

LYNN FELS

PERFORMATIVE INQUIRY

Reflection as a Scholarly Pedagogical Act

Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity.
The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other.
It is neither poised nor unpoised, yet moves both ways...
It is the stop. (Appelbaum, 1995, 15, 16)

I teach in a faculty of education, with a research focus on arts education, arts for social change, teacher education, arts-based research, and drama across the curriculum. I teach a variety of education courses to undergraduate and graduate students. The majority of graduate students are teachers seeking to better understand their practice. Others are artists, or artists who have become teachers, balancing the tensions between their desire to engage in the arts, and the practical need to earn an income.

My undergraduate students, however, are not practicing artists, actors, future directors nor playwrights; they are in the midst of studying economics, education, English, science, business, linguistics, communications; they may be members of the wrestling team, or football players, with only an occasional theatre arts student in attendance. A few are teachers, or dream of becoming teachers. They are not destined for the theatre, although they are co-creators of their experience and will be performing all their lives.

“Whose script are you performing?” I ask. “How will you improvise your life?” Or, as poet Mary Oliver poignantly writes, “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” (1992, p. 94). For students and educators, for each one of us, these questions carry life-long significance. But beyond the bar stool, or a loved one’s ear, how and where can such questions be explored?

In all the courses I teach, whether for undergraduates curious about drama and education, or graduate students investigating their educational practices, my pedagogical and theoretical vehicle is performative inquiry. Performative inquiry provides students opportunities to voice their presence, to work collaboratively across disciplines in a creative environment that welcomes who they are and what they have to offer. We engage in role drama, playbuilding, improvisation, tableau, and other arts activities that invite us to explore our challenges, our stumbles, our questions, our concerns, our practices, our lived experience.

“Pay attention to how your environment performs you,” I advise my students, as we rearrange the chairs from lines into a circle, pushing tables to the edges of the room, so that a space within which to perform is created. Theatre director, Peter Brook (1968) writes, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man

walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (p. 11). Brook’s empty space¹ is a performance space that is simultaneously pregnant with as yet unimagined possibilities and haunted with memories, echoes, absences, reverberations.

Performative inquiry recognizes the arts as a viable medium for educational research. As my experience and training is in theatre arts education, the majority of my writings on performative inquiry reference my teaching and learning through drama (Fels 1998, 1999, 2010, 2011, 2012). However, all performing and visual media arts, including the written arts, may be experienced and investigated by researchers, artists, educators, students, through the lens of performative inquiry as action sites of inquiry and learning.²

Performative inquiry focuses on the opportunities and possibilities of learning that emerge as participants engage in arts-based activities. Performative inquiry offers a curricular pedagogical lens with which to investigate the experience and practice of the arts as an embodied sensorial creative vehicle for research and learning. For example, when a child paints a picture, or a group of students perform an improvised scene, the researcher’s question is not whether or not that painting or scene is “good” or “bad” but rather, what did the child or students, and those who witnessed, learn and share through their experience of making and witnessing? Performative inquiry asks: Who or what calls us to attention? What issues emerge? What stop moments tug on our individual and collective sleeve?

Performative inquiry, as a pedagogical vehicle of inquiry, offers instructor and researcher permission to interrupt habitual engagement, to question conventional expectations, to explore ideas, contexts, and situations, to challenge the status quo, to replay possibilities of engagement. In my class, the simple act of inviting students to sit in a circle rather than in conventional rows is just one of many performative acts we undertake as we interrogate conventional pedagogical and communal practices. My classroom is simultaneously an action site of research and pedagogical inquiry, with a focus on learning in our “what if...?” explorations of what matters and why. At times, unexpected moments arise that astonish, dismay, or interrupt, revealing the fragility and vulnerability of human engagement and interaction in play that touch a nerve, a grief, secrets revealed, through a crack of our not knowing, or falling flat on the floor.

Performative inquiry as a pedagogical vehicle of social change offers educators and researchers the opportunity to make visible political, social, economic, cultural, communal and individual injustices, conventions, expectations, presumptions, aspirations. Performative inquiry may serve as an interruption, illuminating what is, or as a catalyst for personal agency and collective action beyond the performance space that we create in our classrooms. Performative inquiry invites us to perform, to reflect on what is, what has been, and what has yet to be imagined.

Central to performative inquiry is philosopher David Appelbaum’s (1995) concept of the stop—a moment of realization created during the creative process—an encounter, event, experience (or in reflection of an experience) that calls us to attention. A stop is like a child’s tug on your sleeve. *Listen, this moment matters*. A stop is not a literal stop but realized through and within motion, a moment of

possible learning within which choice of action, so often invisible, interrupts us, becomes visible and is recognized. As Appelbaum (1995) explains,

no theoretical construct, the stop is an actual moment, the moment of poise....The stop lives in the interstices of action....it gives us a key to a deeper engagement in a meaning that unfolds our lives. For it offers a choice. Either to remain habit-bound or to regain freedom in one's approach to an endeavour. The stop is the advent of an intelligence of choice. (p.xi)

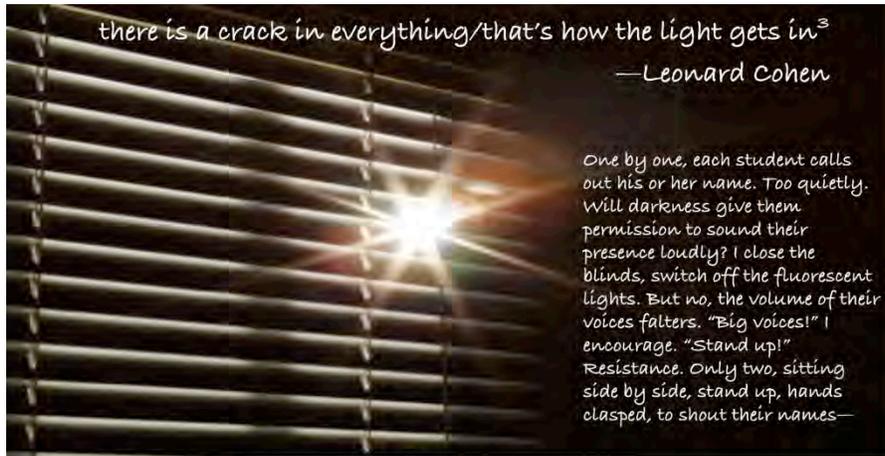
Stop moments are moments within which dwells my research. Our lives rebound with potential stop moments, they are elusive, temporal, often noted in reflection. Our action in response, within the moment, may be one of sleepwalking, habitual engagement, resistance, acceptance, wide-awakeness.³ A stop moment that arrests and engages us, may reveal multiple choices of action available or new possible interpretations and understanding. A stop moment is a gift of risk, a gift of opportunity. A stop moment is an invitation to vulnerability, intimacy, not-knowing, undoing.⁴

Why are stop moments important in terms of a performative research and teaching practice? By identifying and attending to stop moments that call us to attention, we may reflect on why these moments matter; what issues, assumptions, perspectives and practices (economic, political, social, communal, personal, cultural) are embodied within the stop moment; and why we chose (or failed to choose) to engage in a particular choice of action. A stop moment embodies pedagogical learning that is revealed through critical and creative reflection.

Performative inquiry is my vehicle of research and learning within the classroom with my students. My greatest learning has come from engaging with my students. Performative inquiry is, at its heart, a pedagogical quest to engage in the question, "Who am I?" Furthermore, in acknowledgement of philosopher Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, the question arises, "Who shall I become in my encounter with you?"⁵

A STOP IN AN UNDERGRADUATE CLASS—

Postcard 1



"Why didn't you all stand up?" I ask, switching on the lights, our introductions completed. We blink in the brightness, and recognize no one. A failed icebreaker—what was I thinking? Collective silence.
"I didn't want to be the first to stand up," a student offers.

Why the reluctance to stand, to speak? Fear of exposure, ridicule? Habits of engagement? Unwillingness to risk vulnerability? Even with the blinds closed, the lights off? Is this the end product of four years of university education? Students afraid to step into voice? Into action? Into leadership? But wait, two did stand, hands clasped for courage...we shall begin from where we are.

I introduce my students to performative inquiry and lead them through a series of drama activities, including soundscape and tableau. Three hours into our first class together, I say, "There are no right or wrong answers. It's okay to fall flat on your face, we're all here with you." And then, like an exclamation mark, I launch myself full length on the floor. (Not in my lesson plan. I astonish myself). "All of you," I sing out. "Flat on your faces! Join me!" And, to my surprise and delight, they do. I look around the room and am amazed. It's like being a kid again, seeing the world from underneath table legs and floor. Embarrassed, surprised grins greet me. Some are kneeling—that's okay, they have moved off their chairs.

How did these students journey from a singular fear of standing and shouting their name to falling flat on the floor in the space of three hours?

A tug on the sleeve—how did we navigate our transition from sitting on chairs in the dark, refusing to stand, to a collective collapse on the floor?

What words, gestures, action evoke, invite, provoke, inspire action? How does a moment of transition from fear to a willingness to engage occur? Warm-ups? Humour? Collaborative creative exploration? Did I win their trust by sharing my story of how I came to be a drama educator? By trusting and committing to an emergent curriculum? Performing moments of reciprocal offering and receiving?

Here, within this stop moment, we are living the heart of performative inquiry: to engage in action, and then to reflect, what happened? What matters? So what? Who cares?

"Okay, everybody, let's debrief, but first give yourselves a standing ovation!"

One of the many challenges early in my career as a drama arts educator was *lack of reflection*. No, not mine. Me? I *agonized* after every dramatic encounter (and, if I'm honest, I still do). My dominant question in those beginning years was not "what if...?" but "why, why did I do that!!?" On my drive home after each class, I engaged in anguished reflection, inevitably renewing vows to listen to my students, to stay in the moment, to stop expecting, prompting, scripting, to allow our creative work and learning to be emergent. I had yet to comprehend that stumbles, imperfections, perceived failures, were potential gifts of learning embodied within the work my students and I created together.

Reflection, alas, too often was a way for me to dissect and chastise my practice as an educator rather than recognize the value of collaborative reflection as an action site of inquiry, a shared engagement of reciprocal learning. As a beginning lecturer, at the end of each class, I would quickly thank everyone for the scene they had just created, the role drama we had just experienced, and usher everyone out the door with a cheery wave, confident that the 'learning objectives and outcomes' of our tableaux, improvisations, playbuilding, role dramas, were self-explanatory and obvious. What I failed to incorporate into my lessons were reflective practices to permit my students time and ways to connect our drama activities to individual and collective learning, and to make visible the pedagogical opportunities embodied within the individual drama strategies I marched them through.

And then one semester, I taught a graduate research course to practicing teachers and they questioned the value of doing drama activities during class. The course was designed to help educators investigate their practices, to engage in research. These students had backgrounds in everything except theatre arts, so raised eyebrows were the standard response each time I introduced a new drama activity. "When is the *real work* going to begin?" they would ask. I realized that what was so apparent to me, was not so for others without theatre or drama education experience. And so I learned how to articulate performative inquiry as a pedagogical vehicle, to explore the emergent learning embodied within individual drama activities not only in my teacher education and curriculum courses, but also in those drama education courses where I had presumed the learning obvious. I learned that as educators we need to identify and articulate our pedagogical and reflective practices, so that our students' learning, questions, challenges could be invited into presence and witnessed by themselves and others. Introducing students to a reflective practice requires that we pause and inquire about what has unfolded in our work together, in order to make the action of reflection visible—

"Alright then," I learned to say, "Let's talk about what happened during the role drama we just completed. What issues emerged? Why did you make the decisions in role that you did? Did anything surprise you, or startle you, and if so, why? How could you use role drama in your classroom? What might be the benefits of doing role drama in social studies, or to deal with issues in public health or town planning?"

Reflecting on our work together gives us the opportunity to identify the parallels, insights, and connections, intended or not, that engagement in drama activities illuminates for research, teaching, and how we live our lives. Through

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our collaborative reflections together, I have come to recognize the critical importance of reflection as a pedagogical action site of learning and inquiry.

This chapter focuses on how my students and I engage in collective reflection through the writing and sharing of e-postcards as a pedagogical vehicle for learning through performative inquiry. Reflection offers opportunities to revisit, critique, reconsider, reimagine choices of action, responses, and decisions taken during a particular pedagogical activity as well as in our every day lives. The reflective practice of creating, sharing and responding to e-postcards facilitates meaningful dialogue and makes learning (and unlearning) visible. Reflection calls our attention to moments that tug on our sleeve.

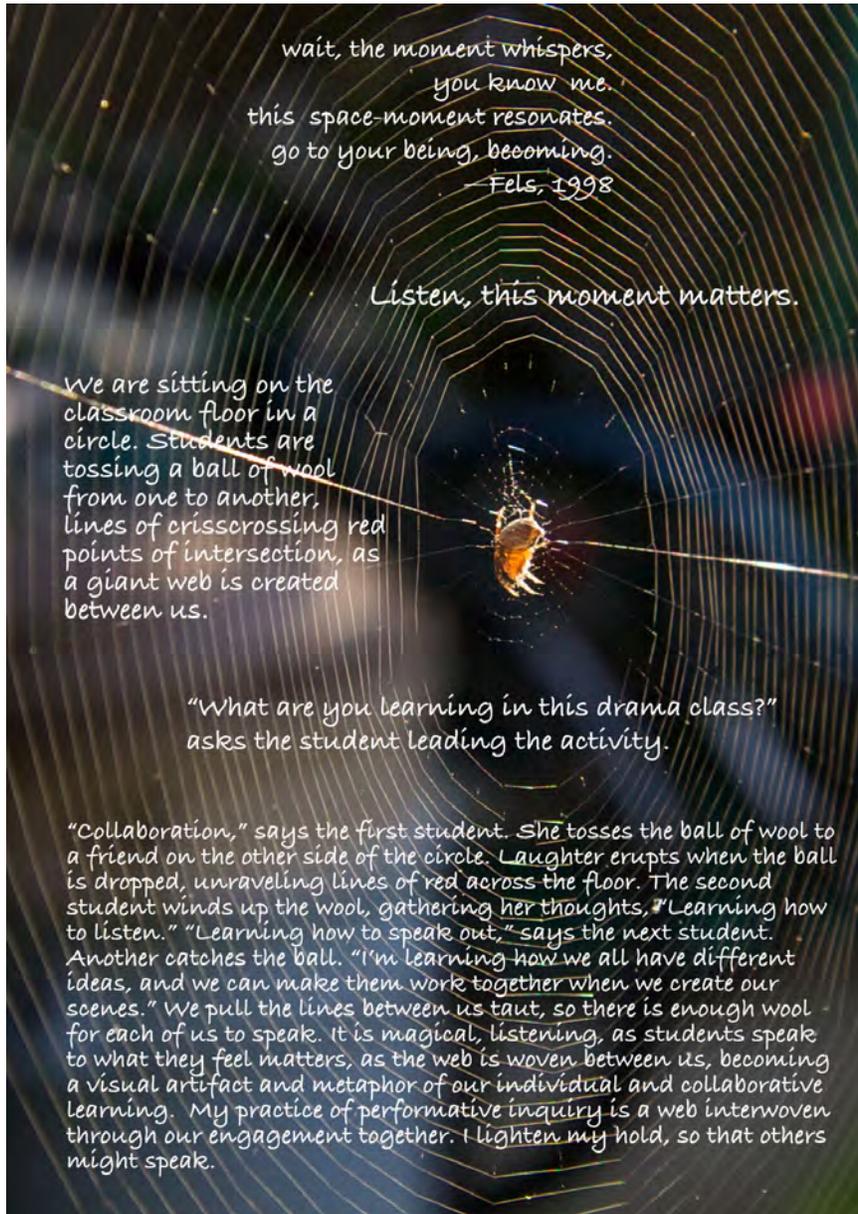
For many students, meaning making requires time for an experience to be understood; reflection through performative inquiry is like a pot of soup slowly simmering on the backburner. Other students are able to make instant connections to what they are learning within and upon reflection of performative explorations. Wiebe, Fels, Guiney Yallop, Snowber & Margolin (in press) note that reflection in the form of journaling is a pedagogical requirement in an increasing number of teacher education programs. They argue however, that reflection-on-demand defeats the purpose, space and time required for meaningful reflection, as student teachers struggle to meet increasing demands for reflective journaling, often from multiple instructors within a program.

The authors recommend a reflective practice that offers respite from on-demand journaling. They invite the contemplation of educational experience and emergent issues explored within a context of an arts-based inquiry through creative action such as poetry, dance, writing, undertaken not with the intent of fulfilling a requirement, but for the experience of allowing learning to emerge within a reflective act of wondering and wandering. The authors write:

Our hope ... is to explore via poetry our own experiences with engagement in learning, and by doing so suggest ways to restore balance to the notion of reflection, reminding practitioners and scholars alike, that our creative and artful ways in learning need not avoid being slow to find an answer, lingering with an idea and possibly not completing it, and exploring queries outside the official canon of curriculum outcomes. (Wiebe et. al.; in press, np)

How might we engage our students in meaningful reflection that touches the heart of learning? Returning to my restless graduate students, I realized that I needed to make visible the pedagogy embodied within the drama activities that we were engaging in and why such activities were of value to the students' investigations into their own teaching practices. I needed to implement a form of reflection that would provide feedback to students on their progress through the course, and allow them to identify and explore what mattered to them, what they were learning and feeling—a reflective practice that would illustrate the impact of our performative collaborative work together while simultaneously permitting me the opportunity to engage with each individual, on an intimate level. I also needed to make visible the scholarship embodied in the arts applied across multiple fields as a viable pedagogical practice of inquiry, learning, and representation.

Postcard 2



wait, the moment whispers,
you know me.
this space-moment resonates.
go to your being, becoming.
Fels, 1998

Listen, this moment matters.

We are sitting on the
classroom floor in a
circle. Students are
tossing a ball of wool
from one to another,
lines of crisscrossing red
points of intersection, as
a giant web is created
between us.

"What are you learning in this drama class?"
asks the student leading the activity.

"Collaboration," says the first student. She tosses the ball of wool to a friend on the other side of the circle. Laughter erupts when the ball is dropped, unraveling lines of red across the floor. The second student winds up the wool, gathering her thoughts. "Learning how to listen." "Learning how to speak out," says the next student. Another catches the ball. "I'm learning how we all have different ideas, and we can make them work together when we create our scenes." We pull the lines between us taut, so there is enough wool for each of us to speak. It is magical, listening, as students speak to what they feel matters, as the web is woven between us, becoming a visual artifact and metaphor of our individual and collaborative learning. My practice of performative inquiry is a web interwoven through our engagement together. I lighten my hold, so that others might speak.

Reflection through performative writing is a creative element of performative inquiry. My own practice of performative inquiry celebrates performative writing⁶ as a fertile way of reflecting on my research, making meaning, and sharing learning. One engages in a performative inquiry, identifies stop moments that call the researcher to attention, and then through reflection, through performative writing, dialogue, embodied retelling, the researcher comes to recognize the learning that emerged through the research, what matters, and why (Fels, 2012).

For several years, I taught a graduate-level arts-based research course specifically about and through performative inquiry. We undertook in-class arts activities that offered us opportunities for inquiry and reflection. Students engaged in performative inquiries through individual arts practices, such as theatre, dance, writing, multi-media, visual arts, or music with an accompanying research report. On the conclusion of the course, students were required to write a reflective paper about their experiences in the course, their key learning moments, and whether or not their experience would influence their practice as artists, researchers, educators. I encouraged students to explore performative writing as a form of inquiry and representation.

One year, artist and dance educator Kathryn Ricketts, then a student in my graduate course on performative inquiry, informed me that she would be absent for three or four weeks of the course.

“Where are you going?” I inquired.

“London to work with teenagers at risk, through dance.”

“That’s a performative inquiry in itself!” I exclaimed. “Why don’t you send emails reporting on your progress and experience, and in return, everyone in the class will send you a weekly email explaining what we’ve been doing in class, a narrative of a key stop moment they’ve each experienced, and why that moment matters to their practice. I’ll ask everyone to include a quote from one of the readings each week.”

Kathryn corresponded with us while she was in London. Technically and creatively fluent in on-line communications, she added images to her weekly emails, inspiring us in turn to create what we came to call e-postcards, which soon emerged as performative artefacts of our learning and experience. A flurry of cyberspace communications traversed the Atlantic between London and Vancouver. The e-postcards were exquisite pedagogical and scholarly performances of our experiences, inquiries, stop moments, reflections, and learning through performative inquiry. To our surprise, documenting our learning through reflecting, writing, and creating e-postcards proved to be a fertile and generative action site of inquiry and learning, shared communally.

Years later, challenged by my graduate class of practicing teachers, I decided to engage them in a reflective practice to make visible the value of our classroom drama activities. Journaling as reflection had run its course with this particular group; they were exhausted by and resistant to the form, which had been used extensively during their teacher education programs and other graduate courses. I needed to address their expressed desire for engaging in a reflective scholarship recognizable to them within the constraints of their perceptions and experience. And then I remembered the e-postcards and wondered how they would be received and enacted in a graduate course that was not an arts education course.

Postcard 3

To venture causes anxiety,
but not to venture is to
lose oneself.
—Kierkegaard, date unknown

"Okay, listen up. I have a plan! After every class, write me a postcard about a stop moment that happened during class, or during the coming week, that calls your attention to something that has pedagogical implications. Given that we perform all the time, within and outside dramatic activities, I would like you to learn to recognize the scripted performances within which you participate, the environments that perform—"

"How many words?" interrupts a student.

"Just a postcard. With a quote that supports or illustrates or comments upon your experience and learning. I don't want you to regurgitate what we've done together, I already know that—instead just choose one moment, a moment that tugs on your sleeve and says 'pay attention to me' and write about why this moment matters, in terms of your teaching, your life, who you are."

"Can it be double-spaced?"

"Write as much as you need to share your moment of learning with me. In fact, let's send our postcards to everyone so we can read about each other's learning, and what you care about. And I'll respond to each of you individually."

"Awk! Does that mean we have to respond to each other's postcards?" protests a student.

"Do the math! That would be 22 times 13 weeks of postcard responses," groans another.

(Of course, I hadn't done the math. How could I fail to calculate how many times I would curse myself for setting up a reflective practice that required that I read, and respond reflectively and thoughtfully to each postcard received from every student over a period of thirteen weeks! Not only that, I'd also promised to write a weekly postcard to illustrate what I meant, and to share my learning with them.)

"No, there is no obligation to respond to each other's postcards, unless you want to—Oh! I also want you to include an image. You can choose one from the Internet—copyright images only—or choose your own photograph or illustration that speaks to your stop moment in some way, metaphorically, relationally, literally, or symbolically."

"What percentage of our marks are these postcards?"

"Um, let me think about that. And please send them to me via email so it's easier for me to respond to you individually."

A pause. Will these postcards work? And then, the e-postcards flooded my mailbox...

The e-postcard as reflective practice through performative inquiry has been a rewarding pedagogical venture, which I have initiated with students at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Performative, scholarly, intimate, pedagogical, reflective, these e-postcards arrive weekly as evidence and expressions of my students' scholarship and engagement in their learning.

Having created postcards myself as a model for students, I have learned that the practice of writing a weekly e-postcard requires creative and critical thought; thoughtful consideration in the selection of individual stop moments, quotes from readings, or words spoken, and images; concise scripting of evocative narratives; and attention to the not yet known meaning making that arises through performative reflection. Knowing that their e-postcards will be received by an audience beyond the instructor, individual writers focus on the careful crafting and performance of their postcards: language, metaphor, image, narrative, choice of content and form matter.

The stop moment narratives are written and rewritten, image and content juxtaposed on the page in multiple ways, images created or found. We perform our scholarship, telling individual stories of stop moments that invite new possible ways of being in the world. "What we do," biologist and philosopher Francisco Varela writes, "is what we know, and ours is but one of many possible worlds. It is not a mirroring of the world, but the laying down of a world ..." (1987, p. 62).

Educator and scholar, Karen Meyer in her teaching, and writing on living inquiry (2006, 2010) invites those in inquiry to explore time, place, language, self/other in every day life. "Each of us finds our own meaning of living inquiry through these themes, and with deeper inquiry, through the absence of any theme—to what is" (2006, p. 1). Living inquiry requires the reflective practice of writing fieldnotes, which like e-postcards, are similarly crafted with care, written and rewritten until a gleam of insight and recognition enlivens the writer's (and reader's) heart. Meyer writes of learning in the following fieldnote, which she titled *In Perspective*,

... I take a small trip in a floatplane. Take off is smooth. As we climb, the reality of details fades. Cerulean Sky is clear and calm. In the co-pilot seat, I survey the view below from the side window. Sea looks remarkable from here. I heighten my attention to these altered dimensions of distance, space, and time. Before long, I spot a crowd of seals sunbathing on a miniature island. They lie flat and expose their dark and speckled fur to Sun. I see my island ahead. It's a short-lived flight and a passing moment. The reality of breadth fades as we descend. (2006, p. 6)

Different in form and practice from the hastily scrawled (or meticulously considered) notes of the anthropologist in the field, Meyer's fieldnotes are pedagogical literary witnesses to a moment, event, encounter, relationship, location, that through reflection in writing reveals learning in unexpected places, so that both researcher and reader are surprised, moved to new understanding.

E-postcards are miniature scholarly essays, personal revelations, performative interplays of text, image, thought, pedagogical recognitions, offering communal stopping places.⁷ In our creations, we are at times, astonished by the unexpected learning that emerges.⁸ Writing reflection is within itself a practice of inquiry.

Postcard 4



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The e-postcard could easily be commandeered as an artefact of learning for assessment and evaluation. Weekly e-postcards pragmatically could be used to provide evidence as to which students are reading the assigned readings, who was paying attention during the lecture; the level of participation in a particular activity—but I envision and experience e-postcards as more than a means to assigning marks, to do so would betray the spirit and intention of e-postcards.

I understand the writing and compilation of an e-postcard as an apprenticeship of scholarly pedagogical writing, reflective learning, and artistic practice. Students whose postcards fail to fulfil the stated requirements (e.g. missing quote or image) are encouraged to resend a revised version. Those whose e-postcard lacks a depth of reflective insight are asked specific questions to elicit a practice of thoughtful reflection of their learning that I am seeking. I ask students to re-engage in their own learning, to look again at the postcard they have created.

How to evaluate these postcards? By attending to the word *value* embodied within *evaluate*, I respond personally, individually, with care, with pedagogical alertness to each student, identifying lines they have written that catch my attention, that resonate, that astonish or trouble me. I ask questions to further the thinking of an individual student, to encourage him or her to reach beyond the obvious; we engage in a pedagogical dialogue online. Their thoughts on their emergent learning evoke within me new learning, new recognitions. I am called to reflect on my own practice, my own laying down a path in walking.⁹ In a response to one student's postcard, I write,

The best moment, stop moment, in my life as a performing arts educator was when I surrendered, and let go of “getting it right, perfect” and began to see the accomplishments, the moments of beauty, achievement, commitment, joy that come from hard work....there's an old saying glass half full, half empty.....when you see the glass as neither but full¹⁰....glass full....then pedagogy not perfection becomes the focus and action-site of our learning and celebration. With care, Lynn

I flag postcards that tug at my sleeve, that illustrate insightful scholarship and learning, and refer to them as a guide for evaluation of student work through the course: how deeply did they engage in their learning, what was the arc of their learning across time? Do these postcards portend future engagements reimagined within and outside the classroom? I consider the impact of individual e-postcards on my own learning and pedagogical practices. Did a postcard help me to see anew a practice, a concept, a theory, an encounter, a shared experience? Students receive remarks rather than marks in response. I select and copy paste a sentence or two from their writing into my reply, and illustrate how their e-postcard has offered a new insight or impacted my practice. I signal when I am particularly moved (or disturbed) into new learning, writing, “Standing ovation!”

I shed tears, laugh, and experience, through their eyes, my vulnerability, my fears, my hopes; my longing for a meaningful life of action and compassion comes into view. In our journey together, I am constantly revisiting, reimagining my own pedagogical practices.

Postcard 5



"My commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism."

—bell hooks, 1994

How surprised I am
Here you are
Your hand placed on mine
A mischord as you press
down
So that my fingers
Respond in a silent melody
of protest.

Who is silenced? Who remains silent? Who silences? Who is absent? Why? In a conventional academic classroom, a professor leans on a lecturn, powerpoint images flicker. An act of resistance is an empty chair, echoed responses, failure to engage, fulfilled expectations. How is it possible that I do not notice or attend to the absence of those most in need of being present? Distracted by oversized classes, unwritten articles, deluge of emails, how might I resist so that I may come again to the pulse of my own absence and mourn its loss?

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E-postcards offer opportunities for learners and instructor to collectively create an intimate dialogue of shared and reciprocal learning; re-evaluate activities experienced together; engage in collective meaning making; and acknowledge the value (and gaps) of our engagement together. My responses are written to each individual in hope of pedagogical moments of connection and recognition. Through offering and receiving our postcards collectively, we engage in a performative dialogical act, attending to that which is so quickly forgotten, elusive, unnoticed, not-yet known. The e-postcard is a reciprocal action site of inquiry and learning, not simply a student assignment designed to fulfil course requirements. We teach each other through our online sharing of postcards.

E-postcards dwell within an action space of performative reflection, new learning, awareness, recognition, wide-awakeness evoked through the creative interweaving of words, image, quote, narrative seeking meaning making that resonates. Upon reading their postcards borne of performative inquiry and reflection, I write in response about what I value in their postcards, what awakens me, what enlivens my understanding of my practice, my life, what I had not thought or considered possible until their postcard arrived in my inbox. Our weekly dialogue is simple, yet complex, as we imagine new possible worlds within which to engage.

In response to a postcard from a graduate student questioning her teaching practice, I write,

You touch on the fears and experiences that haunt us all...a Sally Field's desire to be loved, to offer what matters, to be heralded, carried down school corridors on the shoulders of adoring students...(why else am I trying to lose 20 pounds!)...you ask the difficult questions, and open yourself to considering new approaches... to reach out to your students, past and present, to ask them what they value, what might be offered....how to make the work relevant, of value, meaningful...where art, community and creative critique of social justice intersect....thank you for your postcard....it is an invitation for all of us to pause.... With care, Lynn

I seek to respond to each postcard, with thought, care, compassion, and yes, many times, I feel trepidation, for one never knows how my words are received. "Tell me," I ask my students, "if anything I write upsets you, words are limited, and received in ways we can't always anticipate." I can only trust in the medium of exchange, the care between us, created over time through our reflective writing, in the performative inquiries we do together, our creative explorations, and in our willingness to forgive small stumbles, shared between us. When a postcard sings with the particular beauty of acknowledging and rewriting pain, learning, and acceptance, realized through reflection, pedagogical renewal becomes possible.

Beautifully written, insightful, and evocative — I am called to remember the first time I apologized to my child, and her acceptance of this crack in perfection... you are touching upon a difficult subject, the perception of male's presence within a classroom...I don't think much has been written about male teaching, vulnerability and apology....thank you for highlighting the quote you have pulled out of Free Play¹¹ into our world of education.... With care, Lynn

Postcard 6

E-postcards have been part of my reflective practice and teaching for years now...



... and each year, I grumble as my mailbox overflows ...until I open each postcard, and read the lines of text, contemplate the chosen quote and image, and in response, utter a small gasp of gratitude. For these postcards are not to be marked, they are received, valued, responded to as treasured gems of learning. Over the course of a semester, they become performative artefacts, traces of their footsteps as my students "lay down a path in walking." (Varela, 1987)

stop moment by stop moment, postcard by postcard, breath by breath. Our learning is oftentimes unexpected, our journey unfolding through reflection. As poet Antonia Machado writes, "... when turning around/you see the road you'll/ never stop on again/wanderer, path there is none/ only tracks on ocean foam." (Machado, 1930)

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I once sought permission to include postcards for my research, and was rebuffed—the temperature of the room perceptibly fell when I enthused, “I’m learning so much from you all! I’d like to do a research project around the postcards and post-secondary drama education. Your postcards are great evidence for the value of drama education at the university level! All you need to do is sign this consent form. Confidentiality assured!”

A stop moment materialized as my students—through silence, lack of enthusiasm, and words of objection—spoke of their postcards as a trust, not simply textual objects to be used for my tenure track ambitions or research curiosity. And although disappointed, I listened, for through their offering of e-postcards, I have come to understand that their gift to me is a pedagogical relationship of vulnerability, intimacy, trust, respect.¹²

Rereading my responses to individual e-postcards, I am often surprised and deeply touched how significantly these pedagogical postcards have informed my own learning, how tales of stop moments have shaped my understanding about teaching, how I might engage in my relationships with others, through performance, in play, in response. Dreams, hopes, fears, resolutions, apologies, losses, triumphs, resolutions, slip in between the lines of our sharing. The work and experiences in our classroom, and our lives, are understood as performative engagements of inquiry that reveal who we are, creating the possibility of renewal, a revisioning of what matters and why. An e-postcard offers hope of natality.¹³

WHO SHALL I BECOME IN MY ENCOUNTER WITH YOU?

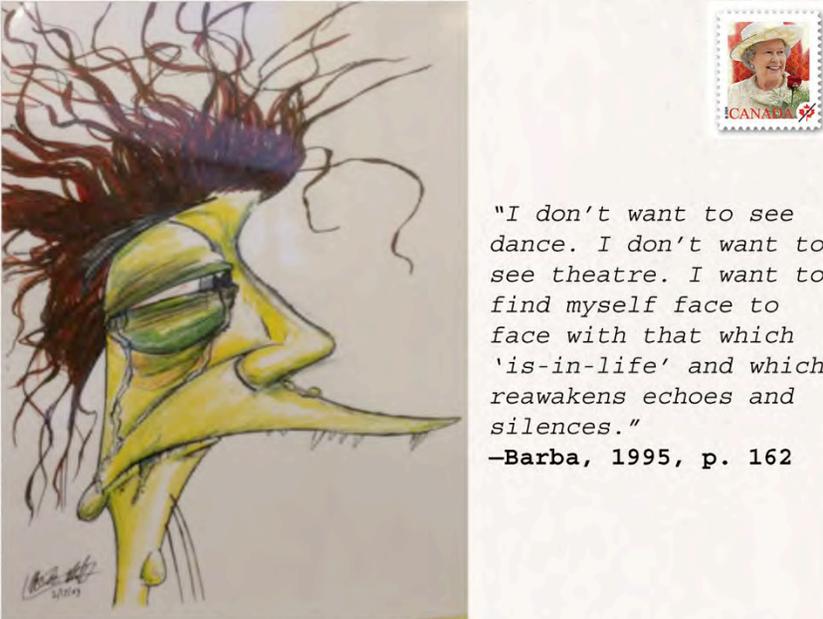
As educator and scholar, Michael Gordon (2001) reminds us,

Natality stands for those moments in our lives when we take responsibility for ourselves in relation to others. In this way, natality initiates an active relation to the world. It signifies those moments in our lives (and there are many) in which we attempt to answer the question that Arendt argues is at the basis of all action and that is posed to every newcomer to the world: “Who are you? (p. 21).

I realize I risk being poetic about these e-postcards; they are after all an assignment, a course requirement; how many stop moments can an individual have in a class? In a day? In a week? We cannot manufacture stop moments on demand, but they are present in our lives, waiting to be noticed and reflected upon. Engaging in a reflective practice designed to enable us to recognize stop moments, we come to recognize that we are blessed with multiple stop moments in our lives, moments that are invisible, hidden, vulnerable, intimate, as yet unknown, unfolding in our presence. And present too, are stop moments, insistent, impatient, demanding attention, like a child seeking love.

However brief or elaborate, an e-postcard as a reflective practice of inquiry becomes a performative pedagogical space of encounter where we may meet ourselves, and each other, *as if for the first time*. The question, *who shall I become in my encounter with you*, calls us to action, offers us an opportunity to reimagine who we are and who we are yet to become in the presence of each other, and in the presence of those who are absent, yet present in our lives.

Postcard 7



"I don't want to see dance. I don't want to see theatre. I want to find myself face to face with that which 'is-in-life' and which reawakens echoes and silences."
—Barba, 1995, p. 162

It's February, we've been doing e-postcards since class started in January. I enter the classroom. A student tugs on my sleeve, stopping my single-minded trajectory to the front of the classroom.
"Lynn, I had a stop moment outside of class this week-end!"
"What happened?"
"Someone did something that made me mad, and when someone does that I usually just get mad.
This time I stopped and asked myself why am I mad? Should I get mad? How should I respond?
It's my first stop where I didn't just let my emotions rule my actions."
"Standing ovation!"
I am thrilled: Here is evidence that my student is transferring his reflective practice of writing e-postcards to lived experience. Perhaps I might employ a similar practice of engaging with such a stop moment when encountering the next person who causes me grief!

FELS

E-postcards are simple. All you need is—

A stop moment.

A quote from one of the readings.

An image.

Create a postcard-length narrative of your stop moment, what you learned, and why it matters.

Reflection through performative inquiry is a collaborative pedagogical act that benefits educator and learners individually and reciprocally. I am thankful for the critique from my class of questioning graduate students, and for the absence of Kathryn, my travelling student who posted e-postcards from London. They inspired me to learn how to actively articulate the value of learning through drama activities and to introduce into my non-arts education classes a performative form of inquiry and reflection designed to help students recognize their learning in a meaningful way. I am thankful for all the e-postcards that I have received, and the generosity of each individual who has shared his or her learning with me.

I no longer regard reflection primarily as a solitary act of rebuke on the drive home. I now perform reflection with my students as an action site of questioning, inquiry, learning, celebration, imagining anew. Incorporating reflection as a visible and vibrant pedagogical strategy creates an emergent performative space that is a catalyst for shared dialogue, reciprocal learning, and meaningful action across communal and disciplinary boundaries.

As a reflective practice of performative inquiry, the e-postcard requires of students wide-awakeness, embodied attention, willingness, and curiosity to learn what matters and why, to make meaningful connections through our learning together and in our lives. By asking my students to write weekly e-postcards of a stop moment they've experienced, sharing my own e-postcards with them, and responding to theirs, I invite my students to learn how to recognize and reflect upon stop moments that tug on their sleeves, a reflective practice of attending to their lives, which I hope will survive the course and become a living practice.

Postcard 8

Inspired by your postcards, I decide to tackle my resistance to technology, by taking my first photo with my I-phone to insert it into my word document. But where was my phone? I search the surface of things, climb stairs, walk through the house to find where I'd left it three days ago. (dead battery!) I hate being tied to the cell phone, "I forget it all the time." I plug the phone into an electric socket and retreat downstairs where Leonard Cohen is playing on the CD.



...today I find my stop through movement—
 as a reluctant child in ballet class, I would peek through
 the door of the tap-dancing class in envy where the tap dancers
 were in full rhythm—
 now I dance behind closed curtains,
 to the music of Leonard Cohen, in and around the furniture,
 across the living room floor into the kitchen—hands, like wings of
 a dying swan's rising towards the ceiling—
 and a line of poetry slices through my abandoned dancing
 "I should have seen it coming, I could see it behind your eyes..."
 so few words to speak of all that matters
why am I called to attention
 and I recognize a yearning, hunger
 for a language to speak to my grief, your words slip under my skin
 and I move in the language of loss—
 "I fill my pockets and my hands with stones and walk into the
 river...
 I stand on the bottom, my boots sucked down by mud,
 the current flowing around me, a cloak in liquid wind...
 and when I can't stand the silence any longer,
 I slip out of my skin, into sound." "

how odd—to imagine a postcard intended to meet technology
 head-on, and, instead to simply offer you this stop
 moment: in movement I come again to what I desire—to slip
 below the surface, to voice what truly matters. How do I
 forgive myself my vulnerability so I might move beyond the
 eyes of pedagogy, and breathe movement in rhythm to the
 pulse of the heart?

NOTES

- 1 Empty space, as I choose to understand the concept, is not empty but simultaneously pregnant with and haunted by anticipation, memory, possibility, absence, renewal.
- 2 A the time of the conceptualization and articulation of performative inquiry (Fels 1998, 1999), arts-based research was an emerging field of engagement; encouraged by art educator Elliott Eisner and his former doctoral student, Tom Barone, who recognized the engagement of the arts as a viable and legitimate means of research and representation. See Eisner and Barone (2012). Their leadership in the field of educational research served as a catalyst and inspiration for many educational scholars who in turn championed arts-based research in its multitude of forms and practices.
- 3 See Fels (2014); Greene (1978).
- 4 In an earlier article, I added “creating” to Heidegger’s notion of knowledge as knowing, doing, being. See Davis, Keiren, and Sumara (1996) and Fels (1995). Since then, in her brilliant thesis, Dr. Kirsten Frantzich proposed that “not-knowing, and undoing” be added to the list. See Frantzich (2013).
- 5 Natality invites us to imagine each new encounter as an opportunity to imagine ourselves anew. See Gordon (2001), Fels (2010), and Meyer & Fels (2014) for a deeper conversation around Arendt’s question of “Who am I?” I am beholden to Dr. Karen Meyer and Dr. Munir Vellani for introducing me to the work of Hannah Arendt, and for their shaping my understanding of the question of who we are in the presence of each other, and who we may become.
- 6 Performative writing, as identified by Della Pollack (1998), “is evocative. Performative writing operates metaphorically to render absence present...The writer and the world’s bodies intertwine in evocative writing in intimate co-performance of language and experience” (p. 80). In her work, six qualities of performative writing are identified: evocative, metonymic, subjective, nervous, citational (dialogic) and consequential. Performative writing plays with form, space, image, metaphor, ambiguity, dialogue, character, invented, remembered, and may include multi-vocal, autobiographical, poetic performative, narrative. Performative writing may interrupt text through changes in font styles, sizes, and layout, writing in fragmented sentences, offering blank spaces between text, thus creating a performative text within which readers may perform their own stories, interpretations, meaning-making. Performative writing is what Jacque Daignault (2005) might call an acousmatic text, a text that listens, a performative space within which resonance, recognitions, new interstandings may emerge. See Fels (2013).
- 7 A stopping place, as I was introduced to the term, was an inn or gathering place where travellers would stop along the length of the Ottawa River, rest their horses, eat and drink, regale each other with stories, and then resume their journey. I love thinking of a debriefing circle, or conference, or those times when we gather to share our experiences, our learning, our questions, before gathering up our belongings and stepping out to continue our journey.
- 8 Scholar and poet, Dr. Rishma Dunlop, when asked by her students what she expects from them in an assignment, replies, “Astonish me.” In conversation.
- 9 See Machado, 1930, p. 63 in Varela (1987).
- 10 This re-reading of the glass half empty, half full was told to me by my brother who listened to a CBC radio interview of a car salesman explaining why he is so successful in car sales.
- 11 Free Play is one of the texts for one of the courses I teach. See Nachmanovitch (1990).
- 12 And so, I can, at this point only offer you examples of my own postcards, written for this article, and responses I have offered in receipt of theirs.
- 13 See Fels & Meyer (2014); Levison (2001); & Arendt (1958).
- 14 Michaels, A., 1996, p. 11.

IMAGE CREDITS

- Postcard 1 venetian blinds, copyright free image from Internet. Photographer unknown.
 Postcard 2 spiderweb, Martin Elliott (photographer).
 Postcard 3 hand drawing, Marshall Fels Elliott (artist), Martin Elliott (photographer).
 Postcard 4 burning candle, copyright free image from Internet. Photographer unknown.
 Postcard 5 email, Martin Elliott (photographer).
 Postcard 6 footprint in snow. Martin Elliott (photographer).
 Postcard 7 Bilirubin drawing. Marshall Fels Elliott (artist), Martin Elliott (photographer).
 Postcard 8 dancing hands. Lynn Fels (photographer).

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