrative and dialogue (Bruffee, 1999; Rossiter, 1999). As people understand their lives in terms

of stories, meaning making takes a narrative form (Bruner, 1990), whereas shared meaning and authenticity are at the heart of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). People relate their own life narratives through their memories and interpretive meanings. Anthropologists James Peacock and Dorothy Holland (1993) have proposed using the term "life-focused" to refer to the history that primarily addresses the factual events and subjective experiences of the subject. Further, how the subject tells the story reflects the meaning the subject has made of his or her life experiences; life stories are also always contextual. In our work with life histories, we seek to show ways to engage students in reading books and to help them to see the power of reading texts, fiction, and expository. The focus on performance derives from perspectives such as Bruner's (1990), that recognizes the imaginative use of narrative to engage readers in the exploration of human possibilities by situating them simultaneously in a "dual landscape" of both action and consciousness. Life histories performances support locating readers in a particular pattern or "grammar" of events, situations, and goals while also revealing the subjective worlds of characters who are involved in such events.

Literature Selection and the Making of Life Histories

We characterize provocative texts as literature that uses themes, contexts, and characters to broaden or change the way readers look at themselves and the world. This literature is quality by nature and lends itself to the critical inquiry that takes place during the life histories process. Young adult literature that can be defined as multicultural and/or critical as seen in Table 1 below has been the basis for our experiences creating life histories with students at the university, middle school, and elementary level.

Table 1: *Characteristics of Multicultural Literature and Critical Text*

MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE	CRITICAL TEXT
Multicultural literature is "literature about racial or ethnic groups that are culturally and socially different from the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature" (Norton & Norton, 2003, p. 457). • Multicultural literature is rich in cultural detail. • Multicultural literature uses authentic dialogue, and presents cultural issues in enough depth that the readers can think and talk about them. • The inclusion of cultural groups is purposeful and never simply fulfills a quota (Yokata, 1993). • Multicultural literature accurately reflects a group's culture, language, history, and values without perpetuating stereotypes.	Critical literacy is concerned with what bell hooks (1993) calls the privileged act of naming. A lived experience linked to processes of self-recovery and naming represents a mobilization and a means for shifting power. • The literature does not make difference invisible, but rather explores what differences make a difference. • The literature enriches our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who traditionally have been silenced or marginalized. • The literature shows how people can begin to take action on important social issues. • The literature explores dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people. • The literature does not provide "happily ever after" endings for complex social problems (Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999).

Life Histories as Creative Process

Louise Rosenblatt (1986) describes (1) the text as stimulus, activating the reader's experience with literature and life and (2) the text as a blueprint for ordering, rejecting, and sketching what is evoked from the reader. Life histories are very much grounded in transactional theories of reading. The term “transaction” emphasizes that meaning is being built through the back-and-forth relationship between reader and text while reading. When reading from the aesthetic stance, attention is on what the reader lives through while in relationship with the text. Life histories involve responding to text through collaborative writing and performances. However, life histories are very different from response activities such as reader’s theater and tableau. In life histories, students engage in inquiry and construct ideas by going back into the text to work on representing aspects of the text for themselves and others (see Table 2 below). Linde (1993) argues that life histories also show the complex interactions between characters and cultural contexts.

Table 2: *Crafting Life Histories*

Crafting Life Histories
Character Analysis
1. Readers identify the main characters in the text and identify their significance.
2. Readers work in small groups and select a major character to work on.
Intensive Reading
3. Readers revisit the text and begin note taking. They mark the text or use sticky notes to identify directly from the text what they know and understand about their character.
Interpretative Writing
4. Readers use their notes and text markings to engage in collaborative script writing that gives voice to their character. One group member serves as the scribe.
Performance
5. Readers perform the life histories. The performance can be given by one or more group members in the form of a monologue, dialogue, or poem. Performances are digitally recorded.

Character Analysis

Life histories feature culturally defined landmark events in a life (i.e., birth, death, discrimination), make some sort of evaluative point about how characters want to be seen by their readers, and do not stand alone but are linked in a web to other stories (Linde, 1993).

Life histories begin with literature that offers richly nuanced character portrayals. The characters that are integral to the narrative are identified and the importance of each of the identified characters in pushing the narrative forward is agreed upon. In pairs or small groups, students select a character that they will give voice to in writing. The groups go back into the text and read intensively about their character. Reading and rereading is central to crafting life histories. Life histories require students to revisit the text for note taking to enable deeper thinking and engagement.

At this level, reading takes on reflective characteristics as readers engage in deliberate interpretations of messages in the text. During rereading, students mark the text or use sticky notes to identify what they know and understand about their character. Students engage in mindful and deliberate interpretation of their characters using literal and inferential textual information. In this process of intensive reading, groups extended themselves deeply into the literature. The emphasis is on the *lived experience*: connecting in personal ways with the story world and actually living in the author's invented world.

Interpretation of Characters—Writing

This step requires readers to go back into the text again. Using notes and text markings, students engage in collaborative script writing that gives voice to their character. This layered process takes place over time in which groups synthesize the information they gather while one group member serves as the scribe for multiple drafts. The writing is crafted to have meaning for someone who has not read the book. Decisions are made to determine how the completed writing will take shape. The possibilities include a character monologue, dialogue, poem, or "Talk Show" interview.

The Performance

This final step is where the work is amplified through performance. Here the value of performance in making meaning of texts is demonstrated (Edmiston & Wilhelm, 1998). The performances can be live and should always be digitally recorded. Performance can be shared among classmates, with other classes, the entire school, and/or outside guests. Digitally recorded performances can be uploaded to websites for further amplification.

The Skin I'm In: Performative Life Histories

The Skin I'm In (Flake, 1998) is a young adult novel that tells the story of Maleeka, a seventh grader who finds refuge in her journal when the sting of colorism and peer pressure engulf her. Her dark skin color and limited wardrobe cause her to be targeted by a middle school bully. The book was used in an undergraduate Honors Literacies course in a northeastern university to generate discussions around difference in a class of sophomores and juniors where all but one student was white. The text was selected because of its rich potential in fostering cross-cultural empathy. Flake's novel embodies themes such as identity, class, colorism, and bullying. As the story and characters unfolded in the life histories process, themes emerged around identity that can be characterized as struggling with identity, having identity disrupted, and seeking one's best self. Yet, it is through script writing and final performances that these themes come to life, bringing students to a deeper understanding and empathy for the human qualities depicted in Flake's characters.

Jared, a white male in our class, asked if he could write a poem to be delivered as spoken word for his life histories performance as the character Caleb, a seventh grader who admires Maleeka from afar. In excerpts from his poem, Jared's interpretation of Caleb is somber; he is written and performed as an outsider very much like Maleeka.

Struggling With Identity

And here I am,
Caleb, poet, scholar
But in the school where defiance ruled king
Why even bother?
Instead I laid low
Praying the teachers not call my name
Though they're answers I knew,
Reciting them would lead to shame.
Trapped more by my head
Than the schools four white walls
I wrote in a book that I kept in a bag
Buried deep in the locker somewhere far in the halls
And on top of their pages was no author to brag.
It seemed someone heard each day I prayed
Because in walked my queen Maleeka,
A girl like me that didn't hide from appreciating words and art
And even though she didn't know
What I have been doing fine for years Maleeka couldn't shake.

This poem excerpt provides a window into Caleb's understanding of self; and later, Caleb's poem captures pieces of Maleeka that help readers shape her identity. Beyond demonstrating an understanding of the character, Jared's poem captures Caleb's deep emotion. The spoken word script that Jared crafted is situated in the world of middle school, difficult choices, wanting to fit in, and the fear of what happens when one does not.

A second script portrays vividly the relationship between Char and Maleeka, yet simultaneously provides a window into Charlese or Char. Maleeka knows she is a bully, yet she allows a relationship to grow between them—one in which Maleeka does Char's homework and, in turn, Char provides Maleeka with a more fashionable wardrobe. Nikki and Thomas extended the story in their life histories that takes Char to therapy. In the dialogue between Char and the doctor, Char maintains her tough persona and quips that she has never explained herself to anyone, yet she goes on to explain herself in detail.

> Doctor: Whenever you would like to begin… we have forty-five minutes left… unless you want to just sit there and stare at me …
>
> Char: You asked me why I did what I did in Mrs. Saunders classroom and I not saying I did… I ain't never explained myself to nobody so listen good and clear now cause there ain't gonna be no repeats. My name is Charlise Jones, people call me Char, and I got a fun fact for you Mr. Psychiatrist I got all those punks fooled back at that dump they call school…" Oh Chars a bully she's so mean, that Char is crazy like she is"… never in my face of course them idiots wouldn't dare. I'd knock them sideways till their teeth was gone... they wouldn't.

A third script focusing on the teacher, Miss Saunders, demonstrates ways that the characters struggle with identity. Miss Saunders, a 40-year-old successful businesswoman, becomes disillusioned and takes a year to teach English at an inner-city school. Elise and Kylie's monologue captures Miss Saunders' struggle with identity:

> At the age of 40 I was a very successful businesswoman. Through the advertising agency I worked with I got to see the world. I was always ahead, wore all the latest fashions and had money to burn. My life was figured out and yet there was something missing. I was always competing, and for what this feeling of incomplete? I needed more so when the agency offered the opportunity to take a year to teach at an inner-city school it was like destiny was slapping me in the face. Maybe giving back could fill this void, maybe it was exactly what I needed. I accepted the offer, ready to give back and determined that McClenton Middle School was going to be my new beginning.

Disrupting

A significant moment in the text develops when Caleb falls victim to his peers and abandons an opportunity to show his feelings for Maleeka in front of others. Jared's poem continues and indicates that Caleb immediately realized that this was not the right choice.

Our classmates soon drove her to tears and I knew that I was next to break.
On a field trip all aboard the crowd screamed at me to leave my queen
And rather than fall to the hoard
I left her side and joined their scene
If I had known the guilt to follow I would never have had the thought.
The whole next year my heart felt hollow for abandoning what my parents taught.
I tried to do right with my queen for falling for the tricks of traitor
But I knew that ____ queen deserves something, someone much greater.
The words I used to win her heart now held nothing to her broken trust.

A second example of disrupting identity emerges in the Char script. Trying to go beneath her tough exterior, the conversation with the therapist continues:

> Doctor: Have you Char… been surviving?
>
> Char: They think that I am the monster well they haven't begun to know JuJu, her voice screaming is one of the memories I have before leaving that stupid town… "I take care of you, I let you wear my Prada, I let you stay up and help at my fabulous parties, and now you think you are some queen and make me look bad you worthless ungrateful child, take off my watch you parasite you have been a thorn in my side for too long"… well I kept that watch dearest sister and a few of her gowns also. Why should I be the only one that gets pushed around like a dog in my own house? Why shouldn't everybody else know how it feels like to feel like scum to the people they see every day, every single day? Maleeka asked for it. I never talked to her until she begged to do my homework so she could have the protection of my name. I learned to defend myself on my own so that no one would dare cross me, why couldn't she do the same? I ignored her but she wouldn't leave me alone. Why not doc? Why? Me, Raiz*, and Reina were fine before she came along, black as coal and dressed in rags. I made her. Mrs. Saunders liked her, and Caleb liked her, who liked me?

Elise and Kylie indicate in their monologue the ways in which Miss Saunders' identity is continually disrupted.

> I knew that first day was going to be the scariest. Not only was I going to be the new inexperienced teacher, but I also had a discolored birthmark on my face that made me more than standout. Most adults had difficulty responding to my face with tact or grace, let alone kids. I've had to deal with how people responded to my face all my life. People have been less than kind to me because of my birthmark, and I'll admit it took me a long time to love and accept myself.
>
> Oh I knew that first day was going to be rough, I however didn't anticipate getting lost. Thank goodness I wore my Prada, and name brands, they'd help make a good first impression. I had been wandering around the school for quite some time in search of the main office when I finally decided to stop and ask someone to point it out to me. I approached a girl and asked her where the main office was, at first she didn't answer; her eyes darted to my birthmark and then away. She looked down and answered.

Seeking One's Best Self

Finally, the life histories scripts pointed to the ways characters might find their best selves. Even though Maleeka was the main character in the text, students elected to address her through the voices of secondary characters and crafted compelling life histories to do so. Maleeka evolves to recognize her own worth. On the brink of acknowledging a need to become better, Char does not quite get there. That is not true for Caleb and Miss Saunders who both experience significant turning points as expressed in the scripts:

My father's words rang in my head
And filled me with a sense of might
I stared in the bathroom mirror and recited you have to take a stand when things aren't right.
My lose apologies of the past I knew now did not matter,
Right now it was time to act, the strife I built would now soon shatter.
One day too late though I would learn the next morning
Char and her mind games had conquered my queen.
I had looked at Maleeka who had ignored my warning and finally felt the betrayal she had seen.
Her face told the story of dishonest and tensions and shame for succumbing what I had warned
I knew that I had finally regained her attention and could finally patch the fibers that were torn.
It took all that she had but Maleeka confessed that her actions resulted from being driven too far.
I looked at my queen and for the first time felt blessed for finding the brightest of stars.

Elise and Kylie conclude their monologue with Miss Saunders coming to powerful realizations that will enable her to appreciate the person she sees in the mirror.

> Maleeka frustrated me the most, and at first I didn't know why. Here was a beautiful, intelligent girl, with all the potential in the world, and yet she denied her worth. She hid her intelligence, did what she was told by equals and continued to believe what everyone else said about her. She'd let Char boss her around just so she could wear her clothes, didn't she know that clothes didn't make you who you were, but instead what was on the inside did? To feel as though she belonged, she let others rule her life and she put up a front that depicted her as an individual who didn't care about school. Didn't she know that applying herself would take her beyond the

> very people who wanted to hold her down, even when one of those people was her? Didn't she know she had to quit the façade and just accept her for her?
>
> Oh this girl she frustrated me, but why!? Oh my, it wasn't just her I was frustrated with. I was frustrated with me too. How couldn't I see it before? All this time I thought I had overcome my birthmark, but I hadn't. Boy was I good at talking the talk. I hadn't accepted myself, I simply compensated for what I consider miss comings. My designer clothes or need for perfection weren't signs of acceptance but instead signs of unsureness, denial of being self-conscious, and the feeling of not belonging. All along I thought I was here to help these young students view themselves in an accurate light, never did I dream that they'd bring me to the realization that I too had to cut myself some slack and accept the person staring back at me in the mirror. I set out wanting to help Maleeka, in the end she helped me more than I thought possible. I now understand that there's no use in hiding one's face, imperfection is beauty, simply accept and embrace it.

Life Histories Performances Move Beyond Reading

Nieto (1992), in arguing for the importance of multicultural literature so that all readers may see their lives reflected in texts, further supports the possibilities of life histories. She asserts that life histories can change the way readers look at the world by offering new perspectives and promoting appreciation for those different than self. These new understandings then give rise to critical inquiry and illuminate the human experience.

Life Histories offer ways to enrich not only reading, but also writing, dramatic speaking, and use of digital tools in amplifying ideas. Literacy practitioners know that writing is not one thing and reading another. Rather, there exists a relationship between textual form and reading practice which has evolved over time and informs contemporary cultural discourse.

Life histories value collaboration—in both understanding the nuances of the selected character and in creating the written scripts for the final performance. Roberts and Wibbens (2010) argue that collaborative writing demonstrates measurable success over students' work not involved in collaborative writing.

Crafting life histories supports engagement with multicultural and/or critical texts. Life histories serve as a tool to help teachers support their students in a multi-layered analysis of provocative text. Life histories foster aesthetic experience and artistic expression through performance. Furthermore, we argue that life histories have the power to generate student excitement for literary engagement and to create a space where students come together joined in a common purpose.

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Performing, Passing, and Covering Motherhood in Academic Spaces: A Heartful Autoethnography

Anna S. CohenMiller

Abstract

This study applies heartful autoethnography to demonstrate the performance of being a mother in academia. As such, the article addresses (1) motherhood versus mothering, (2) the concepts of presentation of self, passing, and covering, (3) systematic bias mothers face in academic spaces, and (4) the ultimate costs of covering motherhood in academia.

The Performance of an Academic

While parents, in general, face challenges while working, mothers face additional constraining structures and stereotypes. For example, in Western contexts, when women become identified as mothers, their prestige and ability are questioned, termed a "maternal wall" (Williams, 2005). In this way, women can face multiple external structures impeding their success, such as "glass ceilings" limiting them from reaching top positions, "sticky floors" constricting their promotion, and then as a mother, a "maternal wall." In other words, performing the gendered role (Butler, 1993) of motherhood, or being considered as a mother, can be considered detrimental to one's work-life. In this performance, mothers in academia are consistently either evidencing expected ways of enacting their role of mother or challenging norms.

In this article, I reflect on being an academic and mother abroad. I note my move from academic life in the United States to Kazakhstan, Central Asia, providing context for the country, city, and University-life. Drawing from the "presentation of self" theory (Goffman, 1959), I show how being a mother in academia is a multifaceted performance. While I focus on mothers within the realm of academia (higher education), it should be recognized that mothers in other environments face similar and often more challenging workplaces. In negotiating the place of women in academia, mothers face a varying level of acceptance and disapproval, as well as a sense of being *policed* in their actions and choices. Throughout the following sections, I intersperse literature on motherhood and mothering, passing and covering with first-person vignettes inspired by heartful autoethnography (Ellis, 1999). The process of developing such reflections highlights the process and product of autoethnography as a research method (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010).

Kazakhstani Context

I live in Kazakhstan in Central Asia. Geographically, it is a vast country—the largest landlocked nation in the world—at about twice the size of Europe. Its borders include Russia to the north, China to the east, and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan on the south and west. Historically, the nation developed

from a variety of nomadic clans, creating the cultures and linguistic traditions of a multiethnic, plurilingual society. Also, the country went through years of rule under the Soviet Union. In 1991, Kazakhstan emerged as an independent nation and until 2019 remained under the leadership of the first President. Today, the country has approximately 18 million people with the majority of people identifying as ethnic Kazakh (Pariona, n.d.). It is a secular Muslim state, has significant oil and agricultural wealth, and is frequently designated internationally as an "emerging economy."

With the size of the country, each region has varied weather, geography, traditions, and linguistic practices. Broadly, the southern area has mountains and steppe predominates the northern area. The capital of the country is in the north and this is where I live. The city sits on the Kazakh steppe and frequently experiences six months of snowy winters with high winds bringing the temperature to -40 F (or -40 C). The city is young, officially becoming the capital in 1997 (*History of the City*, 2020). Thus, the majority of people who live in the capital were raised in other regions. Construction is continual. Cranes spread throughout the city, with unique buildings scattered everywhere (e.g., the largest tent in the world; a large glass pyramid). As the capital city grew, many businesses and governmental centers moved from the former capital of Almaty to what has become known as Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana and Akmola). For example, the national opera, ballet, and many international embassies all moved to the new capital, drawing a growing population of close to a million people (*Kazakhstan Population* 2020*)*. In the last few years, as the city has increased, so too has the international population, drawing employees and families to work at the major economic centers, embassies, and educational institutions.

Education in Kazakhstan and The University Context

Within the last 15 years, the Kazakhstani government has implemented major educational reforms. For example, in 2008, in collaboration with Cambridge University (UK), a new set of schools was introduced, emphasizing gifted education. These schools, termed the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), became the first schools in the country with tenets of autonomy and academic freedom (Shamshidinova, Ayubayeva, & Bridges, 2014). During a similar timeframe, the Kazakhstani government developed the first autonomous university in the nation (*About us*, 2020). Named after the First President (Nazarbayev) and placed in the relocated capital city, Nazarbayev University (NU) opened in 2010. Each of the Schools within the University is partnered with a top international university. For example, the school I work with, the Graduate School of Education (GSE), is partnered with Cambridge University and the University of Pennsylvania. The first set of doctoral students were from Education. It was exciting to see them walk the stage in 2017, shaking hands with the President of Kazakhstan and representing pride for our School, the University, and representing the achievements of the country.

While the vast majority of students in the university are Kazakhstani citizens, the faculty is predominantly from top international universities. In Education, my colleagues and I have multicultural backgrounds working and living in a wide array of countries, including the United States and Canada, Europe, Africa, and throughout Asia. Across the University, there is a similar multicultural background, with degrees in education, humanities and social sciences, engineering and robotics, mining, and medicine. There are

close to 5,000 students across the university with a 50/50 split between women and men (*NU At a Glance*). Women hold the majority of junior faculty positions with more senior positions held by men.

I present the context of Kazakhstan and University-life on campus, not to suggest this is the only place where these experiences result. Instead, I provide these backgrounds to demonstrate a basis for understanding how, in whichever context the academic lives, the considerations of how to behave, to perform, are frequently exacerbated by being a mother. The Kazakhstani history has led to a nation with a mixture of practices informed by traditional family cultures along with a more collectivist structure that affects the educational landscape. For example, young women typically feel pressure from their family and society regarding cultural expectations. These can include an emphasis on getting married by age 25, moving in with her in-laws, and having children. Having a son is important, as common practice suggests the youngest boy in the family is responsible for the parents as they age. Additional expectations frequently include looking aesthetically beautiful, being well educated, and having good employment. Considering that most young people are married with children by age 25, the majority of graduate students have families.

Some women, especially those coming from more traditional Kazakh backgrounds in the southern areas of the country, are expected to take care of their children, house, in-laws, and cooking, while they pursue a desire to complete a degree (CohenMiller, Saniyazova, & Saniyazova, 2019). Despite the modern views and traditions that many families follow in Kazakhstan, there are families who see women as wife and mother first (especially her in-laws), thus expecting she performs well in this role regardless of her other roles (Saniyazova, CohenMiller, & Saniyazova, 2020).

The resultant pressure is immense for graduate student mothers to fit what it means to be a mother and woman in the Kazakhstani context, as well as to align with the varied perspectives of an international faculty. With such a multicultural faculty, there are varied perspectives on educational practice and our students' lives. Additionally, these expectations can be transferred to our perspectives of one another in terms of how to conduct research, teach, mentor, and also parent.

Academic life at an international university in Kazakhstan. When I meet friends from the United States, they ask me about living abroad in Kazakhstan. The simplest way to describe life in Kazakhstan and at the University is "easy." The low cost of living makes life much easier than when I lived in the United States. For example, the cost of a 20-minute taxi ride across town is about two dollars, USD. Likewise, hiring someone to clean a two-bedroom apartment costs about $12 USD. And, a three-course lunch on-campus costs about four dollars USD. These example costs are highest in the capital city where I live. Since I see these prices as affordable, it makes working full-time away from the country of our origin (hence, away from the family support we once had), and living on campus with children, manageable. For example, it means I don't need to own and maintain a car. Instead, I can easily use a taxi when needed. Likewise, instead of having to focus tremendous energy on household upkeep, I can affordably hire someone to clean.

When I first moved to campus, many buildings were still under construction and there were few businesses or resources. Over the years, there has been a significant expansion of opportunities and resources on campus for students and families. For instance, family-friendliness has been shown as relevant for recruiting and retention of faculty with families (Villablanca, Beckett, Nettiksimmons, & Howell, 2011). Today, there is an expanding set of family-friendly resources. For example, I worked with the administration and community to implement an English-language Montessori-school and the first large-scale indoor playing room (*Playing Room Opening Ceremony,* 2020), the latter particularly important for long winters.

Methodology

For this work, I chose to use autoethnography to present an insider's perspective on my experiences of being a mother in academia, including a move to Kazakhstan from the United States with two young children. As a methodology, autoethnography stems from the anthropological tradition of ethnography. The detailed, in-depth engagement with participants can allow ethnographers to get a sense of the "lived-experience" of individuals and communities. For autoethnography, there is likewise an in-depth process of uncovering experience. Instead of looking outside ourselves to other participants and communities, the autoethnographer looks at him or herself. Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner (2010) describe autoethnography as an integration of methods, "A researcher uses tenets of *autobiography* and *ethnography* to *do* and *write* autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product" (para 1). Within autoethnography, there are various types, including evocative approaches that draw in the reader to the feelings and thoughts of the experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2016).

In heartful autoethnography, Ellis (1999) calls for ethnography that delves intrinsically within the individual to engage and encourage feeling and thought from others, "...an ethnography that includes researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies, and spirits; produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality" (p. 66). As Ellis notes, heartful ethnography "…is concerned with moral, ethical, and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy; helps us know how to live and cope (p. 669)." For this study, I found he*art*ful autoethnography (Ellis, 1999, emphasis in original) as a means to speak to, about, and within the topic of being a mother in academia, while encouraging and seeking to help others.

Data involved memory-work, writing down stories of my experiences, reading them to others, rewriting, and reflecting again on the experiences. The process was iterative as I saw the importance to reframe or further articulate the experiences after sharing with others (e.g., scholars in motherhood in academia, scholars without a specialty in the topic, those with insider perspectives—my husband). The following stories are at times composite descriptions and include quotes reflecting the experience in general, instead of verbatim transcriptions.

Act I: When Fine Isn't Good

I first met the Dean of my department through a video conference call when I was in the United States and he was in Kazakhstan. Now, I'm standing in front of him. I'm in both a new university and a new country, thousands of miles away from where I grew up. We sit across from one another. He sat behind his expansive wooden desk. I sat on the other. The Dean smiled frequently and welcomed me to the School. I took in the cavernous size of the office—sofa, bookcases, conference table, Persian rug. The light was streaming in through the large windows. I noticed details on the desk, my eyes landing on the stand holding business cards and pens.

I don't remember the details of what I wore that day, but I know I dressed in "professional" attire, using a high level of care. I felt put together and capable.

He chatted easily, asking questions about my move from the United States to Kazakhstan, "How has your transition been?" I answer quickly, trying to demonstrate confidence, "Good!"

I intentionally avoid talking about my children. The three-and-a-half-year-old, who was excited to travel in four airplanes, hasn't yet realized his friends won't be close by anymore. And the five-month-old has been attached to me nonstop throughout the trip, sitting comfortably in a tricolored Peruvian wrap. What will she do when I'm at work now?

In the interaction with the Dean, I skipped mentioning my family at all. I skipped it even though it was the entire reason I postponed starting the position for six months when my daughter was born. "Everything's fine!"

Motherhood and Mothering

Cultural expectations of mothers vary by nation and community. When becoming a mother, cultural expectations are placed on the person, determining how they are expected to behave. These expectations frame what Adrienne Rich (1976) refers to as the "institution" of motherhood. In the United States, for instance, 24/7 attention to the needs of children is expected of mothers. It is an "intensive mothering" model imposed on women to demonstrate themselves as good mothers (Hays, 1996). This conflicts with the competing expectation that American mothers will also have a workplace career outside of the home. Motherhood can then be considered as a "performance," one that Amber Kinser, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Terri Hawkes (2014) note is consistently under scrutiny by others. In other words, mothers are expected to perform consistently. Tennely Vik and Jocelyn DeGroot (2019) explain it as a pressure mothers feel to be "flawless," or maintain a particular presentation, in public spaces. Therefore, for mothers who work and live in the same general space, there would be a persistent pressure to perform in both roles. In this way, there is a complexity and challenge of living on campus, as the majority of places are public spaces.

In contrast to motherhood, the term "mothering" refers to taking care of or nurturing of another person. As Andrea O'Reilly (2017) explains, the act of mothering can be empowering. In this way, mothering

can move beyond the cultural expectations and impositions placed upon mothers. Nevertheless, women still face concern about telling others about a pregnancy (*Modern Family Index 2018*). Mothers in the workplace face a "motherhood penalty" and "maternal wall" regarding hiring and promotion. A recent five-year study of women's work-life roles in four countries (United States, Germany, Italy, Sweden) found a "work-life crisis" for many, highlighted by the sharpest contradiction between work and family for women in the United States (Collins, 2019). By being a mother, women face a contradiction in being an ideal worker. By not focusing on their job without distraction, mothers no longer fit the "ideal worker norm" (Acker, 1990). In the academic workplace, parents, and mothers, in particular, can frequently be judged against this norm (Sallee, Ward, & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). In order to address such bias, Shelley Correll (2013) notes the importance of altering the *culture* of work from one emphasizing an ideal worker and "the gendered norms about caretaking and breadwinning" (p. 6).

The idea of bringing children to campus went against what I had studied about being a mother and an academic (CohenMiller, 2013). For years, I had researched and uncovered stories about how women in academia face structural constraints, especially when becoming mothers in the United States. I knew how it is commonly recognized that women in the workplace face bias and gender stereotypes, which, for instance, can lead to a lower salary than their male counterparts. Some suggest "leaning in" (Sandberg, 2013). Yet, these messages can have negative consequences: "self-improvement messages intended to empower women to take charge of gender inequality may also yield potentially harmful societal beliefs" (Kim, Fitzsimons, & Kay, p. 974). These *lean in* messages can affect all workplaces, including academia. Whether useful or detrimental, the advice and intended support abound (see *Coming Out as Academic Mothers*, Birken & Borelli, 2014; *Academia and Motherhood: How Can We Have it All*, White, 2016, or *The Mother-Scholars' Work-Life Integration,* CohenMiller, 2016b).

Act II: Bringing the Kids and Milk

It was about 2 pm in the afternoon. I left my office, walking through a shared space in the department. It was there I met the Vice-Dean who quickly came up to me. She was a European, energetic woman who created a community-feel for faculty and staff, with events such as a Friday tea-time and small presents from her travels.

She exclaimed, "Where are your kids?!" and added, "I can't wait to meet them! Bring them by any time." This was not what I was expecting in the academic workplace or what I had experienced previously. Such warmth and encouragement about family. *Was this real? Did she really want me to bring them, or was she just being nice? Maybe I could parade them by the office, as long as I had a clear plan to move them back out, too?* I was indeed welcomed by the leadership in this manner. Flashing back to my time in the United States, I recall hearing judgments about mothers in academia. People would talk about which mother "chose" the right or wrong time to have a child. One graduate student eagerly bounded to her advisor's office with "great news" to share about her thesis. But the advisor didn't feel the same enthusiasm. Instead, she looked up from her desk and asked sternly, "you better not say you're pregnant?" While the stories of graduate students reflect a different context, the experiences of academic mothers

across institutions and levels show systematic challenges, although also a potential for success (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

Later in my academic life in Kazakhstan, I began to hear similar comments as in the United States. Sometimes it was just an offhand comment, "oh! she's having *another* baby?!" while at other times it was more direct. It became clear that while there may be some new "rules" in living abroad at an international university, the overall sense of being a mother in academia was still precarious.

Returning to my office in those early days on campus, I realized I would need to make some changes as a mother. I was no longer at home, able to nurse my daughter on demand. Instead, as other mothers in the workplace, I was looking to find a schedule allowing me to either go home to feed the baby or find a location to pump milk. *Should I just use the bathroom to express milk as I used to as a graduate student? It felt gross. Sitting in a stall, waiting for people to come and go, waiting for the smells to evaporate.* I decided to try to turn my shared office into a place I could also use for pumping milk.

Looking around our office, I notice how my desk backed up against a large window facing other offices, and my colleagues' desk was across the room. Just then, my office mate—a young woman from Central Asia—walked in.

"Hi! What are you looking at?" she asked, noticing my furrowed brow examining the office space.

"I've been trying to figure out how to create a bit more privacy in here for pumping milk or nursing. This window is huge and right on eye level with everyone walking by. I wish someone would just add some frosting to it."

"Yeah, I totally agree. It is a bit like we are in a fishbowl, with people looking in all the time. It's totally natural to want to keep your body private."

After a few days of thinking about creating a more intimate space, I realized the simplest solution would be a stopgap one. "Do you mind if I put up paper on the windows to create a bit of privacy?"

She responded immediately and enthusiastically, "Of course not!"

And with that response, I added paper to the windows, creating frosted glass for privacy in pumping and nursing my daughter. It was a successful moment in developing a physical space as a mother in academia. I continued to think about the next steps and potential pushback—if someone would ask me to take it down, whether to put a sign on the door when I was occupied. *Do I just lock the door? I could put a sign saying I'm busy, or perhaps testing the waters with a direct sign that outs me as a mother, PUMPING MILK—PLEASE COME BACK LATER.*

Act III: A "Good" Academic

How can I be "just" an academic when I also live on campus amidst public spaces and the hierarchy of academia? Is there a way to compartmentalize motherhood so I can maintain my "proper" image of an academic?

My husband turns to me and asks, "Do you want to go biking?" He is an avid bike rider who misses our regular family rides. Before we moved to Kazakhstan, we lived in Texas and would frequently ride as a family with just one toddler. Because of the warm weather, we could ride year-round. Our son would sit in the bright orange seat attached to my handlebars or in a yellow and orange trailer pulled from behind my husband's bike.

Now we are in Kazakhstan.

"Sure, let's go for a ride!" But my mind raced with thoughts of academic hierarchy I had learned in the United States. I kept thinking about what it meant to be seen with children as a mother and academic. During the day, I'm a scholar, lauded for my scholarly pursuits. But at night, if I am seen with my children, I will be seen as someone different. In the US, I remember how it felt to be talked down to suddenly or ignored once the academic world discovered I was a mother. For the academic mother, these dual roles carry expectations, responsibilities, and significance for professional and family life.

I took these American ideas with me when moving to Kazakhstan and immediately thought about what it would mean to be seen biking on campus, with children. *How do I explain why I am not in my office? I bumped into the Provost last time I went walking on campus, will that happen again? What if I see my students? How can I maintain authority as their teacher when they see me in this other role? How do I show that I am still a professional? How will students see me differently? How do I maintain my role as a scholar when I'm being seen as a mother instead?*

I realize now these questions were informed by the history of women in the workplace. Women have traditionally been excluded in many ways and today still do not earn close to the same wage as their male counterparts. Students, staff, and faculty did indeed see me differently once they saw my children. For some, I was elevated in status, a novel finding for myself compared to the United States. However, in other interactions, people avoided engaging with me and would give me a wide berth if they happened to see me with my children.

I prepared the bike with a child seat, a unique sight at that time in Kazakhstan, which meant everywhere I biked eyes turned to follow me. I prepared myself to perform in the role of mother and braced myself for interacting as an academic.

Presentation of Self, Passing, and Covering

At work, as long as I was not talking about my children or associated with an item to remind others of my motherhood status (e.g., stroller), I could "pass" as the ideal worker. Passing in this regard can be

seen as a privilege (although not all agree, see Silvermint, 2018), or it could present other issues as a childless mother in an international context. For the University, the campus is family-friendly (CohenMiller et al., 2019). Still, academic mothers in Kazakhstan feel an ambiguity of gender and mother roles (Kuzhabekova, 2019), while graduate student mothers remain concerned about not having the needed policies or resources to succeed (CohenMiller, Saniyazova, & Saniyazova, 2019; Saniyazova et al., 2020).

Presentation of self. Performance, and the ways individuals are seen, provide insight into how people are expected to behave and present themselves. In 1959, Erving Goffman wrote Presentation of Self, depicting everyday life as a stage, a performance on a daily basis. If every day is a performance, there are both actors and audiences involved. How we present ourselves—our performance—is interpreted by others whether we intend it or not. Using sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), as individuals, we interpret each other's embodied performances through our cultural lens. Thus, society and culture affect the way we see ourselves and others. The roles can change—employer, employee, parent, child—and the importance of how others see us, remains. Within the organizational setting of academia, each person tends to perform multiple roles, such as professor, committee member, colleague, or friend.

A presentation, or performance, of academic motherhood, can then be interpreted as "acting." Moreover, by focusing on one part of ourselves while compartmentalizing another can be considered fairly negatively: *acting like someone else, acting up, two-face*, to name a few examples. None of the phrases present a positive concept. Instead, they refer to being someone you are not, or behaving in a way not preferred. How do we reconcile the life as a stage with the negative connotation of performing on the stage?

However, for Goffman (1959), performance does not have to be negative. Instead, it is about everyday normal interaction. Using the theory of presentation of self, academic mothers might *cover*, choosing to downplay particular traits or "engage in 'face work' by not mentioning their children to others to present themselves as being only focused on their academic work" (CohenMiller, 2014a, 2014b)

Passing. Being associated with a category embodying your characteristics or identity can be referred to as "passing" (Goffman, 1963). The current use of the word "passing" frequently refers to "racial" passing. In racial passing, a person of one *race* passes intentionally, or through others' assumption, as another *race* (I use the term race in italics to emphasize its social construction). Passing has also been used to refer to those who pass as a particular gender, religion, social class, or as related to parenting status.

In several arenas of life, individuals may choose, or be considered, to "pass" as someone they are not. As Goffman explains (1963), passing can present significant assets: "Because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on some occasion by intent" (p. 74). In this scenario, Goffman suggests individuals may aim to deceive when it provides them benefits. However, passing can be determined both by the individual and also by others. Passing "...often occur[s] when an audience miscategorizes an individual's identity and prompts him or her to follow suit

and embrace it" (Renfrow, 2019, p. 502). Related to passing as childfree, it can be a chance for silence or voice (Moore, 2018) and is a common occurrence.

In academia, mothers, especially graduate students who become mothers during their programs, are in a precarious position as an "outed" mother with limited resources and policies at the University-level. For instance, in my doctoral research with doctoral student motherhood and mothering, a participant confessed to having a "greatest fear," that she would be seen differently by her colleagues once becoming a mother, and found it essential to make "extra efforts to compensate" (CohenMiller, 2014b). Similarly, in another study of graduate student mothers, participants were concerned at "revealing their pregnancies and motherhood" (Williams, 2007, p. 103). Furthermore, the pressures mothers in academia experience are frequently mentioned (Evans & Grant, 2008) and affect their well-being (CohenMiller & Demers, 2019). These studies suggest the participants were struggling to fit the role of the ideal graduate student, one who is fully committed without outside responsibilities or tasks.

Covering. In addition to passing, Goffman (1963) also addressed the concept of "covering," a means to downplay a trait. Kenji Yoshino and Christie Smith (2013) explain the difference between covering and passing:

> "Covering" differs from the more familiar term "passing." When an individual passes, she is ensuring that others around her do not know she possesses a particular identity. When an individual covers, she has disclosed that identity but seeks to mute its significance. Covering is a much more universal dynamic – while only some groups have the capacity to pass, all groups have the capacity to cover. (p. 4)

For those who are cannot *cover* their motherhood status in the academic workplace (e.g., being visibly pregnant, being seen with a child), they can face bias in interviews as well as negative pushback in the workplace (Carroll, 2018). Across higher education institutions in the United States, Kirsten Isgro and Mari Castañeda (2015) point to a consistent theme of "organizational prejudice and bias toward motherhood" (p. 174).

For mothers in academia, there may be a choice whether to cover motherhood status. If they are not visibly pregnant, mothers may be able to choose to avoid topics addressing children. On a superficial level, this constraint is simple and straightforward. Nevertheless, what happens when a work colleague asks to meet at the same time as childcare pickup (assuming the mother is picking up the child that day)?

Act IV: Academic Hierarchy in the Wild

The same day that I officially met the Dean in his office, I also later saw him in another context. This time, while he was still in his suit and tie, talking with colleagues, I was now in jeans and a T-shirt. I had already come home. I had already left the official premises of office life and entered into the realm of the family (Clark, 2000). While previously I had been wearing professional attire, in this encounter with my children, I was instead wearing informal athletic wear. I didn't have the air of academic confidence. I was out for a walk with my family, exploring the new sidewalks across campus.

Our son, who was four at the time, was wearing his bright rubber boots and was chatting and running joyfully, looking for any puddles to jump in. Our five-month-old, attached securely to me with a thick grey baby carrier, cooed gently.

The Dean said hello, waving to my family and me as he walked by. My persona of academia no longer existed. Here I was, a mother. As an academic who studies motherhood in academia, I knew that the literature demonstrates how mothers in the workplace are devalued (Correll, 2013). And here I was, unexpectedly, reminded of my cultural framework suggesting I was devaluing myself. While I was being welcomed, I knew others were not, as evidenced by overhearing the following comment about a fellow colleague: "She should just stay home and take care of her children first."

"Hi," I said tentatively to the Dean, trying to find a way to hide. I felt flushed with emotion, my heartbeat heightened, and anxiety filling my ears, making it hard to hear. *What had I just done? Had all my hard work to get to this position been for naught as now I've undone my professionalism with an informal interaction?*

Later, I opened my email, looking forward to the first significant meeting of the semester. This was the meeting where we were supposed to be able to make effective changes to support students and faculty. Then I noticed the timing of the meeting. *What? Really? The meetings all start at 5:30 pm?*

I started thinking about how I could make it work. I was feeling what some academic mothers note as "a complex relationship regarding the (im)balance of family and work...with opposing forces of stress/sadness and support/love" (CohenMiller, 2016a). How I could go to both the meetings and also see my children in the evening, or more importantly, figure out how to pick them up from school. I wracked my brain, trying to come up with a solution. *Really? Why does this have to be a choice? To either go to an important meeting or to be with my family? Doesn't the workday end by then?*

Building up my courage, I talked to the organizers and pointed out the timing constraints the meeting may have on many people's lives. I didn't highlight my own challenge of childcare. I covered my motherhood status and instead talked about the broader community. *Changing the timing of the meeting could help many faculty who have outside commitments.* In changing the focus, I was able to engage more people. However, this change in discourse, unfortunately, minimized the experience of mothers by suggesting everyone else faces the same obstacles.

Motherscholar: Intertwined Roles of Mother and Academic

"*The agency of the academic mother lies in her courage to rewrite and transform scholarship so that motherhood is written into her intellectualism, into her scholarship and into academia*"

-Pillay, 2000, p. 513, emphasis added

Living as a mother in academia, in both the United States and for the last five years in Kazakhstan, has involved a constant internal narrative about performing, passing, and covering. Although in general

it has been a very positive response, I have also been criticized directly and indirectly. Hearing someone say something negative about another mother—whether student, staff, or faculty—reminds me to be vigilant about the image I am portraying. It reminds me of the precarious position of mothers in general in the academic workplace, in particular those at the beginning of the academic pipeline. The occasional negative comments about a mother studying or working reminds me to continue to be aware of my positionality and the potential for push-back at any time. The international community at the University provides opportunities for thinking about ideas in varied ways, yet it also means that many of the "rules" of behavior aren't clearly identifiable.

On a larger scale, the history of women in society suggests a constant policing of women's and mother's behavior, and this doesn't change in academic spaces, even in supportive environments. Regardless of a generally increasing acceptance of women in the workplace in some societies and cultural contexts, the narrative of, what I'm calling, *impermanent acceptance*, requires constant work to remain aware of every interaction to assess the level of approval to vulnerability.

Yet, there is potential to make great change in academia for future generations. As a mother in academia, I am working to embrace each role and identity. As a "motherscholar," I can intentionally intertwine roles advocating against the bifurcated existence of each (Matias, 2011; *The Motherscholar Project*, 2020). I can demonstrate my position and stand up for others finding their place. It is a vulnerable position, yet easier now with children who don't need me as frequently. In this way, we can make changes to the historically ignored voices of women—and, by extension, mothers—to intentionally incorporate them into academic spaces (see CohenMiller & Lewis, 2019).

As Green (2015) encourages, it is time to move "beyond assumptions and expectations of what constitutes good mothering'" (p. 196). By labeling and embracing, identifying, and seeing these multiple roles and performances as born from necessity, academic workspaces can move forward to acknowledge a place for within historically exclusionary institutions for motherscholars.

Fig. 1: The mother and academic: Motherscholar (Photo credit: Douglas CohenMiller)

Act V: Missing Opportunities

At times I have decided to bring my children to academic events, purposively choosing to uncover my motherhood. I presented myself as a motherscholar, advocated on behalf of the mothers enrolled in the programs. Friday late afternoon came, and the smell of pizza began to waft down the hall. The graduate student team-building event was about to start.

I walked in confidently to a familiar space, with my two children by my side. Students surrounded the room in colorful, padded chairs. My kids jumped to a tall set of seats and began reaching for pizza immediately. *Uh, maybe they should wait. I can feel everyone's eyes on me, and my children. Are their hands clean? Is the sauce dripping down on their clothes?*

"You want the one with only cheese?" I asked my daughter. Then turning to face a student, "So, tell me about your thesis?"

Intercepting a small hand touching multiple pieces, "oh, you want another one?" then in the same breath, "Sounds great, tell me more about your work." For 20 minutes, I went back and forth, the dual identity and roles of motherscholar. Then the introductions to the faculty began.

"Hi everyone, I'm Dr. Anna CohenMiller, and I'm a qualitative methodologist who focuses on issues of social justice in education." I continued on to mention the programs I teach. But I left out the multiple years of studying women in academia, motherhood, and mothering. Even though I was looking at a room full of graduate students—the vast majority of women and many of them mothers—I continued to feel the internal pressure to cover (Goffman, 1963) this part of my work and life.

"Oh, and this is my family," I tacked on at the end, realizing I had completely left off a discussion of mothering in academia or my own children who were sitting next to me.

How could I do that? What did I just do?! I left off my own kids. I missed the opportunity to show them and the students in the room the importance and legitimacy of studying mothers in academia. I guess this was my effort to compartmentalize. Ugh.

I took a deep breath and turned to listen to the next person introducing themselves. I had performed the role of a "good" academic, but covered my motherhood status, unsuccessfully, and detrimentally.

Act VI: The Costs of Being a Mother in Academia

This article explored my experiences of performing as a mother in and out of academic spaces. For academic workspaces to address the needs of academic parents, there is a need to know how mothers are perceived. Research maintains a stigma exists for those who are mothers in the workplace (at least in Western contexts).

No matter how much I try, as a mother in academia who lives on campus, I can't hide my motherhood status. I can't use the conventional technique of compartmentalizing work and home. Sometimes the world of academics merges with family life and vice versa. I've brought a child to class, to the office. At other times, while I'm out with my family, colleagues and I will bump into one another and start talking about work. The fine lines delineating one from another are less important from my perspective.

It's the evening now. Gathering helmets, I leave the house with the kids and bikes for a ride around campus. One child is on his bike, a little wobbly as he's perfecting riding on two wheels. I stay nearby, ready to help at any moment, taking on a mothering role. The other child sits in the grey bike seat directly behind me. She eagerly watches everything. I know she's watching me, learning from my actions and behaviors. I don't look the part of an academic. I'm not performing the role. I am no longer 100% focused on academic work. Instead, I have uncovered my role as a mother.

I still have those moments when I am reminded of the academic hierarchy. It can still be surprising to be mothering a child at the local coffee shop and having a student or top leader of the University come to say hi. Sociocultural indoctrination can be deep-seated. The messages sent about ideal workers and covering one's motherhood status can be pervasive.

Uh oh, they just saw me out of work! I should be at work.

But then I realize it's 7 pm on a Tuesday or 9 am on a Saturday. Likewise, I have entered a different context. It's a space where motherhood doesn't have to be automatically downplayed but frequently prioritized. *It's okay to not be at work. It's not typical work time. It's okay. I am an academic* ***and*** *a mother.* I am a motherscholar.

I have uncovered my motherhood status in academia, but for others, the cost may be too high. These consequences of uncovering a motherhood status in academia need not exist. Until systematic bias can be addressed, we need to continually ask, *what is the price of passing or uncovering oneself as a mother* and *what are we doing to eliminate this price?*

Coda: Performing Motherhood and Mothering in Academic Spaces

Coming home from work, my kids met me outside, next to my bike.

"Oh, it looks like someone wants to go for a ride, yeah?" I say, smiling at both kids.

Without changing clothes or removing the briefcase from my bike, I start to get ready. I pick up my little one, putting her into a wrap for riding along with me on my bike.

"Faster Mama, faster!" calls my son, as he zooms ahead of me on his green scooter. Then he suddenly stops and asks to take a picture. We are now in front of a set of playgrounds on campus. Directly across from us are the academic buildings and a stream of people walking around.

I am the motherscholar, but I still feel a bit conspicuous with children by my side. I know the research, which shows how children can be considered "props" to demonstrate good mothering, just based upon how they behave or what they wear (Collett, 2005). I try to talk myself into being okay with the academic world seeing me as a mother. I'm not covering (Goffman, 1963) my motherhood status. I'm embodying this role even though I'm unsure of the "spillover" of work and family (Clark, 2000).

"Todo bien, mi amor [Everything okay, sweetie]?" I ask my little one as she rearranges herself on my back. Then I look down to see what my son is wearing.

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Performative Writing as a Method of Inquiry With the Material World: The Art of the Imperative

Esther Fitzpatrick and Alys Longley

Abstract

Understanding writing as a performative material practice, this paper highlights the "imperative" as a strategy to enhance writing practices in our classrooms and academic workshops. Drawing on posthuman theories and intra-active relationships, it describes how performative arts-based writing can provide a way to engage with the human and nonhuman, the embodied, sensory elements of our writerly worlds. Employing a critical collaborative autoethnographic methodology, the two authors provide a narrative account of a year as two research Fellows in a university exploring writing as a method of inquiry through designing and implementing a series of performative arts-based writing activities.

Writing as a Method of Inquiry: Background

This article explores writing as a method of inquiry across the disciplines, understanding writing as performative material practice deeply embedded in environments and experiences of embodiment. It argues higher education must take pedagogical environments into account when imagining and implementing academic practices if we are to achieve generative, inventive, and politically attuned writing pedagogies. If, as Richardson and St Pierre (2005) argue, writing is a method of inquiry, how can teachers engage students in writing activities that enhance students' potential?

Our work intersects with other work in this Special Issue in its specific focus on the *performance* of writing, as bodies in intra-action through embodied, felt, sensory pedagogies—how we attend to, write with, and include the vitality of spaces and objects in classroom spaces. *Performative writing* is a method of "writing as doing" where "writing becomes meaningful in the material, dis/continuous act of writing" (Pollock, 1998, p. 75). Five characteristics of performative writing suggested by Pollock are first that the writing should be *evocative*—evoking worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and insight; *metonymic*—self-consciously partial, a material signifying process that invites laughter and transformation; *nervous*—an ongoing process of transmission and transferal; *citational*—informed by discourses of textuality; and last, *consequential*—writing that is meant to make things happen (pp. 80–95).

Performative writing provides a critically, aesthetically appropriate and generative method for analyzing and representing stories. The nature of *performative* writing as a method of inquiry allows for the complexity of human beings and recognizes the sensory elements of the phenomena as significant in the investigative process. Ellis (2015) discusses the creative process as a confluence between forces and materials, to "[soften] distinctions between organism and artifact" (p. 98). If material and teacher "in their reciprocal, intra-active entanglement, are not fixed conditions but rather emerging possibilities"

(Battista, 2012, p. 72), what species of documentation might manifest from such entanglement. How might the affective forces of ecologies, spaces, and creative processes morph together?

In this work, we present a series of four narratives which exemplify the imperative as a strategy to engage students in performative writing through a creative, new materialist focus. As colleagues, we were immersed for a year as research Fellows in a University project to explore strategies to enhance writing practices of our students and colleagues. Following Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) "writing as a method of inquiry," we explored a variety of creative, arts-based, writing practices in our classrooms, workshops, and own writing practices. What follows is our increasing recognition of the imperative as a useful strategy when employing creative arts-based writing practices. We begin by further elaborating on the methodological approach employed and the context of our work. We then define our own understandings of the posthuman theoretical approach and new materialist pedagogy, and the imperative as a strategy of instruction. The following four imperatives are narratives from our writing project.

In essence, this paper is a critical collaborative autoethnography. As friends and colleagues, we have been "hanging out deeply" (Geertz, 1998), interrogating and experimenting with writing, generating data through surveys, writing samples, anecdotal notes, and personal journaling. Our collaborative autoethnography is best described as researchers who worked together to generate data, reflect on experiences, acknowledge and respect difference, and check with each other as to what should be included in the final narrative (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008). There are roughly two of us writing (Alys and Esther), yet we can't do this writing alone. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose, "each of us is multiple." We rest into and depend on other bodies, tools, and objects, and liquids and solids. Our practice is influenced by theorists including Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St Pierre (2005), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri (1987), Jane Bennett (2010), and Kathleen Stewart (2007). In our pedagogical practice, where we reconnect intra-active pedagogies of qualitative inquiry, we propose pedagogues consider the work of the imperative. Our positions as lecturers afforded us with opportunity to implement creative writing practices into our undergraduate classrooms and to generate data from several workshops we held for colleagues and postgraduate students. In our conversations and writing we were also attendant to the criticality of our work where, as Holman Jones (2015) reminds us, *critical* autoethnography is where "theory and story work together in a dance of collaborative engagement" (p. 229).

Intra-Active Pedagogy

It is becoming well recognized that qualitative research needs to reflect the importance of environmental and ecological conditions entwined in human narratives (Bennett, 2010; Revelles-Benavente & Cielemecka, 2016; Kershaw, 2012). The notion of an intra-active pedagogy is described by Roder (2011) where learning is seen to take place in an ongoing material-discursive flow of agency (p. 61). Our "writing, writing everywhere" project drew on the relationship between the textual and the material, allowing matter and meaning to spill into each other. In saying this, we realize that the textual is always already material (paper, ink, screen, pixels, electrical current). Following Barad, we understand our becomings as forever engaged in processes of intra-action (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997).

So too, our actions are intra-actions: not the result of our individual sovereign agency, but the outcome of our actions and the actions of others—human and nonhuman beings and materials.

We employ a posthuman theoretical approach as we consider the intra-active relationship between thinker, writer, and the material world, in order to engage the transformative power of higher education. This article focuses on how a new materialist approach to writing pedagogy brings our focus back to understanding how our writing implements—whatever they may be (digital devices, pens, pencils, paintbrush)—guide what we write. We argue that the imperative, as a language of instruction (Longley, 2011), is useful when attending carefully to the materiality of the writing process. If, as suggested by Barad (2007) and later Jones and Hoskins (2016), it is difficult for ordinary researchers to put to work the complex idea of intra-connection or intra-action in our research, how much more difficult is it to work pedagogically with such ideas? Dancer Paula Kramer's (2015a) work provides clear examples of how new materialist ontologies can translate into creative practice. Kramer draws on the work of philosophers Ingold and Bryant to emphasize that in most more-than-human research, material agency, rather than having a single locus, comes into effect through relationship between the human and nonhuman (Kramer, 2015b). Each of our narratives provide specific examples of new materialist scholarship through creative practice, developed through particular instances, locations, fields of collaboration, and methods of research.

The Imperative: Moving Abstract Theory Into Ecologies of Practice

The imperative, we suggest, is linked to Hattie and Marzano's work on the effectiveness of "overt" and "explicit" instructions as a pedagogy (Killian, 2015). Further, especially significant for this paper, is Hattie and Marzano's description of how those instructions are used to scaffold learners through multistep tasks to engage with the material world (Killian, 2015). Clear imperatives in teaching can disentangle the knotty and potentially confusing premises of posthuman thought, creating spaces where students might develop understanding of the more-than-human in everyday life through (seemingly) simple classroom tasks. The art of engaging learners is linked with the teacher's ability to create productive, inclusive, and inventive instructions. We provide specific examples of such tasks, through narratives grounded in the contexts of our teaching in the fields of education and dance.

Pedagogical logic is often communicated through tasks that set activities into motion—defined rhetorically as imperatives. These are core to both teaching and creative practice. The following introduction from Matthew Goulish's (2000) *39 MicroLectures in Pursuit of Performance* provides a clear example of *imperative* writing:

> *A series of accidents has brought you to this book.*
>
> *You may not think of it as a book, but as a library, an elevator, an amateur.*
>
> *Open it to the table of contents.*
>
> *Turn it to the page that sounds the most interesting to you.*
>
> *Read a sentence or two.*
>
> *Repeat this process.*
>
> *Read this book as a creative act, and feel encouraged.* (p. ii)

In her PhD, Alys explored modes of writing that enable the kinaesthetic logics of movement and creative practice to translate to pages. Scores for performance provide starting points for dancers in visual or linguistic forms, enabling a movement from conceptual to material planes. Imperatives work in the same way to direct participants or readers to action:

> Choreographically, one of the ways that processual logic communicates is through studio tasks. Rhetorically, the imperative is perhaps the clearest and most used form of speech act in choreographic (and possibly dance) practice. The Collins Paperback Dictionary (2004) defines the word imperative thus: "1. extremely urgent; essential. 2. commanding or authoritative. 3. Grammar denoting the mood of a verb used in commands" (p. 400). The language of instruction (regardless of how sensible or impossible/ ridiculous that instruction may be) is a form of language that allows dance practice to come into being.
>
> I am fascinated by the rhetoric of choreographic tasks. I love the way that they at once command dancers to do something in a no-nonsense bossy way, while at the same time they often create space for an endless diversity of invention and play. The art of creating productive, unexpected and inventive material for performance research using choreographic tasks lies in devising imperatives that are at once highly specific, and open to a wide range of interpretations. (Longley, 2011)

Teaching is an art form that has much in common with choreography. The art of engaging learners to experience new paradigms of sense and logic is entangled with the ability to create productive, inclusive, and inventive instructions that might be highly specific, and/or open to a wide range of interpretations. The imperative, we argue here, is linked to Hattie and Marzano's work on the effectiveness of "overt" and "explicit" instructions as a pedagogy (Killian, 2015). Further, especially significant for this paper, is Hattie and Marzano's description of the ways those instructions are used to scaffold the learner through multi-step tasks to engage with the material world (Killian, 2015).

Imperatives invite each reader, in all their singularity, to reinvent how the material of the book is ordered, experienced, and organized. According to Bogue (2007), "[c]ollective assemblages of enunciation induce 'incorporeal transformations' of bodies in that they transform elements and configurations of the world through speech acts" (p. 20). We might consider Goulish's list of imperatives as a kind of collective assemblage, as each one involves potential readers transforming their sense of the given terms in order to allow creativity, inventiveness, and chance to enter into the process of reading. "Enunciation" is referred to by Felix Guattari (1996) in his essay *Ritornellos and Existential Effects*:

> For too long, linguists have refused to face up to enunciation, having only wanted to take it into account as a breaking and entering into the structural woof of semantic-syntactic processes. In fact, enunciation is in no way a faraway suburb of language. It constitutes the active kernel of linguistic and semiotic creativity. (p. 164)

Guattari discusses enunciation in relation to the concept of the "ritornello," a term that refers to the highly specific sensory affects triggered by particular experiences to create a "lay-out of sense productions beyond common sense" (p. 164). Attending to the ritornellos triggered by the enunciation of language allows explicit recognition of the role of affect, tone, cadence, and context in the movement of ideas.

As you read the following choreographic imperative written by Deborah Hay (2000)—which Alys frequently draws on in teaching dance improvisation and choreography—you might imagine how the tone of Hay's voice would shift your responses to the instruction, or how she might read her notes for the process before addressing the dancers, but change the instructions slightly at the moment of their enunciation, as she responds to the quality of attention the dancers bring:

> Every performer is responsible for moving her two articles: the blanket and the candle. You move each article forward, in increments of space and time, in any combination, order, frequency, duration. You choose when, how, and where to move, while staying within the parameters of the group and the overall spatial pattern, more or less.
>
> Work related activity with the blanket can be opening it, folding it, spreading it out, holding it up, wrapping it around, carrying it forward, or piling it up.
>
> Work related activity with the candle can be carrying it forward, lifting it, lowering it, or moving it along the floor. (p. 18)

Although these instructions are specific, they also leave room for each group of dancers to riff on the movement theme that Hay has outlined. As Irigaray (2002) argues, "[s]peech thus escapes the calculation that dominates our time" (p. 23) as does the language we bring to creative/pedagogical practices, as it invites contingency and intuitive response. Imperatives can both open and limit the field of a learning process. In the narratives that form the next part of this article, we present a series of pedagogical stories through the form of imperatives, addressing you, the reader, directly. In this way, we call upon our readers to cohabitate these stories with us. We consider the style of the imperative as forming a point of praxis between the abstraction of theory and the multi-sensorial complexity of concrete experience—allowing conceptual things to make sense in material contexts and material agency to lead the formation of knowledge. The instructional style of these narratives aims to engage you beyond the print, to sense, feel, and navigate these worlds with a sense of immediacy—to have a relationship with knowing, being, and doing in specific pedagogical contexts. Using the imperative may raise the stakes for readers, enhancing both the sense of the need to *participate* in the worlds of these narratives, and their direct implication in the research. The first of these narratives is drawn from an activity Esther led, which drew on her research into landmarks on the university of Auckland campus (Fitzpatrick & Bell, 2016). This research examined sites where our lines of history and moments in time converged to form knots in the ghost-filled landscape of the campus.

Writing Tasks for Intra-Active Pedagogies

An integral part of our work as Fellows on the "writing, writing everywhere" project involved organizing and meeting each week, taking turns leading and reporting on different writing experiments, and running two intensive full-day workshops with colleagues and postgraduate students. Esther, in a set of tutorials for a Bachelor of Education course on "diversity," developed a set of performative writing tasks that required students to engage with the "sensory" knowledge of their communities. Alys developed writing tasks for undergraduate dance students to encourage engagement with the idea of a body as fluid, porous and intra-active, rather than fixed and bounded by the skin. Both intended to bring to attention embodied knowledge and the relationship between knowing, being, and doing with "matter." Consequently, several of our writing explorations involved engaging and performing with "matter." The ontology underpinning our practice could broadly be defined as "new-materialist," which is a growing field of scholarship that addresses and questions the anthropocentric assumptions underlying much academic research to consider all matter as carrying force, agency, and vibrancy in enabling human action (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010). Working through a new materialist ontology allows us to consider how pedagogical elements bound with the sensory, tactile, tonal, relational, and atmospheric can be seen to actively shape processes of knowledge creation.

The four narratives we provide are specific, direct examples of how new materialist scholarship might translate to performative pedagogical practice—challenging anthropocentric research conventions by highlighting the agency of materialities and atmospheres. In this way, we enable a radical destabilization of core principles of western philosophy such as relations between subject and object, matter and meaning, inanimate and animate things. We aim to disrupt and problematize the assumption that human activity is at the centre of the world and its ethics (Battista, 2012, p. 62).

1. Narrating Pedagogies of Qualitative Inquiry: The University of Auckland

Esther led us on a walk through the campus, focussing on intra-actions between materials and bodies. In this directed walk through the space, Esther's stories peeled the decades away, allowing us to sense a time when the land was owned in patchwork pieces and boundary walls were yet to be built. This walk brought into focus our lives as entwined with the actual place and materials of the university. We were drawing on the work of Tim Ingold (2009):

> [L]ives are led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places else where ... wayfaring ... describe[s] the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement. It is as wayfarers, then, that human beings inhabit the earth. ... [H]uman existence is ... place-binding. It unfolds not in places but along paths. Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants, meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that life-lines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot. (p. 33).

Esther beckons us to walk—and we follow.

Imperative one: Walking and writing

Let us walk, first down to the solitary lamppost, standing at the top of a hill guarding a tree-lined, winding path. The lamppost looks like something from Narnia—otherworldly on the edge of this city park. An old park bench stands close by, resting, as the autumn leaves dance widely around and through the wrought iron legs.

Look behind the park bench, at the sign that reads "Beach," directing our gaze down the winding path. Many years ago, my great-great-grandmother wrote a letter about her childhood, and the story of the Māori fishermen singing while fixing their nets and loudly at times doing the haka when going out fishing. When you look down the winding path to the city below, there is no longer any sign of a beach, and the Māori fisherman's songs have been replaced by the sound of cars on the motorway.

Let us walk up the road to the old Choral Hall, a large cold stone neo-classical building built in 1872. Now the Faculty of Arts. This was where my colonial ancestors, both Jewish and Christian, gathered for concerts, for important council meetings, for dances and religious meetings. Imagine the different voices, the changing fashions, the arguments, the footfall of generations, and whispers of ghosts.

Take a turn around the corner and down the path towards the centre of the campus. Students are lined up waiting by the food truck, an assortment of bags slung over shoulders, enjoying the brief pool of sunshine. The food truck is parked beside an old barracks wall that crosses through the campus. Avril's ancestor was responsible for the design and building of the wall.[1] If you look up, you can see the holes where the cannons would poke through to deter any attack from Māori. An attack that never happened. Come touch the wall. Feel its rough scoria surface, an artefact of a long-ago volcano. We are standing here, on this hill, on this university campus, once a barracks for colonial soldiers, once a Pa for the local Māori, once upon a time a volcano.

Walk up the path and over the road to the Old Merchant houses, and at the end of the row you will see the Jewish synagogue. Houses, places where my family lived and worshiped. Buildings with echoes of another age that now belong to the University. Imagine the bride and groom standing under the canopy exchanging oaths in the synagogue on the corner, and later the wedding party out on the summer lawn, the women with their long lace dresses and parasols.

On our way, back to our writing room, let us pass by Old Government House, now the University Staff Common Room. The large rooms once housed Governor Grey's collection of books. Can you see the corner where my great-great-grandmother as a child would spend hours curled up with a book? Looking into the library now you see a large empty room, no books, just large leather armchairs where academics lounge and read the news on their laptops.

Pull your jacket closer, the sun has gone. These large trees we walk under also immigrated to this place. Some of them Avril's ancestor brought with him, a pocket full of acorns from Windsor, England. Those large ancient oaks now spread their branches wide over the University campus.

Back in our writing room we decide to spend 20 minutes just writing in response to the walk. When sharing our writing, we realized how our lives are each knotted in this place. One Research Fellow described the three generations of a family that spend a large part of their lives at the university—in various offices and a crèche. How her father had immigrated to New Zealand to work at the University, how he would take visitors for historic walks around the campus grounds. How time in childhood was spent on this campus, echoes of "crushes" in her undergraduate years, and now the university crèche holds a part of her daughters' childhood. For this writer, endless family stories are interwoven into the life and atmospheres and spaces of the university. Alys tells the story of falling in love on this campus. How the walls, the paths, the rooms echo memories of the relationship that led to her family, her life as a mother of two daughters. She recalls rushing to the bus to get home to breastfeed babies, the kids coming to visit her office and pawing through her drawers. The stories shared highlighted Ingold's (2009) deep, knotted entanglements of relationship between the human and nonhuman, that originated within our workplace.

We all had stories of the old tree in the park opposite. Of our children climbing and crawling over its branches, of past encounters with the same tree before the time of children, and I wondered if my great-great-grandmother, too, had encountered this same tree. When the tree, like Auckland, was still in its youth.

2. Embodied Memory and Writing: Faculty of Education and Social Work

As part of the fellowship collaboration in what we call "Creative Critical Writing," Esther introduced several writing activities into a B.Ed. degree course on diversity to enhance students' understanding of key content. One activity asked students to write a "Story of Our Street"—exploring diversity in our communities through sensory memory. Using key ideas from Paula Morris's (2019) work on creative nonfiction, students were scaffolded to respond to a set of questions and provocations.

Imperative two

Diversity in our community
Imagine the main street of your community. Now write a narrative that takes us for a walk down that street. Remember all of your senses.

- *Where are we? What time of day are we walking down the street?*
- *Describe what you see, hear, smell, taste, feel. Think about:*
    - *Footpath*
    - *Road*
    - *Plants*
    - *Buildings*
    - *Signs*
    - *Language*
- *Who might we meet?*
- *What might they be doing? Saying?*
- *Who do you choose to introduce me to? How do you describe them?*

As students wrote, chatted, fiddled with their pencils, there were a few who were hesitant to start. Esther sat with each group, asking them the questions from the side, and getting them to write their answers down. These questions required particular details that were easy to respond to initially—for example “name the street,” “what time of day are you most often there?” As the students began to write, they settled into the process and were then able to respond to more sensory details. When the students had written for 20 minutes, they then shared their narratives with peers. A few chose to share their writing with the class, so for a few moments, we were all taken to the noisy street corner where young children wagging school gathered, or the leafy suburban street where families gathered with water guns and loud laughter, or we walked past the wooden bungalow with washing flapping in the wind, and smelt the curry cooking in the kitchen. Finding a place the students were familiar with, a physical street they had walked down, their intra-action with the material world enabled them to draw on sensory knowledge and to write their own stories of diversity in their communities. They were able then to link the embodied experience to the content of the lectures on ethnicity, culture, identity, language, and socioeconomic difference.

3. Embodied Memory and Writing: Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries

Leaving the Faculty of Education in suburban Epsom, with its wide streets, tuis in the trees, and the kowhais beginning to flower, Esther (magically as authors do) takes us to the Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries in the city’s downtown, amongst the skyscrapers and the tiny boutique coffee shops and the lawyers and engineers. We arrive in the dance studio, where Alys is leading the students enrolled in a Dance Writing first-year course, to entangle dance improvisation and writing practices.

Imperative three

To begin our warm-up, please begin to move around the room, soft in the ankles, soft in the knees, pliant through the soles of your feet, translating the ground through your structure, responding to surface, moved by surface. Noticing gravity, using gravity to find a momentum pathway, noticing weight and letting your weight fall forward a little, your legs soften a little, your feet responding to the surface of the floor, falling with momentum, falling a little into the space.

Let’s think about what it is to be a body, let’s consider all matter in the room as a body—floor, walls, windows, bags, drink bottles, clothing, people, chairs, other furniture, empty coffee cups, all these things are cellular bodies, all coextensive and part of each other, all part of the bigger body of which the walls, ceiling, and floor form the skin. So, moving with the understanding that we are interconnected parts of one body. Every movement in the structure will impact on the structure of the whole. Moving in response to the movements around you, allowing a shift in motion or space somewhere else in the room to initiate the structure of your movement. Moving only in response, allowing the room to move you.

See a gap between two bodies, and move into that gap, as you move through the gap, find a new gap, so the choreography is a constant weaving between the many bodies of different orders in the room.

Sensing the ecology of the space, sensations of fluidity and brittleness, relationships of synchronicity and abruptness, differences in speed and vibration, the possibilities of connectedness and tension. Notice your singular patterning through the space, the repetition and sameness in your own trajectory, can you shift the movement pattern that you are currently riding? Can you allow the habits of your body to become other?

Sensing the body of the room, moving into a state of fluid responsiveness with all the cellular structures that make up our collective body. Tuning with the vibrations of the matter around you. Connecting on a plane of speed. Connecting on the plane of looseness or tension—the dynamic play of energy. Connecting on the plane of intensity. Tune with another, tune with another's system of organization, the folds, the density, the quality.

And our body is slowing by 50%, and slowing by 50% again, and allowing your structure to soften into the floor, to find a point of rest, letting the floor take your weight, letting your weight fall through your skin, held by gravity.

And sensing your structure as a landscape. Noticing the sensation of clothing as a second skin. Notice where your skin exchanges with the air, notice the temperature and quality of the floor, noticing parts of your structure in contact with the floor and parts of your body lifting away from it. Imagine: If your body is a landscape, what kind of landscape is it? Is it more fluid or more earth? Are there flowers, trees, rocks growing? Lakes, rivers, mountains? Are surfaces rough or smooth? Is this landscape of your body inhabited by creatures? What kind of creatures? How do they move?

From here Alys led the class to freewrite, working between writing and drawing, writing from the sense of bodies of different forms being coextensive and interconnected rather than separate, writing with a sense of ecology and landscape where imagination and relationship determine the sensing and movement of a body.

Making and Writing

Our work is ongoing. The aim of our continued exploration using performative writing is to enhance our students' learning, to deepen their understanding, and to encourage more creative forms of meaning making that realize the more-than-human relationships. We envision writing as a material practice in which atmospheres, devices, tools, spaces, relationships and objects actively enable research to form across studio and desk-based contexts.

Ingold (2013) contends that in making something, we are engaged in "transformational" rather than "documenting" learning (pp. 2–8), and proposes that there is a difference between such "knowing from the inside" and learning *about* something from text. In this workshop, we're offering a series of provocations for artist-researchers to write with the logic of creative practices. We're exploring methods for moving types of knowledge between sensory experiences of art making (including performance, musical composition, and other studio practices) and models for critical and reflective writing.

A post-human pedagogy supports this inquiry as we explore multi-modal translations between doing and writing.

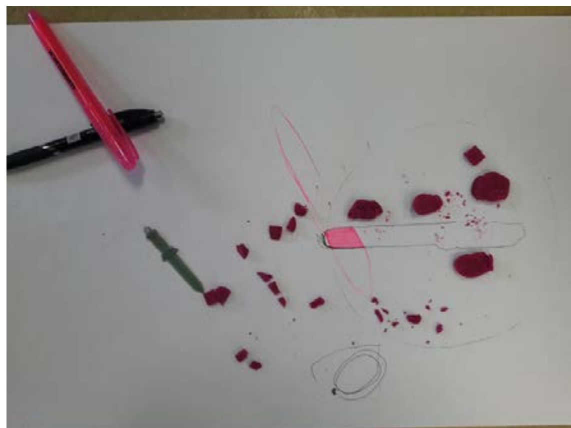

Fig. 1: Material and stuff

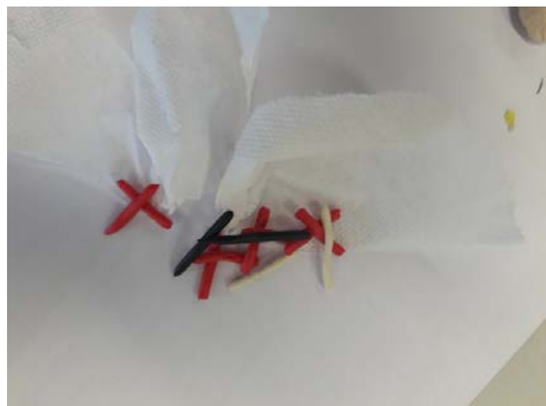

Fig. 2: Tissue with plasticine

Two students work together with coloured plasticine, and we find the plasticine has reached a ripe old age. It flakes in their hands, becoming the shards of a comet in a tactile, miniature, primary-colour, page-framed galaxy (see Figure 3). Colours of plasticine demand collaboration from artists who are led by its delicate textures to better understand the thinking of material in their different research projects. This sense-making collaboration between plasticine, artist-researchers, and words (Figure 4) leads us to consider things differently—the notion of parts and wholes, of the different qualities that make up a body of knowledge, the sense of following the texture of an idea and letting one's experience of sensory pleasure lead the research, as new possibilities of composition/thinking arise in relational, conversational, and multi-modal spaces. As demonstrated in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4, the page became an entanglement of thought, words, shapes, lines, and plasticine. A performance of writing through "an entangled creation of knowledge that "breaks through" pre-established notions of non/human agencies in order to produce encounters in which political and material intra-act to be "part of that nature that we seek to understand" (Barad, 2007, p. 26; Revelles Benavente & Cielemecka, 2016).

Fig. 3: Flakes of plasticine

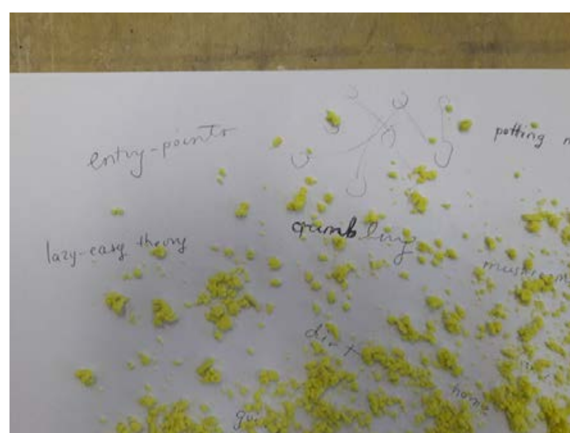

Fig. 4: Words and plasticine

The lump of plasticine
Nestles into a body
Warm hands
Press and stretch

The lump of plasticine
Resists the stretch
Crumbles
Delicately

In the tension between
Human and material agency
New and unpredictable
Possibilities occur

We wrote this poem reflecting on how students drew on sensory details to write through the workshop. Some students played with the writing tools, making prints, playing with the font and thickness of the stroke, with repetition of words, and shape on the page. Others wrote creative nonfiction. Many commented on how they began to write about the making and then their writing went off somewhere else. Playing and performing with plasticine had opened a space to imagine differently.

Where to Next?

This article narrated specific performative writing pedagogies we engaged with in one year of a research Fellowship. It highlights the importance of imperatives to engage writers in creative and post-human—intra-action pedagogies of practice. Researching post-human relations through specific performative writing practices enables a testing of abstract concepts through material and temporal means. Distinctions between theory and practice dissolve as haptic explorations generate theoretical insights and philosophical provocations extend how we make sense of our worlds. As teachers and writers, we continue to explore and hone our skills in embodied relational practices. We open the window to feel the fresh breeze, to hear the bird outside our window, to breathe in the scent of a spring rain, supping on the fresh nutty tasting coffee, as our body leans over the computer, writing, writing, writing.

Note

1. Avril Bell is a colleague and friend. She and Esther coauthored the following paper: Fitzpatrick, E., & Bell, A. (2016). Summoning up the ghost with needle and thread. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, 5*(2), 1–24. doi:10.1525/dcqr.2016.5.2.6.

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Performance, the Arts, and Curricular Change

Sharada Gade

Abstract

The need to improvise and take action as a practitioner draws on Schwab's notion of deliberation and the Greek concept of *poiesis*. Inspired by an impromptu discussion with students at a computer summer camp, the author uses the works of Sarason, Eisner, and Stenhouse to show how practitioner performance, student audience, educational inquiry, teacher as researcher, and curricular change are interrelated.

Background

This article examines the many actions taken by practitioners and the meaning their actions have in the classroom. In particular, I consider the deliberation of actions, as described by Joseph Schwab (1970):

> Deliberation is complex and arduous. It treats both ends and means and must treat them as mutually determining one another. It must try to identify, with respect to both, what facts may be relevant. It must try to ascertain the relevant facts in the concrete case. It must try to identify the desiderata in the case. It must generate alternative solutions. It must make every effort to trace the branching pathways of consequences which may flow from each alternative and affect desiderata. It must then weigh alternatives and their costs and consequences against one another, and choose, not the right alternative, for there is no such thing, but the best one. (p. 618)

Schwab not only recognizes the need for practitioners to consider both ends and means when taking action, but also the importance of choosing alternatives that best achieve desirable outcomes. To fully understand the meaning that such actions convey, I turn to the Greek notion of *poiesis*, which draws attention to what is achieved in the completion of any action. Unlike *praxis* or doing, which conveys meaning in its satisfactory conduct, poiesis is the making or production of meaning, subsisting in the work that is left behind once actions have been taken. Nicholas Lobkowicz (1977) explains,

> Praxis or doing is that human mode of conduct that contains its meaning in itself and whose completion therefore consists of its satisfactory accomplishment. The constantly recurring Greek example is flute playing, but all ethical and political actions are interpreted according to this model. Poiesis, or making, by contrast is production: its completion and meaning subsist in the work that it leaves behind. He who builds a ship or attempts to cure a sick man has ultimately achieved nothing as long as the ship is not finished or health is not restored. By contrast, he who acts as a responsible member of the polis never finishes, because every political action entails others, but he can at each instant be at his goal, which is to act as a good man. The authentic political action, as the Greeks understand it, is not something like a path or step *to* completion but a part of the completion itself. (p. 18)

Lobkowicz identifies actions taken by practitioners with poiesis, whose significance lies in helping them attain greater good in their taking and completing every step. My own attention to poiesis came about

while reflecting on the transformative nature of efforts practitioners take while conducting classroom interventions (Gade, 2016a). I became aware of Schwab's notion of deliberation while teaching a curriculum studies course to postgraduate students. This further allowed me to draw on the works of Seymour Sarason, Elliot Eisner, and Lawrence Stenhouse, whose contributions are explored in this article.

Improvisation at the Summer Camp

Organized by a colleague at my university, the 60 middle school students I met at their summer camp were selected from different district schools in the Indian state of Telangana. The camp was held next to a training centre in the capital Hyderabad; it had audiovisual and other facilities that were lacking in most government schools. In this weeklong residential camp for girls and boys, the students were familiar with computer-based instructional modules in various subjects. My colleague asked me to talk to students about widespread social issues and create a PowerPoint presentation to help guide the discussion. I was also asked to speak in English with students whose mother tongues were most likely the Indian languages of Telugu or Hindi. This activity took two hours and was held at the beginning of the school day at 9 a.m. As a former teacher and now researcher, I decided to use my extensive collection of photographs downloaded from the *National Geographic* website to help mediate discussion about the many commonalities in our lives. The images depicted were diverse: a woman from the Ladakh area dressed in traditional attire; a Vietnamese fisherman catching crabs at dawn; a Hakka house in China; and an Indian villager squatting on a roadside pavement. I asked the students to work in small groups and share their thoughts about these various scenes. Next, I asked the whole group the following question: "What is the nature of our world and what makes us human?"

While this activity proved to be successful, I had a great deal of trepidation at the outset and asked myself many questions: "How should I start off my session after being introduced to the students? What should I do first to allow my students and I to fill the two hours with teaching and learning?" I knew that my years of teaching could come into play while reading the subtext of a student's query or facilitating a larger group conversation. I prepared slides to guide the discussion, but the question still remained: "How was I to *actually* start?" It is with these thoughts that I walked into the classroom that summer morning, greeted students after being introduced to them by my colleague, and asked if I could speak in English. I also mentioned that I could speak in Hindi and Telugu if needed—a declaration that helped the students and I share some common ground. I then mentioned that we would discuss some pictures I had brought for them. On the spur of the moment, I told the students that the languages we spoke everyday borrowed words from other languages. For example, just as *bat* and *ball* had become part of the south Indian language of Telugu, words with Indian roots like *curry, shampoo*, and *bungalow* had also become part of the English language. The discussion then took an unexpected turn. I asked the students if they were aware that the Indian word *chuddies* (i.e. underpants) had recently been added to the Oxford English Dictionary. Being on the verge of adolescence, most students kept a straight face when I my mentioned chuddies. A few squirmed in their seats, not wanting to appear embarrassed about discussing undergarments, away from the privacy of their homes. I'm sure many of them were asking themselves: "What was this teacher talking about? What might she do next?" At any event, my impromptu discussion

about chuddies definitely captured the students' attention. We then moved on to watching and discussing my selection of photographs. In retrospect, I savoured my improvisation, my spur-of-the-moment diversion in our conversation to the English lexicon. It was a performance that broke the ice, allowing me to interact successfully with the students. I had certainly not planned for these actions, yet my coming across a related newspaper item recently led my thoughts in this direction. My actions were not only deliberative in my choosing to draw the attention of students to the English language we spoke, but they also exhibited poiesis in bringing about a sharper focus on the greater truth that all languages borrow words from one another. As practitioners, each of us perform many such actions in our own teaching, tailored to the contexts we routinely orchestrate. My mention of chuddies in this paper also stands for practitioner actions and performances more generally, whose efficacy in productive learning environments is something I intend to examine.

Teaching as a Performing Art: Seymour Sarason

Based on his study of American schools in the 1970s, Seymour Sarason (1990) makes two insightful observations about educational reform: that conditions for learning in schools that exist for students must also be made available for teachers, and that students must be helped to negotiate the growing gulf between what is learnt in school and the world outside (Gade, 2016b). I view my ability to use photographs for my students as an outcome of the very freedom I was given as practitioner. My alluding to the English lexicon was also an opportunity for them to bridge the English they were learning at school to its contemporary growth outside. In *Teaching as a Performing Art*, Sarason (1990) makes three assertions that resonate with my present study—the first of which concerns the character of a performing artist.

> A performing artist is one who uses him or herself to convey an emotion, or situation, or imagery intended to be meaningful and stimulating to an audience. The "message," whatever the medium, is for the purpose of evoking in others the response "I understand and believe what I am seeing and believing. You have not left me cold, you have engaged me." It is an engagement that leads symbolically (and hopefully) to a marriage: artists and audiences are *willingly* in a new, reciprocal relationship. In the case of the teacher, engagement is a sustained one; it is not a one-night stand. (p. 6)

Sarason draws attention to many significant aspects, beginning with how performing artists are themselves the source of the emotion or imagery they intend to convey. Finding out that chuddies had been added to the Oxford English Dictionary motivated me to connect in a similar way with my students. Next is the reciprocal relationship performing artists are able to achieve, so that audiences relate to and believe what practitioners say. It is possible that alluding to the use of common words like bat and ball in Telugu helped my students and I in this direction. Finally, as all practitioners will recognize, my performance that morning had resulted from my ongoing commitment to teaching over the years. Equally noteworthy is Sarason's (1990) second assertion, which examines the audience of a performing artist.

> Audiences are silent performers. They are silent but not passive, at least they did not come expecting to be inwardly passive. They come expecting to see themselves and a slice of life differently. They do not expect to be bored, unmoved and sorry they came. They come to be transported, not to remain their accustomed selves. Audiences expect actors to be their roles, however different that "being" is from their everyday being. To the extent the performer can engender that illusion in the audience, the artist has discharged his or her obligation to the audience. (p. 14)

Far from being passive performers, audiences come to expect an experience that will set their sights higher and enable them to develop a fresh perspective on what may have previously known with certainty, like words in a lexicon. The dialectic between audiences and performers is a relationship inadequately treated in teacher preparation programs. Not sufficiently theorized and understood, the dynamics of this very dialectic is also learnt at great personal cost when practitioners start teaching. Sarason's third assertion is taken verbatim from Arthur Jersild's work *When Teachers Face Themselves*.

> The teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance. ... Such an endeavour means an effort to overcome the prevailing tendency in education to encourage the learner to understand everything except himself. ... It means an effort to achieve a better integration of thinking and feeling on the part of both children and adults. (Jersild, 1955, as found in Sarason, 1999, pp. 52–53)

In addition to highlighting how performing artists draw on individual selves to inspire an audience, the above passage calls attention to a vital characteristic of education—that the enterprise of education has erroneously come to expect learners to understand everything except their own selves. It is possible that my mention of chuddies, and the resultant discomfort some students showed that morning, sensitized them to the intimate nature of words. Such an instance exemplifies Sarason's attention to the need of striking a balance between feeling and thinking or emotion and cognition in teaching and learning.

Arts-Based Inquiry: Elliot Eisner

Eisner has long held a mirror to mainstream views in education—which are influenced by a positivist philosophy of science—and finds arts-based inquiry to complement such views in an insightful manner. Eisner points out that artistic forms of expression, including performances, cannot be strictly codified, and are valid in educational contexts to the extent that they inform audiences. Focused on human experiences, artistic approaches are also flexible, enabling practitioners to adopt diverse approaches in communicating with their audiences. Eisner (1981) thus advocates arts-based educational inquiry,

> Artistic approaches to research are less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning. What art seeks is not the discovery of the laws of nature about which true statements, or explanations can be given, but rather the creation of images that people will find meaningful and from which their fallible and tentative views of the world can be altered, rejected, or made more secure. Truth implies singularity and monopoly. Meaning implies relativism and diversity. Truth is more closely wedded to consistency and logic, meaning to diverse interpretation and coherence. Each approach to the study of educational situations has its own unique perspective to provide. Each sheds its own unique light on the situations that humans seek to understand. (p. 9)

Aligning personally governed meaning and significance with an abiding search for the truth, Eisner takes into account the social and human diversity of our everyday lives. In the passage below, he discusses the difference between the "craftsman in the classroom" and the "artist in the classroom."

> The craftsman in the classroom has the repertoire, is skilled in its use, and manages the performance quite well indeed. But the craftsman creates essentially nothing new as a performer. This person's mark is known by the skill with which he or she uses known routines. ... The artist in the classroom invents new ones in the process. Such modes of performance are not plentiful, and they require ingenuity and all of the skill that the person possesses. The artist is rarer than the craftsperson. (Eisner, 1983, p. 11).

In the context of the summer camp discussed earlier, using photographs as educational resources can be considered an act of "craftmanship," while my improvisation in discussing chuddies to establish a rapport with the students can be viewed as a type of "performance" or "artistry." Two clarifications are helpful here: First, by the "arts," Eisner does not limit himself to visual arts, music, or dance in making the above distinction. Second, he does not view practitioner performances by artists as something routine. In fact, Eisner deems those improvisational acts to be artistic insofar as teachers derive aesthetic satisfaction from them. Highlighting the aesthetic nature of rewards associated with such acts, Eisner (1983) elaborates,

> The aesthetic in teaching is the experience secured from being able to put your own signature on your own work – to look at it and say it was good. It comes from the contagion of excited students discovering the power of a new idea, the satisfaction of a new skill, or the dilemma of an intellectual paradox that once discovered creates. It means being swept up in the task of masking something beautiful – and teachers do make their own spaces and places. They provide, perhaps more than they realise, much of the score their students will experience. (p. 12)

Speaking to practitioners who enjoy what they do—and whose students are swept away by the beauty of the moment—Eisner reiterates the manner in which practitioners derive aesthetic satisfaction. I too shared in this satisfaction as an instructor at that summer camp, leaving an indelible imprint on students' ubiquitous use of words. In contrast with a rule-governed approach that could be personally stifling to both me and my students, I consider my improvisation to be deliberative, display poiesis, and draw also on my inner self. Indeed, Eisner declares artistry to be the very apotheosis of any performance, one that can be observed and shared within any community. Understandably, these actions are carried out in varying degrees in diverse educational contexts as well.

Teacher as Artist Is Researcher: Lawrence Stenhouse

Stenhouse (1988) considers teaching to be an art, an exercise of skill expressive of meaning. He believes the form in which this meaning is expressed allows learners to understand what is being taught and/or learned.

> All good art is an inquiry and an experiment. It is by virtue of being an artist that the teacher is a researcher. ... The artist is the researcher par excellence ... engaged in inquiry, in research and development ... And this development, though it involves improvement of technique, is not for the sake of technique. It is for the sake of the expression of a truth in a performance which challenges criticism in those terms. (p. 47)

Elaborating upon Eisner's position that artistic activities are those in which practitioners derive aesthetic satisfaction, Stenhouse considers art to involve experiment and inquiry—by virtue of which teachers as artists *are* researchers. Based on his extensive work with teachers, he asserts that curricular reform efforts must emphasize the teacher's development as an artist—thus also recognizing the role of teacher as a researcher. A proponent of teacher collectives to both express solidarity and derive political power, Stenhouse (1988) views in-service professional development as one in which experienced teachers can work on their own art. He views any teacher training to effect change to be a nonstarter, since teachers are primarily the ones who need to become artists, conduct research, and/or initiate change,

> As a starting point teachers must want change, rather than others wanting to change them. That means that the option of professional development leading toward professional satisfaction of a kind that brings an enhancement of self must be made clear and open to teachers. Teachers have been taught that teaching is instrumental. When we say that teaching is an art, we are saying that the craft of teaching is inseparable from the understanding taught. In short, teaching is intrinsic. (p. 50)

Agreeing with Eisner's view on aesthetic satisfaction and Jersild and Sarason's need for self-reliance, Stenhouse wants teachers to recognize the central role they play in achieving curricular reform. Moreover, Stenhouse (1988) asserts below that there is "no absolute and unperformed knowledge."

> The artist is the researcher whose inquiry expresses itself in performance of his or her art rather than (or as well as) in a research report. In an essentially practical art, like education, all the research and all the in-service education we offer should support that research toward performance on the part of the teacher. For there is in education no absolute and unperformed knowledge. In educational research and scholarship the ivory towers where the truth is neglected are so many theatres without players, galleries without pictures, music without musicians. Educational knowledge exists in, and is verified or falsified in, its performance. (p. 51)

Stenhouse here helps to bring my discussion—which began with performers and audiences—full circle. He posits that any educational knowledge both exists and can be verified or falsified only in its performance. Similarly, I view the act of drawing my students' attention to the way living languages borrow from contemporary usage, to be held up to the same performative scrutiny. In addition to knowing bat and ball in Telugu, or shampoo and bungalow in English, my students might also understand the use of the expression *chuddy buddy* (i.e. when referring to a friend from one's early childhood, played with while dressed up in informal clothing). Equally important is Stenhouse's view that educational research cannot solely be the domain of ivory towers and must bear the quality of being viable for performance in day-to-day practice. Underlying Stenhouse's stance on the performative viability of research is his premise that teachers as artists are researchers who derive intrinsic satisfaction from curricular change. A nuanced meaning thus underlies Stenhouse's (1975) famous declaration: "It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it" (p. 208).

Conclusion

In terms of theory and practice, my research praxis led me to formulate my objective and tool in dialectical unity in this study and address ontological issues in an epistemological manner (Gade, 2017). The insightful work of Sarason, Eisner, and Stenhouse showed how diverse aspects such as practitioner self, student audiences, arts-based inquiry, teacher as artist becoming researcher, and curricular change were interrelated.

I thus came to examine the nature of the deliberation I exercised as a practitioner with new students at a summer camp. In drawing their attention to words being added to the English lexicon, I brought to fruition a dialectic that lay between the means and ends available to me. As recognized by Schwab, there was no right way to carry out this task. If I were to work with a smaller group of students or with those in their own school premises, I would have achieved my goal quite differently, starting anew. However, my ability to capture the students' interest that summer morning made the pedagogical moment come alive and produce something from seemingly nothing. Exemplifying the Greek notion of poiesis, I was able to aim for the greater good in its very completion, something practitioners carry out quite routinely in their own teaching.

Next, the works of Sarason, Eisner, and Stenhouse enabled me to theoretically reflect on practitioner performance. Sarason spoke of a believability that accounts for how student audiences willingly participate in their learning. Equal importance was also placed on their disposition as an audience, geared to see the world around them in a better light. Eisner next identified those educational acts—in which practitioners derive aesthetic satisfaction—as artistic. Fraught with intellectual risk taking, these attempts have the potential to create newer spaces for teacher and student learning in schools. Moreover, such attempts characterize scientific research according to Stenhouse, whose notion of inquiry is grounded in the kind of change practitioners themselves seek. The rewards for such attempts are not only intrinsic, but also ratified in public performances alone. This is why Stenhouse sought teacher collectives to both gain solidarity and bring forth each other's performances as inquiries for wider discussion. Sarason speaks of teacher performance in alluding to performing artists, while Stenhouse uses the term in relation to teachers bringing about curricular change. These two perspectives are not in opposition. Rather, they are enriched by Eisner's attention to the aesthetic satisfaction practitioners derive in orchestrating their own performances—whose grasp now seems less mysterious and more nuanced in terms of the interconnections identified in this study.

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Educators' Perceptions of Performance-Based Approaches in Teaching Difference With Youth

Madison E. Gaudry-Routledge and Marni J. Binder

Abstract

Recent research into critical pedagogy supports the implementation of performance-based practices into the classroom. This qualitative research explored the pragmatic ways in which youth, ages 8-17, are taught in Canada's, specifically Ontario's, education system on topics of difference and power. Through semi-structured interviews, four elementary and high school educators described their experiences using performance-based teaching in the classroom. A thematic analysis revealed that teachers found including such practices empowered students and influenced their understanding of their own identities as well as the systemic oppression of marginalized groups.

Background

Over the past 20 years, many Western countries have experienced significant demographic shifts (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009; Daniel, 2016; Duffy & Powers, 2018). The intersectionality of various identity markers is one of the many factors that have inevitably made contemporary classrooms significantly more diverse and complex (Gallagher, 2014; Duffy & Powers, 2018). Consequently, the role of a teacher now entails certain demands that greatly exceed traditional requirements, subject matter, and teaching models (Duffy & Powers, 2018). While the diversity of student populations continues to rapidly grow, the proportion of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse teachers continues to decline (Solomon & Singer; 2011; Matias & Mackey; 2016).

Education has a crucial role in both navigating through the challenges, while supporting and cultivating the potential of diversity (Denzin, 2018). Pedagogical frameworks must be action-oriented and directly address racism, as well as the inevitable complexities and intersections of difference within the educational system (Davis & Harrison, 2013; Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014; Dei, 2014a). This study explored the pragmatic ways in which individuals, particularly youth ages 8-17, are taught within the Canadian education system, specifically Ontario, on topics of racial, social, and cultural differences. Also considered are how this influences students' understanding of the construction of identity, and the systemic oppression of marginalized groups.

Research suggests that performance-based pedagogical methods have proven to be highly valuable in the area of addressing difference and influencing social change. This establishes a community that educates and empowers participants, including both students and educators, which is conducive to critical understanding and fostering a safe, equitable learning environment (Snyder-Young, 2011; Gallagher, 2014; Desai, 2017; Duffy & Powers, 2018). This article presents a qualitative descriptive study

on how four educators experienced incorporating performance-based teaching practices into their classrooms. By cultivating an open space, students were free to express themselves and pose questions that are often pushed to the periphery in classroom settings. The benefits and challenges of incorporating critical performance-based methods into their teaching demonstrated how such practices can help to facilitate social change.

Conceptual Framework

Guided by a critical pedagogical approach (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; 2003) and performance-based pedagogy, this study drew on the work of Augusto Boal (1979). Exploring how teachers address topics of difference and marginalization with their students through performance-based methods, raises questions about the significance of these, often unexamined, issues. (Solomon & Singer, 2011). Performance-based pedagogy has long been associated with critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education as it embodies reflective practices that hold the potential to subvert traditional epistemological frameworks of teachers and the importance of teaching through theatre (Duffy & Powers, 2018).

Student Learning Through Performative Critical Pedagogy

Various studies have noted the feasibility and success of integrating performance-based methods into elementary, middle school, and high school curriculums, particularly when addressing issues of power imbalance and oppression (Gallagher; 2014; Desai, 2017; Denzin, 2018; Duffy & Powers, 2018). Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto-Manning (2010) suggested that drama and performance-based art are highly valuable methods in the process of developing critical, anti-oppressive learning environments. They integrated performance-based teaching with Freire's (1970) emancipatory, problem-posing, critical pedagogy and the work of theatrical activist, Augusto Boal (1979).

Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) methodology was created with the purpose of providing people with an alternative language and the practical means to address and resist the various forms of oppression they experienced within their daily lives and systemically within society (Howard, 2004; Duffy, 2010; Desai, 2017). Desai's (2017) ethnographic study examined how several preservice teachers in a small, liberal arts, Catholic college in the Southern region of the United States, responded to topics of immigration in their elementary and high school classrooms. Incorporating Boal's (1979) TO, she noted that the playful nature of this practice where students can interact with each other and take on roles, allowed her to address challenging topics, such as immigration, with her class in ways that appeared less threatening while simultaneously highlighting the importance of the issues.

Boal's primary interest was his work with adults. Drawing on Boal (1979), Duffy and Vettraino's (2010) research and performative pedagogical approach acknowledged the lived realities of youth. Duffy (2010) has long incorporated performance-based learning practices with his middle school and high school students, specifically through Boal's TO method of Forum Theatre and "spect-actors," where narratives of power and oppression are improvised multiple times by participants. His work highlighted and

depicted the various ways in which power manifests in individual behaviour as well as social institutions, and how power imbalances affect different groups. Central to Duffy's (2010) teaching approach was the focus on power dynamics through modalities other than speech, for example, images and movement. Students were encouraged to identify instances of oppression they experienced or noticed in their world and offered opportunities to develop an action plan for their futures.

Methodology

This research study was initially part of a graduate master's research paper that was completed in 2018. The narrow sample size speaks to the time restrictions placed on the research by the graduate program and is reflective of the challenges in recruiting participants. Given the high level of experience needed from eligible participants, some respondents of the study were not included, as they did not meet the necessary requirements. The aim of this qualitative critical ethnographic research design was to examine four educators' experiences and perceptions on the ways in which racial, cultural, and social difference are predominantly conceptualized within the education system and how through performance-based approaches, these issues can be addressed.

A descriptive research design incorporated critical ethnographic methods and used a thematic analysis approach (Creswell, 2014). Grbich (2013) noted that critical ethnography is best suited for research questions that involve how group identity is constructed and represented by dominant cultural institutions such as gender, race, the economy and politics, and whose agenda this ultimately serves. Structured and tactical sampling was used in order to obtain data from experienced teachers to provide enough information to suitably address the research questions (Sandelowski, 2000). Data collection included four semi-structured interviews, of approximately 60 minutes in length, and field notes which were obtained during one-on-one interviews with the researcher and participant in order to gain firsthand insight of educators' experiences using performance-based methods in their classrooms. The use of interviews enabled unique narratives to be told, providing the possibility to uncover and address alternative types of knowledge that otherwise may not be recognized (Olson, 2011). A thematic analysis approach allowed the descriptive data to be represented in a transparent way, drawing direct connections to the research questions and providing insight into these teachers' experiences (Grbich, 2013). A block-and-file approach was used for each research question until all responses had been blocked and filed under various general themes (Grbich, 2013). Those that were similar and arose from different research questions were combined to create overarching themes (Grbich, 2013). As a result, four themes emerged from the data, all of which were directly related to the research questions surrounding teachers' experiences with integrating performance-based teaching practices in their classrooms and were supported by direct quotes from each participant.

Recruitment and Participants

Participants in this study were experienced educators in the province of Ontario, Canada. They were either drama or dance specialists or generalists using performance-based methods in their regular teaching practices. Participant recruitment was through membership in a drama and dance education mailing list server. In order to be considered for the study, participants had to be an experienced educator for at least five years in an Ontario school board, currently teaching, and who regularly, or who had regularly in the past, practiced performance-based methods with youth between the ages eight and 18 in a classroom context. All four participants recruited were experienced teachers of over 10 years, who were currently using performance-based methods with their students in grade four to grade twelve classrooms. Research Ethics Board approval was obtained, and pseudonyms used.

Greg, a White male, was a certified high school English and drama teacher, and professional playwright employed in a diverse urban city in southwestern Ontario, where he taught for over a decade. Sasha identified herself as a Black female from the African Diaspora. She was a certified teacher, professional dancer, and dance teacher who has been teaching for over a decade. At the time, she worked for an Ontario school board, travelling to various elementary, middle school, and high schools on contract as an artist in residence. Nicole, a White female, was a certified drama and English teacher and teaching for over 15 years. She taught at a diverse high school in an urban southwestern Ontario city with students in grades nine through twelve. Kaitlin, a White female, was a certified English and drama teacher at an arts-based high school located in southwestern Ontario, teaching for over 15 years. She currently teaches English, drama, and gender studies to students in grades nine through twelve. Kaitlin has used drama and performance-based methods in her teaching for over 15 years.

Findings

Four central themes emerged out of the findings: motivating influences for including performance-based practices, practices in the classroom, perceived benefits observed, and challenges faced.

Motivating Influences for the Inclusion of Performance-Based Practices

All participants shared their personal reasons for integrating performance-based teaching practices into their classroom. Greg, Sasha, and Nicole all came from backgrounds as professional artists. Kaitlin developed an interest in performance early on in her schooling and continued this work through graduate courses.

Greg's experiences within the professional theatre community helped develop his understanding of performance and performance-based learning, making it an integral part of his everyday teaching practices with students. His approach focused on implementing a sense of structure and collectivity in the classroom, which would apply to many different subjects as it focused on skill development through repetition, practice, and collaboration. This framework of performance-based learning provided students

with a model that allowed them to continuously practice and work towards academic and personal achievements.

Sasha's motivation to integrate performance-based practices into her teaching resulted from her own experiences growing up in an education system that lacked Black teachers and cultural representation that reflected her identity. Having been a professional dancer and dance teacher for many years, Sasha had a passion for the art of dance and performance. When she moved to Canada and began practicing forms of African dance, Sasha realized the power of both. The capacity for movement to tell stories, explore identity, build communities, and challenge traditional processes of learning was significant. Sasha noted that performative practices that encouraged self-exploration of identity and expression were particularly valuable for Black girls and young women.

> *Sasha: Imagine the young Black children who have never been taught about their roots or culture in the curriculum. They do not see themselves. I have a daughter coming up and I am trying to do this for her. We have to have these conversations now.*

Nicole further described the significance of including performance-based practices into her classroom as a way for students to build confidence, develop critical thinking skills, and overcome personal struggles. Nicole had always worked with students varying in levels of ability and mental health, as well as diverse socioeconomic statuses and cultures. She was passionate about helping students constantly dealing with a variety of complex issues, thoughts, and emotions. She personally identified with these students, stating that, "I was one of those students myself, I have gone through my own challenges and those experiences are what has pushed me to help kids that are going through their own issues."

Kaitlin identified the importance of including performance-based practices within her daily teaching routine as a way for young people to express their identity, address struggles, or topics they felt strongly about. This also stemmed from her own personal experience with drama in the education system and the desire to express herself freely in ways that were not typically encouraged in other classes.

While there were individual situated experiences connected to performance, which influenced their teaching approach, the motivating factors shared some commonalities. They all wanted to ensure the students' well-being and address concerns. The growing levels of diversity of classrooms prompted the implementation of various performance-based practices. Additionally, they unanimously agreed that performance-based practices were highly valuable in the teaching of racial, social, and cultural difference, thus confirming that alternative pedagogical approaches are necessary to adopt in the modern Canadian educational landscape.

Practices in the Classroom

Each participant discussed how performance was incorporated into their classroom in various ways. They conceptualized and structured their particular approaches to best suit their respective learning environment and address students' needs.

Greg integrated performance into all of his teachable subjects: Drama, English, Gender Studies, and Media Literacy. Given the high levels of identified anxiety in his classroom, the drama classes are heavily structured. His grade 12 class was in the early morning, which was challenging for many students who had jobs and disrupted home environments. In order to focus students and "collectivize the class," as he put it, he began each day with a warm-up.

> *Greg: I start with a physical warm-up, which is just a variation on the sun salutation. In this class there is a variety of talent and ability levels which makes it difficult to create community. When everyone is engaged in the same activity we begin to create a mutual sense of purpose. Then, we will immediately go into an improv warm-up where they go into improvisation techniques.*

When implementing performance-based practices into her classroom, Sasha adapted her subject matter to reflect the group of students she was teaching. She moved around to many different learning environments, showcasing her travelling exhibits or teaching as an artist in residence. Similar to Greg, Sasha's inclusion of dance in the classroom largely focused on integrating the process of performance into her daily teaching, where discussion and reflection were valued just as much as the movement aspect of a performative piece.

Her approach focused on the connection between movement, spirituality, and culture. She further expressed that her identity as an artist was central to her work and sense of being. While technical aspects of dance were important, Sasha focused on fostering a space where students, especially marginalized students, could begin to strengthen their relationship with their mind, body, and spirit through movement and self-reflection. She offered the following example:

> *So, just an experience I had a couple of weeks ago. I went up North and did a retreat with a bunch of young women and we were doing a beading exercise and just talking and a lot and I told them about how one day I was introduced to African dance and just hearing the drums and how it made my body feel, this connection that I never even knew ran through my blood or my muscle memory. And the room went quiet and I told them that we were all going to try it and that it wasn't so much about the steps, it is more so the connection in the steps and why they're doing the steps and it's more so just a rite of passage in the community where dance was just as much a part of their lives like going to the doctor, or graduating, or giving birth.*

Sasha believed that dance is a malleable art form that can explore a wide variety of topics and was committed to ensuring that students saw themselves represented in the subject matter.

Similar to Sasha and Greg, Nicole described the significance of the process of performance. Central to her teaching approach was the idea that critical discussion and performative exercises were not mutually exclusive, but rather, both highly valuable and necessary in the process of learning through these active practices.

> *Nicole: I think of it as process versus performance. I am a performance-based teacher and I use a professional theater-process-drama approach. I believe that kids should be able to explore subject matter, and acting, performing, using their voice allows them to do so. I incorporate a lot of performance-based exercises in my teaching, whether it's improv games, tableaux, or more scripted performance pieces.*

Like other participants, Kaitlin used various performance-based practices in her classroom that focused on the process, such as a discussion surrounding a particular topic and then explored through a performative approach. She incorporated concrete drama techniques into all of her teachable subjects.

As Kaitlin described:

> *This year, each group of students got a different source to work from. So, one group had a photograph from a Black Lives Matter protest, then another group had a piece of text, like a poem from Audrey Lorde, and then another group had a song, and they had to use some of the different techniques that we explored in class to critically engage with them. Each group then had to write a performance piece and present their work to the class. Afterwards, we debriefed and discussed the pieces.*

Using performance-based teaching approaches, such as improvisation, role-playing, scriptwriting, and Boal's (1979) TO techniques, provided students a space to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. New modes such as dance were also explored.

Perceived Benefits Observed by Teachers

All participants discussed the perceived benefits they observed through implementing performance-based practices into the classroom environment. Each one described how these methods were useful in addressing topics of power, difference, identity, and oppression. Greg described one of the main benefits of including performance-based practices into his daily teaching with his high school students is that they challenged predominant standardized models of education. Critical thinking was promoted, allowing students to explore subject matter freely.

> *Greg: Performance-based strategies encourage and allow students to think outside this idea of 'what is the right answer?' which is definitely important. It allows them to take control of the subject themselves. This is where we have to get to as we prepare kids for university now. How to take control of your subject matter, your learning and your understanding of it and not feeling like the answer lies outside of what you're doing.*

In his classroom, Greg noticed that students responded well to performance-based methods, which included both obvious forms of performance, such as script-based drama, as well as more subtle components of the process such as repetition and open dialogue. He noticed that students were able to express themselves through these approaches, which worked to normalize different forms of cultural expression and strengthen understandings of difference in the class. He found that these methods were particularly useful with his highly diverse class, as it offered students the tools to understand and articulate their lived experiences, which, in turn, helped to address symptoms of depression and anxiety that many of *them face due to a wide variety of socioeconomic and cultural factors.*

> *Greg: My classrooms are predominantly Black, and male. What we're doing now is dealing with issues of White supremacy and issues of phallocentrism. I'm using media imagery right now with my grade 12 class so I'll go through different media imagery and we'll discuss why certain images mean what they mean in relation to narratives, in relation to masculinity, femininity, race, and mythically normative identities.*

Sasha also perceived there to be several benefits from practicing performance-based methods with her students. She noticed that using performance was highly valuable in expressing aspects of identity and addressing social and cultural differences amongst students. While many of the White students that Sasha worked with enjoyed aspects of African Canadian culture, especially dance, they lacked the contextual knowledge of that art form. Sasha attempted to address this void of cultural awareness by combining dance with a dialogue about African Canadian culture and history.

Through the integration of performance-based methods, Sasha observed a significant increase in self-confidence among her students, particularly with the young, Black female students, as well as an overall improvement in class dynamics and students' personal habits.

Nicole also discussed her perceptions of the benefits of the performance-based practices. She explained:

> *Performance, being present, public speaking, it is all a part of building confidence and self-esteem. It allows students to have a voice and be heard. Drama actually allows students to be in different positions, which you don't really get anywhere else. Our vocal unit in particular, is really useful in helping students build that strength and confidence.*

She noticed that performance-based practices were highly beneficial to students whose first language was not English, where they were able to practice their verbal and nonverbal communication skills. This approach supported and prepared the students for different situations they may come across in their daily lives.

Lastly, Kaitlin observed many benefits of implementing performance-based practices with her students. She emphasized how the implementation of drama and performance in the classroom was useful in exploring topics of power and oppression with her students as it provided a visual example that resonated with young people. She noticed that her students developed a stronger sense of empathy, became more aware of their behaviour, and felt able to express their feelings and thoughts freely.

Through engaging in performance-based activities, Kaitlin observed her students becoming increasingly self-reflective and more critical of the world around them, specifically surrounding issues of power relations, oppression, and identity. Kaitlin offered an example of when she led a docu-drama unit with her grade 10 class where students took a specific event in history, researched it, and then created a performance piece around it. Since many of these events took place in various countries throughout the world, students portrayed different cultural identities. She noted that this activity led to a collective class discussion surrounding cultural appropriation and representation.

Although many of her students initially felt like they should be able to take on roles of characters of other races, and cultural backgrounds, they later came to the realization that this can often be inappropriate.

> *Kaitlin: There was one group, the group that did Japanese internment camps and they said, "I don't think we were responsible, I don't think we did enough research and we made stuff up and I don't think that was appropriate," which I thought was great. It was a really good learning experience.*

Further, this activity spoke to the influence of performance as being a deeply self-reflexive practice and valuable tool in developing one's understanding of identity, difference, and power, and communicating through conflict.

Challenges Faced

Greg described some of the challenges he experienced with implementing these strategies with his class. He felt that some of the issues commonly experienced by his students, such as high levels of anxiety and disrupted home situations, contributed to the behaviour in his class. He noted that many of them acted out and were disruptive as a way to make themselves feel more secure in their educational environment. He noted at times, his students' tendency to act out impeded his ability to engage effectively with the rest of the students during a particular activity.

> *Greg: There is a lot of acting out in classrooms right now because it makes students feel secure. Because everyone is reacting to the students' actions, in a sense, they are controlling everyone else.*

He also felt as though there was never enough time to complete every activity. This led to a bit of tension with students who felt like they needed more time to finish a particular exercise.

Sasha expressed that one of the issues she faced with implementing dance and other new practices in the classroom was that the school board did not prioritize performance-based learning. As a result, she has had to negotiate with administrators and other teachers who challenged her methods and attempted to control her work with her students. While not noting any challenges trying to implement performance-based practices with her students, she expressed some anxiety about the future of the educational landscape.

> *Sasha: So many of these schools refrain from having these discussions about cultural differences and identity out of fear. Teachers often do not know what to say or how to approach a particular topic. So how do we navigate this and make kids feel safe? And the answer to this is that there are people who do this work, bring them in the school! Get the support! Prioritize it and believe in it!*

Like Sasha, Nicole felt the pressure and stress of negotiating with administrators and the school board system when trying to implement alternative teaching practices within her classroom.

> *Nicole: The school board can really hamper progress. Policy is a big issue. The board level is more disassociated from what is actually going on within the school and these classrooms. They are not particularly supportive of my teaching methods or any form of alternative teaching in general.*

She also described some of the challenges she faced as a teacher using these methods with her students. Nicole felt that it was difficult at times to use performance-based methods with her students, while still maintaining a level of control and structure within her classroom. She noted that some students were hesitant to engage in such approaches out of anxiety and fear, but suggested these challenges often opened up space for discussion, leading to important learning experiences for both herself and the class.

Kaitlin did not notice any issues trying to incorporate performance-based practices into her classroom, but described the challenges surrounding discussions of power, difference, and oppression with her students.

> *Kaitlin: I think it's easy to be a teacher and avoid issues of race and diversity. You can also just pay lip service to it. If you look at the Ontario curriculum, it's very broad and it's really just a bunch of suggestions. We really have a lot of freedom to design our own content and choose materials that we want to teach and even more so at this school because we have a principal who really trusts us. Students genuinely want to talk and learn about these topics, it's on their minds.*

Discussion

Educators noticed that by implementing performance-based practices in the classroom, students became more self-reflexive, empathetic, and self-confident. Through educators initiating open dialogue around topics surrounding power, oppression, and difference, the students were able to share their thoughts and feelings concerning aspects of their lived experiences and identities. The literature supports the findings on the benefits of incorporating critical, performance-based pedagogical practices in the classroom. Several studies suggested that existing power imbalances within the educational setting contribute to the ways in which students of different social, racial, and cultural backgrounds come to understand their own identities as well as the identities of others (Duffy & Powers, 2018). By addressing difference instead of minimalizing it, students and educators are able to move towards a more equitable pedagogical framework (Daniel, 2016).

Educators felt that performative teaching methods were useful in addressing many of the issues young people currently face such as high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and confused sense of self. to the studies of Duffy (2010) and Gallagher (2014), the findings showed that through performance, students became more understanding of the ways in which social, cultural, and racial differences are socially constructed and systemically reinforced through Canada's institutions. Specifically, all participants described the various ways in which this approach enabled their students to express and experiment with aspects of their identity in ways that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do or not be encouraged to do in other areas of their lives. This led them to not only be more self-reflexive of their own potential privileges and biases, but also to transform the ways in which they interacted with those whose identities were different from their own. However, due to rigid school administrations and education policies, lack of time, and disruptive classroom environments, participants found it difficult at times to implement critical performative practices with their students. Additionally, some participants experienced challenges addressing topics surrounding power, identity, difference, and oppression due to a lack of confidence to speak on a topic that they were not properly trained to teach.

Participants all used practices reflective of what the literature deems as performative critical pedagogy. The literature placed a focus on open dialogue, critical inquiry, problem-posing, and collaboration between educators and students as the basis of critical performance-based learning (Freire, 1970;

Boal, 1979; Fels & Beliveau, 2008; Gallagher; 2014; Desai, 2017). All educators demonstrated these components of critical pedagogy through various performative activities. Sasha's work, for instance, strongly connected to Freire's (1970) notion of praxis through dialogue and problem solving based on generative themes. This was demonstrated through her use of the theme of change as an entry point for open dialogue with her students and as a basis for performative inquiry to ensue.

Despite the benefits acknowledged by educators, this study identified various challenges associated with implementing performance-based practices in the classroom with youth (Conrad, 2004; Fels & Belliveau, 2008; Snyder-Young, 2011). Educators addressed both the difficulty of incorporating performative methods within the classroom from a logistical perspective, as well as the struggle to utilize these methods in order to teach students about issues related to difference, identity, power, and oppression.

As various studies (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Portelli, 2011; Snyder-Young, 2011; Solomon & Singer, 2011; Carr & Lund, 2014; Dei, 2014a/2014b; Daniel, 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016) indicated, the preparation of teachers continuously negates the importance of equitable discourses and pedagogical practices. The findings reflected this as some of the White educators faced obstacles discussing issues surrounding difference in their classrooms. This strongly connected to two of the main obstacles currently impeding the Canadian education system: the unwillingness of educators to learn and teach about White racial identity in an effective way and the disparities between a predominantly White teaching force and an increasingly diverse student population (Dei, 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Daniel, 2016).

Feasibility of Implementing Performance-Based Practices

The research suggested that the feasibility of implementing performance-based practices as a form of critical pedagogy within the classroom is largely dependent on educational policies, administrative agendas, and educators' personal inclination to use performance-based methods in order to address issues of power, difference, and oppression (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Snyder-Young, 2011; Desai, 2017). In particular, the literature consistently highlighted the issue of teacher preparation as an obstacle to the feasibility of implementing critical performative methods within the classroom (Howard, 2006; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Duffy, 2010; Snyder-Young, 2011; Schaedler, 2010; Desai, 2017). However, the findings demonstrated that it was feasible to implement performance-based practices within the classroom in instances where educators had a high level of control over their curriculum and daily routines, as well as a passion for social justice and/or performance.

Implications for Practice

This research study illuminated several implications educators should consider when implementing performance-based practices within their classroom, where these methods are being used as a critical pedagogical tool to address issues of difference, oppression, and power. Including performance-based practices in the classroom provides students with the opportunity to address a wide variety of subject matter in a lighthearted and relaxed manner (Howard, 2004; Fels & Belliveau, 2008; Gallagher, 2014; Desai, 2017). This further allows them to practice being in different situations and responding to various issues that they may encounter outside of the classroom.

Although not outlined in the literature, all participants found that growing mental health concerns posed a challenge to students' learning processes. They unanimously agreed that performance, although sometimes challenging to implement with students struggling with their mental health, can actually help to alleviate symptoms of anxiety by providing students with an outlet to discuss their feelings as well as topics that strongly resonate with them.

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Performing Society: Pursuing Creativity and Criticality in Secondary ELA

Stephanie Ho

Abstract

As an English Language Arts teacher, I have experienced cost-effective approaches replacing the actual "arts" of ELA (Trend, 1992). This article explores how Surrealist-oriented pedagogies could restore imaginative freedom and deconstruct conceptual barriers (normative standards, curricular constraints, and status quo power relations) in secondary ELA. I will also examine how we can use Surrealism as a political and pedagogical model to treat societal problems mirrored in ELA classrooms. Surrealist-oriented pedagogies could enable students to experiment with social issues and develop senses of agency and voice that reflect awareness of contemporary society while simultaneously building their ELA skills.

Background

The concept of performance connotes ideas of physicality in artistic expression. In this vein, performance in education can sometimes be positioned outside (rather than alongside) traditional pen-and-paper modes of teaching and learning. While I fully agree with the idea that fine art mediums provide exciting educational opportunities, I wonder if performance can involve exclusively mental movement and still be progressive. In other words, do we need to move the body in order to perform, or can we flex the brain and still demonstrate impact?

As an English teacher, I have never been gifted in the dramatic arts, and have on a number of occasions cringed at the sound of my recorded voice. I don't consider myself graceful and cannot remember musical scores to save my life; and this comes after having completed 14 years of force-fed piano lessons. Recently, I visited the McGill Art Hive and found myself overwhelmed with stress—not because our performance activities (aimed at relaxation) were not well constructed—but because the artist in residence was so profoundly calm and, dare I say, artistically enlightened in aura. I felt pathetically drab and conventional in relation to this woman, whose speech seemed to flow freely and in perfect synchronicity with her body movements. As she described peaceful breathing strategies, all I could notice were my untanned bare feet and my seeming incompatibility with revolutionary education.

Following this recognition of my own artlessness, I began to examine my practice in relation to the Art Hive's freedom. I then realized that while I will probably never succeed in implementing song and dance into my study of a play, I was slightly shortchanging my pedagogy in deeming it "traditional." Despite the reputation of senior-level students being unmotivated and checked-out of their learning, my class has, at times, offered great fulfillment with its discussion and inquiry. It seems then, that in a far less aesthetically impactful manner, I have been aiming to create an educational hive of my own. To discount

myself as “nonperformance oriented” was possibly a quick assessment, and perhaps our idea of performance could be expanded to fit varying situations. In my mind, while some forms of performance involve displaying colours and dramatic gestures, others can involve sitting still and imaginatively expressing these concepts. In fact, rather than solely involving an impactful end product, performance, in my mind, involves active processes, and new modes of expression. Performance is not stagnant, and the movement involved can take place in the mind. Also, performance is unquestionably artistic in nature, and I feel my English Language Arts classroom is hungry for art. Hence, I have become increasingly interested in my own form of performance education, one that involves creating educational spaces where our students’ brains can work through the complexities of our everyday human condition; essentially, within my class, I aim for students to perform society.

While my English class has at times succeeded in forming a hive, buzzing with creative potential, these moments are unfortunately not commonplace. I frequently refer to these magic moments of critical coalescence, where all educational stars seem to align, as our “nuggets of brilliance.” I revisit these nuggets on a regular basis, attempting to motivate students through an acknowledgement of their own intellectual power. The problem, however, comes in how these moments get spread out over the course of a year, systematically losing their magic within lacklustre learning contexts. The idea that students aren’t actively accessing their critical potential became apparent to me through a disappointing classroom experience. Earlier on this year, my students and I engaged in a group reading of Tennessee Williams’ play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. While the story was meant for theatrical performance, we examined it from our context of literary analysis. I was saving a particularly juicy passage for my students, expecting they would appreciate the dysfunctional messiness of it. Within the passage, Maggie, the protagonist, frustratingly recounts her extramarital affair to her husband Brick, a presumed closeted homosexual. To make matters worse, Maggie allegedly made love to Brick’s best friend—who also shared romantic feelings for her husband. I read aloud the passage where Maggie describes the encounter in an uncomfortable and desperate manner. I built up to the climax of the moment, using air quotations and strategic pauses to emphasize Maggie’s comment that the exchange “didn’t work.” To my unexpected surprise, the response to this juiciness was pure silence. I repeated the passage again multiple times, asking the students what they thought of the fact that it “didn’t work” between Maggie and Skipper. Finally, one of my students raised her hand and said, “Ms. Ho, can you just give us the answer?” I was shocked. When asking my students what they thought of this passage, they expressed a belief that ELA, which to me is emblematic of human experience and emotions, has a single answer.

I wondered who was to blame for this lack of criticality in my ELA classroom. Was it me, the teacher? I didn’t think I was short on enthusiasm and I had made an effort to find a picture of human experience that could rival the drama of a Netflix series. Was the problem, then, the institution? I recognize we have curricular and time restraints, but unlike public school teachers, my context allows me decent financial freedom in my practice. Perhaps the problem was the ubiquitous “society at large.” If so, I wondered why that was the case, and how our societal context was faulty to the point where its trickle-down effect could be so artless. I realized the answer lay in not committing the same erroneous flaw that my students presented. If ELA does not have a single answer, nor do the problems of ELA education.

This understanding that the systematic de-criticalization of our ELA classes is a matter of joint blame, shared amongst many parties (including myself), opened up a new realm of intellectual inquiry. Acknowledging my complicit nature in deflating my ELA class of its creative potential prompted my quest for a revolutionary solution. This is what brought me to the historic movement of Surrealism, which was originally aimed at eliciting authentic, unhinged thought and expression. Surrealism was an active movement and its philosophy purports that human beings, due to social, political, and cultural shaping, are not free thinkers; thus, we need to reclaim our imaginative emancipation by embracing a new dimension of reality.

Surrealist Play as Theory

I therefore aim to create a new, Surrealist-oriented pedagogical style to meet the needs of ELA classrooms lacking in creativity and criticality. Based upon antisociety, anticapitalist, and anticonventional beliefs, Surrealism involves an aggressive attack on reality (Breton, Seaver, & Lane, 1972). Led by Andre Breton in the 1920s, Surrealism as a philosophical practice was born in Paris and branched from existing societal critique intrinsic to the Dada movement (Marantz & Rubin, 1969). Within my practice, this exact societal critique is severely lacking, despite being a goal imbedded within our curriculum. As a result, our ELA curriculum has been reduced to a measurable science, with standardized evaluation tasks favouring efferent reading (MEES, 2019; Rosenblatt, 2005). My ELA reality made me wonder how my discipline deviated so far from the artistic freedom necessary to build the autonomous, critical agents we aim to form. I then, in an effort to form a holistic understanding of my ELA problem, extended my exploration to the inherently economic societal context housing our schooling system (Davies & Bansel, 2007). If we consider our classrooms to be units mirroring the neoliberal values of society at large, we may begin to determine why our language arts education has morphed into a language science. This brings me back to our need, as ELA teachers, for a revolt of sorts that can help reclaim the artistic power we are missing. We need to begin deconstructing the formulaic models that limit and dictate the possibilities of ELA, much like how the historic Surrealists fought for the power of artistic thought and expression under the guidance of Breton (Breton et al., 1972). However, the impetus of a historic artistic movement, though it be political in nature, does not form a linear connection with the artistic needs of modern classrooms. This gap prompted me to consider theories of critical, radical pedagogy. Within this domain, figures such as Giroux (1988) attack hegemonic neoliberal contexts in order to liberate educational freedom, just as Breton and colleagues (1972) fought in the name of artistic emancipation.

This stream of consciousness presents a web of seemingly disjunctive, yet evidently influential, bodies of thought. Therefore, in this paper, I plan to engage in an act of theoretical, Surrealist play (Marantz & Rubin, 1969), where I will form meaningful associations between the conceptually distant bodies of Surrealism, contemporary ELA classrooms, and Critical Pedagogy. I will begin with an exploration of neoliberalism as a political construct, whose ideologies can be used to analyze the construction of classroom communities. Next, I will explore Critical Pedagogy, an ideological framework that critiques the operations of neoliberal societies and the presumed negative effects they have on education.

I will explore Critical Pedagogy with the goal of better understanding my own politically charged ELA context, while perhaps discovering some solutions to reintroduce the missing "arts." Finally, I will explore Surrealism, an artistic movement which targets reality and conformity in the name of artistic liberty. I aim to illuminate how Surrealism is not confined to its original historic school, but instead is ongoing, and worthy of revisiting in light of dilemmas in contemporary classroom practices. Through my Surrealist play and the formation of spontaneous connections, I endeavour to forge a new theoretical framework for examining contemporary ELA education. I also aim to justify the need for Surrealist-centered pedagogies, while illuminating theoretical gaps in need of further research.

Neoliberal Practices in ELA

Within our neoliberal societal model, our ELA curriculum has become a system of targeted skills building and efferent reading. Efferent reading involves reading solely for the attainment of information, rather than development of interpretive skills (Rosenblatt, 2005). This method limits ELA to a series of procedural tasks, rather than the more educationally interactional experience of reading with the intent of entering into a story and reflecting on its personal significance. An example of an assignment that calls upon efferent-reading strategies is the Secondary ELA Reading Response. While the Quebec Education Program (QEP) has illustrated the analysis of texts to be a holistic endeavour that "represent[s] sociocultural values and beliefs, promot[ing] viewpoints and influenc[ing] our actions in society" (MEES, 2019, p. 32), I have observed the formation of step-by-step categories to result in fragmented, checklist-style reading methods. Rather than reflecting on the personal significance of aspects such as writing techniques and themes, this categorization of different textual elements has, in my experience, caused students to read in a tunnel-vision style. Consequently, students become passive scavengers, rather than active agents engaging with a body of textual work. The text thus becomes divorced from the real world by virtue of our unwillingness to bring it to life. Rosenblatt (2005) has illustrated the difference between the efferent reading practices evidenced in our current ELA education, as opposed to aesthetic reading practices. Rosenblatt has also prefaced that literature is closely related to human experience. Therefore (neoliberal) didactic, moralistic methods of teaching literature stifle the possibilities of aesthetic, transactional reading. The efferent practice of reading to attain an established body of information eliminates the power of the reader. The reader, who, in this case, is my ELA student, with his or her past experience and ongoing life experience, brings to a text a specific angle from which to read and interpret. The engagement between a text and the unique reader (with his or her body of knowledge) forms a new experience and thus, the creation of meaning. Writers can elicit emotions through stories, presenting a particular perspective in response to our shared world. The reader thus participates in the vision of the writer, using it to make sense of his/her lived experience outside of the text. The relationship that takes place between the reader and writer forms an imaginative experience when the reader becomes focused and absorbed by his/her feelings in response to the stimulus of the text. This imaginative freedom is the central aim of Surrealist theory (Breton et al., 1972) and is notably lacking from contemporary ELA education. Therefore, we can observe how the objectives of the historic artistic movement, itself entrenched in emancipatory struggle, speaks directly to ongoing challenges observable in the arts and artistic educational disciplines.

Critical Pedagogy and Secondary ELA

Within my Secondary ELA practice, I have the responsibility to present students with a window into their world. The frame in which I set that window could confirm the method of market-oriented societal preparation, or conversely, critically engaged social activism. In a sense, ELA is about storytelling, as we simultaneously deconstruct works of literature and the stories of society. The power of ELA lies, as illustrated in the QEP's mandate (MEES, 2019), in representing societal values within the school place and recognizing their role in shaping our actions as individuals. However, there stands an apparent disparity between the theory and practice of the QEP's intended goals. I feel that identifying why this critical engagement with societal values is not happening to its fullest potential, lies in first recognizing restrictive practices such as standardized, procedural assignments. Secondly, however, approaching ELA from a standpoint of Critical Pedagogy can help us engage with the storytelling we have been doing, thus illuminating its restricted nature. Trend's (1992) perspective on knowledge as static currency speaks to our closed nature of storytelling. Essentially, through this hegemonic narrative, there lies one story and one way of telling it. Culture, and the messages transmitted through stories, are stripped of their transactional value, and presented in a singular way that supports a dominant discourse. This discourse often communicates settler white, male, heteronormative ideologies, while actively suppressing the voices of people such as ethnic minority groups, women, non-gender binary individuals, and Indigenous Peoples. What I feel is missing alongside creativity and criticality in my classroom, is not a recognition of this hegemonic system, but rather, a frank interrogation and subversion of it. My disempowered ELA teacher peers could therefore reignite imaginative fire in their classes by forging an honest dialogue about the oppression that comprises our societal institutions and everyday practices (Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Trend, 1992). By forming a critical discourse around which to frame our existence, we are not only subverting our artistic disenfranchisement in a highly Surrealist manner (Breton et al., 1972), but also bringing our ELA storytelling to life. Asking questions and interrogating common-sense narratives can not only encourage students to fulfill the aims of the QEP, by examining societal values in relation to identity and the self, but also voice the stories that have been silenced by the canonical framework of "proper" education (Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Trend, 1992). For example, when interacting with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, we may choose to ask questions surrounding Brick's presumed hidden sexuality. We could examine ideas of masculinity as a social construction, and consider why a 1950s white man of nonconforming sexual orientation may have felt the need to conceal his identity. This conversation could open the floor for a discussion about our own contemporary society and the degree to which we can witness a legacy of established, restrictive ideologies such as those witnessed in the play. Finally, imperative in this discussion would be a consideration of why, if it is indeed the case, certain ideologies such as racism, homophobia, and sexism, continue to perpetuate our everyday discourses, despite us living in an "advanced," forward-thinking society. Essentially, becoming critical educators, and I mean this in no hyperbolic sense, can save our students from complacency and social stagnancy. Critical pedagogy operates on the educational scale, within classrooms, just as Surrealism operates on the artistic domain. Breton and his Surrealists created their manifestoes and revolutionary movement to reclaim artistic autonomy and most importantly, the freedom of thought (Breton et al., 1972). Breton based his movement upon a belief that our thought has been hinged via the barriers of

living in conformist, politically charged societies. As Rose and Kincheloe (2003) had highlighted the delegitimization of certain art forms, Breton called to question the same dismissal of artistic practices of expression. Expression, according to Breton, is an artistic gift linked to humanity and our understanding of the world. If our expression becomes blocked, it is likely that our thought processes have also been blocked, and this is the epitome of artistic imprisonment. We, in ELA, aim to attach the same respect to the imagination as Breton has done. His aims for democratic emancipation of the mind mirror the views of Trend, Giroux, and Rose and Kincheloe in terms of liberating the education domain. As such, I feel the subversive strategies of Critical Pedagogy aimed at the classroom, could serve in bridging the similarly subversive aims of Surrealism aimed at the art domain, forming a joint conversation that could speak to the needs of my artless ELA classroom.

Surrealism in ELA

In our current ELA classrooms, our initial concern may be a practice-oriented one, as we feel logistical barriers restrict the way we act. However, if we were to more critically dissect our positions as educators, we would notice our own role in supporting these barriers. Breton's (1972) radical devotion to Surrealism, and his constant efforts to define and redefine the constituents of the movement and its philosophy, were all aimed at helping man reclaim his most powerful possession: his mind. It may be tempting to examine the Surrealist movement solely based upon the art produced under its name; however, these revolutionary works do not independently speak to the political nature of the cause. To examine them as such would be to view the problems of contemporary ELA in complete isolation from the sociopolitical issues surrounding it. Likewise, to view the artistic works of Surrealists as the end goal of the movement would be problematic, since it would involve an interpretation of the movement as solely arts oriented. The work of Surrealist artists, rather, should communicate the charged freedom for which Breton has advocated, as these pieces form a subversive statement about the power of automatism (Breton et al., 1972). These works are not the end product, since the ultimate goal of Breton's fight was achieving purely unaffected thought and expression. One could argue that a sole focus on Surrealist works, rather than a joint examination of them in conjunction with Breton's manifestoes, would produce a "chicken and the egg" problem, resulting in a misaligned understanding of the movement. If we therefore shift our gaze and recognize pure automatism to be a tenet of the movement, we could consequently begin reconceptualizing our own ELA problem. In fact, focusing on logistical restraints such as the need for standardized testing, in addition to seemingly dehumanizing realities such as class sizes and funding, would be to examine Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (Marantz & Rubin, 1969) as a purely artistic, rather than political and emancipatory, work. The point is not the restraints surrounding our practices; the point is the impact these restraints have on our ability to free students' minds in a Bretonian manner. Therefore, our solution must take into account this conceptual web, since a solution does not lie in simply dismantling unsavoury boundaries. Hypothetically speaking, if we were to abolish standardized testing in ELA education, the noncritical educator would then ask: "Now what?" In fact, I feel a sustainable solution in achieving creativity and criticality in ELA education, and to free students' minds, making them sensitive and tuned in to their societal surroundings, is to use our own minds. Subversive thinking, and Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 1988; 2016), could therefore operate in thinking our way out of our

conceptual bounds. As previously noted, we are maintaining our own imprisonment by not analyzing its structure (Davies & Bansel, 2007). By coming together in a collective manner, like Breton's Surrealists (1972), ELA teachers have the potential to create a political movement of our own, one aimed at liberating our domain and restoring its artistic power. ELA educators cannot continue to silently struggle in isolation, resigned to an idea that change is impossible. We must harness the fire of Critical Pedagogy, question our subjugation, and intellectually rise above the structures that have made technicians (Trend, 1992) of us artists.

Surrealist Play as Practice

My act of creating a new conceptual framework from which to interpret problems in ELA education was a matter of theoretical performance play. Following this play, however, my theory demands to be enacted within the field, and be transformed into an act of experiential performance. I plan on creating an environment of Surrealist imaginative play, where students can be free to stretch their perspectives much like I created my theoretical framework. My unit will take place over the period of one secondary school term. I will begin the unit with an overarching lesson on the historical movement of Surrealism. Following this lesson, students will have the opportunity to experiment with creative Surrealist-oriented activities such as the creation of found poetry or Surrealist-style collages. I will then aim to contextualize the philosophy of this political movement into a modern-day context—specifically, within our ELA classroom. I will then solicit students' thinking about the politics and hierarchical structures that surround their lives, ranging from the context of the private school to its place in the larger society. Within this discussion, students can examine power dynamics ranging from students and teachers to citizens and politicians. After having sufficiently formed a base of political inquiry, I will present all preexisting aspects of the curriculum through a Surrealist critical lens. For example, when students learn the skill of article writing, we may choose to focus on opinion pieces based upon their previous creations of Surrealist-style art. This exploration could open a dialogue surrounding why specific perspectives (namely those who do not fit the dominant discourse) are silenced within societies. Similarly, when pursuing reading responses, rather than having students concentrate on efferent reading skills, we may choose to explore close, critical, and subversive reading strategies. Lessons will be largely student-centered, with a predominant component of dialogue. I will also enlist students to interview on the perceived effects of my teaching methods. This will be done on a purely volunteer basis. During each class, I will create jot notes, which I will later organize into sequential field notes. I will essentially be observing students' reactions to my new Surrealist-style pedagogies, specifically targeting the effect these strategies could have on eliciting critical discussion. In my mind, critical discussion comprises students asking big questions and interrogating the concepts raised in our curriculum, rather than accepting them as common-sense truth. The criticality I hope to inspire will involve students drawing connections between our ELA classroom and the outside world. I will pay close attention to how my use of the strategies in promoting critical discussion (scaffolding, questioning) could affect students' verbal output, in terms of superficiality or depth. Within this laboratory of Surrealist experimentation, I aim to move away from hierarchical teacher-centered methods of information exchange. This means that students need to feel

ownership of the ideas they craft, and be free to grapple with the difficulties these complicated concepts involve. I plan on adopting a facilitator role in sparking conversation, but ultimately hope to witness magic forming without my intervention.

Conclusion

The aims of ELA far surpass the grammar and syntax rules upon which we attach so much importance. These rules, despite being important, proceduralize ELA and pull students further away from the concepts housed within ELA. Our classrooms should instead provide spaces for students to expand their societal, cultural, and educational agency. This research project will serve as a laboratory to explore how an early twentieth century artistic/political movement can be adapted to address current societal, cultural, and educational challenges in present-day Quebec. With constraints surrounding the education domain in Quebec, from funding and ministry demands, to pressures to maintain normative standards, teachers often feel limited in their power to impart change on the world. Through a contemporary adaptation of Surrealist philosophy, this project will demonstrate and perform artistic agency in order to enable a reconceptualization and revitalization of my artless ELA.

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Student Evaluations and the Performance of University Teaching: Teaching to the Test

John L. Hoben, Cecile Badenhorst, and Sarah Pickett

Abstract

What do course evaluation questionnaires (CEQs) do to our teaching and to our perceptions of ourselves as teachers? We are all early- to mid-career academics at a midsized Canadian university who explore how course evaluation questionnaires have affected our academic identities. By using autoethnography and critical reflection, we examine how CEQs shape and restrict our teaching identities as well as the identities of our students. Alternative ways of assessing teaching excellence and promoting communities of inquiry are explored.

Background

The course evaluation questionnaires (CEQs) are a common source of evidence to assess faculty performance in teaching. CEQs are most often administered by central units within the university and are constructed around a universalized set of questions that can be used across disciplines. The development of questions and compilation of the responses takes place at a distance from the individual teacher. Students respond anonymously and usually have to answer survey-type questions with space being provided for open-ended responses as well. Instructors receive CEQ reports once the data is compiled and these reports are used in promotion and tenure processes as proof of teaching effectiveness. Although assessing teaching is an important goal, one of the central issues with the current CEQs regimes, is that it presents a service delivery model of teaching and learning, as opposed to a more dialogical and contextualized picture of the classroom environment.

More troubling, only the teachers are assessed even though classrooms are a microcosm of the institutional forces, personalities, and cultures that intersect within these spaces. Within this model, it is easy for student satisfaction to take precedence over pedagogic goals. Feeling frustrated with this form of teaching evaluation and wondering what effect this type of assessment had on our teaching, led us to this paper. Butler (1997) shows we perform our identities through repeated acts. We draw on identity-categories that are largely external to us, and over time with much repetition we create a sense of individual identity. Performing teaching is a large part of the construction of our academic subjectivities, particularly for those of us in Education faculties. Performing the effective teacher is important to us, since we value strong pedagogic design and student engagement. The question we ask ourselves is: What do CEQs do to our teaching and to our perceptions of ourselves as teachers?

Course Evaluation Questionnaires

The extensive literature on CEQs highlights the contentious nature of these evaluations. There is a continual stream of research that maintains that CEQs are a valued form of assessing teaching effectiveness. Winer, DiGenova, Costopoulos, and Cardoso (2016), for example, found CEQs to be unbiased and reliable. However, much of the literature is critical and revolves around the validity of student respondents. This research suggests that when it comes to student respondents, there are many flaws in the CEQ process. For example, many studies suggest that low levels of participation by students, particularly with online evaluation forms, provide biased results (Groen & Herry, 2017). Certain students are more likely to complete the forms, and these tend to be female and/or academically strong students or students who receive high grades in the course (Adams & Umbach, 2012). Some studies have suggested that students grade professors higher if they get good grades and lower if they get poor grades (Maurer, 2006). Zumbach and Funke (2014) even found that mood was a factor in CEQ responses. When students were manipulated into a positive mood, they rated professors more highly than those in a negative mood. Some studies argue that only students with extreme opinions respond to course evaluations which provide dichotomized responses, while others raise concerns about gender bias. MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt (2015) found that both male and female students rate male professors higher. Male students particularly rated female professors lower.

Other studies note that students often lack motivation to fully complete the forms and rush through it without paying much attention. In Bassett, Cleveland, Acorn, Nix, and Snyder's (2017) study, "catch questions" were embedded into the CEQ, for example, "The instructor was late or absent for all class meetings" (p. 435). If students responded, "definitely true" or "more true than false," they were deemed to be making an insufficient effort to respond to the CEQ. Results demonstrated one out of four students showed insufficient effort at responding to CEQs. This study also showed that students sometimes take CEQs seriously but other times, they respond quickly to get it done. Overall there were low to moderate levels of motivation when completing evaluations and many did not pay attention to the wording of questions. Bassett and colleagues (2017) speculated that the reason why students were not motivated to fill in the forms fully was because they were doubtful that instructors used the CEQs.

Research has also found that what students want in a course are: high grades (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005); essays more than exams (Sander, Stevenson, King, & Coates, 2000); limited writing (Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007); no presentations (Sander & Sanders, 2005); and prompt feedback even if students do not incorporate that feedback into their work (Ackerman & Gross, 2010). Ultimately, some studies conclude that students value "superficial learning that requires limited effort as opposed to courses with high achievement goals" (VanMaaren, Jaquett, & Williams, 2016, p. 426). Jaquett, VanMaaren, and Williams (2017) suggest, based on the findings of their study, instructors can increase their student ratings by: allowing all students to get good grades; providing extra-credit options for all students; being organized; giving feedback promptly; not having small group discussions; limiting the inclusion of tests, course papers, and student presentations; and emphasizing the probability of student success rather than the commitment to high standards (VanMaaren et al., 2016, p. 436).

Shifting from this focus on the micro level of student responses, we feel it is important to situate this type of assessment within the broader framework of neoliberalism and the attached audit culture. Neoliberalism as a dominant ideology of the twentieth-first century, insists that market forces and top-down hierarchies should be placed ahead of human moral agency and noneconomic forms of growth and value (Ross & Gibson, 2007). Neoliberalism has been used as a value system to rationalize forms of governance that limit professional autonomy, increase surveillance, and force knowledge-workers in those industries to consistently do more for less. What academics are seeing is the systematic introduction of a set of governance practices developed in the worlds of business and public education that are being transplanted into public postsecondary institutions under the guise of efficiency-directed educational reforms. Much of this reform is taking place within a context that is ahistorical and nonsocial, with the only time horizons that matter are the compressed time horizons of fiscal emergencies and budget cuts. Singh (2018) describes the operation of these discursive and affective performative practices of control in the public schooling context, technologies that are also increasingly being put to work in the academic setting. As he notes, "these new 'datafication'…mechanisms firstly construct the 'teacher-as-problem' or barrier to quality learning, and then embed accountability/responsibility instruments into schools to fix the 'teacher problem'" (p. 491).

We are well aware of the research on the problematic nature of CEQs both on the micro and macro levels. Yet, CEQs continue to be the single-most important evaluation tool for teaching effectiveness in our promotion and tenure process. In this paper, we want to explore what these tensions do to us and our teaching.

Methodology

We are early- to mid-career academics who work in a Faculty of Education in a midsized comprehensive university. Two of us (John and Cecile) are in adult/postsecondary education while Sarah works in the Faculty's counselling psychology program and educates future counsellors and teachers. We selected collaborative autoethnography as our methodology to explore our relationship to CEQs and how we believe these assessment instruments shape our teaching practice and identities (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2016). We began the project as co-participant-researchers with a collaborative discussion of the issues surrounding our experiences with CEQs. This first step in our method established the parameters of the data collection and determined how the individual aspect of data collection would be integrated into our methodology. The next step was to write individual autoethnographic narratives surrounding our experiences with CEQs. We purposefully gave space for creative writing and did not limit ourselves with the expectations of academic prose (Ellis, 2004). Finally, after the individual narratives were written, we gathered again as coresearchers for a collaborative discussion of the emerging issues associated with CEQs (the data analysis). In this final phase, we analyzed the autoethnographic narratives we had independently generated for themes and insights that would not only help us understand our individual experiences, but also situate our experiences collectively in the context of the neoliberalism and current academic culture. Writing, telling, and sharing our stories became at once a

means of exploring our awareness of social reality and of affirming the power and meaning of our own individual voices as an expression of our own agency as teachers and academics. Our collaborative autoethnographic analysis takes an evocative and provocative position in illuminating how the phenomenon of CEQs influence individual academics and the collective academy (students, faculty, and community). Collaborative autoethnography helped us to explore our perceptions and to understand the intersection of our experiences in ways which valued and respected individual subjectivities with shared meanings (Ingersoll, 2012).

Assessment, Performativity, and Identity

Our individual written narratives and collective reflection sessions on our experiences with CEQs revealed a number of central themes about how CEQs shaped the performance of our academic identities. Two of these themes were predominantly negative, namely the operation of CEQs as an anxiety-inducing intrusion into our everyday lives as teachers and scholars, and, their role in inducing us to perform conservative pedagogies. However, although CEQs forced us to confront the reality of neoliberalism's far-reaching intrusions into our institutions, they also reminded us of the importance of performing practices of resistance and sharing experiences as a means of creating a counter-discourse and spaces of renewal and hope.

CEQs as Anxiety-Inducing Intrusions Into Everyday Life

A central question of importance in today's educational politics, according to Ball (2003), is "who is it that determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid?" (p. 216). Increasingly, these determinations are not made by "us" (i.e., academics), but by managers and quality assurance systems that are imposed from beyond and above without discussion—increasing the alienation and frustration that has come to accompany so much of current academic life. They also lead to intensely personal and hidden conflicts, since these "struggles are often internalized and set the care of the self against duty to others" (p. 216), meaning that resistance often becomes characterized as selfishness or irresponsibility whereas compliance is associated with intrinsic moral worth.

Often our experiences are anxiety-ridden internalizations of the notion that we are potential problems in the making if we are not vigilant enough about our practice—it is almost as if we have to flap our wings frantically just to continually overcome the gravity of our own tendency towards mediocrity, or even, failure. As Cecile writes:

> I see a brown envelope with a printed label in my mailbox. My heart drops. It's at least six weeks since I finished teaching. This can only be my course evaluation forms (CEQs). I take the envelope and leave it unopened on my desk, for days, sometimes for weeks, plucking up the courage to open it.

John too noted seeing the CEQ envelope and leaving it unopened in his mailbox or on his desk for several days due to the anxiety it provokes, and to the possibility of receiving hurtful or frustrating comments from students. Like her colleagues, Sarah describes the seemingly impossible predicament that CEQs force us into:

> The double bind as discussed by Gregory Bateson and his colleagues comes to mind. The double-bind is a no-win kind of communication. A classic example includes the message to be spontaneous; however…when following the directions to be spontaneous one is inherently not spontaneous. Another variation of the double-bind as when a person is chastised for a correct perception of the outside world. A classic example of this is when a child is in an abusive home and is yet expected to see the abusers as loving caregivers. In this scenario the child learns that they must choose to either trust their experiences or what others are telling them are truths. CEQs represent a variation of the double-blind. Faculty are told in several covert and overt ways that they have the knowledge and expertise to teach in their discipline and to interpret feedback from students accordingly; simultaneously they are told through the CEQ industry that students have the competency to evaluate their pedagogical expertise and are suitable evaluators for promotion and tenure in the academy. This following story is a good illustration of a double-bind and a solution:
>
> *A Zen master says to his pupils: "If you say this stick is real, I will beat you. If you say this stick is not real, I will beat you. If you say nothing, I will beat you." There seems to be no way out. One pupil, however, found a solution by changing the level of communication. He walked up to the teacher, grabbed the stick, and broke it.* (Wedge, 2011, n.p.)
>
> In applying the Zen story to CEQs, one option for faculty is to opt out of including CEQs in the promotion and tenure process and to dismiss these measures as anything other than student feedback on their experiences in the course. This feedback may then be considered in the larger course redevelopment process alongside other pedagogical variables rather than *leading* the course revision process. Opting out of including CEQs for promotion and tenure presents a more significant challenge in that faculty may face another double-bind. Colleagues sitting on the promotion and tenure committee may both consciously and unconsciously question why this faculty member chose not to include their CEQs in support of their teaching scholarship. CEQs have become so embedded and synonymous with evidence of teaching efficacy, even our peers may be skeptical about faculty teaching performance in the absence of CEQs. [Sarah]

As Sarah's narrative emphasizes, neoliberal assessment technologies force us to confront powerful institutional interests since they leave us with few or no alternatives. All of us felt pressured into dilemmas that were not of our own making and that did not seem to have any easy solutions. Although we wanted to continue to teach, write, and research in our own close-knit collegial communities, neoliberal regimes of power compel us to play these zero-sum games in a way that is intrusive, anxiety inducing, and often counterproductive. As we shall see, these types of misgivings often have a chilling effect on our own pedagogical engagement by limiting our sense of freedom and our willingness to explore.

Performing Conservative Pedagogies and Limiting Academic Choice

As one example of powerful, "academic performance management" technologies (Kenny, 2017, p. 900), CEQs shape our pedagogies in subtle, unexpected ways. CEQs presume and privilege a transactional model of teaching where "client" preferences are privileged above intellectual exploration and discovery.

They entice us to perform a customer service mentality where professors are efficient knowledge workers who deliver services that customers are likely to want to consume. Collectively, neoliberal reforms and the audit culture that are its fundamental tools, have "reveal[ed] a worldwide trend of reduced self-determination of academics over key aspects of their work, a loss of influence over decision making about the allocation of resources within their institutions" (Kenny, 2018, p. 366). This may be something as simple as whether to use group work in one's courses:

> My strengths and experience as an educator lie in designing curriculum for adult learning. Each course I have developed has been carefully crafted and scaffolded to bring students through the course with a minimum of disruption. I do, however, want to take them to new places, so often I ask them to engage in activities that are different but never without carefully creating conditions for learning. Group work is something I value and there is plenty of evidence and sound pedagogical reasons for including group work, particularly, in online learning. I use groupwork to reinforce learning, build skills and develop self-efficacy that can later be used in the bigger assignments. I ask students to complete short weekly group assignments based on the material for that week. Instead of just reading and discussing, I get students to apply that week's course material in a carefully constructed activity.
>
> I often don't assign many marks for the groupwork activity because I want them to work under low-risk conditions and in most cases, unless a student did not complete an activity, they all get the entire mark allocated for the group activity. While there are many students in my classes who recognise and appreciate the pedagogic design and the role of group work, there are also many who do not. Every round of CEQs brings the inevitable barrage of comments around groupwork across my courses, despite the different iterations of groupwork, the carefully laid foundations, the meticulous organization and the many emails to ensure that everyone is on track…As one student noted "I'm not a fan of groupwork". Comments like these, make me first, grind my teeth in anger and then second, seek a darkened room to lie down in. I'm angry because these are really ill-informed opinions. I'm exhausted because the implication is that I must somehow make students "fans" of groupwork. Or I must remove groupwork to make their lives easier. [Cecile]

Although seen in isolation, CEQs may seem little more as a minor annoyance; when viewed in relation to broader systems of control, they become another piece of a surveillance apparatus that relies on appraising, quality control, and performative norms. We agree with Hennessy and McNamara (2013) who contend that, "within cultures of performativity, where knowledge is perceived as measurable and often explicitly defined, the propensity to question, challenge and critically evaluate knowledge is arguably limited" (p. 9). In classrooms that are dialogical and collaborative, these expectations inevitably influence how students construct their identities and, in turn, they play a role in shaping the classroom environment. As John wrote in his narrative:

> CEQs affect me in two main ways I think. The first is that they make me less likely to be straightforward and honest with students. I feel like I have to be continually avoiding hurting their feelings or coming across as too demanding. Students today seem to feel like that if they are stressed or if they cannot understand something then it is automatically the instructor's fault. This is problematic for me as a teacher because in my view, if I am not challenging the assumptions of my students or challenging them then I am not doing my job. It is a delicate balance and one that becomes more worrisome when one is on the tenure track where there is so much scrutiny and it feels like any weaknesses or deficiency can be fatal.

> The other problematic way that CEQs impact me as an instructor is that they make me less likely to experiment with my teaching. You are more careful about trying anything out of the ordinary because you are not sure how students will react. Especially in an online environment when you try something new there are always wrinkles to iron out and this takes time. It is better to keep things relatively simple which I suppose might lead towards a kind of institutional group-think where everyone just tries to stay within the norms of expectations, at least until they get tenure and at that point they might not even care any longer about what happens. [John]

Where does this leave us? We cannot compel educational consumers to attend classes; we cannot make them uncomfortable with their privilege or the state of the environment. We are not supposed to challenge their abilities or to insist on the integrity of academic disciplines. We are creating a space where it is difficult, if not impossible, to be the teachers we want to be. For students, consumerism in higher education creates a type of pseudo-agency where market power stands in as a proxy for real critical consciousness and community-building. This is particularly true for academics who lack the protection of institutional tenure:

> Early career scholars and untenured faculty are dependent upon CEQs to demonstrate their teaching efficacy, this however is an impossible task as the CEQ does not measure the quality of instruction, does not account for pedagogical choices, and does not consider the power relationships between students and faculty. In fact, CEQs act upon early career scholars and untenured faculty in an oppressive manner, forcing them to choose: do I teach for a positive CEQ outcome or do I teach to unsettle, to disrupt and to challenge learners. A dichotomous relationship of performance is established when faculty must choose, do I perform the act of educator for the promotion and tenure committee, or do I perform the act of educator for the learners in my class. [Sarah]

Neoliberal scripts are hidden, but they are revealed in the practices and habits that shape our everyday existence, especially when they are presented as inevitable or without any realistic alternatives; they shape our sense of self, our capacity for self-determination, and our desires (Clarke, 2013). Questioning CEQs and other aspects of audit-culture does not mean that one is against good teaching, or that one does not care about students. We need to collaborate with students and our peers to try and find meaningful alternatives that allow us to perform our identities in more fulfilling and empowering ways. We find a sense of kinship and shared purpose by

> 'giving voice' in the manner in which we have done so is an effective means of "talking back" against such neo-liberal regimes of performativity which may also be effective as a form of localized resistance, strengthening our ability to cope with the anxiety such regimes routinely provoke. (Ruth, Wilson, Alakavuklar, & Dickson, 2018, p. 154)

CEQs Remind Us of the Importance of Performing Resistance

What the CEQ process reveals is an underlying message that flaws are not an expected part of a unique human identity, but are a kind of pathology that need to be quarantined or expelled. Such a norm conditions us to hide our vulnerabilities, and to avoid those who are open and honest enough to give voice to their own. The pursuit of knowledge and truth does not extend to self-knowledge or psychological truth; these things are not of interest to tenure and promotion committees or external

referees, though they do exist, like a kind of growing collective subconscious that needs to be continually repressed even as it finds other means of expression—some destructive and, we hope, others that gesture towards happier endings. In order to "count" you have to become another self, even as your other hidden self comes to cease to exist. We have to hide the self that we want to exist. Sometimes, even just acknowledging and sharing one's own frustration can lead to seeing the possibility of opting out of seemingly all-pervasive governance practices:

> The group work I design forces students to 1) engage in course material by having to apply what they learned that week; 2) communicate with other learners. I do this because we have so many online learners who don't even read the course content and only submit the assignments. My courses make them work. The question I ask myself before teaching this semester was: What should I do, based on these CEQ comments? Should I give up on group work because students aren't "fans"? Like I gave up on the digital essay I asked students to produce one year, or the co-operative app that I asked students to use another year to read a paper together? Anything new and different is too much work, too complicated, not worth the marks. Should I leave students to work in isolation – something that I know will not aid learning or enrich their experience? The educator in me refuses to give up on group work. A more satisfying solution would be not to open that brown envelope when it turns up in my mailbox. [Cecile]

Imagining otherwise, even giving voice to our sense of frustration, is not a meaningless exercise but a means of finding alternative tactics of resistance, such as, for example, "insisting that a diverse range of meanings be ascribed to a term like 'quality' rather than allowing it to be reduced to the results of high-stakes test scores" (Clarke, 2013, p. 236). John has similar worries about the impact of CEQs on the teacher-student relationship:

> All in all, although I can understand the rationale for CEQs I think that they can become a substitute for a deeper relationship with students and an academic environment that is an intense and vibrant community. Instead they have become a one size fits all solution to a problem that is really about true caring and the need for both students and teachers to be present in a world where we are increasingly frustrated, unappreciated, and alone. Why isn't there some similar measure for administrators or students themselves I wonder? Or a better way to take an inventory of our feelings? These types of transactional quick fixes are a poor substitute for real meaningful conversations about the nature and purpose of education and how we can work together to create more meaningful and authentic educational experiences. Maybe there should be a box we can all check for that? Sign me up. I'm all in for that. [John]

Those researchers who work in autoethnography and self-study understand the powerful synergies that can result from careful study of the institutional subject roles and the spaces of resistance that are open to being reclaimed. Rather than pitting us against students and each other, scholars and students need to re-signify the meaning and nature of the university that is more than a conglomeration of inputs, outputs, and efficient processes, but rather, a community that is critical, rooted in meaningful institutional practices and that is firmly committed to the nature of education as a critical public good. Autoethnography in the neoliberal academy becomes a counter-trend in a world where "concerted focus on measurement and testing in education has also resulted in the emergence of an affective/effective divide in which attention to the affective is perceived to exist at the expense of effectiveness in education"

(Hennessy & McNamara, 2013, p. 10). Sarah describes a one-on-one assessment session that she had as a graduate student that was both difficult and transformative:

> My heart began to race, the heat from inside was slowly moving its way up toward my fleshy cheeks, a thought flashes in, why do I have to show the intensity of my feelings on my face so clearly. It's like a direction or sign post to everyone "something is wrong" I'm not ready for them to know yet how angry I am, how embarrassed I am honestly. 12 other students are sitting quietly, as we all receive our first year performance evaluations. Objectively I should be pleased, the narrative reports of my academic and clinical performance sing high praise, I however have tunnel vision for the last small paragraph.
>
> *"Sarah is passionate and a staunch advocate for social justice. She raises important conversations with her peers and professors, conversation that may cause us to pause and critically engage with issues of equity which she offers up for dialogue, however her approach is off-putting and we are concerned about her apparent difficulty regulating her emotions, anger in particular in these instances. The manner in which she approaches others can be abrasive, demanding and results in disengagement and verges at time on unprofessional behavior."*
>
> In one fell swoop I was enraged and terrified, overwhelmed. What would this mean for me as a professional? Is this really how I am perceived? How was it possible that my intentions were experienced by others in this way? [Sarah]

As Sarah reflects on this encounter today, she realized how important it was for her to experience and process these powerful emotions:

> I paused before acting. Time seemed to have stopped, it was in slow motion. I took a deep breath. I had a choice. It was an importance decision in that moment, at 28 in entering my second year of a clinical psychology doctoral program, I could choose to accept the information I was presented with or reject it…I chose acceptance. In the years since this moment I have come to a nuanced understanding of how privilege, mediates the feedback I received from my now colleagues.
>
> How does this relate to evaluation, assessment and critical review?
>
> You see while the information I received was challenging to integrate I could not disregard it. As a student I was compelled to engage with this narrative feedback. It had meaning because it was catered to me as a learner. Upon entering the academy several years later, I naïvely assumed that is the same ethic as care, flaws and all, which I had experienced as a student with evaluation would be reciprocated in the evaluation process for faculty. Instead I found the CEQ measures to be unhelpful, dismissive of my expertise as an educator and scholar and an invalidating process for both students and faculty. [Sarah]

As the above narrative demonstrates, performativity as a means of continually writing and rewriting the self, cuts both ways. It can be a technique of consciousness raising as well as a neoliberal technology of control. If teaching is a meaningful part of academic freedom and our teaching identities are constructed by quality assurance instruments like CEQs then, we need to focus our attention on the centrality of identity and identity-shaping practices as being fundamental to intellectual activity and freedom of inquiry.

Performing Otherwise—Concluding Thoughts

What do CEQs do to our teaching and to our perceptions of ourselves as teachers? We were surprised at the extent of our frustration and anger with an institutional practice that has become ubiquitous. We draw three conclusions from the exploration of our experiences: First, the presumption with CEQs is that we need to continually be proving our worth as university teachers. Despite qualifications, long-term experience, and in-depth knowledge, we are positioned as the "problem" and need to continually prove that we can do our jobs. This is particularly relevant for those of us in Education. Second, what our narratives show is that CEQs are a micro theme within the bigger picture of a service delivery model of university teaching. CEQs function as a means of undermining teachers' status and autonomy by positioning them as neoliberal knowledge workers who need to adopt a customer-service type of mentality rather than seeing students as community-members who share responsibility. While we focus our struggles on the micro (CEQs), the macro situation becomes invisible. CEQs become yet another administrative task in an increasingly long list of matters to negotiate. CEQs also reinforce notions of individualization since it is the individual who carries the responsibility of teaching in the university. With this individualization comes shame—if the CEQ results are poor—and isolation. The final point we would like to make is that engaging with CEQs *collectively* as we have done in this paper, shifts us away from a blame-culture and fosters individual shame resilience. In this collective space, it is easier to move towards useful conversations of teaching accountability and a resistance of CEQs.

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Performing Life Stories: Hindsight and Foresight for Better Insight

Lynn Norton and Yvonne Sliep

Abstract

We examine the benefits of developing critically reflexive learners through life story performance embedded in a Critical Reflexive Model. Students are invited to work with their life stories in a safe, dialogical space and to deconstruct various forms of power and its influence on their lives. Using a mix of creative and embodied methodologies, students explore their values, agency, and performativity to enable a deeper level of critical reflexivity. As researchers, we track what ongoing contributions reflexivity has made to the lives of students after graduating and currently working in the field as professionals. Our findings indicate that students experience shifts in their perception of self, others, and their contexts, which make them better placed to respond to the many complexities of society in South Africa on both a personal and a professional level.

Background

In this article, we examine the benefits of experiential teaching and learning work involving life stories that has been done with Health Promotion Masters' students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The relevant module, entitled the "Personal Is the Professional," facilitates interactive and dialogical learning spaces for students to share and deconstruct their personal stories collectively to increase insight and the ability to respond to their own and others' contexts. This process is facilitated using a Critical Reflexive Model. The model focuses on four aspects explored by students in a carefully facilitated dialogical space: the deconstruction of power, values informing identity, agency linked to responsibility, and performance of self in daily life and in a work context (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009; Norton & Sliep, 2018; Sliep & Gilbert, 2006; Sliep & Norton, 2016). Students are invited through a range of mindfully developed experiential exercises to tell and retell their stories and life experiences in the context of the group. In each sharing, we view students as performing aspects of their lives and listening to and being exposed to the stories of others. This adds a rich context to the experience as they are each asked to analyze their stories in relation to each aspect of the model. Use of a narrative approach within this framework deepens the exploration of pathways to critical reflexivity (Sliep & Norton, 2016). Exposing students to stories beyond their own context, invites them to challenge their assumptions and intentions within a social constructivist paradigm. It is argued that such reflexivity is crucial for the development of critical consciousness, revealing power dynamics, enabling agency and to better understand others in context and to walk the talk (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009; Sliep & Gilbert, 2006). Creating spaces that value and support the telling of and listening to personal stories is viewed as an empowering activity that helps create meaning and shape identity (Rappaport, 1995).

The model has previously been interrogated as a tool for promoting reflexivity in health promotion education (see Norton & Sliep, 2018), which details the development and elements of the model and its application to life stories. Findings indicate that the process of sharing and deconstructing stories in terms of this interactive and participatory methodology and the model helps equip students with the reflexive skills necessary to better negotiate their current social contexts. The aim of this section of the research is to more fully explore the question whether such skills are transferrable over time—does reflexivity last? We wanted to find out what contributions this approach has made to the personal and professional lives of students since doing the module and what impact it has had going forward. In an endeavour to answer these questions, we brought together a group of students who had graduated, to track their reflexivity from an educational to a professional setting.

Critical Reflexivity and Stories in Education

There are a variety of ways to describe critical reflexivity, but we view it here as comprising an appraisal of the self as a participant of collective action. This involves understanding that our actions are formed through interactions with others in our environment (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). Cunliffe (2004) describes reflexivity practically as "examining critically the assumptions underlying our actions" (p. 407). In education, such an appraisal is aided when viewed as a dynamic process that opens students to developing a critical consciousness that is necessary for them to become self-determining learners and socially responsible professionals (Mangadu, 2014). Sharing life stories in a group through a narrative approach invites students to work with their lived experiences in a way that links their personal discourses to their professional lives (Sliep & Kotze, 2007). Various creative methodology is used like embodiment, performance, poetry, and visual arts to open the way for the development of agency and accountable performance in a learning community (Sliep, 2010).

Such a process opens possibilities for transformative learning (TL) or changes in perception that occur as students develop skills to help them to challenge how they view themselves within their own stories and in society. TL has been defined in a number of ways, but of relevance here is an expansive description by Kroth and Cranton (2014) of TL as a "deep shift in perspective during which habits of mind become more open, more permeable, more discriminating, and better justified" (p. 9). In life story work, such a shift in perspective becomes possible through critiquing one's own story to better understand the operation of power, leading to a better understanding of one's internalized habits and beliefs. Stories are not experienced or told in a vacuum, but within the context of the stories that surround us. A full understanding of the self therefore depends on an understanding of our cultural, social, and political lives (Dirkx, 1998). Thereafter, transforming our frames of reference requires critically reflecting on the assumptions we generally take for granted, which is aided by participating in dialectical discourse to validate new judgments formed during this process (Mezirow, 1997, 2009).

Graham (2017) explains the reflective process as one that allows us to examine our meaning-making process, which is influenced by our subjectivity and embodiment of the discourses that affect our lives. She brings together reflection and narrative as "weaving a pattern of knowing and self-inquiry" (p. 4).

By better understanding how they are positioned within discourses, students can develop the ability and agency to critique the status quo and to play a more active role to position themselves more favourably (Sliep, 2010). The power of the self-telling process is that, "[i]n the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (Bruner, 1987, p. 15). The shifts that happen when we come to understand how we interpret our reality, open our potential for building preferred stories and accepting different worldviews. This is transformative as we are then better able to position ourselves differently. Performance then is both in the process (telling, retelling, listening, questioning) and the product. The critical reflexivity process requires that we continuously examine how we act in the world—how we perform.

Study Design, Aims, and Methodology

This is a qualitative study using creative and dialogical research methodology with a group of students who had completed the module in the last 12 years and were followed up as professionals in the field or furthering their studies. Participants were invited to share their experiences at an intensive two-day participatory data-gathering workshop (the "workshop") through a variety of experiential exercises in a tranquil and natural setting that was especially chosen to enhance and deepen reflexivity. We wanted to understand more about the reflexive skills that are developed through life story work, whether these skills are transferred from the teaching space into participants' "real" lives, and what value they may have in different and future contexts. These are not simple questions as we are inquiring about change—a different way of interacting in society. Such understandings are often not immediately apparent and may be hidden below the surface. Stimulating deep, reflective responses from participants required using a variety of experiential and creative methods to tap into their conscious and subconscious understandings of personal change.

Sampling

We used convenience sampling to gather a group of past students prepared to share their understandings at the workshop. The sample included 10 past students from different nationalities, five male and five female, with six from SA and four from a variety of other countries across Africa. A sampling criterion was that they had completed their master's degree at least two years prior to the study. The timeline spanned 2006 to 2015.

Data Collection and Analysis: An Experiential Exploration

We followed a reflexive and participatory approach to collecting and analyzing the data that involved a variety of qualitative methods, including using methods informed by grounded theory, especially in regard to coding strategy and analytical questioning of the data (Charmaz, 2012). Previous research had already provided some evidence of the value of following a critical reflexive approach in education and of the practicality of using the model as a guiding framework for developing critical reflexive skills (Norton & Sliep, 2018; Sliep, 2010; Sliep & Kotze, 2007); however, we still required more rigorous

evidence of this, particularly in relation to *what* the long-term benefits are and *why* the model was proving effective.

We used a variety of creative exercises to generate text for analysis, including structured interviews and presentations, reflecting in nature, reflexive writing exercises, using cell phone photographs, poetry, body work, and a collective collage. Exercises done individually were presented to the group for a deeper probing into the experience through which themes and patterns were identified. This layered approach includes participants as coresearchers, but also allows for emotion and a more sensory understanding of their experiences (Bryant, 2015). Being reflexive is about being open to alternative realities (Gergen, 2009); and as this is a subjective experience, one needs to look towards creative ways to uncover this. A mix of creative methods can also help to give meaning to or explain experiences that are difficult to describe, or that involve emotional as well as cognitive responses (Bryant, 2015). Further, expressive arts are used in research to contextualize meaning in a subjective way to help uncover deeper meaning, experiences, and insights (Brady, 2009; Gallardo, Furman, & Kulkarni, 2009; Rogers, 1993). An overriding aim in facilitating these exercises is for the participants to embody their experiences, and to express (perform) their emotional connection to the experience. For example, participants were invited to work in pairs and interact with statues in the garden to capture a deeper expression of their reflections, and to create their own bodily representation of this (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Cell phone photographs representing characteristics valued by participants: [1] Empowerment [2] Confidence and freedom, [3] Teamwork and appreciation of the power of the collective

All exercises involved verbal, embodied, or written responses from participants explaining their positions, for example, in relation to the choice of photographs and representations in the collage. These were transcribed and, together with other written texts, were analyzed using a mix of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) coupled with a coding process that used gerunds in terms of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2012). In this way, we coded for both topics and themes (thematic); and actions and processes (gerunds). We did this interactively with the data to make comparisons with the themes identified by the participants. We also critically analyzed the overall findings using questions framed in terms of the model following a dialogical approach to delve more deeply into the question: *why* these results? (Frank, 2010).

With emerging results showing that the central theme and process was one of "change" in the way participants viewed themselves, others, and their context, we went a step further to explore the links between the processes and outcomes to highlight the necessary preconditions for this interaction, and to draw conclusions about the efficacy of the model as a framework for developing critical reflexivity.

Our findings are presented using a mix of tables, explanatory narrative interspersed with quotations from participants, and "found" poetry which uses the actual words and phrases of the participants to form illustrative poems of the results. Found poetry can be used in different ways, either as an analytic inquiry tool or, as we have done, as a form of presentation. Either way, it is considered as a means to "bring the researcher closer to the data in different and sometimes unusual ways that can yield new and important insights" (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 235). Cell phone images are added to reveal another layer of the experience performed by participants, but were only analyzed in terms of explanations given by participants and so became part of the textual analysis. In keeping with the principle that no single understanding is ever adequate, the presentation of our data includes photographs, original quotations, and poetry, weaving together the words of participants, to leave our analysis open to further interpretation by the reader (Frank, 2010).

Results

The results are presented first from the perspective of the participants and then findings from the coding process are offered in a way that shows the interaction between process and outcomes. The findings indicated strong shifts in the changing perceptions of participants in self-, relational-, and contextual awareness.

Participatory Analysis

We worked closely with participants during the workshops to reveal not only the values they identified for themselves as having crystallized during and after their experience of the module, but also the themes they saw emerging from the overall practice of being reflexive students and practitioners. In the final collage, the participants were asked to identify themes that they felt strongly represented their experiences of reflexivity. They identified seven major themes: the difficulty but value of sharing stories; search of the self; diversity; tolerance; togetherness; happiness; and uncertainty. These themes were very closely tied to the values the participants identified as having crystallized for each of them during and since the module.

These findings are reflected in a collective poem using lines of poetry written by the participants during the workshop to express their reflection on sharing their stories. After the participants gave their reflections in poetic style, the lines that stood out while we listened were captured and are expressed here in a pantoum, showing powerfully the importance of trust, non-judgment, the value of diversity, and the growth in confidence that comes from a deeper understanding of the self. A pantoum is a form of poetry which repeats lines throughout the poem, allowing the words to "circle back" and to add new

meaning to what has been said before (Schuster & Coetzee, 2014). By writing lines that have been identified by the participants in a reversed order, it creates the opportunity for meaning to sink in and be transformed by the reader. In the example below there is a tentative request in the opening line—*Not judgemental where my tree of life grows*. If the same line is read at the conclusion of the pantoum—*not judgemental where my tree of life grows*—it calls up a state of confidence and affirmation. The collected lines reflect the process that participants went through where it is not the essence of their life story that changes, but how it is now understood differently. From uncertainty to confidence, and an emphasis to not judge the life stories of others, the poem reveals the many layers that may not otherwise become visible.

Fig. 2: Group collage

Not judgemental where my tree of life grows
Trust is important in sharing
The importance of diversity and team work
I am a work in progress

Trust is important in sharing
There are so many layers to me
I am a work in progress
Beautiful from the inside out
Not ashamed of who I am

There are so many layers to me
Like a pearl in an oyster
Beautiful from the inside out
Not ashamed of who I am
The deeper you look the more you see

Like a pearl in an oyster
The importance of diversity and team work
The deeper you look the more you see
Not judgemental where my tree of life grows

Further evidence is provided in cell phone photographs taken by participants and referred to above (see Figure 1). The participants used the images to reveal vivid descriptions of their reflections and these were coded and analyzed as part of the data.

A Dynamic Interaction of Process and Outcomes

Coding across all the data included taking into consideration the themes identified by the participants and a critical questioning of what was happening during the process. Reflexivity is a dynamic and iterative process and we discovered during the analysis that the process described by participants (experience of reflexivity) interconnected very closely with the outcomes (results of reflexivity) that were identified in terms of the themes. When probing the data even more critically—by asking *why* these outcomes—the themes revealed also a close tie between the manner in which the process was facilitated (necessary preconditions) and the outcomes (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Patterns, Themes and Subthemes Identified in the Data*

<table>
<tr><th>PROCESS
(Coding in gerunds)</th><th>OUTCOMES
(Coding for patterns and themes)</th><th>PRECONDITIONS
(Critical questioning)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Process of change
• Becoming aware
• Getting a broader understanding
• Starting to appreciate others
• Working through uncertainty
• Becoming more reflective
• Having a more holistic approach</td><td>Change
• Change in self
• Change in perceptions (ways of seeing the world)
• Change in perceptions of others (embracing diversity)
• Uncertainty as a result of change</td><td>Developing skills for change
• Critical and reflective thinking
• Questioning and challenging assumptions
• Seeing things from different perspectives
• Communication and expression
• Creativity
• Empowerment</td></tr>
<tr><td>Process of self-exploration
• Taking time to explore
• Digging deeper
• Reflecting on past experience
• Being critical
• Being reflective
• Questioning
• Understanding construction of the self
• Becoming more open-minded</td><td>Self-awareness
• Strong sense of identity
• Confidence
• Aware of strengths and weaknesses
• Authenticity
• Resilience and overcoming obstacles
• Focus on values
• Positive outcomes: happiness, peace</td><td>Supporting transformation
• Time, space and opportunity for self-discovering
• Space for voice
• Witnessing the stories of others
• Building trust
• Supportive, safe space
• Evoking emotions
• Guided process</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr>
<td>Process for social cohesion
• Bringing people together
• Learning about other cultures
• Learning to trust others
• Accepting people
• Respecting others
• Embracing diversity
• Not making assumptions about others
• Moving towards collectivist views</td>
<td>Relational awareness
• Diversity
• Understanding other perspectives
• Collective vs individualist views
• Tolerance, respect, and acceptance of others
• Value of teamwork
• Positive outcomes: togetherness and social cohesion</td>
<td>Facilitating connectivity
• Being in a group and sharing journey
• Finding commonalities in overcoming obstacles
• Influence of diversity in group
• Facilitating open discussion to challenge stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic and dynamic process
• Analyzing context more consciously
• Understanding others in context
• Taking context and circumstances into account
• Holding a broader view</td>
<td>Contextual awareness
• Importance of context
• Holistic approach to working with others
• Positive outcomes: better understanding of broader issues
• Seeing the bigger picture</td>
<td>Linking the personal and the professional
• Sharing personal stories and challenges
• Understanding influence of past & present experiences on future choices
• Understanding of self in relation to others and wider societal context</td>
</tr>
</table>

The data revealed four strong overlapping and dynamic themes that were explored separately: self-awareness, relational awareness, contextual awareness, and positive change. The themes were closely tied to the process that evolved through the facilitation of a reflexive and dialogical space: exploring self led to self-awareness; building social cohesion led to relational awareness; and taking the surrounding environment and background into account led to contextual awareness. The "preconditions" for critical reflexivity clearly indicate the importance of communication, creativity, and space for voice (a space to enact your story among others). For example, *being part of a group, sharing the journey,* and *open discussion*. Interaction is vital for setting a stage for challenging one's assumptions and beliefs, and for broadening one's views of self in relation to others and context. This is a necessary foundation for undergoing a process of change (learning that is potentially transformative) that facilitates growth.

A Journey of Discovery: A Developing Awareness of Self, Other, and Context

Attaining self-awareness was closely linked to a discovery of the self. Having once believed that it was better to remain silent and not share her experiences, one participant said she began to understand that it was "ok to share my experiences" and to explore the layers to reveal who she really was. Increased self-awareness was seen to lead to self-acceptance, enabling one to embrace oneself authentically. A better understanding of the self, opened the way for participants to see their identity as one that they could shape and control and thus navigate themselves more effectively through their worlds: "I gained a clearer, firmer understanding of how I fitted into the world, how I had positioned myself."

Hand in hand with increased self-acceptance came an increase in relational awareness, tolerance, acceptance, and nonjudgment of others: "It's linked to a shared understanding or feeling that everyone is facing an obstacle no matter what their circumstances and that we must not take people for granted or their circumstances for granted."

One participant said that as her self-awareness grew, she began to see things from others' perspectives, to be less individualistic and self-absorbed, and to take a more holistic approach towards others, including her clients. The increased awareness of the importance of connecting with others also translates into a better contextual awareness, an ability to *see the bigger picture*. As one participant stated: "It was an experience of sharing, learning, understanding, embracing, and developing the big picture of commonality and humanity."

Responding to questions about what these realizations have meant to participants in their professional lives after the module, participants said the following:

"Professionally I can relate to others with respect irrespective of my perceived superior position or different background."

"I have a much broader and flexible understanding of people, the importance of teamwork, and the advantages of being able to work as part of a multidisciplinary team."

"I believe that I am a more authentic, more holistic professional because of what I learned."

"It's helped me to be able to communicate with people more effectively, to be able to take into account peoples past circumstances, their backgrounds, environments they have grown up in, different beliefs and respecting that."

Changing the Story

In all of the above, participants reveal a process of change—moving from a primarily self-centred approach to a more relational one. This was also reflected in an exercise in which we asked participants to explore their before-and-after experiences of sharing their stories within the group and were formed into a "found" poem showing the shifts that took place:

Before I shared my story
I was rigid in my thinking
Too worried by what others thought
I was closed in, shy
Not able to express myself
I did not want to go deep
Interrogate my past
I was lost in a way

After I shared my story
I was more self-aware, critical, flexible
The entire picture of my growing up became clear
I became confident
I realized that I'm a fighter, a survivor
Someone who is resilient
I realized how the world around us
Impacts our development

Before I heard your story
I didn't really know who you were
Just took you at face value
I was self-centered
Totally committed to minding my own business
I viewed you as someone in control
I was quick to judge
I didn't understand

After I heard your story
I learnt to appreciate you
Respect who you really are
Built by your situation
Now I can relate to you, appreciate you
See you embedded in your context

And now
I take time to understand
And appreciate your history
I am able to express myself
At a deeper level

These words reveal a more insightful acceptance of self and others. We learn and grow through our own stories and through the stories of others. Stories in this sense are performative tools for change. For this change to take place, our stories need to be revealed, shared, and acted upon.

An Illustrative Overview

A strong illustration of all the themes interwoven into one student's story comes from a participant who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, grew up in Zambia, and has now lived in South Africa for 10 years. Navigating her diverse background has been difficult, "'cos I couldn't relate to one country, I couldn't relate to who I am." However, through the process of reflexive storytelling, she says, "I've learnt to embrace myself and my diversity and to relate to all three countries and what I want to pass across to different people (is) that they are who they are and they should embrace themselves."

During the exercise on values and choosing a representative statue, the participant chose an image of herself next to the "Statue of David" and captioned it "resilience," stressing the importance of being authentic (see Figure 3). She explains why:

> … when I was sharing my story, I actually did realise that I have gone through so much, and so the characteristic that came up for me was resilience… I realised that I'm actually very resilient despite everything that I went through I was able to actually bounce back to life…the story was a mirror, a reflection 'cos I actually didn't get the time to reflect on my experiences. So sharing my story was like getting an opportunity to reflect, to actually see myself, ….I had to learn to embrace myself. So this statue being naked, for me it should present the person, showing who they really are.

On the process of sharing her story and awakening to an awareness of her resilience, the participant explains: *"Sharing your story is something that actually awakens your eyes, like you get to see things from a different perspective."* The following short segment of a poem written by the participant during the workshop sums up how the process changed her:

I can relate with you
Not ashamed of who I am
Embracing my uniqueness and taking one step at a time
The beauty of life

Fig. 3: Cell phone image, caption: Resilience

In regard to taking these realizations into the workplace, the participant, a senior tutor, says:

> You know this is who I am and I can actually do something and add some value in people's lives and that's what I try to also embrace—every student's uniqueness, trying to relate to them on the level as well as relating to each person individually, considering their diverse culture and how they were brought up.

Discussion

A Transformative Process

The data indicates that a transformative process has taken place among all participants. We see this in terms of their increased awareness of themselves, others, and their social context. Although not all participants change in the same way, and different participants experience aspects of the process in their own unique way, all indicated that some form of a realization that has taken place (about themselves, others, or their work). This is confirmed by the participants in written responses to the question *"How did the life story work you did during the module influence how you see yourself in the world?"* which are merged into a poem, once again using the actual words of the participants*:*

I became
more self-aware
more informed, and better armed
I had a clearer, firmer understanding
of how I view myself in this world
of how I fit into this world

Stepping into my personal strength, I became
more open to those around me
not making assumptions
taking people at face value

Although developing critical reflexive skills does not cover the entire process of transformative learning as envisaged by Mezirow, these changes in awareness could be viewed as a shifting in one's meaning perspectives, which can cover a range of interpretations about various social issues and psychological responses (Mezirow, 2008). Relationally, providing circumstances that open us to more integrative and inclusive frames of reference, for example by experiencing others' cultures and critically reflecting on our own biases, we can become more accepting and tolerant of others (Mezirow, 1997). Cunliffe (2004) describes critically reflexive practice as involving both the examination of our assumptions underlying why we act in certain ways and the *impact* of those actions. Through such an analysis, we are then better able to develop more ethical and collaborative ways of responding to others. When we understand reflexivity as relational in the sense that it arises in interaction with others and occurs in "continuously constructed" contexts, it becomes necessary to be mindful of where, when, and with whom action takes place (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009, p. 470). In this sense, self-, relational, and contextual reflexivity are part of the same dynamic and iterative process envisaged by the practice of moving through the loops of the model within a dialogical space that encourages examining one's own story amidst the stories of others and not as stand-alone tales.

Transformational learning is a two-way process. The facilitator is continuously formed and informed by the participants during the process. Although it goes beyond the scope of this paper, a poem written

by the second author for the students is included as an example after a discussion on decolonizing the curriculum.

Decolonising the teacher

The stone, the mud, the moss, the tree

Morphed into more than you, more than me

Other spirits mingle in and out

New stories germinate and sprout

Carried in whispers, a gentle breeze

You free yourself from guarantees

Liberation narratives weave a twist

You free me from forming a fist

Social action with an open palm

Social action as a healing balm

Through you, we decolonise the curriculum

You teach, I learn, power to a minimum

Challenges and Potentials

Although the results show a very positive outcome from a diverse set of students, our sample was not large. Was this particular group of students, who were willing to come to the data gathering workshop, representative of others who have experienced the module? Maybe not, and perhaps not every student or even every group of students will experience such positive results. The research does, however, indicate the overall value of facilitating dialogical spaces for interaction over time for the development of critical reflexive skills for students, and of providing a theoretical framework for strengthening these skills. The data gathered at the workshop showed that reflexive shifts are deep seated and do carry over from the learning space into the professional.

Participants experienced a shift in the way they thought about themselves, others, and the way in which they approach their work and their clients or students, depending on their context. This indicated a shift not only in their thinking, but also in terms of performativity, going beyond their performance during the module itself. However, each individual is different and not all experience reflexivity in the same way or to the same degree. It was apparent during the research that the potential benefits of facilitating a dialogical space and offering the tools for reflexive practice will be limited or augmented by the ability of the particular individual to respond in terms of where they are positioned in their story at that moment in time. This may mean a shift in the self, other, or contextual viewpoints and not necessarily in all domains. The effect of various other factors, such as the developmental stage of the participant,

the homogeneity of the group, personality types, culture, and persistent structural difficulties, need also to be considered and require further research.

It was also made clear to us by participants that we need to find ways to continue the journey. When we asked participants which themes they felt they had neglected in their lives, all participants felt there was still "work" to do on the search for self, happiness, tolerance, and uncertainty, but saw this realistically as part of their ongoing life journey. The seeds are sown, but a growing tree still needs to be nurtured. Finding ways to continue to develop reflexivity by intentionally creating dialogical spaces for deeper reflection and interaction over time is important. We perform with and for each other, tell stories to each other, and are part of a larger forest. We cannot grow in isolation.

Conclusion

Waghid (2009) highlights the importance of cultivating deliberative democracy (sharing commonalities and respecting differences); compassionate imagining (treating others justly and humanely); and cosmopolitan justice (rights for all, including those considered as other) in universities on the African continent. Effective education then needs to favour a dialogical, egalitarian, and participative practice that is contextually based within the lived experiences of students. This research shows that when given the opportunity, students are more likely to realize their potential through a better understanding and critical reflection of themselves, others, and their social context—bringing together hindsight and foresight to develop better insight as a necessary skill for accountable praxis.

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The Role of Performances in Educational Practices: Experiences of BEd Students Preparing for the Classroom

Hetty Roessingh

Abstract

Performances and artefacts of student learning provide tangible evidence of their understanding of classroom instruction. Hattie (2012, 2015) uses the term *visible learning* to focus attention on the need for teachers to gather and consider these as evidence of students' ongoing learning, linking these tightly to teachers' pedagogical repertoire identified for having impact value. This article describes and illustrates a progression of learning tasks in an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program that affords insights into students' beginning ability to complete and execute lesson plans in their first year, first semester of the program.

Background

In 2006 the Association of Canadian Deans of Education met for the first time to formulate broad principles on initial teacher education (ITE) to be applied across Canada in Faculties of Education. The broad domains of *academic content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge,* and *situated practical knowledge*, as well as an introduction to research and scholarship in education, underlie a framework of 12 principles aimed at preparing preservice teacher candidates (i.e., BEd students) for entry-level into our profession and setting the stage for their continuing professional development as in-service practitioners. In broad strokes, these principles encompass and align with the *knowledge, skills*, and *dispositions* we seek to engender in ITE programs.

Teaching is a complex, delicate juggling act that makes many demands of teachers. They must not only be good "on paper," but also good "on their feet" and teach from the heart (Palmer, 1997)—a fuzzy construct that is hard "to nail" and even tougher to evaluate in a preservice teacher candidate. Academic content knowledge is often expected in the admission requirements to ITE programs, especially among secondary route students. Pedagogical and situated practical knowledge thus become the core of what these programs do to prepare teachers of the future: this is the focus of this article. The broad question that frames this work relates to making visible through understanding performances, the skills and dispositions that are part and parcel of an ITE program.

My work takes place in a faculty of education located in a large, urban setting that prepares teachers who will overwhelmingly seek and find employment in the local school boards. I have teaching responsibilities in the undergraduate program that includes an on-campus survey course for first semester students newly admitted to our BEd degree and a field (school-based) component of one week in an elementary and one week in a secondary setting that affords the opportunity to make the connections

between campus- and field-based experiences. It should be noted our work as teachers of teachers is second order pedagogy (Goodwin et al., 2014). However, there is an overlap of related content, pedagogical and practical knowledge, and skills. To a significant degree our faculty and ITE program seek to integrate knowledge and practice, by "walking the talk": that is, we want to model and engage our teacher-candidates in purposeful work that we hope they will observe in the field, and, in turn, adopt and adapt in their pedagogical repertoire for the own classrooms in the future.

This article describes a series of assignments in our ITE program that recognizes the value of learning by doing in the completion of a lesson plan, executing the plan via a micro-teaching assignment, the students' reflections, and instructor feedback. This work is completed in small collaborative learning groups that facilitate the give-and-take of discussion in constructing and theorizing the pragmatics of preparing to teach. In short, the path from pencil-and-paper planning to performing is made visible, documented, observed, interpreted, and used as "data" for the next iteration of my instructional planning (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1997). Artefacts of student learning are provided to illustrate this process.

Three Domains of an ITE Program

As mentioned above, ITE programs are structured to address three domains in preparing teacher candidates: academic content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and situated practical knowledge. In this section, further elaboration is provided for each domain.

Academic content knowledge, the "what" of teaching, is stipulated in provincial curriculum documents in content areas such as Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies, and Literature. Among secondary route teacher candidates in particular, a high GPA in a previous degree in a relevant discipline is usually already in place and is a key factor in the admissions criteria to ITE (Casey & Childs, 2011). Casey and Childs, however, conclude that GPA has little predictive value in determining students' preparedness for the eventual exigencies of the teaching profession. Hattie (2012) corroborates on this point, noting that teachers' subject matter knowledge does not improve student achievement.

Pedagogical knowledge, the "why" of teaching, addresses broad questions of developing the skills of teaching: lesson planning, task design, technique and strategy, grouping students for learning, and bringing to the fore the theoretical underpinnings that inform these aspects of teachers' work. For all teacher candidates, the meta-language of our discourse community in faculties of education and the teaching profession, is largely unfamiliar. Students of History, Literature, Physics, Mathematics, and Engineering, for example, must become conversant with the language of the predominant sociocultural theories and practices of teaching and learning that inform what we do as practitioners. Skills, theory, and the associated professional discourse conventions can be taught in an ITE program. However, we must be mindful that not all schooling contexts and parent communities adhere to the same foundational institutional frames associated with sociocultural theories and practices (Hirschkorn et al., 2017). For example, key findings evolving from a case study of perceptions of school culture and leadership in a local Chinese-Canadian bilingual program (Cheung, 2019) related to competing

conceptualizations and expectations among staff and the parent community relating to concerns such as homework, disciplining children; the role of direct instruction, drill, rote learning, precision and accuracy required (i.e., 100%) for basic written literacy development in Mandarin Chinese. Pen stroke and sequence matter in developing basic written literacy skills. This places the principal in the delicate position of constantly negotiating the curriculum, the pedagogical choices and the expectations of the parents, the Chinese-speaking staff, and the English-speaking staff.

Finally, situated practical knowledge represents the "how" question of enacting, executing, and evaluating the ability to mobilize content and pedagogical knowledge into the pragmatics of the teaching↔learning equation and the crucial, conceptual essence of what it means to be present to and to engage our students—"to teach." It is an elusive dimension that is less amenable to instruction in an ITE program. It is on these points—the skills and dispositional dimension—that effective teachers make a difference (Hattie, 2012).

The scholarly community advocates for gleaning insights into students' learning through an array of approaches well beyond the traditional paper-and-pencil mode that has been the mainstay in education and teacher preparation for decades (Hattie, 2012, 2015; Perkins, n.d.). Some professions and career fields are more amenable than others to adjusting their instructional and assessment repertoire to fulfill this mandate: the performing arts; technical, vocational, and apprenticeship board programs such as welding, autobody, carpentry, culinary arts, aestheticians; and courses that involve design and production (e.g., dressmaking and fashion design come to mind). These disciplines provide a compelling argument for the central role of the hands in laying down the neuro-circuitry in the hand-brain complex, leading to embodied cognition and precision of execution that we want for our teacher candidates as well (Wilson, 1999, 2002). It is important to underscore this is more than "just technique" or pedagogical skill, though they do not replace basic knowledge and skills.

The Role of Performances

The question, "what is a performance task?" or more precisely, "what is an understanding performance?" has shifted the discussion from knowledge telling, to demonstrating understanding through the *doing* of some task that reflects deep understanding of the central conceptual information, procedural proficiency, and the concomitant executionary requirements, and finally, retrospective reflection. It must go beyond rote, routine doing, but demonstrate the "I got it!" dimension in the mold of Piagetian-type tasks (Beilin, 1992; Beilin & Fireman, 1999) that ask children to arrange a set of sticks from shortest to longest, for example. Performances involve a representational view of understanding—students must manipulate and transform internalized schema into a product that reflects on the "I got it!" dimension. Achieving proficiency in complex tasks is *incremental*, making a good case for the inclusion of such an approach in any learning context. In time, with mindful practice, further feedback and ongoing reflection mastery may be achieved.

Considerations for a performance task might include the *authenticity* of the task: is this something we would do in real life? The *transferability* from the classroom to real-world contexts, the *explicitness* and *challenge* presented in the learning goals, the degree of *scaffolded supports* built into the task are further considerations. Perkins (n.d.) explained the idea of *flexible performance ability* that involves online monitoring of the performance and the ability to correct, recuperate, and redirect the performance, if necessary, as in a jazz musical performance or a youngster making good use of their eraser in putting thought to words on the page. In a teaching context, it can mean recognizing a *teachable moment* (Baxter, 2007), that is, the ability to respond to an unplanned event during the day and to capitalize in the moment on a teaching opportunity. *Strategy deployment* might be another consideration, as when students are involved in debating a point, advancing an argument, or playing chess. Asking for student reflection of their performance can further their own understanding and growth.

Performance-based educational practices find their theoretical roots in the domains of experiential learning (Dewey, 1897), constructivism, and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), with ongoing and evolving insights from the cognitive, and neurosciences. It is a practical theory of knowledge construction that emphasizes social and interactive processes, a continuity of experiences and experimentation in a purposeful learning environment. The role of the more knowledgeable other (MKO) in pitching learning experiences just beyond the current, actual level of development to challenge the learner in the zone of proximal development (ZPD: Vygotsky, 1978; 1962/1986), is crucial in scaffolding these next steps and mediating learning through language.

Making learning visible has been the watchword of educational movements both recent and past. Popularized by Hattie (2012), the term “visible learning” emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between teaching and learning. This is the intersection where effective teaching makes a distinct impact on student achievement outcomes. In the early childhood years, Helm et al. (1997) and Kline (2007), inspired by Malaguzzi’s work in Reggio Emilia, similarly underscore basic underlying tenets of observing, documenting, and interpreting performances that apply to students in any learning context, including in a teacher preparation program, the context in which this work takes place. Helm et al. (1997) write:

> Perhaps the greatest value of comprehensive documentation is its power to inform teaching. Teachers who have good documentation skills will make more productive planning decisions, including how to set up the classroom, what to do next, what questions to ask, what resources to provide and how to stimulate each child’s development. The more information a teacher can gather when making these decisions, the more effective a teacher is likely to be. (p. 201)

Indeed, these instructional considerations apply equally well to an ITE program as *becoming* teachers are apprenticed into their responsibilities for instructional planning, and, in turn, their role in observing, documenting, and interpreting the impact of their practice on student learning outcomes in the classroom.

Our work as teachers of teachers includes modelling and making visible the types of learning that, in turn, and, in time, can have an impact in the classroom. It is important to our students’ early preservice experiences that they can develop knowledge and skills for teaching in a safe, supportive, collaborative

learning setting where mistakes are part of the learning process and risk-taking is encouraged. The stakes in the second semester (Field 2) are much higher, including the possibility of failure or withdrawal from the BEd program.

A Progression of Understanding Performances in an ITE Program

This section provides an illustrative example of a progression of understanding performances in our ITE program. These include a lesson plan following a Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) format, and a micro-teaching assignment that involves executing the lesson plan completed in groups. An individual reflection of the micro-teaching affords insights into each student's thoughts on the process. Finally, I, as the instructor, offer feedback on the micro-teaching.

Lesson Planning: Templates as Scaffolds

Many lesson plan templates are available, including suggestions from provincial Ministries. Some school boards mandate lesson plan templates, and commercially, an array of formats are on offer. Fisher and Frey (2013) advocate for an explicit, structured framework to teaching and learning: the GRR that draws on Vygotskian notions of modeling, guided practice, and independent practice, through a progression/continuity of three stages: "I do→we do→you do." This transitions the learner to ultimately work alone.

For the purposes of this assignment, I adapted Fisher and Frey's (2013) GRR lesson template to provide scaffolding and a reminder of the key concepts in the left-hand column. Recall these students are still preservice teachers, and they are just in week 3 of their ITE program. Students are expected to contextualize this plan with a topic of their choice, usually a craft or skill that can be taught to a class of 35 students, their classmates, within 15-20 minutes. Origami projects (i.e., cranes), making paper airplanes or friendship bracelets, performing a simple card or "magic trick," playing simple games (i.e., cat's cradle), gift wrapping a package, making occasion cards, or securing a men's tie have all been used in the past to very successfully realize the goal of asking students to prepare a lesson, and think about the use of materials, partial completion of the task with the material (if necessary, ahead of time) to save time, timing/pacing, scaffolding and more.

Figure 1 illustrates the planning template.

GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY (GRR): LESSON TEMPLATE	
OPENING	
Teacher: • Sets objective and purpose: 'invitational hook' – why is this important? • Identifies goal: what should students know, be able to do? • Establishes, connects and builds prior knowledge (P-K): metaphoric connection, new vocabulary, key concepts • Technology use: Video clip? **Time:**	**Look 4s: 'Can do'/understanding performance in students:**
I DO (Direct teaching and Modeling)	
Teacher: • Explains and demonstrates the use of materials, procedures, processes. • Repeats the steps with a 'Think-aloud' to expose cognitive/ meta-cognitive engagement with the task • Strategy used to teach? • Models • Anticipates 'challenge points' and focuses on what to do • Scaffolds needed (hand-outs) • Technology use (document projector?) • Questions to 'check' for understanding **Time:**	**Look 4s:**
WE DO (Guided instruction)	
Teacher: • Uses a variety of activities/steps to engage students (folding, creasing, gripping, working with materials) • Checks for step by step progress • Transitions to partner work • Monitors and guides on timing, pacing • Provides feedback, offers re-teaching • Circulates, offers 1-1 support to help **Time:**	**Look 4s:**
YOU DO (Independent work)	
Teacher: • Circulates, monitors students work alone or in pairs • Assesses student mastery of task • Intervenes with anyone struggling learners • 'Show and tell' time/gallery walk **Time:**	**Look 4s:**
CLOSURE	
Teacher: • Restates the purpose and goal of the lesson • Informally assesses achievement ('exit slip') and invites student reflection **Time:**	

Fig. 1: Adapted GRR lesson template

Figure 2 illustrates a lesson plan for making balloon animals/buddies, including the step-by-step process of putting the plan together, following the guidelines provided in left-hand column.

GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY (GRR): LESSON TEMPLATE	
OPENING	
Teacher: • Sets objective and purpose: 'invitational hook' – why is this important? • Identifies goal: what should students know, be able to do? • Establishes, connects and builds prior knowledge (P-K): metaphoric connection, new vocabulary, key concepts • Technology use: Video clip? **Time:**	Objective: Students will create a balloon animal to sit on their wrist within twenty minutes. Students will improve their fine motor skills and listening comprehension. Display sample balloon animal to class. 'This is what you are going to make.' Hook: 'Does anyone remember receiving a balloon animal are going to make.' Hook. 'Does anyone remember receiving a balloon animal at the fairground? Would you like to make a balloon animal for your child? Logistics: We will split the class into 3 groups and each will be led by a facilitator. Within each group, the facilitator will go over each step to create our animal friends. We will also have a PowerPoint with each step being shown and animated. Encouragement: It's tricky at first, but with a bit of patience, you can master the technique. Each balloon animal is unique and no two will look alike Key Vocabulary: We will identify key terms we will use to refer to different parts of the balloon. We will label our hands 'dominant' and 'non-dominant.'
I DO (Direct teaching and Modeling)	
Teacher: • Explains and demonstrates the use of materials, procedures, processes. • Repeats the steps with a 'Think-aloud' to expose cognitive/ meta-cognitive engagement with the task • Strategy used to teach? • Models • Anticipates 'challenge points' and focuses on what to do • Scaffolds needed (hand-outs) • Technology use (document projector?) • Questions to 'check' for understanding **Time:**	We will demonstrate how to make a balloon animal and then you will each make one with your group leader. Each step will be shown on the screen and there are examples provided of the animal at each stage of construction. Balloons are pre-inflated. 1. From the nozzle end of the balloon, measure out a length of 3 fingers width and twist at that measurement. 2. Hold the body of the balloon in your twisting hand and pinch the nozzle with your thumb and pointer finger of the same hand. 3. Use your other hand to twist the nozzle and neck together and loop nozzle through the created string. 4. Make four bubbles of two equal finger widths and twist the last bubble together with the head. Making sure to hold onto the previous made bubbles. 5. Measure the body length to be the same length as your legs and twist together. 6. Cut a hole in the end of the tail without letting go of your last bubble. 7. Loop the tail through the legs and then back around the head to create a bracelet. 8. Customize your animal with a sharpie. 9. Wear your new animal friend and show it off to your friends! Think Aloud? Does it have to be a turtle? No! Get creative!

WE DO (Guided instruction)	
Teacher: • Uses a variety of activities/steps to engage students (folding, creasing, gripping, working with materials) • Checks for step by step progress • Transitions to partner work • Monitors and guides on timing, pacing • Provides feedback, offers re-teaching • Circulates, offers 1-1 support to help **Time:**	• Make sure to push the air up from the balloon, into the uninflated nozzle, as you make each bubble. This will stop your balloon from popping. • Remember to twist each bubble 10 times to make it secure. • Do not skip a step as your animal friend will not be complete. • Be bold with your twists! You might think as you twist your balloon that it's going to pop, but no, the balloons are surprisingly versatile! Encouragement: Each animal friend will take time to make, so have patience and remember to have fun! It will take some practice to get all the steps right, but you can always re-do a step or untwist a section to make sure it's correct. Monitor/Assess Answer any questions – refer students to the supplementary resources. If you have finished a step or completed your animal friend, check on a neighbor and see if they need help. Can you think of another way of explaining this?
YOU DO (Independent work)	
Teacher: • Circulates, monitors students work alone or in pairs • Assesses student mastery of task • Intervenes with anyone struggling learners • 'Show and tell' time/gallery walk **Time:**	Facilitators ensure members of their group have completed all the stages of balloon animal construction. Offering help to those individuals who need it. If necessary, they will assist other groups to finish their balloon animal sculptures. Students personalise their balloon animals with a permanent marker. Designs will be shown on the PowerPoint and models for inspiration. The internet can be used if more inspiration is needed – for other creatures, etc. What other animals can they make from balloons? Displaying their animals on their wrists to friends and/or family. Making up a story to go alongside their animal. Balloon sculptures are displayed on a table for all to admire.
CLOSURE	
Teacher: • Restates the purpose and goal of the lesson • Informally assesses achievement ('exit slip') and invites student reflection **Time:**	Restate objective: 'You have all successfully created a balloon creature!' Class discussion and informal assessment: This can take place around the display of balloon animals. How successful do you think you were? What was surprising? What was difficult? What was easier than you expected? Did you perform better then you expected? Did you enjoy it? What other animals would you like to make?

Fig. 2: Completed lesson plan template

Our class then conducted a gallery walk of the lesson plans that afforded the opportunity to provide visual support for how the lesson would unfold to accompany the lesson plan template. This provides further evidence of the student group's thinking related to task progression, the demands of the micro-teaching, and the likely visual support in the demonstration phase that would ensure success of

the lesson. It also reinforces the language used for the step-by-step progression in the plan. While this might seem like a simple consideration, these skills and insights need to transfer to the real-life context of the classroom in their Field 2 experiences when ITE students are expected to take on major responsibility for work in their placement schools.

More immediately, however, these students will be immersed in a Field 1 experience, as mentioned earlier (one week in each an elementary and secondary setting). The expectation here is that our students will be good ethnographers, embedding themselves into the culture of local schools and classrooms. These initial few weeks in the ITE program intend to provide frameworks, essential/inquiry questions for daily observations, documenting and interpreting in light of the research and campus experiences so far. This includes lesson planning in relation to curriculum, pedagogical and practical skills, formative assessment strategies, and the impact of all of these decisions on student learning. It's a very busy time for our students! Note *taking* becomes note *making,* that is the transformative dimension of making meaning of their journaling throughout the day in a supportive, collaborative cohort model that encourages talk and interaction. Students report even after day 1 the rich learning opportunity that Field 1 provides.

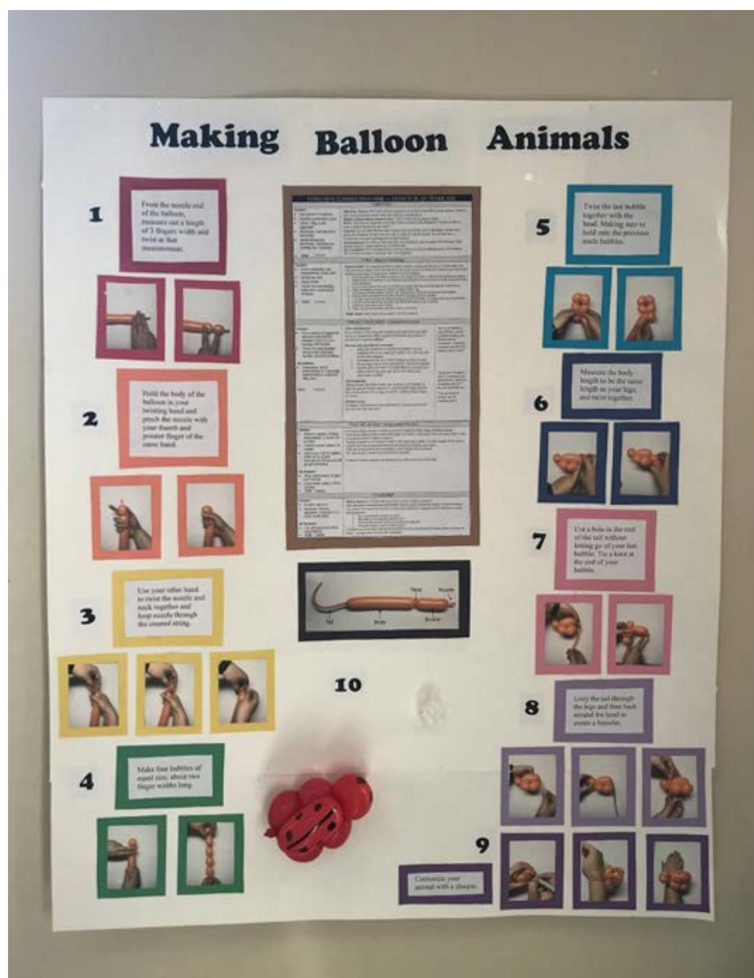

Fig. 3: Lesson plan with step-by-step demonstration visuals

Micro-Teaching: Executing the Lesson Plan

Following this lesson plan assignment, students execute the lesson plan as a micro-teaching assignment. As a group of six, there was enough to do, especially since the balloon buddy project required a significant amount of prep work. The task is fairly challenging, and all six group members had to be proficient to engage the class. Distributing materials, demonstrating through multimodal inputs (demonstration both at the front of the class, and with the document projector), further support in the way of a handout, individual helping, circulating, offering feedback, and more all made this lesson very effective and a good learning experience for the group.

The class is invited to give informal feedback along the lines of the following rubric:

Traits		Comments
Activating phase: Motivating 'hook': I see the relevance and importance of learning this skill/procedure. I really want to learn this!		
Teaching phase: 'I do, we do'… Explanations, modelling, demonstrating		
Guided practice: 'You do'		
Assessment: 'I did it!'		

Fig. 4: Informal feedback slip for group teaching: So you think you can teach!

All six students further needed to submit a reflection of their lesson execution. Common themes emerging from these included the detailed thought, anticipation concerning the level of challenge, advance preparation, demonstration and modeling, pacing and timing, and more. They focus on the ideas of hands-on, a progression or continuity of step-by-step tasks toward a goal, multi-model inputs, scaffolds, and external memory supports (i.e., handouts). What became clear to me as the instructor in this feedback loop is the benefit of the template as a scaffold in itself that facilitates thoughtful lesson planning.

The evaluation and feedback for this progression of assignments focuses on three dimensions of the micro-teaching: *delivery, engagement,* and *assessment*. We hope to note initial ITE students' appropriating the language/terminology that connects to the pedagogical decisions they are beginning to make, their sense of confidence and teacher presence—this elusive dimension that is so difficult to articulate, but we "know it when we see it" phenomenon.

Figure 5 provides the student group with a narrative assessment following a rubric on delivery, engagement, and assessment of their teaching performance.

Lesson: Balloon buddy

Delivery: "hook," shared responsibilities, pacing
A LOT of planning, prepping of materials, and rehearsal/practice was evident. This all allowed for a smooth delivery, with all group members participating. The class was quickly put to work once the demo/modelling/explanation phase was done. The balloons had been prepared/partially inflated and distributed to ensure quick entry into the task itself. This was a multi-step project where, at several spots, things could easily get derailed (you don't hold the nozzle properly, you don't twist enough or consistently in the same direction at each joint, you don't squeeze enough)—a good idea to provide enough challenge and keep the class working toward a doable goal within the allotted time. Individualizing our balloon buddy and doing the gallery walk allowed for a progression of activities, sharing, and some fun.

Engagement: Instructional strategies, multiple entry points/multi-model input, interaction with materials, interaction with teaching/group, individual helping / "teacher presence"
Used various ways/multi-model input for modeling the process, including verbal, visual, and "hands on" help to get the grip and twist of the balloon just right, and the progression. The overhead projector/document projector was used effectively together with a handout as a permanent external memory support for following the multiple steps to the end point. All group members circulated to help with finger/hand positioning and finalizing the balloon buddy to make the wrist band; and then to personalize it with a marker pen—too fun, too cute. The gallery walk was a good way to get people moving past each other ... everything done within about the amount of time we wanted for this. Everyone in the group demonstrated confidence, exuded enthusiasm for the balloon buddy mini-project, and a strong sense of "teacher presence."

You don't have to be a princess to LOVE balloons, but you have to know what you're doing. This guy makes it look so easy.

Assessment: ongoing/progressive monitoring
Group members circulated throughout to make sure everyone was on track and progressing smoothly with their balloon buddy, and when ready, to move to the second step of working with the marker pens to give their buddy a bit of a personality. This step yielded turtles, ladybugs, and all kinds of cute critters a kid could have close at hand for comfort and companionship. This would be a great party skill to have! Thank you so much for taking this assignment seriously, to thinking it through so meticulously and thoroughly and doing all the prepping ahead of time. It really came through! All of these are such important considerations for thinking about the classroom and working with kids of ALL ages, but little ones especially. They will not be patient without a good plan for working with and distributing materials, following multi-step tasks, transitioning from pair work to larger group gathering ... this could so easily collapse into chaos.

Fig. 5: Narrative assessment from instructor

Conclusion

Preparing teachers for the future is a difficult task for ITE programs. Many competing and complex factors must be taken into consideration. A partial list of these might include:

- Linguistic and cultural diversity
- Honoring Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world
- The call for inclusionary / least restrictive learning settings for all students
- Inquiry driven pedagogy balanced with explicit teaching of foundational skills
- The heightened demands for accountability concomitant with heightened demands for academic literacy for future participation in the knowledge economy
- The introduction of technology and increased expectations for digital literacy and engagement in distance delivery modes
- Character education
- Bilingual settings that may not conceptualize learning within a constructivist/sociocultural frame (Cheung, 2019)

ITE programs are under enormous pressure to recognize, recruit, select, and prepare teachers for the complexities and competing demands of the contemporary classroom. Current fiscal restraint experienced in many jurisdictions at all levels of education—both k-12 and postsecondary settings—places additional pressure to prepare and retain excellent teachers. It is a not a neat and tidy affair to select a cohort of ITE candidates from the pool of applicants, and respond to the local, national, and international workplace needs of our profession.

ITE programs, nevertheless, are charged with the responsibilities at a minimum of developing the pedagogical knowledge and skills that can make a difference at the classroom level. Performances and demonstrations of pedagogical knowledge and situated practical skills hold potential in our instructional and assessment repertoire in an ITE program. As for the elusive "it" factor that separates great teachers from good teachers, it resides in the heart and is of a piece of those who see teaching not as a career, or even a profession, but rather, a calling "to teach."

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Hetty Roessingh is a long-time ESL practitioner in the K–12 system, and a faculty member (since 2000) in the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. Research interests have included language and literacy development and longitudinal tracking studies to note how academic vocabulary is learned over time. Of particular interest is how young learners come to "own" the words they know, as this is visible in their written literacy efforts beginning at the onset of literacy learning. For the past six years, Hetty has voluntarily tutored four young Punjabi speakers every Monday evening. She learns and finds inspiration in their energy, curiosity, and endless enthusiasm to learn language.

Performing School Failure:
Using Verbatim Theatre to Explore School Grading Policies

Rebecca M. Sánchez

Abstract

This article describes how dramatic writing and performance practices can be used to reshape qualitative interview data into a verbatim theatre performance with the intent of drawing attention to social movements in education. The performance described in the article reveals the consequences of a punitive educational policy agenda and addresses the emotional toll school grading and other neoliberal policies have had on teachers at a school in the southwestern United States. A primary objective is to examine and explore how verbatim dramatic writing and performance tactics can amplify current issues and social dilemmas and evoke an emotional response in the absence of dramatic action. The methods of writing a script from qualitative data are presented for other scholars and educators who intend to create performances from data.

Performing School Failure:
Using Verbatim Theatre to Explore School Grading Policies

"The arts are more than mere entertainment. In my view they should also be the vessel which houses the conscience of a nation; they should ask the difficult questions others would rather leave unasked." (Soans, 2008, p. 17).

The living room was no longer a living room. It was a theatre with a live audience. Teachers, preservice educators, university professors, community members, artists, and several children crowded into the space to see a performance called *This Scarlet F*[1] about school grading initiatives in the United States. In recent years, some states in the United States have used student achievement data to assign letter grades (A to F) to public schools (Crawford-Garrett, Sánchez, & Tyson, 2017; Murray & Howe, 2017). In the southwestern state where the performance took place, many schools were assigned D and F grades by the state Public Education Department (PED).

After some mingling and catching up, the performance was announced and the audience members found seats. Although data was not collected from the audience about their impressions of the play, their responses to the live performance in real time were noted. The lights darkened and the sounds of a popular educational protest song played. In the dark room a transition occurred, both literally and figuratively. Literally, the performance began and the sounds of the audio postcards could be heard through the speaker. Figuratively, the mood of the group was altered into that of audience. Audio postcards played and the audience listened to three children and one mother sharing stories about their favorite teachers. In the darkness, the audience of about 40 people nodded. Hearing the qualities of good

teachers resonated with the group: support the creation of hands-on activities, maintain an ethic of care, and instill high expectations. As the audio postcards concluded, the lights came up, and an actor, playing the part of a teacher, asked each audience member to retrieve a poem placed under their chairs. Two other actors, from their places in the audience, began reading lines from a poem about school grading policies in the United States. Audience members too, participated in the recitation. Their parts were highlighted and the seamless oral reading of the poem created a stillness in the group. The pain and anguish expressed in the poem became a collective experience and for a moment, audience members became not only actors, but also the characters (the real teachers) they were representing through the oral expression of the text.

ACTOR 1-AMELIA

Our letter grade you said?
how do you reconcile the letter grade with, with how you feel about the school?

ACTOR 2-MANUEL

I don't/

ACTOR 3-HEATHER

I don't care about the grade/

ACTOR 1-AMELIA

I could care less about the letter grade. It means nothing to me.
…we don't care about, that.

ACTOR 2-MANUEL

but the problem is
it has affected our enrollment
but I don't think any of us pay attention to that.
But the kids all knew we were an F school.
We're an F, F, F, F, F.
they had already deemed themselves F,

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

but all the F means is that we're one hundred percent free and reduced lunch.
I just let it go,
it's a practice in letting go. . .
those worrisome, weird labels can bring you down if you're not careful.
I really don't think it's an F, I know kids say that, but it's not,
“you're an F,
at an F school”,
I'll be the danged Best F you've ever seen.
You wanna see F? I'm kind of defiant like that.
But I just think about, the F grade

AUDIENCE 2

but I think about the students that are here,
so many gifts, they have so many languages,
they have so many talents,
how can you reconcile the kids with the grade?
and I think if you give enough negative self-talk
you create self-fulfilling prophecy
I'm a master teacher, being dragged down to the ranks of a novice
that is so demoralizing. It is so demoralizing
And offensive, it's just plain offensive. (Poem continues)

As the poem concluded, the three actors made their way to the front of the room toward the "stage" and took their places on stools. Each presented a monologue about school grading containing moments of humor, despair, and hope. The monologues were interspersed with brief exchanges of dialogue, highlighting and punctuating the way a person tells a story. For example, in Amelia's monologue the following exchange takes place:

> AMELIA
> I am fully, fully aware that 90% of our, school grade is based on standardized test scores, a standardized test score. Our school grade, teacher evaluation, is hinging on an unproven test. Can you imagine going to an elementary school and knowing that your school has a grade of an F? And, and you're told all the time, you know,
> MANUEL
> if you get an F, you're failing.
> AMELIA
> Can you imagine? All of our students go to a school that has a grade of an F,
> HEATHER
> Their parents willingly take them to a school with a grade of an F.
> MANUEL
> An F,
> AMELIA
> An F, and that's around, the idea of an F, so of course the impact is awful. There're schools that get an F grade year, after year, after year, after year. And when you get an F you don't get all the support. When teachers subconsciously know that as long as we're given a grade based on that test score we will always be an F grade, that is demoralizing. It's demoralizing for parents, it's demoralizing for children, it's not a motivator, to do better. It is demoralizing. And it is demoralizing because the, the implied message from the PED, and from the mainstream media, is we are an F because,
> HEATHER
> There're bad teachers at our school,
> MANUEL
> and there's a lot of people, who imply there're bad parents, too.

As each actor performed a monologue, the complex emotions teachers feel for children were expressed and contextualized within the current policy environment that quantifies and grades children, their teachers, their schools, and their communities (Murray & Howe, 2017). The performance concluded with music playing in the darkness and the audience was given a moment to sit with the ideas presented.

The views of the teachers presented in the scripted performance are not commonly heard in public spaces. Rather, in the United States a different script, a manufactured script, dominates public discourse in education. Headlines such as, "Why we must fire bad teachers" permeate mainstream media (Thomas, 2010). Reichel (2018) argues, "the entertainment and news media have both tended to portray teachers as a central part of the problem, treating them variously as inept, lazy, out-of-touch…" (p. 483). Policy reactions have tended to favor the use of standardized controls and high-stakes testing to rate students, schools, and teachers (Giroux, 2016; Lipman, 2011).

In performing a script developed using the words of the teachers, an alternative narrative was disseminated to the public. Educational researchers committed to social justice and equity, must heed the call to disseminate research findings in compelling and alternative ways (Kelly, 2019). Performance is one way to expand the audience for educational research. This evening of verbatim theatre was the culmination of a scriptwriting practice and performance inquiry. The aim of the inquiry discussed in this article is to describe how dramatic writing and performance practices can be used to reshape qualitative interview data into a performance with the intent of drawing attention to social movements in education. As such, a primary objective is to examine and explore how dramatic writing and performance tactics can amplify current issues and social dilemmas and evoke an emotional response in the absence of a plot based on dramatic action. The aims and objectives are rooted in a long commitment as an artist and educator to principles of democracy, social justice, and emancipatory practice.

Background

In 2013, I began working with two colleagues and a group of public school teacher activists attempting to reveal the unintended consequences and negative impacts of an aggressive and punitive neoliberal accountability structure. Neoliberal policies in education have resulted in increased standardization, overuse and misuse of standardized tests, and privatization efforts (Au & Ferrare, 2015). In this case, teachers, traumatized by the working conditions and unreasonable high-stakes testing expectations, have slowly organized to educate the public about the policies (Crawford-Garrett et al., 2017). The imposed accountability structure, saturated with a neoliberal agenda, has had a chilling effect on creative instruction, and has also resulted in the emnification of teachers, communities, and children (Giroux, 2016).

As part of the accountability structure, schools in the U.S. state where these teachers work were assigned grades by the Public Education Department (PED) and a majority of schools were deemed as D or F schools. A 2018 study indicates that 16 U.S. states have initiated school grading policies (Murray & Howe, 2017). The same report indicates:

> …there is good reason to think that many such A-F report card systems are *technically* flawed: they fail to validly measure and represent school quality, and they typically fail to drive the school improvement they promise. There is also good reason to think that they are *democratically* flawed: they typically fail to measure, and reward or punish, how well schools promote good democratic citizenship (p. 3).

However, in spite of the flaws inherent in the school grading system, school grading policies were developed under the guise of promoting transparency related to school quality (Murray & Howe, 2017), and many parents and community members rely only on common understandings associated with A-F.

As activist scholars, artists, and educators, my two colleagues and I attended school board meetings, community meetings, and engaged in protests along with the teacher participants from the initial study. In conducting the research study, one of our initial goals was to understand the experiences of the teachers working at the school. Additionally, we wanted to broadly disseminate the findings to audiences

within academia, but also to a teacher-practitioner audience and our community. While the mainstream media has reported on the activism, the tone often implies the teachers are cranky and afraid of accountability and the news reporting questions their competence. The old adage "if you are doing your job, why are you afraid," characterizes the mainstream journalism on the topic. The script in this article is based on a qualitative study on school grading. The participants in the study were 13 teachers at a public elementary school in a southwestern state in the United States. Data collection consisted of interviews with individual teachers at a school designated an F by the PED. A focus group was conducted to substantiate the initial findings and to follow up with additional questions. Data was coded for themes. A study of the findings related to trauma was published by the research team (Crawford-Garrett et al., 2017). An additional article collectively written by the teachers and the researchers was published in a teacher magazine to highlight the activism.

Role of the Researcher

I have spent my career as a teacher educator at a public research university in a southwestern state in the United States. My teaching and research have centered on investigating ways to support teachers throughout the professional lifespan. Moreover, I am interested in how contemporary and historical narratives shape teacher understandings of social phenomena. I attempt to prepare teachers to critically question how official narratives operate as fact.

Recently, I began exploring how arts can be used to prepare teachers to address the needs of diverse children. In working with the arts in teacher education, I became curious about developing my artistic impulses through formal study. I enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts program in dramatic writing at the university where I teach. Initially, my thought was that through study I would be able to support teachers and children in writing creative theatrical dramas. As I studied playwriting, I became more committed to my own development as an artist.

Upon completion of the study, I revisited the data using an artistic analytic process. The performance on school grading emerged because I became increasingly interested in finding a way to communicate the experiences of the teachers to the local community. Furthermore, as a playwriting student I was beginning to see theatre potential in research data. One of our regular exercises in the playwriting courses was to take overheard dialogue and construct it into short plays. This practice came to mind as I looked at the qualitative data from the school grading study. My inspiration to craft a performance from the data was also motivated by my desire to communicate the story of the teachers to our local community. With the support of the teacher participants I crafted the performance.

Data was curated into a performance with three parts: audio postcards curated from the voices of children and a parent, an opening interactive poem, and three monologues. Audio postcards are short recordings of people addressing a particular experience or prompt. They are often place-based, but in the case of this performance they were reflective postcards to great teachers (Sánchez & Spurlin, 2009). The interactive poem was devised from the exact words extracted from the focus group interview. The remaining three monologues were developed using only text from the individual interviews with

teachers. The first monologue speaks to teacher activism and resistance to the school grading policy. The second monologue addresses the toll of the grades on teachers. The third monologue describes how the teacher talks to the kids at his school about the grade. As a whole, the performance is a curation of teacher voice describing the impact of the school grading system on teachers, children, and communities.

Practice Lineage

The inquiry emerges from a robust theatrical and activist practice lineage. Aristotle and the Poetics (1995), historical and contemporary dramatic writing traditions, qualitative research methodologies, and performance practices influenced the development of the script and performance. However, theatre for social justice and verbatim theatre point more directly to the practices engaged in this inquiry.

Theatre for Social Justice and Change

Theatre for social justice and change, like that created by Teatro Campesino, has been influential to my understanding of activist theatre. Teatro Campesino uses pedagogies and stories of the field to create theatre specifically geared to farmworkers and migrant workers (Broyles-González, 1994). This theatre offers both the performers and the audience an opportunity to examine their reality with the intent of empowering marginalized communities. In the act of viewing, and reviewing power dynamics and markers of oppression, the audience acquires a new vocabulary to name their world. Much like the literacy circles of Freire (1970), and the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985), Teatro Campesino activates audiences and performers to take critical steps toward their own liberation. The plays themselves are both nonfiction and fiction, allegorical and realistic, but in their own ways re-created the familiar lives of the often oppressed farmworkers (Broyles-González, 1994).

Verbatim Theatre

Verbatim theatre extends from the Social Justice theatre tradition and is also related to Documentary Theatre (Derbyshire & Hodson, 2008; Taylor, 2013). However, rather than merely presenting nonfiction, representative, or allegorical theatrical representations of reality, the script emerges in a word-for-word account of the participant-articulated experience (Derbyshire & Hodson, 2008). As such, it becomes a living piece of data for audiences to interpret and analyze through performance. Furthermore, Soans (2008) identifies that the "audience for a verbatim play will expect the play to be political" (p. 19). Playwrights can call attention to social causes and use verbatim theatre to invite audiences to examine critical issues and pressing social phenomena with an honest telling of experience (Soans, 2008).

Verbatim theatre presents scriptwriters and theatre makers with distinct challenges associated with representation, reactivation of trauma, and decision-making (Derbyshire & Hodson, 2008). However, as a practice it allows a new way to see and represent experiences. Furthermore, and possibly more importantly, verbatim theatre is a way for theatre to help individuals and groups make sense of the world (Hammond & Steward, 2008). By involving and incorporating the words of someone directly involved

in an experience or phenomena into a theatrical work, a democratizing ripple reverberates from the theatre outward (Soans, 2008).

Practice-Based Methodology

Practice-led research differs from traditional quantitative and qualitative inquiry in a number of significant ways. In his article, "A Manifesto for Performative Research," Brad Haseman (2006) describes some of the key distinctions of practice-led research. The first is a commitment to practice. Rather than beginning with questions, the practice instigates research and nurtures the curiosity. A second feature is the mode of evidence. In practice-led research, the evidential outcome is a work or art, a script, a novel, a sculpture, a dance, a live performance, or other piece of art. Again, the desire in research to use numbers, a quantitative form of evidence, and a qualitative form of evidence, is subverted (Haseman, 2006). The new knowledge emerging from practice-led inquiry requires a direct experience with the art itself. Haseman describes this as "direct (co-presence) or indirect (asynchronous, recorded)" engagement with the art (p. 100). Because this inquiry entailed both the practice of dramatic writing and the production of a theatrical performance—in addition to the examination/utilization of an existing qualitative data set—numerous insights were gained related to verbatim scriptwriting and performance.

This inquiry is grounded in the practices of dramatic writing and theatrical performance. As such, a number of practices contribute to the study. At the root of the scripted performance is the script. Because the inquiry is not about devised work, the script itself, and the practices associated with creating the script, are of central importance. However, as this inquiry is investigating the "realness" and compelling nature of a contemporary topic, the performance becomes central. As an artist practitioner, both the scriptwriting and the performance tactics and practices are in dialogue with each other throughout the process. The following sections outline how the qualitative data transformed into a script for performance production.

Theatrical Practices

The inquiry began with generative practices for theatrical scriptwriting. In creating the script from the qualitative data, I carefully sifted through all of the school grading interviews and the focus group. I created a list of ideas that might inform the script and performance. In this phase I completed a thorough read-through of all study data. I assigned a theme to each interview. I then selected three different interviews based on diverging themes from which to craft the monologues. The themes of the three selected interviews were: activism, trauma, and love of teaching. This choice was based on the desire to create a more comprehensive and compelling performance. Several of the interviews read with similar themes and I wanted each monologue to present a distinct voice on the common issue of school grading. I also continued to look for theoretical and practical resources related to performing qualitative research.

Curating Postcards

The opening moments of the performance present a set of four audio postcards recorded by my daughter, two nieces, and sister. They each describe memorable teachers and the qualities that make the teachers outstanding professionals. The postcards are the result of an impulse to make/curate a small piece of art outside the realm of the formal research study. The personal postcards from my family at the beginning of the performance contextualize me as an artist because through the postcards I can also identify and present my own value judgments, priorities and I can publicly own my position because I share the views of quality teaching presented in the postcards and I intentionally selected the people to share stories. Finally, the postcards are a way to preserve art creation and movement politics as something beyond institutional control associated with research. The inclusion of the audio postcards is a small gesture resisting neoliberal ideologies based on control and managed inquiry.

Script Writing

Monologues were a natural choice because the data is largely in the form of individual interviews. In the process of crafting each interview, I first removed all interviewer and participant labels from the exchanged dialogue. I then "cleaned" each interview up. The cleaning phase entailed fixing contractions, typos, and removing many of the disconnected sentence fragments present in the transcript. For example, in Heather's interview, she had this to say about professional practice associated with school grading:

> Heather: So, I'm, I'm very disturbed that my leaders are modeling, that they would come to us as [?] and say we're an F school. So I want to say to people, I want to say, do you want me to go into the classroom and do that with kids? You are F children, it's, it's, we know that this is not a good, um practice for making growth and for encouraging self-esteem or learning.
>
> Interviewer: Right.
>
> Heather: And so if they think up above that that putting this scarlet F
>
> Interviewer: Umhmm
>
> Heather: on us is going to trickle down to the kids in a positive way, they're so wrong. I think that's the strongest thing, the thing about it, it's like they should be modeling, it's like, um, education 101, you find the strengths in your child and you nurture them. You don't focus on the one wrong thing they're doing and like slap them around, it's like they're doing the worst educational practice on, on, on, on a school setting that you could possibly do. I do believe that things trickle down like that.

The interview exchange was included in a monologue and the raw data in the previous segment became this:

> HEATHER
>
> I want to say to people, do you want me to go into the classroom and do that with kids? You are F children? We know that this is not a good practice for growth and for encouraging self-esteem and learning. If they think up above that putting this scarlet F on us is going to trickle down to the kids in a positive way, they're so wrong.

I attempted to maintain the semantic thrust of the raw data, but I also wanted clean the passage up for performance. It should be noted however, that all of the words included in the performance script were taken directly from the interview and presented in the same order. However, some fragments were not removed, especially if they contained theatrical power.

I then selected chunks of the interview that told the thematic story for each participant. Once the interviews were abbreviated, sculpting occurred. This mainly consisted of trimming each monologue into a manageable size and making each utterance count. In each of the three selected interviews, I noticed instances in which the participant re-created conversations about school grading and policies. I decided to maintain some of these exchanges and to punctuate each monologue with the dialogue. This choice was a deliberate attempt to interrupt some of the long monologue sequences for performance effect.

Theatrical Elements

Another performance practice is related to making choices about light and sound. I chose music from popular culture with themes of educational resistance to use for transitions. I also identified a visual image for the poem and for each monologue. The defining image was selected based on the content of the poem or monologue. For example, when the poem was being read the spotlight slowly began to illuminate the front of the stage. As the audience participated in the poetry reading and listening, the focus was moved from the collective to the individual through the use of the spotlight, in our case, a projector light. Later in the performance, Amelia, one of the characters presenting a monologue repeatedly speaks of acts of protest. As she performed her monologue, a “down with testing symbol” was projected over her body. Heather mentions the way the accountability structure is taking a physical toll on her body, so splatters of blood appear on her (through projection) as she performs her monologue. In his monologue Miguel speaks about the F grade the school received 41 times. As his monologue is performed, 41 Fs are projected unto his body, one at a time, until he is tattooed with Fs.

Praxis

The praxis of the school grading performance resides along parallel research planes. It is characterized by the intersection of performance ethnography, performance research, verbatim theatre, and activist traditions. According to O’Neill et al. (2002), “Performance science makes more accessible the contested and multiple versions of reality, and the unheard voices and experiences of individuals who may consider themselves powerless” (p. 71). In the process of writing, theorizing, and performing, an alternative active stance is developed. The resulting knowledge and insights inform both the process of scriptwriting, and the act of performing politics.

Scriptwriting: Creating a Dramatic Response

During the process of crafting the script, significant insights were gained. When writing a new script from existing text, the first challenge is altering the text and the order as little as possible to maintain integrity.

This results in the honest and “revelatory and truthful” portrayal of experience (Soans, 2008, p. 19). Upon careful examination of the interview data and text, it became clear that certain words contain linguistic and theatrical power, and though they do not advance or further dramatic action, or a plot, they call attention to specific incidents and create a dramatic response. This points to the interest that can be created in theatre around dramatic response as opposed to the more traditional dramatic action. For example, the phrase “was literally killing me” in the following monologue excerpt is a powerful phrase eliciting a strong emotional response.

> HEATHER
>
> A couple years ago when I was at another school, my work load, because of these policies and what's expected of me, was literally killing me, literally. And at the end of one year, I was like, my body, I'm just gonna die physically. I'm just gonna break in half, I felt like the load was impossible.

The follow-up phrases “die physically” and “break in half” contribute to the overall emotional response of the viewer. When a live person performs phrases such as these in real time, the emotional impact is further amplified and an audience might empathize with the trauma the teachers experience working in this environment (Crawford-Garrett et al., 2017).

Paying attention to the repetition in the text was also a powerful compass in the scriptwriting process. The following excerpt comes from the transcription of the raw data. Amelia, a teacher at the school, talks about the impact of the F grade:

> So, it's demoralizing. It's horribly demoralizing. And it's, it's, it's, you know, horribly demoralizing to hear that the reason that we have to have our schools grading, the reasons that we have to be evaluated as teachers is because the children aren't doing well on tests, those tests. Not for any other reason. So. Yeah. It's demoralizing.

In a paragraph with five sentences the word “demoralizing” is used four times. Repetition such as this became instrumental in making writing choices for Amelia’s monologue. I knew I had to include some information about the demoralizing aspects of school grades since it was a source of frustration for her. Later, in the interview she revisits the idea of demoralization. The script includes the following exchange:

> AMELIA
>
> When teachers subconsciously know that as long as we're given a grade based on that test score we will always be an F grade, that is demoralizing. It's demoralizing for parents, it's demoralizing for children, it's not a motivator, to do better. It is demoralizing. And it is demoralizing because the, the implied message from the PED, and from the mainstream media, is we are an F because,
>
> HEATHER
>
> there's bad teachers at our school,
>
> MANUEL
>
> and there's a lot of people, who imply there's bad parents, too.

Sometimes interview data doesn’t follow a traditional storytelling arc. There may not be a plot, or dramatic action in the interview. However, repetition itself is another example of a way to create dramatic response from the audience in the absence of dramatic action. In the case of activist teachers, the repetition becomes almost a parallel example of political movement speech and the repeated words and phrases take on a protest chant structure.

In writing the monologues, I read for exchanges. In doing so, I was able to pepper the monologues with moments of dialogue. This opened the monologue structure up and added aural interest. I was concerned with monotony and discovering the existing dialogue in the interviews was something I chose to capitalize on for theatrical interest and to enhance the dramatic response with the audience.

MANUEL

No ‘cause my test scores, like I said, random. I really don't like when kids’ efforts are diminished in so cavalier a way, that no matter how good they did,

HEATHER and AMELIA

You're still an F school!

MANUEL

You're an F school or you know, you went up to a D.

‘Cause kids know… what it is, they all have older brothers and cousins and they know Ds suck.

HEATHER AND AMELIA

Ds suck.

HEATHER

We're a D.

AMELIA

doesn't that suck?

MANUEL

And I was like, that sucks that somebody graded us that, yeah. Are you a D student?

HEATHER and AMELIA

No!

As the teachers break from monologue to dialogue, there is attention drawn to a collectivity drawing the audience in to that collective.

Using a monologue format resulted in a script that explores the larger issues of school grading with distinct stories and perspectives. The process of writing a verbatim theatre script is powerful as a dramatic

writing practice, but an unexpected finding is that the act of scriptwriting became a form of data analysis in relation to the qualitative study.

Performance: Humans and the Amplification of Emotional Impact

Just as the practice of scriptwriting produced powerful findings, the performance itself illustrated new insights. Elevating speech acts extracted from the interviews and compiling them into a script has power. However, when humans perform the script, the emotional impact is amplified. The script coming to life in real time, through the performance of the actors, reminded audience members of the human cost of the school grading initiative. School grading is often defended by public officials with a discourse characterized by use of data, graphics, and information points. Rarely do we get to assign faces and humans to the policy. With a performance, crafted from the words of teachers themselves, the emotional dimension of the policy initiative took the fore as actors embodied the experience of the teachers.

The relationship of the audience to the topic can create unexpected reactions. Noneducator audience members were able to experience moments of humor in the script. Even though there was a serious tone, the life brought to the words by the actors made some moments funny. For example, the poem extracted verbatim from the focus group interview contains the following lines:

> AUDIENCE MEMBER
>
> But [The Governor] is going to fix that.
>
> she's going to give us pre-paid debit cards with
>
> 100 dollars
>
> 100 dollars for us to. . .
>
> 100 bucks.
>
> 100 dollars. . .
>
> For supplies
>
> For supplies for the year. . .

In the raw data from the focus group interview, the teachers had a lively discussion about how receiving gift cards from the Governor was a sorry remedy for all of the punitive educational policies that vilify teachers initiated under her administration. However, when this part of the poem was read during the performance, there was laughter from the noneducator audience. In performance, the absurdity of the 100-dollar gift measure was revealed and the laughter pointed to the irony of this educational structure. A teacher audience shook their heads in disgust during this portion of the performance and during a post-performance discussion they reflected on this part of the performance. The 100-dollar gift card was beyond funny for teachers intimately involved with the inadequate gesture.

A further finding has to do with audience expectations of the performance and the examination of literal and figurative space. Is the audience expecting theatre? Is the audience expecting research? This shapes the entertainment value of the performance. For example, when performed in an academic venue this performance generated perhaps more excitement than when performed for a theatre audience. Regardless of audience expectation and venue, the relationship of the performers and the moments of dialogue automatically add layers of camaraderie, relationship and evoke a community feel to the data. Through the process of embodiment and the brief exchanges, the monologue form was fractured, and actors transcended the performance space to evoke a sense of shared activism. This shared activism is not present in the interviews alone; it is only through the structuring into the monologue form with moments of dialogue that the shared experiences comes to the surface.

Concluding Thoughts

Performing research has the potential to disseminate significant findings outside of the academy and to advance social movements. In the case of the inquiry presented in this paper, the teacher participants had the opportunity to be heard by the larger community where they live. Furthermore, in performance, the teacher participants, who were already demonstrating an activist stance throughout the course of the study, were able share their vision of love and care for the children they serve. They broke from the manufactured script that refers to children as data points and they reminded themselves, the research team, and the larger public, that the teaching profession is an emotional and loving act of service. Scriptwriting and performance tactics can effectively amplify a message and create an emotional response even in the absence of dramatic action. When the performance concluded, the audience was challenged to revisit simplistic notions of school grading. They were left to consider their own priorities and to ask bigger questions about education. For all involved, the performance of *This Scarlet F* served as an opportunity to resist dehumanizing policies. The following excerpt was the concluding passage of the performance in which the teacher Manuel moves away from talking about the F grade and focuses instead on capturing the complexity that educational standardization overlooks, thereby re-centering the audience on the value of relationships that emerge from shared humanity.

> MANUEL
>
> When you sit with a teacher and you see the way they work with kids and you see the love, and you see the genuineness, and you see it all, and you say, “Wow! That is exactly what I want to do.” When I see other people doing it, it only makes me feel even more passionate about what I am doing. ‘Cause I know I've seen love and that’s one of the first things I tell my kids. I love you guys. Thank you for coming to my class ‘cause I don't even have a class, I don't even have a job, without you. So if you're not here, neither am I. So thank you for being here and you know, let’s make this work. And we are going to be better this year because you are here with me and I'm here with you. And I'm sure we will be better at the end.

Note

1. The script of *This Scarlet F* will be published in its entirety in Emancipating Education: Considerations of Deferred Dreams and Visions for Change. D. Kemp (Ed.). Findings from the qualitative research study have been published in Critical Education. The APA citation for the qualitative study findings is as follows: Crawford-Garrett, K., Sánchez, R., & Tyson, K. (2017). "If I give one more piece, it's gonna be the end of me." The trauma of teaching under No Child Left Behind. *Critical Education*, *8*(3), 1–21.

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Generational Bridges: Supporting Literacy Development With Elder Storytelling and Video Performance

Kathy Snow, Noelle Doucette, and Noline Francis

Abstract

This paper describes our implementation of digital storytelling within a First Nations community elementary school in eastern Canada. Our aim with this project was to support community engagement in the school, while promoting literacy development, by inviting Elders to share their stories, both traditional and modern lived experiences, with children in a grade 4/5 split class. Positioned as a participatory action research project, anchored in Indigenous methodologies, the project was developed through meetings with community members to build on the strengths of the community. Reflections from students illustrate that working with Elders gave deeper meaning to the stories they heard and performed, and fostered greater engagement in literacy development.

Background of the Development of Generational Bridges

In conceptualizing the Generational Bridges project, we came together, as grade 4/5 teacher, education codirector, and outsider researcher, to ask what is the next step for school improvement? Many conversations were held over coffee and tea, in offices and homes, in search of an answer. We began with an accounting of assets, identifying strengths in the community. Potlotek First Nation has a long history of resistance to colonization. The community, and members of the community, refused to move to either of the proposed relocation sites for Mi'kmaq during the 1942 "centralization plan" implementation. Refusal to move meant a loss of services and support promised to the Mi'kmaq through the treaty process. Despite, or perhaps because of, this history, Potlotek is home to many recognized leaders including Lillian Marshall, an accomplished historian and linguist; Noel Doucette, one of the founding members of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN); and first home to Marie Battiste, who is recognized internationally for her work in decolonizing education. The community itself is considered by many as the capital of Mi'kma'ki (the collective Mi'kmaq territory including Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Quebec) because it includes Chapel Island—an island considered sacred by Mi'kmaq. The island has served as a traditional meeting place for the Grand Council of Chiefs since time immemorial and became home to the Feast of St. Ann in the mid-18th century when the French erected a Catholic church on the island. One of the strengths of the community was the elementary school, which is one of the few schools in the province with a full-time land-based learning instructor with dedicated facilities and scheduling for land-based learning at all levels of K-9 instruction. The community radio station, the high school, and the education director's office (parallel to office of the superintendent in mainstream education offerings) are all located within the same building, adjacent to the elementary school. The physical proximity, and small number of people working in these

locations, leads to collaboration and synergies in activities. The small number of students, and the welcoming, family approach to relationships in school, lead to a great deal of team teaching, shared resourcing, and a blurring of the boundaries of formal and informal learning.

In further discussions, it was determined there were also clear directions the community wanted to grow. The staff and director of the radio station had been involved in supporting media skills development through youth internships and writers' workshops with a focus on creating short journalistic pieces. When we asked the radio station director what his vision was for further development, he identified the need to build on the workshop programming with a broader audience. Noelle, then education codirector, was concerned about community engagement in the school. She, as well as the elementary school principal, noted that parents and families were not as frequent visitors to the school as they had hoped. At the same time, the grade 4/5 classroom teacher was seeking methods to differentiate literacy instruction through culturally relevant project-based learning. Through these discussions the natural starting point appeared to be storytelling, as a culturally responsive pedagogy supporting literacy development. Bringing all of these discussions together, we sought to bridge generations by combining traditional and modern techniques to support knowledge sharing and to engage both parents/Elders in learning.

This project became an act of decolonization, as we attempted to design a project based in Etuaptmumk (two-eyed seeing)—a theoretical and practical construct for designing learning by Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall. Albert Marshall explains this concept on his integrated science website as the ability to:

> learn to see from your one eye with the best or the strengths in the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learn to see from your other eye with the best or the strengths in the mainstream (Western or Eurocentric) knowledges and ways of knowing ... but most importantly, learn to see with both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (n.d.)

Literacy Development

Traditional Storytelling as a Pedagogy

We adopted an assets-based stance, presuming that challenges to literacy, attendance, engagement, and behavior were based in historic injustice and systemic bias, rather than deficits possessed by the children, their parents, or the community. At the foundation of the research was the belief that local and Indigenous control of education leads to more relevant, and thus more effective, learning and higher levels of student success (Agbo, 2002). In Nova Scotia, this concept has been illustrated by the rise of Mi'kmaq students' graduation rates to 91% during 2017-18 surpassing non-Mi'kmaq students in the province and significantly higher than the national average (35%) since the inception of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), an educational collaboration of 12 of the 13 Mi'kmaw bands in Nova Scotia (MK, 2018; Simon, 2014). Curriculum resources seated in Mi'kmaw tradition and values have been slower to follow, but are continually being developed, and Mi'kmaq educators and schools must also decolonize themselves to move away from the Eurocentric teachings forced upon them through historic processes and ongoing

accreditation systems. Indigenous children have not been well served by current approaches to literacy development (Hare, 2011). As an example from Nova Scotia, although 41% of Mi'kmaw grade 6 students completing the provincial literacy assessment scored a level 3 (basic pass standard) or above, when the average was deconstructed into the various skill components, approximately 15% of these "passing" students scored below the pass level in the area of "organization, language use and conventions of reading and writing" (MK, 2018). Indicating that although students are performing well in speaking and listening within the areas of reading and writing, more can be done to support the students. However, the discrepancy between Mi'kmaw and mainstream literacy success needs to address that formal literacy assessments also ask children to adapt to colonial ways of thinking and communicating to succeed.

According to Iseke (2013), storytelling is a practice in Indigenous cultures that sustains communities, validates experiences, nurtures relationships and the sharing of knowledge. Telling, understanding, and retelling a story is a highly valued literacy. Lowan-Trudeau (2015) explains the power of storytelling as pedagogy is that it is highly adaptable—the story can be modified to suit the current lives of the audience without changing the original meaning and values, which allows the audience to better relate to the concepts of the story. Battiste (2011) outlines storytelling and the role of Indigenous language use in the telling of the story as giving unconscious order and structure to understanding. From a mainstream perspective, educational theorists such as Dewey (1934) and Vygotsky (1978) also value storytelling in learning, as a means to creating lasting impressions, deep learning, and interconnections among learners. Extending storytelling through digital media, Powell, Weems, and Owle (2007) state that through interpretation with technology enhancements, digital stories offer a way Indigenous students can move beyond paper-and-pencil responses to creative representation that supports identity development and decolonizing practices in education.

Digital Story Creation

Indigenous digital storytelling provides opportunities for Indigenous peoples to change the dominant narrative. Through self-representations that challenge the taken-for-granted and stereotypical (mis)representations frequently presented in mainstream society, digital storytellers create lasting products that better reflect culture and beliefs (Iseke-Barnes & Sakai, 2003). This is a contrast to the recording of Indigenous storytellers as "artefacts" by mainstream researchers as an ethnographic examination tool, which has been criticized as not a true expression of culture (Manuelito, 2015). The creation of the digital stories for this project was positioned as an artistic expression by the students and the Elder storytellers who created them. Raheja (2011) identified creative self-representation in media as a form of visual sovereignty, or the right of a group to depict themselves with their own values and goals as central. Therefore, Indigenous digital storytelling also creates opportunities to understand political activism and creates spaces for Indigenous youth to affirm their identity and become agents of social change (Pratt, 2010). Returning to academic development, Skinner and Hagood (2008) have outlined the role of digital storytelling to promote language learning for second-language learners by supporting foundational literacy skills, new digital literacies, and self-esteem. The importance of self-esteem in early elementary literacy development has been well documented (Boyes, Tebutt, Preece,

& Badcock, 2018; Koosha, Abdollahi, & Karimi, 2016). Self-esteem has been found to be fostered in partnership with holistic learning when it involved working with Elders (Castellano, 2004).

Elders as Teachers

Parent and Elder involvement in schools is most frequently associated with supporting programs external to learning, such as donating items for the classroom, attending concerts, parent-teacher interviews, and classroom management support (Pushor & Murphy, 2004). Commonly, conversation between parents and teachers may be limited to discussing academic and behavioural challenges observed in the classroom (Pushor & Murphy, 2010). And in the case of Indigenous people in Canada, relationships between formalized school, teachers, and even the physical building, can be loaded with trauma based on the history of residential schools leading to avoidance of the institution. Bringing parents and Elders into the school as equal and valued members of the community is important to begin restorative practices related to education. Hare (2011) cautions that when educational messaging at school is presented in a dramatically different way than expressed at home, children are not as successful. Therefore, it is important to develop a shared process for learning that includes Elders, traditional values, ways of learning, and language in ways that move beyond colonial approaches to educational development. For example, great success in language restoration has been observed through the adoption of language nests which inherently involve all community members in learning (Pitawanakwat, 2008).

Methodology

This participatory action research (Finley, 2008; Gillis & Jackson, 2002; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) was anchored in Indigenous methodologies that prioritized relationship, dialogue, and respect (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). Our choices were informed by mutual respect and First Nations statements about appropriate and desirable researcher conduct with First Nations communities (Battiste, 2011; Lowen-Trudeau, 2012). We were respectful of different forms of knowledge and existing expertise in Mi’kma'ki, drawing on the strengths of academic and Elders advising the design of the classroom activity. Methods of data collection included observation of students in the classroom, a short debriefing conversation (Healey & Tagak, 2014; Kovach, 2010). The debrief with the children consisted of five questions and each one-to-one interview was approximately 5-20 minutes depending on the child’s response. Two longer discussions with the classroom teacher were held and focused on her observations of the impact of the activity and its design. Principles and procedures for protecting anonymity or giving due credit (naming participants) was negotiated with adult participants as per their preference. Before commencing any work within the school, ethics approval was obtained from the university research ethics board, the Mi’kmaw Ethics Watch Committee, and the Potlotek Band Chief and Council.

A Path to Relationship Building

Our first attempt to conduct the project occurred in the spring term of the 2017-2018 school year. The teacher of the 4/5 class sought to gain parent, grandparent, and Elder volunteers to participate in the project. The invitation was sent out in paper handouts through the students, emails to parents, and open calls on the School Facebook page, and resulted in no volunteers coming forward. In retrospect, this was not surprising given the intention of Elder engagement was to respond to the desire to increase parental engagement in the school. Noelle explained that community members, and Mi'kmaq in general, are very humble and very shy. There are a few outgoing individuals in each community, and these people often have busy careers or are called to many activities. Frequently, adults in community don't realize the fountain of knowledge they have to share with youth and others. Noelle was concerned that we were missing a vast collection of stories and historical knowledge, which was another reason for a project of this type, to empower the community members to recognize and share their voices. As an outside researcher, though Kathy had built some relationships within the school and community, the community was rightfully skeptical about her intentions and what she was doing there. With school ending for the summer, we left the project open to begin again in the fall. However, the fall saw many changes. Both the principal and teacher of the 4/5 class left their positions. Noelle facilitated introductions with the new teacher and the principal as we sought to explain our project and determine if it was still relevant.

In the fall of 2018-2019, Noline, the new grade 4/5 teacher, sent out an open call for participation. This time we were successful in receiving volunteers. Unfortunately, scheduling challenges led to difficulties getting started with our volunteers. Noelle, not easily discouraged, pointed us in a new direction. Several years before, Lilian Marshall, one of the Elders in the community, had been involved in the creation of a picture book from the traditional story "Muin and the Seven Bird Hunters." Community members had adapted the story into a theater performance that the grade 4/5 class was preparing to perform as part of the local Celtic Colours festival. Noelle suggested we record the performance, and work with this recording in the classroom so the children could learn how to edit, write, interpret, and work with video. Noline and Kathy taught the children how to combine video clips, add subtitles and transitions to produce a completed story using iPads loaned to the project from the Centre for Sound Communities, a research institute within the local university. The children were highly engaged in the project and enjoyed watching and sharing the videos they created. Now that we had an example of the product, we reached out a third time for community storytellers. Two storytellers came forward, both with close ties to the education department: George Marshall, the director of the radio station, and Nora Bernard, an Elder in residence with the school.

The Project Implementation

Schools are busy places, and what was planned as a two-week activity with the children was extended to three months. Rather than a two-week intensive activity, the project was completed in phases around the other activities of the school. The project would not have been completed without the dedicated support and flexibility of programming provided by the school administration. Initially, we established a

series of classroom “Tea With Elders” times. In total, three of these sessions took place. During Tea With Elders, the volunteer Elder storytellers visited the classroom and were served tea and cookies by the children. The class consisted of nine children and was divided into two groups. Each group was responsible for getting to know and take care of their Elder storyteller, who they quickly began referring to as “our Elder.” The initial meeting was simply introductions and time for getting to know one another. This time for relationship building by adopting traditional protocols established a space for the stories to be shared that was reflective of the traditional storytelling process and important to respecting the cultural storytelling space (Iseke, 2011). In the second session, children heard a story shared by the Elder and were given time to ask questions. There was a great deal of laughter during these sessions as children connected with the Elder and made connections between their own experiences, shared relatives, and the story. Noelle explained laughter is also important to Mi’kmaq learning traditions and her claim has been supported by the work of Manuelito (2015) in discussions of creating space for Indigenous digital storytelling. During the third session, children created storyboards, with each child choosing an aspect of the story and drawing an interpretation, as well as writing text to accompany the story. Children needed to work with one another, negotiating the selected part of the story and how it would be portrayed with the others in the group. Elders reviewed the childrens’ interpretations of the story, corrected misinterpretations, made suggestions for illustrating backgrounds and future performances, described the place where the story occurred, and added more details that may have been missed in the initial telling. Both Elders chose to share modern stories, rather than traditional or more sacred stories. Stories were chosen because they were short and easy to share. The stories offered insights into traditional values, but were highly relatable. The children could recognize the people in the stories, the locations and events. The stories also offered a view of the Elders’ early lives, sharing not only aspects of the personal history of the Elders, but also that of community activities and events.

The format of the stories shared by the Elders was different. Nora’s story was a personal account of a visit to her aunt’s house and the walk home, while George’s story was read from a booklet produced by his aunt. George’s, or rather his aunt Lillian’s, story, told the story of her experiences on a culturally significant day in the community. The booklet was helpful for some students in visualizing the story and providing a model for writing. The lack of formalized documentation of Nora’s story led more conversations around interpretation and writing. Both approaches offered benefits to the children for different reasons: the scaffolding provided by the booklet was motivating for some children who found writing more challenging, while the open space for creative interpretation was motivating for others.

Fig. 1: Storyteller George Marshall shares a story written by his Aunt Lillian Marshall with one of the children in his group.

Once the storyboards were ready, the children travelled to the university with their storyteller to perform the story in front of a green screen. Though we had originally planned to do this in the community, we later decided that a trip to the university would offer a full day of uninterrupted filming time and also be exciting for the students. Performance parts were created for all of the children, which meant some aspects of the original stories were modified through discussions with the storytellers during the day. The Elders acted as directors for the performance, guiding the children in their expressions of emotions, actions, and portrayal of the story. While one group was filming, the second group of children was creating the images that would be used for the background on the green screen using a simple drawing program on the iPads.

Fig. 2: Storyteller Nora Bernard directs the action for the video of her story.

It was originally hoped the high school students would work with the radio station through their internships or a volunteer club to learn the technical skills to merge the children's animated images into the green-screen-captured video. Because of time delays, the high school students were no longer available, so two radio station staff (the director and a community staff member) did this work. Nora's group asked to have their original storyboard drawings from pen and paper included in the video because they were very proud of their images. George's group used digital drawings made on iPads, specifically

as backgrounds for the green screen after the performance. In both cases, the images were added and enhanced with animation by the tech team when the videos were edited and compiled.

Fig. 3: Noline works with her students to edit the video and create subtitles.

The draft videos were returned to the classroom for the children to provide feedback. The process of editing was explained, in relation to the work the children had previously done with the “Muin” video. The children began to add subtitles, an opening/title sequence, animation, as well as closing credits. These changes were compiled, and the original Elder storytellers reviewed the videos with the children to clarify language. The school has the benefit of a formal “Land-based learning teacher” who is also identified formally as an Elder in the community. The land-based teacher visited with the children and their Elders during this review and added, from his position of authority, further feedback. This process of consensus building, through gathering and sharing interpretations of the story, not only served to ensure the accurate representation of the story, but also the Mi’kmaq values of decision making and honoring accuracy in story. As a direct example, we share a critical discussion which emerged from differing interpretations and approaches to problem solving. During filming, an additional brother was added to Nora’s story so that all children would have a performance role. Though not the truth, this modification of the story was considered acceptable to ensure inclusion of all children. However, also modified during the performance, it was decided that both brothers mirror Nora’s activities, to increase their presence on screen. It was decided that little brothers copying their big sister would offer additional humour to the story. However, in the revision of the narrative for the changes which arose on filming day, the boys were initially referred to as “naughty brothers, who liked to tease their sister.” Upon seeing this, Nora wanted changes made. She did not want to refer to any children as naughty in the film. Nora didn’t want the parents of the “naughty boys” to see them called naughty on screen; furthermore, she felt this was not an accurate perception of their actions. Nora’s interpretation of the addition was that the boys were not naughty, but instead playful. This counternarrative was important to defining relationships, where children’s playful behaviour in the classroom can be viewed as naughty and punishable. These insights from Nora likely offered greater impact to the researchers and teacher than they did to the children, but illustrate where cultural bias in language and interpretations of actions can lead to conflict. Nora’s comments illustrate the role of defining relationship patterns through storytelling, and how a discussion of these patterns can play an important role in defining interactions in the

classroom. What might be observed as "misbehaving" by a teacher, or even fellow students, is recast through Nora's story as playfulness and a valued characteristic, which, in turn, changes teacher and fellow student response. Though the duration of the project was too short to make definitive claims to a changed student-teacher relationship, and the current teacher already illustrated a consensus building approach to classroom management, it was observed that the conversations around behaviours and discussions about how to position the "naughty boys" served as social stories that supported a more positive classroom environment. The addition of the land-based learning teacher, an Elder, who offered a critical lens to language usage, deepened dialogue and discussion on culturally relevant interpretations further. In the case of Nora's story, some words were not translated to English within the story, because the Mi'kmaq words were more relevant and offered a specific meaning that was reflective of culture, that could be lost in translation. To ensure the profile if Mi'kmaq remained prominent, the land-based teacher suggested that subtitles in Mi'kmaq should be added not only to the Mi'kmaq narration, but to the English narration as well. The process of adding Mi'kmaq in written form allowed us to revisit language and translation. We took the videos to the language teacher from the high school, as well as a language expert in the community, and through another process of consensus decision making, they revised the narration and provided an accurate translation into Mi'kmaq. Beyond simply developing an accurate translation, the process of developing the translation engaged more community members in the project. This dialogue included a teaching for the children about the process of translation and meaning making across two language groups with different grammatical and cultural bases. The videos were brought back to the classroom for the children to view and a celebration with the community was planned.

The official launch of the videos occurred in June at an annual information session for the community on the activities of the school. The children were bussed to the community center, the entire community was invited, and a feast was held. The teacher introduced the project and its aims, the videos were shown, and each of the children spoke about the project in both English and Mi'kmaq. Many parents attended. It was evident from the children's smiles they were pleased with their creations. The parents appeared to be happy as well, everyone laughed at the jokes in the videos, and the presentation felt like a celebration of success. However, our observations of success are an incomplete picture of the impact on the children.

Reflections From the Children

Six of the nine participating children agreed and received parental permission to be interviewed and speak to us about the project. From these six children, important insights about the role of Elders stories and performance in storytelling arise and point to the importance of both of these activities for literacy development.

Stories Have Meaning and Context

The children connected words on a page, written language, to meaning and context. In the words of one child, "I learned that stories are more than just words," while another stated, "I learned that stories teach us about our past." The importance of these simple statements from the students cannot be

underestimated, particularly in this context, where children are commonly presented with mainstream (non-Indigenous) reading materials that lack cultural relevance. In other words, stories are frequently "just words" on a page without meaning or relevance. One of the critical developments within reading comprehension is to develop an understanding and appreciation of text (Veenendaal, Groen, & Verhoeven, 2015), and through oral tradition, engagement with Elders, and performance, students were able to make this connection. Namely, the children learned that stories and storytelling (told, written, performed, recorded) are powerful tools for remembering history, in sharing cultural knowledge, and in communicating what was known.

Listening to Elders Is Important

All of the students identified the importance of listening to Elders and enjoyed learning from them. Research has shown that to develop fluency, students need to: hear and use spoken language in many contexts, and engage in discussions where they use language for meaningful communicative purposes (Graves, August, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2012). The children built relationships with the Elders, as one child stated, "I learned that Elders are funny," and another said, "I learned that Elder stories are important," continuing with "it's like a piece of history, if the Elder passes without sharing the story then no one else will be able to pass it on." Children learned to listen carefully, to talk to an Elder for advice, and that Elders stories carry important messages about how to interact with the world. Another student inverted the message, stating that, "Elders care about their stories," but followed up explaining that they believed the Elder's interpretation, that stories are important. Students learned it is important to ask questions, and to check for understanding. Literacy-focused research further evidences that oral language activities in the classroom are critical for students' reading comprehension (Martin-Beltran, Tigert, Peercy, & Silverman, 2017). The opportunity to work in small groups, and with one-to-one interactions with their storyteller, allowed the students to develop interpretation and question asking skills in a safe and supportive environment, that may support their literacy development in future.

Interpreting Stories

Returning to Vygotsky and social constructivism, the role of dialogue has been outlined as enhancing student thinking and literacy development (Wilson, Fang, Rollins, & Valadez, 2016). Beyond ensuring that understanding of the story was correct, the students spoke about learning to: create the video, check that the parts of the story worked together smoothly, and confirm the interpretation and sequencing was accurate and clear. For example, one student identified the need to learn how to "space out" the images, words, and titles to ensure that the narration and subtitles matched and were easy to read. Another student mentioned, "I get stuck on some words," but followed by saying the performance assisted in the understanding and review of words. While another student mentioned, "I really liked drawing the lanterns," referring to creating the illustrations for the story, and learning what a lantern was and what it looked like based on the Elders feedback. Accuracy of storytelling and representation of interpretations is a critical aspect of Indigenous storytelling approaches, so not only did dialogue and interpretation through this project support mainstream literacy development, but it also supported the development of

culturally specific values in relation to storytelling. When asked, "how do you prefer to learn, with an Elder or with a book?" one student outlined, "working face-to-face with an Elder is easier and more fun, you can't chat and share tea with a book, you can't ask a book questions." In addition, through the storyboard, performance, and video finalization process, children, in discussion with Elders, learned when and where modifications to stories can be respectfully made to balance accuracy against creativity. In another example, one child explicitly named values she learned from the story: "I learned how to ask my parents politely to go visiting," which was presented in the content of Nora's story.

Reflections From Activity Design

In listening to the children's interviews and our own reflections on the value of the project, all participants, teachers, Elders, and researchers agreed that our project should be repeated. We observed that the activity added value not only for literacy development and technology skills, but also for the holistic development of the children.

Relationship Building With Elders

New relationships were formed between the students and both storytellers through the project, regardless of group membership. Students learned about the lives of the storytellers and grew their community support network. Archibald (2008) evidences the importance that Elders stories have on holistic learning and development for children in elementary school. The benefit of mentoring and external support networks for student retention and resilience has been documented for Indigenous students entering postsecondary (Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Snow, 2017), but little has been documented in relation to public education. We propose that waiting until postsecondary to consider support networks is too late, and these should be fostered early in children's academic lives, so that relationships are well developed prior to increasing pressures and demands of study. Furthermore, Pidgeon (2008) outlines that persistence is supported by self-efficacy through finding personal talents, maintaining cultural identity and reciprocity through service to community. Through the open design of the activity and the prolonged contact with storytellers, students were able to deepen their relationships with these key members of the community. We hope these relationships will support them as they continue to progress through education. In speaking about the Elder experience, one student stated, "working with Elders is fun, I have a Grandpa and he and I hang out all the time, share some tea, hot chocolate, cookies and chat about stuff." While a second student replying to the question*, what did you learn from this project?*, answered, "Elders are interesting and fascinating!" In addition, the Elders, as kind grandparent-like models, supported the children in their learning about themselves, their culture, and their community. The Elders provided far more depth of understanding of, "who am I and where I come from," than could be provided through reading alone. Reading, telling stories, and being exposed a diverse typology of literature are consistent goals in the classroom. Finding ways for children to make personal connections to texts is a significant challenge. However, building relationships and personal interactions with Elders created foundations for establishing those personally relevant connections before the storytelling even began.

Performance and Literacy—Interpretation and Engagement

The performance was identified by most of the children as their favourite aspect of the project. As an example, one student stated, "My dad is a writer, he writes songs and plays and it [the project] inspired me to do the same stuff, it is interesting and cool once you get into it. I really had fun with it." Another student outlined the ability to play and laugh during the performance as the most interesting part of the project, saying, "in our video, my face was hilarious." Though children did not discuss this explicitly, teachers and researchers observed that performance, and the correction of interpretation through performance, was important for understanding. Two children explicitly stated the direction offered by the storyteller helped them to understand the meaning of the story, as exemplified by this comment: "a few times we had to do it again [the performance] to get it right based on the story." The class was considered "busy", with several children presenting with challenging behaviours. Very few and always minor behavioural incidents occurred during the creation of the videos. Through active learning and performance, children were highly engaged. The need for an additional actor (a parent figure in one story) allowed us to engage an older student (on a highly individualized learning plan) who became a supported and active learning member within the group. Students engaged with storytellers through questions. They were independently motivated to clarify details and seek understanding to improve their portrayal of the story in the video. Children were further motivated, through the processes that followed, to visualize the story, recall and sequence main events, and attend to and clarify details. Student re-creations demanded high order critical and creative thinking, problem solving, identifying, recognizing and working with literary elements, characters, dialogue, and setting. The final product became a source of great pride for students, a pride they shared with their now Elder friends, their parents, and their community.

Fig. 5: Sample images from the completed video entitled, "Nora's Story," illustrating the students' animation and subtitles in Mi'kmaq and English.

Collaborative Learning—Differentiated Instruction and Peer Support

Literacy levels were highly diverse within the class. The act of performance, collaborative interpretation through shared storyboarding, and discussions between peers and storytellers, allowed for an array of differentiation strategies to support learning. As mentioned previously, the scaffolding provided by the booklet served as an additional differentiation strategy. The shared purpose of creating a high-quality product for the community, rather than a focus on individual progression, was effective in reducing stigma associated with skill level. The one-to-one support from classmates, Elders, teacher, and teachers aid during the group-writing events provided in-class differentiation without the stigma of "pull out support" or "individual education plan" tools. The children worked as a team with "their Elder" to make the best quality production they could. Noelle observed, "It's always a treat to see students thoroughly engaged without feeling like it's classroom work. Mi'kmaq are hands-on learners and the students really thrive in this type of environment." With the goal of the product in mind, corrections of interpretation and writing were easily accepted by students. Alternatively, the teacher observed that grades and teacher comments on writing can result in demotivation and withdrawal from the writing process. One child stated working with the Elders and her classmates in this way helped improve her vocabulary because she could discuss the meaning of new words. With the external shared goal of collaborative performance, and digital story production, competition between students (the evaluation of self in relation to others) was reduced. Each child participated fully within the group and shared pride in the final product. In the words of one student: "the project was hard, but worth it."

Concluding Thoughts

Though the project was not completed as planned, many of the challenges became opportunities for student learning. The prolonged engagement with storytellers allowed for deeper relationship building and more open feedback and sharing. Children strengthened their ties to storyteller role models. Though we had hoped to work in smaller groups (two to three children per storyteller), the larger collaborations of four and five children per storyteller created more dialogue and discussion than would have been observed in our original planning. The dialogue around the stories, their meanings, and how they should be presented created an environment for deep learning to occur. And the learning was bidirectional, between the researchers, teachers, Elders, and students. Through the lens of Etuaptmumk, values and interpretations were recognized, discussed, and challenged, to lead to greater understanding, or a binocular vision related to a possibility of multiple interpretations. The learning was not only related to mainstream values of literacy development, but also inherently included cultural values around storytelling. The stories, which included locations and people the children were familiar with, was highly motivating; students could build on their own knowledge of places and people and extend the stories by asking clarification questions. Furthermore, literacy development of both English and Mi'kmaq occurred concurrently within the creation of the stories as the children navigated the storytellers' use of language, wrote scripts, and revised work. Finally, the ability to move, to rehearse, to gain feedback on dramatizations and to share the final performance offered a physical and mental space to engage with stories that would not have been possible through reading and writing alone. The performance provided

multimodal engagement in literacy that supported differentiated learning and engagement. If given the opportunity to complete the project again, we would change several things:

a) We would plan from the outset a longer period for engagement with the stories and their tellers.
b) We would increase invitations to the community and engage more "experts," such as fluent speakers of Mi'kmaq and parents earlier in the project, rather than at the end.

We would film the performance at the school, to reduce the pressure to complete the filming in one day. The reduced time pressure would allow for more rehearsal and revisioning of the performance, but also ensure children realize this activity is something they can do in their own community. Staying home might also reduce the intimidation some of the children felt while filming at the university.

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Writing the Wrong in the ELA Classroom: The Role of Performance Through Creative Writing

Petryna Venuta

Abstract

Why aren't English teachers creative writers? Why is there little to no emphasis on creative writing in ELA classes? What are the implications of popular media portrayals of the writer on students' perception of writing? In my classroom practice, I encouraged a variety of writing styles that allowed students to grow as readers, but, more importantly, as writers. This paper attempts to understand how we can integrate creative writing with traditional academic writing, to imagine its possibilities, and to examine how we can do more of it.

"Historians have constantly impressed upon us that speech is no mere verbalisation of conflicts and systems of domination, but that it is the very object of man's conflicts."
~Michel Foucault (1972, p. 216)

"If you just read literature and never have the experience of trying to make it, it's a monument; but a writer knows that when it was being made, every word was debatable."
~Wallace Stegner (quoted in Bunge, 1985, p. 78)

Performance in the English classroom, be it in the literal dramatic playing with text in a spoken word production, or the figurative working out of ideas and wordplay in the imaginative space of the student and creative direction of the teacher, is more necessary than ever. Students are inundated with performance through posed selfies, creating 15-second TikTok videos (or its precursor, the six-second Vine), and developing online personae. This Instagram lifestyle, itself a performance piece, need not be in direct competition for creativity in the classroom. And yet, we are in the throes of scripted and reality television shaping the way young people view the arts: singing competitions, dance competitions, and depictions of the reclusive, socially inept writer in films like *Finding Forrester* (2000) and *Stranger Than Fiction* (2008), or morally corrupt writers in films like *Can You Ever Forgive Me* (2018) and *The Words* (2012). Despite this host of inculcating realities, I, years ago, chose to combat incomplete portrayals, in a small but impactful way, with living realities: I took my grade twelve English classes to afternoons of professional productions of live theatre and evenings of author readings at the public library. On one such occasion, after an author reading and during the open question period, one student asked, "What is your best piece of advice for a young writer?" to which the visiting author, Farley Mowat, replied, "Put your foot through your tv." Though it is sage advice for writers who struggle to find the time and thinking space to write, teachers of high school writing recognize the need is to marry popular culture and media to creative writing and literature studies.

Even while in class, young people are bombarded with messages of instant gratification and supposed normalcy though their incessant use of social media and media multitasking (Lau, 2017).

Teaching literature in this climate either attempts to divorce literacy from popular culture or overlap the modern world with the study of literature until both realms are blurred. It is a struggle to force the reader into a hiatus from the barrage and into a realm of quietude. This is why my method as a teacher, in order to slow down the liveliness but continue to excite the readership, was to expose my students to authors. We went to see many: Margaret Atwood, Alberto Manguel, Alastair McLeod, Douglas Coupland, Penn Kemp, André Alexis, and the aforementioned Farley Mowat, to name a few. My hope was to reveal what Rita Dove (1995) in her essay, *For the Love of Books*, experienced; Dove explains that she "had no living role models—a 'real' writer was a long dead white male usually with a white beard to match," but it was when she was in the eleventh grade that her English teacher took her "to a book signing in a downtown hotel" where she met John Ciardi. It was at "that moment [she] realized that writers were real people and how it was possible to write down a poem or story in the intimate sphere of one's own room and then share it with the world" (p. 122).

For one of my students in particular, Jessica—a strong maths student with no interest in sustained reading—attending an author reading ignited her love of reading. Our class had sat through an evening with Douglas Coupland at the city library's auditorium. When the final question was answered, and the applause had died, my students streamed out and headed back to their residence. Jessica, however, hovered around me as I packed up to leave.

> "I want to talk to him," she said.
>
> I told her that people would be lining up to get books signed so she would have to line up with the others.
>
> "I don't have a book." She was crestfallen, and ready to bolt.
>
> "I do." I took my copy of *Hey Nostradamus!* out of my bag and handed it to her. "For you. C'mon, let's go wait."

Although it was nearing midnight by the time Jessica arrived at the front of the line, she was animated and chatty. She engaged with Douglas Coupland, he signed her book, and she promised to read it. By the end of term, Jessica had read, written about, and presented on *Hey Nostradamus!* and had begun reading another Coupland novel.

Another student, Jason, who aspired to be a screenwriter, sent his final essay on Jon Tattrie's *The Hermit of Africville* to the author and was thrilled when Tattrie responded. Jason arrived to class one afternoon and announced, "A writer wrote to *me*! A writer read *my* essay about *his* book!"

Furthermore, Carl Leggo (1997) experienced the chasm between education and readership:

> As a student in school I believed that poetry was written by dead men who had lived in faraway countries. I also believed that poetry was about grand themes of love and war and heroism and religion and nature. Moreover, I thought that poetry was a puzzle—obscure, ambiguous, and convoluted—that I could never solve. I never wrote poetry in school because poetry was written by people with gifts for rhyme and rhythm, and I was convinced I had none (p. 7).

In the classroom, I wanted my students to feel the nearness of poetic experience. When Penn Kemp came into our room to deliver her sound poems and have students participate in choral readings, the students began to recognize the living breath of reciting poetry, and of the poet herself. One can imagine, then, after crafting and implementing writing lessons, the excitement I felt when four of my students became published poets in *Possessions: The Eldon House Poems* (Hoogland & Walde, 2010) while writing and submitting during my course. Two of them were granted the further pleasure of performing their piece for an audience during the book launch at the London Museum's Eldon House while another was featured in the local paper.

One of these student poets, Yun Wu, demonstrated the powerful shift from *othering* to *becoming*—an important resituating when writing as a response to reading moves toward writing creatively within diverse personae. Yun Wu's poem, "Through the Pale Green Curtain," puts the writer inside the experience of a witness to a Victorian household: "Bells tinkled in the kitchen/Servants held out the porcelain tea set" and "I was wandering, a player caught in some naughty kid's/Game of hide and seek." Despite having few instructions on the assignment, Yun Wu wrote a lyric poem from a class field trip to a local museum while "she watched the snow dancing in waltz step."

This issue—creative writing in the literature classroom—is important because students who are beginning to read and write critically in all subject areas, require, above all, creative thinking skills. Creative writing improves understanding through closer readings of the text (Broekkamp, Janssen, & Van Den Bergh, 2009). Indeed, when we compose, be it academic or creative work, we continue to combine, edit, build, and adjust as we write (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998), for writing is itself a process separate from reading or discussing (Gardner, 1983). It was with this ideology that I brought writing into the classroom.

Because the study of literature is "interwoven with studies in linguistics, anthropology, sociology, history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and politics" (Leggo, 1997, p. 8), students, who are learning to be world citizens, need to appreciate that writing, and exploring, is available to them, and necessary for them. The main thrust for the study of literature in senior English classrooms, and beyond into university, is to shape critical readers; it is my position that it is not only creative writing that is being neglected, but also a whole host of its benefits.

It is time we move away from teaching English as reading skills and writing in a reporting way. When students develop identities as confident meaning-makers, they will be less "reliant on technique spotting" (Lockney & Proudfoot, 2013, p. 158). We ought to be teaching reading as art teachers train students—by mirroring styles, nurturing myriad points of view, and practising, practising, practising. If we are to build a world wherein we strive to understand and accept—indeed, celebrate—our cultural differences and ideological divergences, then we must allow the assuming of various personae within our creative writing (*becoming*) rather than responding to reading (*othering*). Writing narrative promotes identity construction/self-awareness, and awareness of others' positions. If we are to better understand our own position, one another, and, ultimately, become world citizens, we need to see creative writing as a way to help students dig deeper into their understanding of a text.

English Teachers Are Effective Readers

> What we do when we read, however "natural" it seems, presupposes a whole theoretical discourse, even if unspoken, about language and about meaning, about the relationships between meaning and the world, meaning and people, and finally about people themselves and their place in the world. (Belsey, 1980, p. 4)

English is the study of literature, literary analysis, professional writing, and creative writing. More often than not, however, the emphasis is on developing effective reading and reporting skills (Gannon & Davies, 2007; Hogue, 2011; Elbow, 1999). Moreover, writing is deemed, across departments, to be the domain of the English Department (Isaacs, 2009). In a study conducted in 2007 on whether students in English teacher training programs identified themselves as writers:

> 73 students wrote prose responses to the open-ended question: 'Why do you want to become an English teacher?' […] [H]alf the students said that their primary motivation was a love of reading, especially literature. Only ten of 73 mentioned a love of writing in their responses. Reading is the mode that invites English teachers in to the profession and that incites their passions. (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 91)

Since most teachers identify themselves as readers rather than writers (Antoniou & Moriarty, 2008; Rubin & Kirby, 1982; Green, 2009), creative writing is often neglected in the literature classroom, even though reading ought to reveal aspects of life with which we are unfamiliar. This is the dichotomy, then: how are we to bridge building understanding neglected by the reader's lens and sense of self-actualization when we only offer one stem of learning?

Why Aren't English Teachers Writers?

"Why do people who write continue to teach (thus disrupting the myth that says those who can, do; those who can't, teach)?" (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 88)

As Gannon and Davies (2007) point out, "few English teachers are simultaneously 'writers' in any sustained, pleasurable or publicly successful ways" (p. 87). Frager (1994) reminds us that by examining "teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers, we may understand more about how teachers' writing ability affects their work" (p. 275). In his 1994 study, he found that only six of 26 teachers in a writers' workshop believed that writing was an integral part of their identities and lives (p. 275).

We read to glimpse a life we cannot or are not living. To better understand our fellow beings. To gain sympathetic insight by peeking into the imagination of others. However, even though we speak as though we witness the main character or are surrounded by the setting, all reading is passive observation, and most writing that literature classes impose on students is reporting on that reading. This kind of writing—observing and reporting on our particular observations—perpetuates "othering." If we are to cultivate an education that encourages myriad perspectives, cultures, understandings, and truths, then we must motivate our students to write creatively. Creative writing does not report—it engages. Creative writing forces the writer to assume the point of view of the subject material. It stimulates "becoming." Reporting on *Hamlet* is quite different from writing Ophelia's private journals, writing an offstage dialogue between

Gertrude and Claudius, or writing Hamlet's letters from university to his father. This is especially important for social issues—the danger, of course, is assuming roles for which we cannot know—but this is easily rectified by the assigned task.

One former student, Wushuang Deng, wrote in 2011 in the school's newsletter, that defining himself had been elusive in his teen years:

> How surprisingly, then, it was for a young man who used to dislike literature to be enchanted by those literary masterpieces? Everything has changed since I attended my grade twelve English course at London International Academy, taught by Ms. Venuta. She gave students independent approaches to secure knowledge and I found my learning experience increasingly piqued every time I dove into the context. More importantly, the course was not simply and solely confined to books but virtually went beyond itself as we applied the theses to our real lives. With passion leading the way, following my heart, I learned how to make the best decisions for myself during the fleeting life course.

Since English teachers are prone to offer reading strategies rather than writing activities, the possible benefits of creative writing are often overlooked, and easily dismissed, possibly because of the need to provide practical, job-oriented skills (Austen, 2005), but probably because many teachers are suspicious of the value of creative writing (Green, 2009); "creative writing courses are often perceived by students and faculty as peripheral courses to be taken only if one has time for fun in his/her schedule" (Austen, 2005, p. 138). And yet, "more than 75% of the examples of good writing chosen by leading teachers in 1986 for the book *What Makes Writing Good* were autobiographical pieces that emphasized personal revelation and reflection" (Dyer & Friederich, 2012, p. 267).

No one disputes that the subject position of English teacher entails a "love" of reading (Peel, Patterson, & Gerlach, 2000), however, there is no corollary with writing. Few English teachers are simultaneously "writers" in any sustained, pleasurable, or publicly successful ways; Rubin and Kirby (1982) point out:

> High school students learn about grammar, about literary genres and history, about types of writing. They do not, as a rule, learn to use grammar, to respond with literature, to engage in writing in the course of coming to grips with the substantive world. (p. 41)

In a more specific light, Grossman (1989), in *A Study in Contrast: Sources of Pedagogical Content Knowledge*, investigates the influence of subject-specific coursework in the development of pedagogical content knowledge in English through contrasting case studies of six novice English teachers, only three of whom graduated from teacher education. Throughout her investigation, she disparages non-teacher trained Jake, whose goals, while teaching *Hamlet*, were for his students "to have them see the interconnections among the themes of the play, to learn the skills involved in textual analysis" (p. 24), and includes assignments of "an in-class analysis of one soliloquy, memorization and recitation of a soliloquy, a five-page paper on any theme in Hamlet, and a final exam" (p. 24). The contrast is provided with her celebration of teacher-trained Steve, whose class watched film clips of various productions, and wrote an essay that compared modern sensibilities to Hamlet's, and yet, "During this time, the students never read the play itself" (p. 24). To imagine that there are only these two binary possibilities seems as

effective as teaching cursive writing with a glow stick and with—if the students are lucky—the lights turned off.

My method was a performative one. I tasked students to rewrite a scene from the play in their own words but maintain the sense and motivation of the scene. They also had to prepare a backdrop using PowerPoint slides, costumes, props—and write a journal describing the group work experience. The results were tremendous: tumbling clowns for kings and advisors to the king, all-female casts to reveal deeper or alternate meanings of the text, and futuristic final scenes replete with lightsabers and capes. Students were also tasked to complete the traditional academic essay, but it must be emphasized that creative thought, critical thinking, along with observing and reporting, are all vital skills for students and can be built most thoroughly when myriad writing skills are practised.

When I handed over the script I had written for *The London One Act Festival* to my students to direct, perform, design, and stage, I had not suspected the impact it would have on them. Every word, name, characterization, and stage direction became alive and questionable to them. They asked questions, made notes, and grew before a live, paying, local audience. One student, after graduating, wrote to the school principal saying:

> I was excited and nervous, as I was a novice in this field. However, the tough job can be solved by appropriate means. Communication, one of the most useful methods I found, helped me compile information and advice together. Thus, the show was successful, and I felt that I was growing more and more confident. (personal communication, October 26, 2011)

Penning the Writers

> To try such writing oneself, and thereby to gain the authority of 'textual power' is to remove much of the threat [or in the terms already expressed in this paper, much of the awe, or fear, of literature] for teachers and students alike. (Bloom, 1998, p. 5)

Dance teachers are dancers. Art teachers are artists. Music teachers are musicians. Why, then, are not Literature teachers writers? As Jay Parini (1994) notes, "for such literary figures as Ben Jonson, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, '[t]he critical and creative aspects of their writing co-existed happily in the same imagination'" (quoted in Austen, 2005, p. 139). If we offer students the pen and allow them to explore the positionality of the writer, students will gain insight into the weight of the word, the search for meaning, and the decision-making process that shapes creative writing. Creative writing is as arduous and serious as academic writing (Kingsley, 2007), though by neglecting it in the classroom, we have allowed it to be seen in one of two ways: on one hand, creative writing as mysterious and impenetrable, or, on the other, as made by the mind consumed with, as is seen in film, madness. No one expects that we will create a classroom of writers any more than we expect a biology classroom to be peopled with future biologists, but by positioning students as the producers of literary writing reflects the dominant goal of ensuring that our students take on active roles in our classrooms (Austen, 2005; Green, 2009).

Creative Writing: Discovery and Invention

> Writing literature to learn literature obliges and enables the students to become invested in their own writing, and in the writing of their peers, in ways they would never have imagined before they tried it. The students fret. They stew. They write and rewrite and rewrite again before they're ready to share their work with me and with each other. (Bloom, 1998, p. 58)

Part of the problem of cultivating a creative writing component to the senior is classroom is, as Rubin and Kirby (1982) point out, that "English teachers who face 140-160 students each day, quarter after quarter, despair of their limited ability to provide the time and individual attention students need to progress in writing ability" (p. 44). We must begin with Rosenblatt's (1994) "transactional approach" to literature studies—one that combines the reading of literature with both essay writing and creative writing. Leggo (1997) draws a lovely analogy of this experience:

> Too often students' experiences in poetry classes are similar to my experiences in driving school. For four Saturdays I sat in a classroom and listened to lectures and watched films that depicted the driving process in intricate detail. My first experience behind the wheel of a real car was a shock. I understood the mechanics of driving and had driven hundreds of miles in my imagination, but suddenly realized that I could not drive. Too many poetry classes operate around the model of my driving school experience. The teacher creates an artificial environment in which readers are granted entry to the poetic text through the door of his or her perspective. Armed with a battery of notes and a special guidebook, the teacher gives a lesson designed to manipulate the students to reiterate the teacher's encounter with the poem in the hope that meticulous and appropriate attention to two dozen poems a year will prepare the reader for reading poetry with satisfaction and enthusiasm. (p. 7)

According to David Bartholomae (1985), this divide can be lessened using activity-specific approaches; for example, "When students are writing for a teacher, writing becomes more problematic than it is for the students who are describing baseball to a Martian" (p. 277). Peter Elbow (1999), for his part, is not making an exclusive case for teaching writing about literature over anything else; he suggests that first-year writing students would benefit from more work in writing with metaphor and imaginative language. Veronica J. Austen (2005), at The University of Waterloo, states that there are five benefits of incorporating creative writing activities into English literature courses:

> (1.) Dispelling the awe of literature and creating active learners; (2.) Developing critical readers; (3.) Furthering student understanding of literary criticism; (4.) Inspiring deeper commitment to excellence; and (5.) Motivating class bonding and dismantling the classroom hierarchy. (p. 139)

Her arguments are at once compelling and convincing. As she expands her argument, giving credence to each of her five benefits, Austen purports that creative writing assignments will foster a closeness to the text that academic writing cannot; students will take ownership, will weigh their words, will search and find symbolic meaning, and she adds even assignment design and assessment. Clearly, it is able to come to fruition, but it seems to require a lot of convincing and cajoling on the part of those who agree to get those on board who do not agree.

In a similar vein, Margaret Atwood's early involvement in an exciting project on Wattpad (an interactive online writing page) whereon she contributed to the popular phenomena of the Zombie in a short

collaboration examines performance in collaborative writing. She applauds the Internet's ability to open writing to all who are interested: "Suppose you're a young person in a developing country," she told *The Next Chapter's* host Shelagh Rogers in an interview,

> You don't have a school, you don't have a library, you don't have a bookstore, you don't have paper books, you don't have a tablet computer ... But you've got a cheap cell phone. You can read on your phone, you can write on your phone. (Rogers, 2012)

In order to engage students with the possibilities available to them, and to further their understanding of myriad course material in all departments, we must cease to think of creative writing as having less intellectual rigour than essay writing; we must come to recognize creative writing as a critically engaging activity that provokes students to become close readers and advances their understanding of literary criticism. In fact, part of the attraction of including creative writing activities is that they allow students, as George Marsh (1992) expresses, to "illuminate criticism by learning experientially about the construction of a text" (quoted in Austen, 2005, p. 142).

We must move beyond simple memorization of literary terms, theories, and schools of criticisms to the machine of applying these facts into the fabric of the students' lives, ideas, opinions, and perspectives. Creative writing can offer so many of these opportunities.

Why Creative Writing Is Important in the Classroom

> The political enters the study of English primarily through questions of representation: who is represented, who does the representing, who is object, who is subject — and how do these representations connect to the values of groups, communities, classes, tribes, sects, and nations? (Scholes, 1985, p. 153)

Creative writing serves the student's ability to share, negotiate, and exchange power dynamics. Power structures and the inequality of the relationships between colonizer and colonized is a dominant theme in Western literature. Creative writing exercises offer strategies of seeing more deeply into the lives of others. In *Creative Writing, Contemporary Theory and the English Curriculum*, Miles (1992) explores how creative writing serves both to enhance a student's understanding of theoretical constructs and to develop the skills of close reading. In other words, creative writing demands that students pay careful attention to the effect of their words. This attention to detail can transfer to their reading. As Miles suggests, the "practical element [of creative writing] encourages close reading, an attentiveness to the peculiarities of form" (pp. 43–44). Once students understand the challenge of making their writing both interesting and meaningful, they will come to recognize the efforts in the writers being studied. Therefore, through this practical experience of creating literary works, students will come to appreciate the techniques used in the literary texts they read and, thereby, become further motivated to read closely.

The Implications of the Depiction of the Writer in Western Literature

In George Eliot's single drop of trembling ink,[1] William Makepeace Thackeray's master puppeteer,[2] and Thomas King's fluid storyteller in concrete prose,[3] depictions of the writer is the vehicle propelling the narrative to fruition—thereby creating the universe. But in others, like Haruki Murakami's fiction,[4] the storyteller is carried by the action—being created by the universe. The writer in some literature seems to hold a dichotomous position; either the writer is an esteemed artist living outside, indeed above, the wildness of everyday activity, or they are a bedraggled lunatic, trapped within the furious storm of human life. The artist figure in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* (1833), for instance, is a creator embowered in a mirrored universe even though it cannot sustain her in real time. Michel de Montaigne's tower,[5] too, and his self-reflecting prose, allow him to both see and be seen without lowering himself to live interaction. But take, on the other hand, the creative Madame Reisz in Kate Chopin's attic,[6] reduced to being both abhorred and mocked by her community. Take also Michael Douglas's portrayal of a writer in the film *Wonder Boys* (2000) or Sean Connery's rendering in *Finding Forrester* (2000)—both are scraggly, defeated talents reduced to moral or social deviancy. According to bell hooks (1996), film can perform a pedagogical function by providing a "common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about…charged issues" (p. 2); but, even further, these images help define our culture's ideas of normalcy. This has greater implications than simply developing our collective idea of a writer.

As a secondary school English teacher, I have witnessed how reading is overemphasized. While students are trained to be critical readers, they are not taught to be creative thinkers or writers. Responding to literature in creative ways would help the student to become a critical reader. If the student saw through the lens of the writer, shaping the prose with Saussure[7] on the shoulder whispering significations of shapes and sounds s/he would gain greater insight into the weight of the word. If the student were to sweat and twist out words like Fitzgerald's Carraway[8] or Camus's Sisyphus-ian Stranger,[9] each all-seeing though less sighted than Eckleberg's faded advertisement,[10] s/he would have a keener eye to identifying symbol, metaphor, and plot. If students could develop their own positionality, they would be adept at seeing the female writer herself, having finished Virginia Woolf's dishes[11] while still rubbing Charlotte Perkins Gilman's yellow wallpaper[12] off her shoulder. The student may be repelled by the depictions of the author in Western literature, even of those images that drive the narrative like the transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's transparent eyeball[13] or the modernist T. S. Eliot's socially awkward Prufrock,[14] but we must allow them the opportunity to drive their own narrative because depictions of the writer in literature are defining our students, and, perhaps, even limiting our collective perception of the arts, of performance, and of scholastic achievement.

We must be prepared to allow students to negotiate their interpretations of meaning in their readings through creative lenses. They must be encouraged to write for this feeling of entitlement, of autonomy, of power and of privilege, can only serve to help students in their academic work, their self-knowledge, and feelings of satisfaction. By motivating our students through writing, we will be ensuring that our students gain a deeper understanding of the literary texts studied in class. The direct instruction model of education, which provides students with the teacher's own interpretation of the texts, may be efficient, but it breeds student apathy. It can be challenging to get students to take the time to pay attention to each

word, phrase or sentence and how it functions to create meaning; however, because students often treat creative assignments as an expression of their inner, secret selves, they begin to recognize the weight of their words. Though the media threatens to divorce understanding from the craft of various arts, we can allow students to see that, contrary to images from singing and dancing competitions portrayed on television, creativity and artistic motivations are built stone by stone, rather than in an overnight leap. We have to allow students to take ownership in their own learning.

Notes

1. In *Adam Bede* (1859)
2. In *Vanity Fair* (1847)
3. In *The Truth About Stories* (2005)
4. In, for example, Norwegian Wood (1987) and The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1997)
5. In his *Essays* (1580)
6. In *The Awakening* (1899)
7. In Writings in General Linguistics (1907-1911)
8. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925)
9. In The Stranger (1942)
10. *The Great Gatsby*
11. *A Room of One's Own* (1929)
12. *The Yellow Wallpap*er (1892)
13. In *Nature* (1836)
14. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915)

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A Symbiotic Link Between Music, Movement, and Social Emotional Learning: Mindful Learning in Early Learners

Matt Yanko and Priscilla Yap

Abstract

In the following study we investigate how young learners engage with music and movement to illustrate their understandings and connections to nature. We discover a symbiotic relationship between the performing arts, Social Emotional Learning, and Mindful Learning over the course of six months, and examine the potentials and constraints of this harmonization. Results from this study show that learning in a co-constructivist setting, which allows opportunities for reflective listening, choice, intentional focus, and feedback, supports the development of behavioural and emotional abilities, and empowers students to delve deeper into their connections with nature through composing abstract music and movement pieces.

A Prelude to Our Inquiry

David Abram (1996) posits: "The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn" (p. 33). Abram elucidates that our surroundings are alive, and he entices us to embrace our feelings and foster a relationship with it. Accordingly, many educators provide opportunities for their students to engage with the natural world through play, exploration, wonder, and imagination. While participating in such experiences, learners are encouraged to represent their feelings, values, and understandings. However, the conventional means of communicating through pencil and paper can become a restrictive, one-dimensional medium for meaning making, as it hinders the livingness that resides in the lived experiences of children and falls contradictory to the livingness of the natural world. Therefore, we turn to the performing arts, and, in particular, music and movement, as living media for meaning making. Music and movement can offer learners a means to interpret and express their experiences in the natural world, as the arts provide a platform for children and teachers to perceive things in ways other than they are normally seen (Eisner, 2002, p. 83).

When students apply music and movement as a way to illustrate connections, values, and understandings, they participate in co-constructivist processes that evoke subjective vulnerabilities, feelings, and ideas. In those types of experiences, educators need to provide opportunities for children to engage with purposeful focus and listening, and to develop openness to others' perspectives. In doing so, those students also require skills such as solving conflicts, being attentive, following directions, and managing emotions. Thus, as young learners engage with music and movement as media for meaning making, such experiences necessitate an acquisition of behavioural and emotional capabilities, and educators can turn to *Mindfulness* and *Social Emotional Learning* (SEL) to foster those abilities.

Mindfulness has been described as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Activities such as music and dance can cultivate awareness, attention, and intention, as well as empower students to express themselves freely to create something that is guided from within. SEL involves processes through which a person develops fundamental emotional and social competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop concern and care for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively (Weissberg, Payton, O'Brien, & Munro, 2007, p. 417). Educators can orchestrate SEL and mindful learning experiences together, since both initiatives focus on educating the whole child through the development of positive self, moral, social, and emotional understanding (Lawlor, 2016).

To date, there is minimal research that has examined the integration of mindful learning and SEL programming. Thus, we seek to fill a void in research concerning the harmonization of mindfulness and SEL within a framework of the performing arts. We examine the struggles, benefits, and extent to which children's meaning making through music and movement provides a platform for the co-development of the attributes associated with mindful learning and SEL. This study occurs over the course of six months and involves 22 Grade 1 students.

The Pulse of Our Story

Stories readily incorporate themselves into our felt experiences—in hearing or telling the story we vicariously live it, and the travails of its characters embed themselves into our own flesh (Abram, 1996, p. 77). Contemporary ethnographic methods that bring storytelling into the inquiry process illustrate new ways of writing that re-conceptualizes teaching and learning. In the current investigation, we employ an autoethnographic storying approach (Ellis, 2004) that empowers us to create stories written in a creative nonfictional style based on empirical data—observations, notes, and artefacts. In doing so, we pursue essences and meanings, rather than portraying and representing precise facts. Within the context of music education, autoethnographies have been used to shed light on the experiences of students and teacher (Gouzouasis & Yanko, 2018a, 2018b; Yanko, 2019). The classroom and outdoors are more than mere settings, as they contribute meaning to their inhabitants and embody the fabric of their storied experience—places develop their significance or identity through stories about what has happened there. Thus, our stories are written from the perspective of the teacher(s), from the self or auto, but are also composed in dialogue with those involved in the learning experience. We interpret the prefix "auto" through Greek language underpinnings to afford a consideration of the joining of the self, him and her, them, those, they, and that (Gouzouasis & Ryu, 2015). We engage with autoethnography as a means of writing critical reflections based on concrete details, vivid descriptions, personal feelings, and emotions (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Lesa Lockford (2002) describes this emotionality and sensitivity in alternative ethnographic texts as "stories that move [her] to stillness…call[ing] [her] to take pause, to reflect, to feel" (p. 76). Thus, this framework empowers us to evoke our students to reflect on their behavioural and emotional development as the inquiry progresses.

Grounding Literature

We reflect on literature that supports music and movement as a means for meaning making, as the abstract nature and poetic capabilities of music can support students to express their understandings of their lived experiences. For instance, the practice of soundscape composition draws on perceptual constructs of the acoustic landscape, whereby the original sounds must stay recognizable and the listener's contextual and symbolic associations should be invoked for a piece to be a soundscape composition (Truax, 2008, p. 105). We also seek guidance from a previous study of ours where young students used soundscape composition as a means to illustrate their understandings, values, and emotional connections to landmarks in their city (Yanko, 2019). With the above in mind, the students in the current study are encouraged to incorporate natural sounds and materials alongside traditional instruments to illustrate their understandings and connections to nature.

Children naturally play and make meaning through story—as human beings we live storied lives. Snowber (2019) extends the idea of story to include body narratives, where our body and all the senses are a source of knowledge, learning, wisdom, and material for creation. We encourage our students to engage with creative movements as a means to illustrate understanding through basic elements of movement, like body, space, and effort (Laban, 1963). Malaguzzi (1998) posits, “symbols have profound associations with emotions, feelings, and many other things that cannot be qualified through observation” (p. 93). In the case of dance, it is a unique language through which individuals can express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions. As the inquiry progresses, we will encourage our students to communicate their connections and meaning making through movement and music, as the performing arts are a living media that can illuminate the livingness that resides in the lived experiences of these children with nature.

Mindfulness is a human capacity, and, like other capacities, it can be honed and sharpened, or it can be dulled. When we engage in learning experiences that evoke mindful states, we recognize that there is more than one perspective on the information given. We choose from among those perspectives, and reflect on how our perceptions structure experience on the assumption that they are more malleable and susceptible to individual control than that which is apparent at first glance (Langer, 2016). Thus, we avoid narrow mind-sets that limit our potentials, and recognize the arts as a means to navigate roadblocks and attain a flexible state of mindfulness. The arts play a role in meaning making through reflection, awareness, and transformation, leading to a heightened and focused relationship between the individual and what was previously unseen (Eisner, 2002).

Being mindful is a simple act of drawing novel distinctions, which can lead us to greater sensitivity to context and perspective, and ultimately to greater control over our lives (Langer, 2000). Ellen Langer refers to that practice as “mindful learning.” Langer’s construct of mindful learning supports the proposition that each music making experience should be seen as novel, potentially exciting, and always providing an opportunity for rich experiences. Research by Langer, Russell, and Eisenkraft (2009) compared two orchestral performances of Brahms’ Symphony No. 1. In that study, the control group focused on re-creating a previous best performance, while the intervention group was instructed to draw on novel distinctions within a boundaried, task-specific focus. Findings revealed that the audience and

musicians reported more enjoyment from the mindfulness performance in comparison to the control group. In addition, dance and creative movements can also support the construct of mindful learning because they require focus on the present moment. In a study by Pinniger, Brown, Thorsteinsson, and McKinley (2012), participants engaged in learning the tango—an intense synchronized dance that requires focus, trust, and support between partners as they walk backwards and forwards. Results found the tango to be an effective strategy to reduce participants' levels of depression and increase their wellness.

There are five components of SEL: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2003). Research recognizes that early childhood is an ideal time to begin SEL development (Denham, Brown, & Domitrovich, 2011), and a small but growing body of literature indicates that children's involvement in the arts can result in positive gains in SEL (Rooney, 2004). Research in music and SEL shows that investing time and effort that results in a successful performance, can also foster self-esteem, self-confidence, determination, and emotional expression (Croom, 2012; Hallam, 2010; Lund & Kranz, 1994). In the context of elementary school music, Jacobi (2012) explored the development of children's socio-emotional skills and posits that cooperation, sense of belonging, empathy, and active listening can be fostered through music. Also, a study by Pereira and Marques-Pinto (2018) examined the social and emotional skills of middle school students who participated in a dance program, whereby the results revealed the social and emotional needs of the students, and their desire to engage with interesting music and dance moves.

Six Autoethnographic Vignettes: A Narrative Interlude

The following autoethnographic vignettes depict the journey of Grade 1 students as they explore, wonder, investigate, and connect with the ecosystem of a creek near their school. These stories weave together as a narrative to illustrate their meaning making through music and movement, and how engagement with the performing arts can scaffold growth in mindfulness and the development of social emotional skills.

Vignette One: Wonders in the Water

> As the children, Ms. Yap, and Mr. Yanko arrive at the creek, they stop at a rickety old bridge, and everyone huddles together.
>
> "Wow! The water sounds fast, like a rushing tap," exclaims Rosanna.
>
> "Look! There's a family of bugs dancing on the water," adds Luisa, as she mimics their jagged movements with her arms.
>
> From the bridge, the children venture into a forested area with tall mossy trees and prickly blackberry bushes. They follow a path that leads to a smaller trickling section of the creek.
>
> "The water by the bridge was way louder," claims Paolo.
>
> "Shhh! Stop it! Stop talking! I can't hear it," whines Rohan.
>
> It takes a while, but everyone eventually quiets down to focus on listening.

Fig. 1: Children using sticks to explore the water

Afterwards, they follow the course of the creek and stop where the water expands to a pool. Some of the children notice a pile of sticks and use them to explore the water.

"What are you doing with those branches?" Mr. Yanko asks.

"I'm seeing the sounds of these," Crystal replies as she dabs two sticks.

"Does the size of the stick make a difference?"

She whacks the large branch on the water, "This one is loud. The other isn't loud, maybe because it isn't big."

After the pool, the creek flows into a sewer pipe. However, the children don't have time to explore that area. It is time to head back to school.

Later that day in the classroom, the children organize gathered leaves, pinecones, rocks, flowers, and sticks from the creek. While doing so they discover a slug on a leaf and decide to make it a class pet. They name it *Slugly*.

Vignette Two: Re-creating the Timbres of the Creek

The following Friday we share an *autoethnographic learning story* (Yanko & Gouzouasis, 2019; Gouzouasis & Yanko, 2018b) about the experience at the creek. In the midst of reading the story, the children spontaneously break out in body-percussion to revive the sonic elements of their explorations. Ms. Yap works with their sound effects and draws out the descriptive words in the story. The students make swishing sounds with their mouths and drum their hands on the carpet. After the story, they begin to explore and create with the gathered materials from the creek.

Mr. Yanko notices two girls shaking a large cylinder vigorously.

"What are you making?"

"It's a shaking-creek-thingy," Rosanna states, as she and Crystal shake it together.

"When we are at the creek, we don't just hear water," Rosanna says, as she takes off the lid. "Look inside. There are rocks, sticks, and this green stuff. All of the creek makes the sounds that we hear, not just the water."

Mr. Yanko comments, “It’s like a symphony that harmonizes the water with other elements in the creek. I like that idea.” Rosanna grabs a fistful of sand and plunks it into her instruments. They shake it. Both partners nod in affirmation. She adds a few pebbles and shakes it again.

“Nope, not right!” She states and takes a few out.

Fig. 2: Children putting in materials gathered from the creek

Fig. 3: Children shaking a large cylinder

In the meantime, Ms. Yap is outside with students exploring water in a large tub.

Paolo taps a rhythmic ostinato on the rim of the tub, while Alex rapidly swirls a stick to create a long whirlpool note in the water.

“What’s this song about?” Ms. Yap inquires.

Alex replies, “It’s a water song. We have different beats for different parts of the creek.”

“Stop...Stop tapping! Let me get closer! It’s my turn you guys.” Calvin shouts and pushes his way to the tub. He whacks his stick loudly against the water.

Ms. Yap notices this, “Calvin, if you can’t hear your friends’ music and only your own then you’re playing too loud. Try to play your music with a gentle touch.”

He concentrates on gently tapping the water while listening and harmonizing with his friends.

Fig. 4: Sticks in a tub of water

Vignette Three: Meaning Making Through Movement

Over the next weeks, the students begin to incorporate movement into their projects.

> Mr. Yanko walks over to a group of students constructing an elaborate set using stumps and various coloured fabrics.
>
> "Mr. Yanko, this is our stage," Pam says.
>
> Simrit explains, "These are the trees and down there is the creek. The sewer is also part of it. We go in it." She giggles and crawls through the hula-hoop.
>
> "This is quite the set. How is your movement part coming along?" Mr. Yanko inquires.
>
> "We move like water: we go up and down," Jennifer states, as she sways her arms and body from side to side and slowly lowers herself to the ground.
>
> "But I want to be a tree, not water!" shouts Rob with frustration.
>
> "No! Everyone needs to be water because there's so much water at the creek," Simrit argues.
>
> Jennifer interjects, "Well what if the three of us do water and the two boys do trees. There are lots of tall trees at the creek. If we have too much water it may look like a lake."

Fig. 5 and Fig. 6: Students dancing with fabrics

> Mr. Yanko leaves them as they negotiate their ideas and walks to the middle of the classroom where two students are waving a long piece of fabric.
>
> "It looks like you are creating the creek. Am I right?"
>
> "Yeah, we're the creek," pouts Steve, as he struggles with the fabric. "It is so hard. I'm trying to make waves, but it's…it's so hard to wave at the same time…and…and…all they seem to do is play around."

"Nicole, are you working on the speed of the waves with Steve?"

She replies, "Kind of, it's hard when the others are moving under it so beautifully. I just want to watch them dance and I forget to wave the fabric with him."

"It takes a lot of focus to be aware of your partners' movements and how and when to move together," Mr. Yanko replies, and leaves them to practice. He walks across the room to join a quartet of boys.

"How's it coming along?"

"Tom is still too orange, we need more brown fabric to cover his shirt," Shawn suggests. "I'll get more so he looks like a real branch."

"Rohan, you move too much! Rocks don't move like that in water. You should move a bit less. That would look more real and cool," states Alex.

They practice it again with the feedback from each other, and this time they seem to be more in tune with one another.

Vignette Four: A Lament for Slugly

Slugly is not doing so well and the class decides to return it to the creek. They want to do something special to say farewell and compose a good-bye song with Mr. Yanko. When they arrive at the creek, Ms. Yap takes the leaf that Slugly is resting on and places it in the stream to be carried away. The water slowly pushes the leaf downstream and the children begin to sing their farewell song as Slugly drifts away.

After the lament, Ms. Yap provides the students with two thoughts to guide their exploration time at the creek—to observe things that are the same and to notice what is new and different. The students add a third idea, which is to find a place at the creek that speaks to their hearts.

Fig. 7: Hands cupped to ears in forest

To focus their thoughts on the three provocations, Ms. Yap encourages the children to engage with mindful observation skills. "Use your owl-like listening skills to pick up soft sounds. This will help you focus with an alert and open listening, so those sounds won't be missed," she states, as she cups her hands around her ears.

They venture along the creek bank and many students engage with owl-like listening.

"It's so much louder today!" exclaims Rosanna.

Tom adds, "Yeah, it's like thund..."

"No, it's like a monster," Carrie cuts in.

Nicole trudges her zebra-striped boots against the creek's current, "there's a lot more water. It's swishing really fast!"

Upon returning to school, many students share the part of the creek that speaks to their heart.

"Mine is the deep part of the creek. It was so much fun. The water made me feel like it was a rainy day and I was jumping in puddles," Rohan comments.

"I love the part with whooshing water. I love just being in the water," states Nicole with her hands on her heart.

"I like the creek because the water is soothing, peaceful, and calm," Jennifer adds.

Vignette Five: Places That Speak to Our Hearts

Today, the students focus on the final touches of their music and movement projects. Mr. Yanko observes the group with the elaborate set. The three girls are working on their water piece. They dip down low, and then back up high to mimic the flow of the creek. As they move towards the hula-hoop, Jennifer shakes a pair of jingle bells, Pam taps a triangle, and Simrit rows a rain stick like paddling a canoe. Off to the side, Trevor and Rob are drumming and playing the thunder tube.

"Last day you were exploring loud and soft sounds, how is that coming along?"

"Soft sounds are inside the sewer and loud are outside. The sewer is a safe place and outside is dangerous," Simrit answers.

"Dangerous for who?"

"Slugly!" She exclaims. "She floated down the creek to her home in the sewer where it's safe."

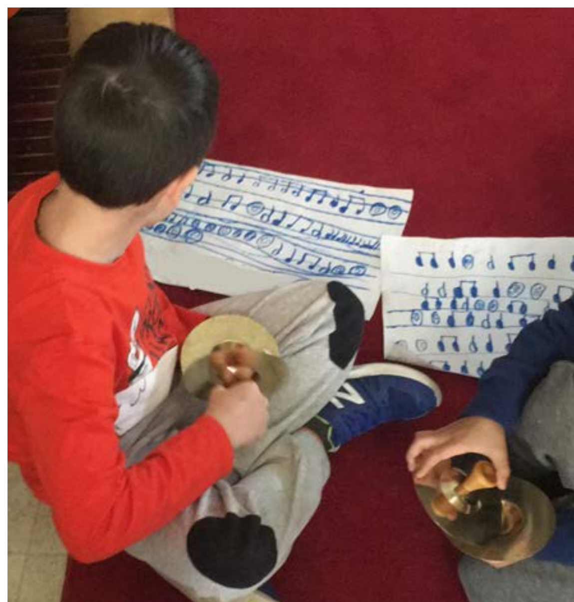

Fig. 8 and Fig. 9: Students playing with instruments

Mr. Yanko leaves the group to work on their music and walks to the quartet of boys. Three of them have metal cymbals in their hands. "How are you going to make fast water, rocks, and sticks sound different if you are all playing the same instrument?"

"We can show you," states Rohan.

Rohan rubs the flat surface of the cymbals together in small circles. As he nears the end of his music, he nods to Alex and he begins to gently rub the sharp edge of one cymbal against the flat edge of the other. Rohan than cues Tom to join in and he rapidly slices the flat part of one cymbal against the edge of the other.

"Wow! That is an amazing interpretation. I have never seen the cymbals used like that."

Vignette Six: Discourse in the Learning Community

As the class settles into a semicircle on the carpet, Mr. Yanko begins a discussion, "Some of you said that your music makes you feel a certain way. Who can share a little bit about their music and feelings?"

Crystal thinks for a moment and then answers, "My piano music sounds like rain quietly dripping down. It makes me feel calm."

Tom comments, "I used the metal clappers for the branches crashing by the water. It sounds loud and I like loud sounds."

Jennifer adds, "Well, the music in the sewer was loud and happy sounding because it was a safe place for Slugly. Outside the sewer felt like a danger area. I played quietly because I was far away from the safety of being in the sewer."

Ms. Yap asks, "What is something that was challenging during the project?"

Pam states, "Working together! It took a lot of time to put it together and to agree on good ideas."

Carrie adds, "I noticed that adults are better at talking to each other than kids. When we were doing our movement, it was hard to talk to each other because everyone was saying their ideas at the same time, but when Ms. Yap or Mr. Yanko were helping us, we were better at listening."

Karen adds, "Working together was hard because there's so much interrupting and we need lots of calmness."

Mr. Yanko asks, "Is there anything new that you learned?"

"I learned how to work with my friends," answers Rosanna.

"That things can take lots of time and that you need to work together to make ideas come true. One person can't do it all, it's too hard," states Nicole.

Shawn comments, "I learned how to silently show my friends when to come in with their music."

"Me too, especially when I wanted to talk during the recording part. It was so hard to tell people what to do without words," adds Karen.

Deciphering the Tones of Behavioural and Emotional Abilities

The autoethnographic vignettes illuminate how the performing arts can provide a framework to support mindful learning and social emotional skills. The stories depict the challenges many young learners

encounter in their emotional and behavioural development. Fostering a solid social emotional foundation can support them to wholeheartedly engage in mindful learning. Greene (1995) posits,

> When we see and hear more we take risks into the unknown. We embark on new avenues for choosing and action where we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, and can take an initiative in the light of possibility. (p. 123)

When children are able to strengthen their social emotional skillset, they are better able to engage with mindfulness. This allows them to take risks into the unknown through a focused, yet, flexible, state of mind that allows for new beginnings, possibilities, and understandings. At the onset of the project, we took note of how the students carefully chose their instruments and movements based on a comfort level that directly related to being self-conscious about how their peers would perceive them. As the project progressed, we noticed an intrinsic change and self-assurance in the students, and they were better able to express their ideas through risk taking. This led to a more varied and deeper layer of sound and movement that was not based on how they felt others would perceive them, but on how they wanted to be seen by others. In turn, students were able to appreciate each other's interpretations of music and movement—as a safe and freeing space for expression was created through self-discovery, reflection, and re-visitation.

Mindfulness can be seen as a flexible state of mind through which students actively engaged in the present, notice new things, and are sensitive to context. Experiences in the performing arts that center on inquiry and imagination can scaffold that mindset, as "by imagining, we are enabled to look at things, to think about things as if they were otherwise" (Greene, 2001, p. 65). When children engage with focused imagination, wonder, and exploration in the performing arts, they illuminate aspects of mindful learning, whereby such experiences are seen as novel and potentially exciting. For instance, the ingenuity of the three boys playing the cymbals shows how they circumvent a narrow mind-set and expand beyond the possibilities of preconceived conceptions of how cymbals should be played. Furthermore, it does not matter whether what is noticed is important or trivial, as long as it is new to the viewer. When the children used owl-like listening to focus on changes in the ecosystem, the higher, more forceful water and the abundance of fallen leaves were new and exciting observations.

A significant aspect of mindful learning is being able to make acts of novel distinctions. The second vignette elucidates how the children chose not to work with traditional instruments, but invented new ones using sand, leaves, sticks, and rocks. During that experience, they intensely focused on their creations, engaged with deep listening to the timbres of their new instruments, and delicately tuned them to sound more like the creek's ecosystem. What is interesting about the performing arts in this study is how it empowered the students to engage with a process of categorization, which involves a cognitive process of labeling phenomena and using those labels to make sense of the world around them. In this nontraditional means of communication, they engaged with elements of movement and music as languages to illustrate their understandings.

The abstract nature of movement and music challenged the children to develop a meta-communicative toolbox that assisted them to work through artistic impasses that emerged during the project. In meta-communication, meaning is derived from interaction with others and does not depend on literal

verbal meaning (Bateson, 1976). As the children worked on creating and performing their pieces, they engaged with meta-communication, whereby they not only listened to their group as a whole, but also to individual parts and interacted with more than one person at the same time—as mentioned by Shawn and Karen who commented on having to learn how to quietly conduct and cue their partners. In such performative learning experiences, students need to develop the ability to step back from what is occurring in the present moment and look at things from a meta-perspective. This requires the capacity to participate in what is going on while observing at the same time. Thus, in performing arts contexts meta-communication can be thought of as a type of mindfulness-in-action, which involves bringing one's complete attention to a present experience on a moment-to-moment basis.

We examine how the five competencies link to the performing arts: to identify and manage emotions, understand other's perspectives, set and achieve goals, foster relationships, and make responsible decisions. The competency of responsible decision-making refers to the ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems. In the group with the elaborate set, the two boys were struggling with their part. Jennifer made an ethical and constructive decision to support her group by not criticizing them. She observed without judgment and offered to switch parts based on awareness and care. This type of consciousness lends itself to decisions and actions that are driven from awareness and compassion, rather than choices based within a pro-self orientation. When Jennifer switched parts to support her group, she demonstrated flexibility and empathy to help her group's music composition progress as a whole.

Self-awareness and self-management are competencies that relate to emotional capabilities. The children's comments concerning the part of the creek that speaks to their heart depicts them being self-aware. Learning experiences like these can facilitate the surfacing of underlying emotions, values, and motivations to assist in the development of self-awareness. At the same time, self-management is addressed through Carrie's explanation of how adults can help children improve their communication skills and better negotiate their differences. This competency emerged vividly during the first visit to the creek, as some of the children struggled to hear the water because their peers were talking and unable to self-manage. Over the course of the inquiry, engagement in contemplative practices allowed the students to foster more reflective versus reactive responses to the experience—like being quiet while listening, or having to negotiate their ideas in co-constructivist situations. When children are in a reflective state, they are better able to notice and handle difficult emotions and persevere towards goals.

There is value in movement and music as a means to develop the competencies of social awareness and relationship skills. The livingness that resides in both art forms empowered the children to reflect on bringing life to their understandings in a way that enabled others to hear, feel, and perceive what they experienced at the creek. While doing so, they had to simultaneously observe and interpret group members' music and movement ideas, discover how to orchestrate those ideas together, and find their own function and role within the group. For instance, Steve's attempt to create watery waves by rippling the blue fabric with Nicole took a fair bit of time and patience. They both had their own ideas of how the ripples should be performed, as their arms moved at two different tempos—one wanted fast, short waves and the other wanted big, slow waves. The abstract nature of the rippling waves provided them with an opportunity to reflect, negotiate, and coordinate to develop an understanding of each other's

ideas. Thus, by learning to look through multiple perspectives, young learners can help build bridges to connect, heal, and empower themselves amongst peers.

Although SEL and mindfulness have thus far been examined separately to identify and reflect on key traits, they do harmonize together. For instance, mindfulness was able to allow for meaningful inner self-exploration by facilitating the surfacing of underlying emotions, values, and motivations. During one session, Nicole contemplated over singing her musical composition, and she initially chose not to sing based on how she felt others would perceive her singing abilities. In providing a safe and exploratory learning environment, the students were able to revisit their music and movement pieces time and time again. As the project progressed, Nicole was able to explore, try, and change her part within her group. She began cultivating her own conclusions about her capabilities and, in turn, utilized her skillsets with confidence towards the end of the project. Through the symbiotic relationship between SEL, mindfulness, and the performing arts, we were able to empower the children to reflect and illuminate their emotions and feelings in music and movement compositions. We also found that learning these concepts in tandem led to a heightened sensitivity to listening, as students embraced listening as a way of welcoming others and their differences. As the students engaged in a manner of reciprocal listening, they were able to represent their theories and interpretations through music and movement. By doing so they were also able to offer their peers the possibility of becoming part of their theories, developments, and thoughts (Rinaldi, 2004, p. 4).

A Heartfelt Coda

Through the arts children can begin to learn to see what they had not yet noticed, to feel what they had not yet felt, and to employ forms of thinking that are not only indigenous to the arts, but also to their emotional and behavioral development (Eisner, 2002, p. 12). There is great value in providing artful learning experiences that center on mindful learning and the development of SEL. A commitment to guiding those concepts through the performing arts not only allows for successful performances, but can also foster self-esteem, self-confidence, determination, and emotional expression. With that in mind, there is still minimal research on SEL and mindfulness in the performing arts. In our study, we only explored music and movement. Due to limitations, we were unable to include drama. Furthermore, there is research to be conducted with meta-communication as mindfulness-in-action in the performing arts, as the abstract nature of movement and music is a powerful tool that can enable children to develop a meta-communicative toolbox to assist them through artistic impasses.

Eisner (2002) posits,

> The arts are means of exploring our own interior landscape. When the arts genuinely move us, we discover what it is that we are capable of experiencing. In this sense, the arts help us discover the contours of our emotional selves. They provide resources for experiencing the range and varieties of our responsive capacities. (p. 11)

It was evident that as the students developed a deeper understanding of their capabilities through self-discovery and exploration, the compositions that they were creating also began to reflect an

increased sophistication and creative use of sound and movement. We believe that it is important to not only promote the necessary tools and practices for young learners to succeed in the arts, but to also develop their well-being as artists. Being successful in the performing arts means more than partaking in an experience—it entails the development of empathy, passion, understanding, and, above all, imagination that enables children to particularize, to see and hear things in their concreteness. If imagination is to transcend and transform experience for young learners, it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life they live. Maxine Greene (1995) suggests,

> To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real…Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. (p. 19)

As educators we need to see beyond to carve out anew. We need to provide meaningful learning experiences that empower children to not only engage in the present moment and make novel distinctions, but also foster a social and emotional skillset while doing so. Learning experiences that allow for imagination can support children to steer clear of fixed mind-sets and develop those that are flexible and open. By doing so, we can support children to make novel distinctions through intense focus, reflection, and transformation. Inviting students to use their imagination means inviting them to see things other than the way they are. And, of course, this is what art educators do; they scaffold their students to perceive what is, imagine what might be, and then use their knowledge and artistic skills to pursue what they have imagined (Eisner, 2002).

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