

THE CLASSROOM AND THE POLIS: POLITICAL ACTION, DIALOGUE AND
THE PROJECT OF PEDAGOGY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores students' experiences in a dialogue-based program and what these experiences reveal about the possibility of creating dialogic classroom spaces that engage the political and support the emergence of students as political actors. The case study was a semester-long, undergraduate program in a comprehensive university in western Canada. The theme for dialogue was "Indigeneity in Canada: Past, Present, and Future."

In a qualitative case study, I observed classroom interactions, wrote field notes and interviewed students and instructors over the course of thirteen weeks. Working hermeneutically, I interpreted the data by placing it in conversation with the political theory of Hannah Arendt.

The students' experiences revealed the dialogue-based classroom as a pseudo-public space repeatedly under threat from the larger social pressures of conformity, utilitarian thinking and emotional self-interest. The students' experiences in the program tell a story marked by profound struggles for political voice, authentic relations, and a sense of equality. Confounding students struggle to appear in the dialogue was the potentially volatile psychological dimension of learning. The inherent unpredictability of the classroom as a public space cast the teacher, not as ring-leader or director, but as one who attempted to hold open the spaces so that the students could continually return, willing to take the risk that speech and action are in the public realm.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to those everyday heroes who, “age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.” (Adrienne Rich)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origins

At the centre of this study is the Dialogue and Leadership Program (DLP), a fifteen-credit, interdisciplinary course offered as part of the undergraduate curriculum at a comprehensive university in Western Canada. It was conceived of and developed in response to a perceived decline in the political engagement and actions of the undergraduate student body. The DLP aims to promote student civic engagement by connecting student learning and public issues through a curriculum of dialogue and shared inquiry. This immersion in dialogic practices is part of a carefully considered repertoire of activities, experiences, and thinking exercises intended to help undergraduates meld disciplinary knowledge gained in their regular classes, with the creativity and skills necessary to be competent, thoughtful, and engaged citizens.

According to Dr. Mac, Professor and Director of the DLP, the central concern of the program is “that people care about their world around them, that they reach their full potential to have a positive impact on the world.” The DLP sets out to do this by inspiring in students a “sense of responsibility that they should make a difference” and helping them develop “the skills” necessary for them to do so.

The DLP first came to my attention during the second to last semester of my undergraduate degree. An email forwarded by the departmental secretary described a program that, upon reading the description, almost seemed too good to be true.

The idea of learning through the discussion of public issues while developing the skills needed to be able to effectively communicate in the public realm sounded like the perfect way to end my undergraduate education and so, I applied. And I was accepted. And it began.

My experience in the DLP contributed to one of the most powerful learning lessons of my life, an experience I would truly define as transformational. I became intrigued by both the idea of dialogue and dialogue-based pedagogies, and was fortunate enough to be able to further explore the various interpretations and applications of dialogue in my work as both a research and teaching assistant in the DLP. During my time working for the program I also had the opportunity to interact with many students from various cohorts, receiving feedback on the curriculum, hearing about their experiences, and watching them engage with one another directly in the classroom.

My experience of dialogue, and that of other students,¹ revealed it to be a slippery concept, eluding efforts to pin it down and frequently creating confusion around whether an interaction was “real dialogue” or not. Despite my overall positive feelings about the “power of dialogue,” I started to feel some tensions and paradoxes around concepts such as “consensus” and “equality” and around the relationships between speaking, listening, and feeling heard. I felt there was something just under the surface of the collegiality and equanimity of dialogue, like an undertow or deep current, invisible and perhaps a little dangerous.

¹ Anecdotal and observed.

I still believed the DLP was an excellent approach to education for political action but I wanted to know more. What defines a successful dialogue? What interferes with the emergence of dialogue? And what was the relationship between dialogue-based pedagogies and political action? I was curious to see the DLP from the perspective of a student again, only this time not so overwhelmed by the newness and intensity of the experience. As there was a rule against taking the DLP more than once,² I knew I would not get the opportunity. To my good fortune, Dr. Mac invited me to focus my graduate research on the DLP, an invitation I gladly accepted.

In what follows I explore the experiences of a group of students participating in the DLP as they learn about dialogue and political action by engaging in conversations around complex and controversial public issues. Based on these experiences, I explore the possibilities of creating the types of spaces in universities that facilitate the emergence of the political actor.

1.2 Program Description

The DLP is open to students from any faculty, and is also available as a Graduate Diploma for those who have already convocated and wish to participate. Efforts are made to attract as diverse a group of students as possible by promoting the semester through various means such as signs and posters, emails to all faculty

² Many participants in the DLP have expressed either anecdotally or in program evaluations that they would love to take the class again and a common theme of the program is helping students prepare for the transition back to regular classes.

and departmental listserves, visits to classes by previous students, as well as personal recommendations from previous participants.

Administratively, credits earned during the semester frequently transfer as part of the undergraduate breadth requirement. Many students have been able to transfer some of the DLP credits directly toward their major, a decision handled individually by the respective department and dependant on how the DLP content compares to that of the students' home faculty.

A maximum of twenty students participate in any one semester. Students must apply to the program, which runs for an entire semester (13 weeks) twice a year in addition to one intersession (10 weeks) semester during the summer. Application packages are comprised of a 500-word statement of intent, official transcripts, resume, and at least two letters of reference, one of which must be academic. An initial shortlist is comprised and the students invited for interviews with Dr. Mac, after which the final selections are made.

Students from any faculty may apply so long as they have completed at least 45 credit hours. Part of the credit hours restriction is due to the sheer volume of the work during the semester, which requires some demonstration that students can maintain such a workload. Exceptions have been made to the credit hour requirement on a case-by-case basis and while the students' current academic standing is taken into account, acceptance rarely hinges on GPA. Students with GPA's as low as 2.63 have been accepted to the class, based on other demonstrated achievements, the strength of their interview and/or letters of recommendation.

The other purpose for the 45 credit hour requirement is to give students the opportunity to begin developing their disciplinary languages, which are brought to bear in the class, contributing to the diverse perspectives and understandings that make up each semester. As Dr. Mac explains it, “we always seek topics that are deep, difficult, controversial, adversarial, and hope that by providing a dialogic approach, we can reveal them in their nuances.” Dr. Mac believes that dialogue “is the ideal educational tool.” As a process of shared inquiry “based in curiosity,” he believes that it emphasizes

collegiality rather than competition, [and] has as its goal the deepest possible understanding without excessive judgment – these are all traits that I think education should reflect so dialogue is the perfect tool to bring to education, from my point of view.

As Program Director and lead instructor, Dr. Mac believes that his primary responsibility is “to provide the type of environment in which students can thrive.” He describes this further as

an environment where [the students] feel safe...in which they know that there is a safety net there...if they take a risk and it doesn’t work out, then I’m there to help remedy the situation.

1.3 Pedagogical Components

The assignments for the DLP reflect an emphasis on speaking, writing, and research skills oriented toward a public, rather than an academic audience. The various assignments and activities have been designed to help reveal the multitude of perspectives that exist on any issue and bring the students face-to-face with people who are deeply involved with those issues. Most of all, these assignments and activities aim to reveal the person behind the title in such a way that the students hopefully begin to see themselves in those positions, bringing their own unique perspectives and talents to bear on the issues they care deeply about. The overall message of the program: these people are making changes and influencing their world and you can too.

A central part of the curriculum is the guest dialogue, during which one or two individuals directly involved with issues related to the semester's topic join the students and their teacher-facilitator in conversation. Dialogues occur in the morning session for the most part, running from 9:30-12:00 with a break mid-way through. Each guest dialogue is organized according to a topic for the day that Dr. Mac keeps "deliberately vague"(i.e. health, justice, treaties, governance, art). Overly prescriptive topics ultimately would restrain dialogue; the general topic provides the opportunity for the conversation to follow its own spontaneous course while still remaining relevant to the topic for the semester. There is also an effort to have as diverse a range of people and perspectives as possible represented in the classroom, with guests to the DLP invited from government, non-profit organizations,

independent think tanks, professional associations, businesses, arts organizations, and community organizations.

One of the most important activities according to the students is the class debrief. Debriefs provide an opportunity to speak openly and frankly among peers in order to collectively reach new understandings about both the topic for the semester and dialogue. These conversations may occur immediately after a guest dialogue or be scheduled for later. A couple of debriefs are included in the class schedule, while the remainder occur at various times throughout the semester, whenever the students find themselves struggling with the topic, the process of dialogue and/or their experiences with some of the guests. Most of the students interviewed identified the debriefing process as one of the more valuable learning experiences of the semester because it gave them the space to try to sort out the complexities of the topic and their experiences.

The first assignment of the semester is the first paragraph exercise. Each student is required to write what would be the opening paragraph of a newspaper or magazine article that relates to the semester's theme. The students' paragraphs are copied onto transparencies, displayed on an overhead projector and collectively read and critiqued. This assignment is intended to help establish classroom norms around constructive critique and respectful ways of engaging with differences of opinion. At the same time, the exercise helps students move past any initial nervousness they might be feeling in the first few days of class by giving them a safe vehicle to get their voices out into the shared space of the classroom. To facilitate

this process the students retain anonymity, thereby preventing things from getting too “personal” while they learn how to work together respectfully.

Another assignment that occurs early in the semester divides the students into two groups. They are given a fictional conflict scenario and asked to continue the story from where it ended. While the focus is initially on the story, the students slowly come to realize that they are, themselves, acting out the complexities of engaging with others in the world. The students have twenty-four hours to develop the story, which they present in the form of a skit. After each presentation there is the opportunity to debrief, discussing the processes of both developing the story and of working together under the pressure of a tight deadline.

Students are also required to write an Op-Ed piece on a related topic for submission to a newspaper, enduring multiple rounds of editing from their teachers as they develop the ability to be clear, succinct, and persuasive in their communication. The formal writing is preceded by a presentation to the class, after which the presenter receives feedback from the students and instructors, cultivating the capacity to both offer and receive critique. This process also encourages students to see the benefits of pooling ideas and perspectives in order to make a good idea even better.

Another key assignment sends the students out of the classroom and into the community. Divided into smaller groups of four or five, they decide on an issue to explore and then must determine the five most influential people involved in the issue, interview them, and present their findings to the class. This assignment in

particular is about demystifying power and demonstrating that in some cases, the most influential person may not necessarily be the person with the most impressive title or in a traditional position of power.

Additional assignments specific to this semester included an assignment exploring the interrelationships between social justice and community health, where the students had to research and create a social justice/community health program, and an assignment that required reading the Indian Act and proposing changes based on what they were learning. They were also required to create and present story about their background and family histories in the spirit of the oral tradition, as well as keep an ungraded personal reflective journal about their experiences. The final project for all semesters is a 3000-word manuscript or the equivalent of, which in the past has included the production of websites, radio segments, works of art and performance pieces.

1.4 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 introduced the program at the heart of this study, outlining its conception, guiding pedagogical philosophy and the general structure of the program. Chapter 2, “Arendt, Education and the World,” introduces the study’s theoretical framework and provides an Arendtian reading of the educational problem at the heart of this thesis, reflected by the research questions: 1) What are students’ experience in the Dialogue and Leadership Program? 2) What can these

experiences tell us about the role of a university in the preparation of political actors and the role of dialogue within this type of education-for-action?

In Chapter 3, “Methodology,” I outline the methods used for my research design, data gathering and subsequent interpretations. I draw upon philosophical hermeneutics, case study research design, and Arendt’s theories of judgment and exemplary validity, all of which resonate with dialogic ideas of contingency, multivocality and interrelationships.

Chapter 4, “Finding Their Voice,” is the first of three analysis chapters. It begins with the students’ first attempts at dialogue and their frustration at their inability to get their voices out into the open. The idea of the struggle to speak against myriad silencing forces was a strong theme during this semester and to a certain extent all three of the analysis chapters are concerned with sources of this silence. “Finding Their Voice” begins by connecting the students’ articulation of “voice,” with Arendt’s articulation of political action, and explores how societal influences such as political correctness and the conforming influences of mass society interfere with attempts to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Chapter 5, “Ensemble: Encounters with the Other,” explores the complexities of living among others in the world. The chapter focuses on responses to classroom guests in light of the power associated with their social and political positioning. Over the course of the semester, the students struggled to develop a sense of their own legitimacy in light of the power associated with certain guest speakers. The

breakthrough came in the form of the authentic relation, where the students felt they finally got to “know” the person behind the position.

Chapter 6 “Behind the Mask” examines the murky spaces between public and private. For the students, getting to know someone involved a certain amount of disclosure, the revelation of an aspect of the self as a gesture of trust. But the spontaneous and revelatory qualities of action means that, not only are we not in control of our actions, we cannot direct how we appear or how others will interpret us. When combined with the emotional vicissitudes of learning, an education oriented to facilitate the emergence of the political actor occupies a potentially explosive space.

Chapter 7 and 8 return to the research questions in light of what has been revealed in the previous analysis chapters. Chapter 7, “Action’s Agonies,” returns to the struggle to appear. In their quest for political voice, a sense of equality and authentic relations, the students found themselves frequently frustrated by the boundlessness of action and tyranny of social rule. The second part of the chapter explores the relationship between public and private spheres as it plays itself out in the classroom. As mass society erodes the distinctions between public and private, the public is invaded by the action-defeating influences of self-interest while the private is left to wither in the glare of public scrutiny. The courage to act out and start something new, despite the struggle, turmoil and defeat, heralds the appearance of the political actor and the realization of voice.

Chapter 8, “The Classroom and the Polis,” returns to the question of teaching and curriculum. Connected as it is to Arendt’s idea of natality, teaching is both a matter of continual beginnings and uncertain, unpredictable outcomes. The educator’s role in the classroom is further complicated by the positioning of education in the intermediate spaces that bridge the home and polis. Teachers have the responsibility of introducing the students to the world while simultaneously mitigating the frequently conflicting needs of the two. Most importantly, the educator must hold open spaces for students to act in their own unique and particular ways, regardless of what they may have been hoping for or expecting. The call to political action through pedagogy, as in the world, can only be an invitation; it can never be a command.

CHAPTER 2: ARENDT, EDUCATION, AND THE WORLD

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the Dialogue and Leadership Program (DLP). I described its inspiration and origins as a response to concerns about an increasingly apathetic undergraduate population, as well as provided examples of how the program tries to address the issue through curriculum. In this chapter I provide an Arendtian reading of the educational problem that the DLP tries to address. Working with Arendt's distinctions between the public, the private and the social I demonstrate how her ideas about politics and the world resonate with the philosophy and methods of the DLP.

2.2 What is at stake?

The patterns of increasing apathy and disinterest observed by Dr. Mac echo Arendt's (1998) warning of the encroachment of a homogenizing mass society and our increasing alienation from the world, the only thing that can truly bring us together. This world is not of terrestrial origins; it can't be seen, touched or held but can only be called into creation through the speech and action of distinct individuals in public spaces. In this world reality is determined, mortality subverted, and heroes are born, but we must not take it for granted. Just as it may emerge in action, it can also disappear in the face of inaction and we might not even notice as it slowly

evaporates, perhaps distracted by “small things” (Arendt, p.52), accepting false freedoms in attractive packages. Fifty years ago, Arendt warned about the destructive powers of the consumer society, a conformist conglomeration with a relentless appetite that threatens to annihilate the one realm where human existence can experience its apotheosis. Fifty years later it is difficult not to wonder if anyone was even listening.

Arendt (1998, 2006) explores the human condition within the context of three distinct spheres – the public, the realm of politics; the private, the realm of biology and necessity; and the social, a dangerous hybrid of the two. She similarly divides human activities into three categories: the “labour of bodies” (Arendt, 1998, p.136) represented by *animal laborans*, the “work of hands” (Arendt, p.136) represented by *homo faber* and political action, the only activity associated with the public.

Eternally yoked to scarcity and necessity, the life of *animal laborans* is one of servitude to the urgencies of life’s processes. *Homo faber* provides the objective, tangible world in which humans inhabit. Guided by utilitarian thinking and an instrumentalism fixated with the fabrication of a “sheer unending variety of things” (Arendt, 1998, p. 136), from skyscrapers to snowshoes, super highways to fine jewelry, *homo faber* provides the backdrops and props for human activity. One modality constructs the world of objective things and the processes that produce these things, the other labours in a constant struggle to alleviate the demands of life.

Arendt (1998, 2006) argues that the blurring of the distinction between public and private has conditioned the forms of human aspirations, relationships, and

political organization that are encouraged or even possible. Returning to the etymological origins of these words, Arendt traces the subtle shifts and distortions in their meanings in an attempt to set in motion a reconditioning, one that may awaken the latent actor of modernity from their dreamlike existence and restore action as the central activity of the public realm.

2.3 Going Public

Public space provides two particular functions central to “any theory of democratic legitimacy...that holds that government is essentially for the people, through the people, and by the people” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 201-202). As a “holistic” space, the public is a place “in which the collectivity becomes present to itself and recognizes itself” (Benhabib, p. 201) through the collective apprehension and interpretation of their world. The “epistemic” (Benhabib, p. 201) aspect of the public is based on the willingness to travel to other perspectives, a defining aspect of the actor’s enlarged mentality and which is made manifest in public judgment.

Habermas argued that modern, democratic “political legitimacy” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 202) across a variety of spectrums is based on “the voluntary union of equal citizens” (Benhabib, p. 202), requiring “a public sphere of the exchange of opinion...and of mutual deliberation” (Benhabib, p. 203) where individuals can engage in the “public exercise of one’s reason” (Benhabib, p. 202, citing Kant). Kant’s conception of judgment “depends on the presence of others” (Arendt, 2006c, p. 217) for its validity, making it “a political rather than a merely theoretical activity”

(Arendt, p. 216). As a collective undertaking public judgment helps to counter the fallibility of human reason, offering “the only guarantee for ‘the correctness’ of our thinking,” (Arendt, p. 230).

Judgment arises from the commonality of the shared world, the objective realm that exists between and among actors and can be collectively witnessed and interpreted (Arendt, 2006c). Through the faculty of common sense the “sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass” as we shift from our “private and ‘subjective’ five senses...to a non-subjective and ‘objective’ world which we share with others” (Arendt, p. 218).

This “objective, worldly reality” (Arendt, 1998, p. 184) provides a common world within which we may appear before one another. In this way, the public can be considered as simultaneously “appearance” and “the world in itself, in so far as it is common to all of us” (Arendt, p. 52). It is only as people, things, and ideas enter the light of the public and are witnessed that they enter the realm of reality. The collective apprehension and agreement constitutes what is real and “whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality” (Arendt, p. 199). The world appears to us, we appear in the world through speech and action, and the story of these appearances is human history.

2.4 Private Life

Juxtaposed with the public realm and the space of appearance, is the private realm. The private is often represented by the metaphor of the “home,” “four walls” providing “the only reliable hiding place from the common public world” (Arendt, 1998, p.71), not just from the activities that take place there but from the exposure central to public life, “from being seen...from being heard” (Arendt, p. 71.). The private provides a “darker ground” (Arendt, p. 71) from which the actor can emerge but which “must remain hidden” (Arendt, p. 71) or risk being “killed by the glare of public light” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 127). A life lived completely in the public, constantly “in the presence of others” is ultimately a “shallow existence” (Arendt, p. 71)

As a place of retreat, the “domestic-reproductive domain of the household is just as essential to world-sustenance as the public realm” (Benhabib, 2003, p.137). It is in the private realm that the “daily labour” (Benhabib, p.125) of the “nurturing and protecting” of bodies” (Benhabib, p.137) occurs. As the place “into which we are all thrust at birth” (Benhabib, p.125), the household is also the space reserved for the raising and education of children, and it is from the home that we first start to explore our world. This nurturing and educating of the next generation of actors connects the private, to “aspects of the human condition of natality” (Benhabib, p.137). A sanctuary for both those new to the world and the judging actor, the

private provides the space necessary for the renewal of the body and mind before the actor returns again to the world.

The public and private are both essential aspects of the human condition, but just as essential is the distinction between the two. Built on inequality, the household represents the family, a “non-political and even antipolitical” (Arendt, 1998, p.40) set of relations represented by the “despotic power of the household head” (Arendt, p.40), the *paterfamilias*, and the activities of *animal laborans*. Chained as it is to the urgent demands of life processes, the feeding and sheltering of the body and the inevitable march toward mortality, *animal laborans* represents “at best the highest, of the animal species which populate the earth” (Arendt, p. 84). Not free to act, “caught in the fulfillment of needs” (Arendt, p. 119), *animal laborans* is subject to the insistent, “irresistible” (Honig, 1995, p.135) compulsions of the body—hunger, thirst, and physical and emotional rest—ignored at the risk of death, communicating in pain. The urgencies of life supersede all other activities, including action, which must be spontaneous and free from coercion (Arendt, 1998).

Mastery of the life processes is the essential precondition for joining other citizens in the *polis*. Until biological needs are transcended, a person is denied the possibility of appearing, of having their existence noticed. Through our appearance in the public we are more than our biological bodies; as political actors our concerns extend beyond necessity to the realm of possibility. Under the demands of the private a person may exist, “not as a truly human being, but only as a specimen of the animal species man-kind” (Arendt, 1998, p. 46). It is this private realm, the realm

of biological necessity, inequality, and violence that stood in opposition to the freedom and spontaneity of association within the *polis*.

The Greeks believed exclusion from the public realm was a form of deprivation. In a demonstration of how much language has shifted, the idea of a private citizen was a complete contradiction during antiquity and the realm of the private was, in fact, treated with significant contempt; “the privative trait of privacy...meant literally the state of being deprived of something” (Arendt, 1998, p. 38). We no longer associate the idea of privacy with deprivation due in large part to the rise of “modern individualism,” which resulted in an “enormous enrichment of the private sphere” (Arendt, p. 38) that displaced worldly concerns for self-interest.

2.5 Social Pressure

As society grew it continued to erase the distinctions between public and private, creating the conditions for the dominance of *animal laborans* and the triumph of life concerns, which ended up “occupy[ing] the position once held by the ‘life’ of the body politic” (Arendt, 1998, p. 315). In the present world, the laboring society is steadily being replaced by a “society of job holders” (Arendt, p. 319), different in specific activity, similar in their servitude to life’s processes. With the rise of Christianity came the idea of the “immortality of individual life” and the promise of heaven began to supersede the call of the world (Arendt, p. 316).

Mass society represents a distorted form of human association that arises when the boundaries and distinctions between what is public and what is private are

eroded, allowing life concerns to flood into the public and creating the overriding conditions of necessity that are anathema to free action. The influence of mass society shifts the focus of the *polis* from the common world to activities previously only found in the private realm, those concerned with “individual survival as well as of continuity of the species” (Arendt, 1998, p. 45), creating an ever widening “breach between freedom and politics” (Arendt, 2006a, p. 148).

Mass society’s preoccupation with “life processes...follows its own necessity” and can be considered “free only in the sense that we speak of a freely flowing stream” (Arendt, 2006a, p. 149). Society engulfs the public and distracts the *polis*, allowing the preoccupations of *animal laborans* to flood public spaces. This manifests as a “concern for economic survival, a preoccupation with amassing and keeping wealth and objects of consumption; [as well as] the treatment of others as means to one’s own ends” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 140).

The public is not the only thing that suffers under the conditions of the social; the private fares no better. Whereas traditional privacy stood in opposition to the political, the modern private emerged in response to the forces of the social, which exposes “the intimacy of the heart”(Arendt, p. 39), but cannot fulfill the private’s function by giving it a home. With no place of retreat for protection, the modern subject flees the world for the dark spaces of “inner subjectivity” (Arendt, p. 39) and refuses to leave. It is a flight from the world, a desperate turning away, a sinking into the self.

Under the conditions of mass society we become trapped in the world of subjective experience, “deprived of seeing and hearing others...deprived of being seen and heard by them” (Arendt, 1998, p. 58). In this instance, more is not merrier, for a singular subjective experience “does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times” (Arendt, p. 58). Subjectivity by its very definition cannot be shared.

The loss of a common world, the “relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them” (Arendt, 1998, p. 59) gives rise to one of the hallmarks of the modern condition, “the mass phenomenon of loneliness” (Arendt, p. 59). The common world is the one thing capable of bringing people together in a way that still allows for distinction – a togetherness that transcends the conformity of the mob. Devoid of a public in which to appear, we remain trapped within ourselves, incarcerated in our own limited inner world, lonely in the crowd.

2.6 What’s Education Got to do With it?

The realm of education bridges the lives of private individual and public citizen, introducing students, those “about to enter the community of adults as young people,” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 173) to the world they are bound to inherit. These “new ones” (Arendt, p. 173), as the Greeks referred to them, are the subjects of pedagogies concerned with preparing the next generation for political action. However, Arendt warns against using education for political means, and argues that politics and education must be kept separate.

Education has long played a role in the pursuit of “political utopias” (Arendt, 2006b, p.173) lending those “revolutionary movements” that sought to create change through the “indoctrina[tion]” of children a decidedly “tyrannical cast” (Arendt, p.173). Rather than “joining with one’s equals...and running the risk of failure” (Arendt, p.173), some choose to manipulate the young through a “dictatorial intervention based on the absolute superiority of the adult” (Arendt, p. 173).

Arendt maintains that “school is by no means the world and must not pretend to be” (2006b, p. 185) and while she is specifically speaking here about elementary school, this statement raises important questions of what is possible in a classroom oriented toward inspiring political action. How can professors and students negotiate the tensions between public and private in an educational program oriented toward stewardship of the world? Where does education stop and politics begin?

In “The Crisis in Education,” Arendt (2006b) connects “the question of why Johnny can’t read” (p. 175) to “a more general crisis and instability in modern society” (p. 182). Although frequently dismissed as “a local phenomenon, unconnected with the larger issues of the century” (Arendt, p. 170), Arendt views this crisis as “a problem of immense difficulty because it has arisen under the conditions and in response to mass society” (p. 176). As the social encroaches upon the public, it destroys the realm of action, the only place where our natality may be realized. This has profound implications for the educational enterprise, the “essence” (Arendt, p. 171) of which is natality. It is the arrival of new ones as they

“are *born* into the world”(Arendt, p. 171, italics in original), the continual renewal of human society “through birth, through the arrival of new human beings” (Arendt, p. 182) that calls the pedagogical enterprise into being.

Although Arendt (2006b) focuses her critique on elementary education, and progressive education in particular, she does mention post secondary education, assessing it as primarily oriented toward specialization and vocation, “no longer aim[ing] to introduce the young person to the world as a whole, but rather to a particular, limited segment of it” (p. 192). It was in response to this trend that the DLP was developed, to introduce students to the world in its complexity. The task is a challenging balancing act because

the subject of education, has for the educator a double aspect: he is new in a world that is strange to him and he is the process of becoming, he is a new human being and he is a becoming human being. This double aspect...corresponds to a double relationship, the relationship to the world, on one hand and to life on the other (p. 182).

The world that the teacher introduces the students to is an old world to which only these recent arrivals are new. Created as it is through human speech and action, it is infused with the mortality associated with human endeavors. All works by mortal hands follow their makers, eventually crumbling and fading away, and the world is not spared this fate. Its existence relies upon being “constantly set right

anew” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 189). The challenge for educators is to “educate in such a way that setting right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured” (Arendt, p. 189).

The double aspect of the educator’s position manifests in a tension between the teacher’s joint “responsibility...for the life and the development of the child and for the continuance of the world” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 182). As students begin their forays into the public, they still require the protection and privacy to learn about, and recover from, the demands of political life. At the same time, this world that the new ones will eventually be entrusted with requires its own protection, vulnerable as it is to “being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation” (Arendt, p. 182).

The educator must find a way of protecting both the world and the student in such a way as to preserve the opportunity for the new to make the world for themselves. The perpetuation of the world is dependent upon the natality inherent in the arrival of each successive generation and it is “precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 189).

Responsibility and authority are central to the educational project but Arendt (2006b) warns about what she sees as an increasing refusal of responsibility for the new and a rejection of authority, describing education as “the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it” (p. 193). We assume this responsibility for a world not of our making, and “even though [we]

may, secretly or openly wish it was otherwise” (Arendt, p. 186). Responsibility “is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world” (Arendt, p. 186) and is so essential to education that Arendt insists that “[a]nyone who refuses to assume joint responsibility for the world should not have children and must not be allowed to take part in educating them” (p. 186).

“True authority” arises only when it is “joined with responsibility for the course of things in the world” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 186). It is in the refusal “to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought children” (Arendt, p. 187) that “modern man” most clearly communicates “his dissatisfaction with the world, for his disgust with things as they are” (Arendt, p. 188). Arendt describes this attitude as “a symptom of that modern estrangement from the world which can be seen everywhere but which presents itself in especially radical and desperate form under the conditions of mass society” (p. 11). It is to this general condition, the atrophy of the public realm and the increasing influence of the social that the DLP is a response to.

Dr. Mac describes his role in the classroom in terms of authority and responsibility by acknowledging

I’m not the same level as the students. I am a professor and I do have a different presence in the room than the students. We are not all equal, we have different roles, but as a mentor, and a professor, and maybe as a teacher sometimes, I have more power in the room than the students

and I don't think that is a bad thing, I think it provides...if I exercise it well it provides an atmosphere of safety and exploration for the students. If I exercise it poorly then it's a really bad situation...[it] is a very powerful position and I am quite aware of the differential there, and recognizing that is a necessary part of what we do...that is why in a classroom, I will intervene and I will be proactive in exercising my authority as a professor but I choose to exercise my authority most of the time by providing students with choices rather than saying that it has to be my way.

2.7 The Research Problem

I began this research project with many questions about what role dialogue plays in educational settings, particularly within those pedagogies concerned with provoking a shift in the attitudes and actions of students, rather than simply downloading disciplinary content. Was dialogue just another form of communication or was it something more? How was it different from, for example, talking or lecturing and how did these differences relate to both pedagogy and politics? What was the relationship between speaking and listening in dialogue? And what, if any, connection was there between dialogue's democratic ideas of equality and equanimity and a functioning *polis*.

I oriented my inquiry around two key questions:

- 1) What are students' experiences of the Dialogue and Leadership Program?

- 2) What can these experiences tell us about the possibility of creating dialogic educational spaces that support the emerging political actor?

The complexity of the scene in which dialogue emerges demands an observational scope that includes both the particulars of dialogic exchanges and the context within which these exchanges take place. It was for this reason that I decided to conduct a semester-long case study, combining classroom observation with a series of in-depth interviews.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the methodological underpinnings of the study. I begin by introducing a case study research design, providing an overview of the research literature and outlining the strengths as well as some of the controversies surrounding this approach. I also outline my approach to data gathering. I go on to discuss how philosophical hermeneutics guided my framing and interpretation of the case study.

3.2 Case Study Research Design

A case study research design is structured so as to produce “holistic” (Yin, 1994, p. 3; Snow & Anderson, 1991) representations and interpretations of social events (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Each case is “a specific, complex, functioning thing” (Stake, p. 2) emphasizing the unique (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Often incorporating multiple perspectives and multiple levels of analysis, a case study offers the reader a “vicarious experience” (Stake, p. 63), by providing examples (Flyberg, 2001). These examples “expand and enrich [an individual’s] repertoire of social constructions” (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 182), helping them to clarify descriptions and advance interpretations about the world of social activity (Stake, 1995).

Case study researchers make selections based upon what is most likely to demonstrate the phenomenon of interest or the “uniqueness of the situation”

(Merriam, 1988, p. 30). Research conducted during my time working for the DLP led me to the conclusion that, while certainly not the only undergraduate program aimed at encouraging an orientation toward deliberative civic involvement (see Marullo and Edwards, 2000; Hess & Posslet, 2002; Hemmings, 2000; Anderson, Levis-Fitzgerald, & Rhoads, 2003; Heath, 2000), it provided a very unique research context. The DLP was created specifically to encourage engagement with political issues, not as an addendum or underlying teaching philosophy, but as a stated goal and the curriculum was oriented in such a way to reflect that.

The students for the DLP are chosen through an extensive application process and come from multiple faculties and departments. The search image for the DLP is for students that demonstrate a curiosity about the world, a willingness to learn from others, and a desire to have a positive impact on the world around them. This selection process results in a diverse group of students with different talents and challenges who share a curiosity about and willingness to engage in, and learn from, dialogue. Such grouping increases the likelihood of successful dialogues while at the same time magnifying the significance of potential deviations or communicative breakdowns, much more so than a random grouping of students who may or may not want to cooperate with the pedagogical model.

Methodologists working within the traditional hypothetical-deductive paradigm would criticize the case study of the DLP and its participants for its selectivity and specificity, arguing that such a sample could not produce generalizable results. Flyberg (2001), however, argues that “formal generalization is

overvalued” (p. 77) and that an emphasis on the search for universals results in a limited kind of knowledge.

The goal of this study was not to produce formalized statements or rules but to illuminate a situation, reveal complexities and compare what was discovered with what we think we know. A critical mass of in-depth studies examining similar issues and settings could potentially provide generalizations but that is not the case here, nor is it the intent.

The emphasis on learning through dialogue while bound to a community of peers almost five days per week for a whole semester distills and condenses the typically more nomadic undergraduate experience, building the specific context for interactions, a community of inquiry. Dialogue is front and centre – as an idea and as an action – alerting the students to its presence, its complexity and its promise. These factors, in addition to the topic that semester of “Indigeneity in Canada: Past, Present, and Future,” created a very unique research context with the potential to reveal something significant about students’ experiences in dialogue and the relationship between pedagogy and the political.

From the moment I began thinking about researching the DLP I had the idea of conducting a case study. Even before I had gained a more advanced understanding of research methodologies, I recognized the potential compatibility of case study with a research project on dialogue, pedagogy and political action. From my experiences as a student, research assistant, and a teaching assistant, I knew that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to glean any meaningful information about

students' experiences as they participated in the DLP without also taking into consideration the context within which these experiences occurred.

Social situations are saturated with the complexity of history, power, culture and class, and I wanted to consider the many invisible forces that might be at play in the dialogue classroom, augmenting and influencing words and actions. Previous semesters had revealed dramatically different groups of students, distinct "class personalities" that emerged from the serendipitous combinations of course topic and timing, which drew students in various combinations of academic specialty, age, personality and political persuasion.

Case study research recognizes the complexity of social situations and the interrelation of variables with one another and with their settings. At the very heart of the case study is an implication of "embeddedness," or context dependency (Stake, 1995, p. 16). The particular case of the DLP is defined by the complex interactions between the students and the curriculum, relationships with their professors, their personal perspectives and predispositions, as well as the particular moment in history in which they all came together.

Of course, even a study that takes into consideration issues of complexity and interrelationships has to focus on something amidst the very many things that go on among people, while at the same time accepting that it is impossible to capture everything. And while the focus had already been narrowed down to students' experiences, rather than, for example, teaching approaches or effectiveness of the class assignments, it was simply not practical to follow all students for the entire

semester. I was curious about their actions as a group but I needed to somehow access the more particular aspect of individual experience.

While I appreciated the dynamic unpredictability of classrooms, I also realized that I needed to focus specific attention on “one or two issues or processes that are fundamental to the system being studied” (Snow & Anderson, 1991, p. 153). I felt it was important to observe the dialogue group for some days and to look at the DLP through the eyes of a researcher, as opposed to the student or teaching or research assistant I had previously been. As I observed the class in those first few days of the research study, I asked myself, “what situations are at play here that may shed some light on my research questions?”

The merit of an individual case is determined by its potential to “replicate or extend the emergent theory” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 537) as opposed to the extent to which it reveals overarching theories, trends and behaviors. My goal was to see dialogue in action and discover something new or interesting. Working from within a particular interpretive framework can help the researcher determine situations in which the phenomenon of interest is most likely to be demonstrated and observed, potentially increasing the value of their case (Eisenhardt, 1989; Wells, Hirshberg, Lipton, & Oakes, 1995).

3.3 Philosophical Hermeneutics

Case study is situated within the interpretivist research paradigm (Stake, 1995; Flyberg, 2001), which is primarily concerned with generating shared meanings

through the description and interpretation of “the phenomena of the world” (Bassey, 1999, p.44). Its focus on particular events within larger social contexts resonates with the tenets of hermeneutic philosophy, which Bassey refers to as one of the “alternative labels for the interpretivist paradigm” (p. 43).

Philosophical hermeneutics, case study, and the DLP all share an ontology that considers reality to be emergent, context dependent and multi-vocal. As a process of shared inquiry, dialogue requires both a willingness to examine ones own assumptions and the commitment of all participants to collectively work toward new understandings (Bohm, 1991; Burbules, 1993; Burbules & Bruce, 2001; Ellsworth, 1989). Dialogue is contingent and unpredictable, and in order to be open to the emergent phenomenon of any social situation it is critical that the researcher stay open to the evolution of the case as it slowly emerges or is constructed (Wells et al. 1995).

Philosophical hermeneutics “clarifies the conditions in which understanding takes place” (Gadamer in TM, Gallagher, 1992, p. 5) and, in the modern understanding, is concerned with interpretation, or how we encounter and understand our world. In contradistinction to the linearity of traditional positivistic inquiry, hermeneutics follows a circular, or rather, spiral path on its way to understanding as it continuously moves from the whole, to the parts and back to the whole, comparing what was known with what is observed and vice versa (Gallagher, 1992). Similarly, defining the case is a continuous iterative process, moving between

theory and the particulars of data and back to theory again (Rueschemeyer, 2003; Wells et al., 1995).

Traditional research methodologies insist on “the conscious separation of wholes into parts” (Flyberg, 2001, p. 22) and eschew complexity, effectively “destroy[ing] what it seeks to understand” (Cilliers, 1998, p.2, in Anderson, Crabtree, Steele & Rueben, 2005, p. 671) by separating out intricate interrelationships. According to both philosophical hermeneutics and case study theory, the social world is a multi-layered and complex system where relationships between variables and the context in which they are found are the source of understanding (Anderson et al. 2005; Donmoyer, 1990; Gallagher, 1992; Stake, 1995). Eisenhardt (1989) argues that this should be viewed less as a “license to be unsystematic” and more as “controlled opportunism” (539).

The notion of controlled opportunism and potentially shifting variables completely confounds ideas of control and makes some researchers decidedly uncomfortable (see Atkinson & Delamont, 1986). But variables not only emerge in the process of research, their interrelations make it impossible to separate them and still observe the phenomenon of interest. In this study of the DLP, classroom dialogues could have been impacted by myriad influences including student age, cultural background, disciplinary training and prior knowledge, personal issues, personality type (i.e. shy/quiet, confident, aggressive and/or defensive) and the power dynamics that may exist in the presence of professors or invited guests.

3.4 Data Generation

I explored the research questions through a semester-long (13 week) case study of The DLP focusing on the issue of indigeneity in Canada and how the past and the present may come together in forging a new future for indigenous people.

Classroom observation, which included detailed field notes, was supplemented with student and instructor interviews

3.4.1 *Observation and Fieldwork*

In total, I attended twenty-five morning sessions and four afternoon sessions of the DLP. A typical day consisted of a two and a half hour morning session, during which many of the guest dialogues took place, with afternoon sessions running for an average of two hours, dedicated primarily to working on group projects and individual assignments

The DLP classroom was exclusively for student use during the semester and the entrance was pass-code protected. The room itself was long and narrow. At one end was a student lounge area with couches and a kettle, microwave and fridge. At the other end of the room was the long oval table where the class gathered for dialogue. I sat between these two points at a small round table in the middle of the room. Recognizing that my presence in the room would inevitably have some kind of impact, my goal as an observer was to be as discrete as possible.

I did not engage in any classroom activities or dialogues but concerned myself with the gathering of data. I told the students that I would refrain from striking up conversations or engaging in impromptu interviews with them but I also told them to feel free to come talk to me about anything they wished, with the understanding that information from these conversations may be used in the study.

As it was, I frequently found myself in conversations with the students as they shared with me things that confused or frustrated them and asked questions about my prior experiences in the program. I also received frequent reports about events that had taken place during my absence. For example, the day after the students' first interaction with Peter Tompkins, I was approached by a number of students who shared with me their impressions on the day's events. I summarized these conversations in my field notes, using paraphrasing where possible, recording the information as soon as I was able while it was still fresh in my mind.

I spent the first couple of weeks of observation deciding how and where to focus my energy. I ultimately decided to focus my attention on the guest dialogues, which were central learning pieces of the program. They had also quickly emerged as a scene of some very dynamic tensions, ones that reverberated through the class, unsettling some students more than others but putting everyone on alert. I also made the decision to be present at as many of the class debriefs as possible, which gave me the opportunity to hear the students reflect on their experiences and work through issues or complexities, as they arose.

I decided not to follow the students into their groups for the group projects, focusing more on the whole class conversations than on what they might learn from their assignments. Also, class assignments were directed more toward teaching how to communicate with a public, an important skill but not directly relevant to students' experiences in dialogue.

I recorded field notes by hand and included both paraphrases and quotations from classroom discussions. I made observations about the guest, the tone of the class that day (i.e. high energy, restless, lethargic), as well as notes about any observed body language and/or facial expressions. I kept track of how many minutes each person spoke, comparing the amount the guest spoke to the amount of time students did. I also took special note of things the guest may have done or said that seemed to facilitate the dialogue as well as those actions that seemed to hinder the emergence of dialogue i.e. the guest who actively seeks the students input versus the guest that monopolizes the speaking time and ignoring the students' attempts to join the conversation.

3.4.2 Interviews

I decided to conduct a series of three interviews with four focus students: one within the first few weeks of the semester, one mid-way through the semester and a final interview approximately six – eight weeks after the semester ended. The first two interviews allowed glimpses into the students' experiences as they were unfolding, as well as providing points of comparison. My goal was to see how ideas

or attitudes about dialogue or the class topic may have shifted and to track the possible emergence of new issues.

I decided on a longer time period between the second and final interview for a couple of reasons. I thought it would be better than trying to schedule an interview for the end of the semester, which is an incredibly busy time assignment-wise. Plus, the final class dialogue was a reflection on their experiences in the class and, although not as in-depth as an individual interview, I felt I would receive useful information from that situation, not only about my focus students but the class as a whole. I also felt that conducting these final interviews later gave the students time to gain some distance from the intensity of the program and begin reflecting on their experiences from a somewhat different perspective.

Interviews were one and a half hours long on average and were conducted off campus to help preserve anonymity. Interviews were semi-structured,³ with a number of questions prepared beforehand focusing specifically on issues or events related to my research questions. A number of questions also emerged during the course of the interview related to students' particular experiences, further exploring the issues and ideas that seemed to impact them the most.

The first interview was focused on getting to know the students' backgrounds, the reasons why they had applied to the program, and their initial impressions of, and ideas about, dialogue. The second interview focused on the students' experiences in the class and how they compared to initial expectations,

³ See Appendix A for sample interview questions

focusing in particular on things they found surprising or challenging, as well as on specific guest dialogues. I also asked them about their understandings of dialogue at that point and to describe any changes in understanding that may have occurred as a result of participating in the project.

The final interview was an opportunity to look back at the semester, reviewing how the students' saw their individual experience as well as their experience as part of the class. I asked them about what stood out for them about their experience and what kind of memories they were left with. I explored their memories of the guest dialogues in addition to discussing their understanding of what dialogue is, and if they felt there had been any shifts in these understandings over the semester. I asked questions about their relationships with their professors and classmates and about how they found the learning process in general. For each student, I also took this opportunity to revisit comments or concerns that may have arisen during an earlier interview.

All ethical guidelines were followed, including obtaining consent forms from all students agreeing to participate. A few weeks prior to the start of class I contacted the students via email introducing myself, the study and explaining exactly what they would be consenting to in terms of their participation. Ultimately, 13 of the 14 students gave consent to be included in the study. During classroom observation I omitted any comments made by the non-consenting student. Students were required to commit to no more time than their regularly scheduled class time, with the exception of the focus students, each of whom volunteered between three to five

additional hours for a total of three in-depth interviews. Focus students and instructors were provided a copy of each interview transcript to check for accuracy and/or offer clarification or addendums.

Signed consent was also received from participating instructors and all guests. Visiting guests were emailed one week prior to their visit to the class informing them of the study and giving them the opportunity to either give consent or to withhold it. In total I received consent from 19 guests, whom I observed over 17 dialogue sessions. The names of all students, instructors and guests to the class as well as the program name are pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

3.5 Participants

Choosing the particular focus students was more difficult than settling on the more general focal point of the class itself. My choices were guided by wanting the widest possible range of perspectives and so I took some time to get to know the students a little. As I observed them, I thought about the unique viewpoints that each one brought to the class, while also considering how those viewpoints compared or contrasted with one another. I wondered about the kind of picture that might develop from the various combinations of particular perspectives.

I decided to select a group of four focus students whom I hoped would collectively reflect a range of different perspectives. I decided that I would like the group to include at least one male student and one of the aboriginal students. Both of these groups were in a minority in the class, with the men outnumbered two to

twelve and three of the fourteen students identifying as First Nations or Metis. The major deciding factor, however, was how they acted in class, how they had distinguished themselves to me in the first couple of weeks. In addition to considering basic demographics, I wanted to include a variety of styles of engagement as well as different levels of knowledge and comfort with both the topic and dialogue.

3.5.1 The Students

Sparks was the first student to emerge as a potential focus student. She appeared like a sparkler suddenly roaring to life, a crackling cool heat that rips into the fabric of the night. Early in the semester the students were still proceeding cautiously, trying to determine how to navigate the space. The frustration that the students felt after the first guest dialogue was quite evident, but Sparks seemed especially frustrated. As I walked by she burst out, “This is impossible! That wasn’t dialogue, not even close. I’m beginning to doubt that we’ll ever achieve dialogue this semester!” Her certainty intrigued me and at the same time stood in stark contrast to my own uncertainty. Sparks had come for the dialogue and quickly worried she wasn’t going to get it.

The second focus student I decided on was John. John emerged more silently, like a well-camouflaged animal suddenly materializing in the trees, along with that breathtaking realization that you could have missed something so much a part of the landscape and which is impossible not to see once you have realized it

was there. I made the decision during the Oral History presentation. John was a quiet man and up until that point I hadn't heard much from him. He struck me as a gentle and thoughtful person. One of the other students commented that he seemed wise and they wished he shared his wisdom more often. John seemed to recognize this, establishing early on in the semester that his personal challenge would be to get out of his head and have the courage to say what he thought.

From the beginning Consuela appeared boisterous and fun, always ready to laugh yet she wore her perceived lack of knowledge on her sleeve and apologized frequently for her ignorance. She was the youngest of the group and felt intimidated by the more "political" content yet she was determined to stay and give it her best try. At the very least she felt it would help her to be a better teacher, her goal at the time. There was a quality of "newness" to her uncertainty, as opposed to the uncertainty born of confusion, or too much information. In contrast to Sparks' certainty about dialogue, Consuela's mind had not been made up; she was eager to explore. Consuela's early days in the class were a mixture of enthusiasm and frustration – she articulated a clear sense of feeling fettered somehow and she was eager to break free.

Sarah didn't talk much, especially toward the beginning of the class, yet something in her silence attracted my attention. She had been scarred by her experiences in her home department, one that she described as combative, patriarchal and hegemonic. As she became more comfortable in the setting of the dialogue program her manner loosened a bit, but it never lost its care. When she

listened, she listened deeply, taking everything in. She looked as if she had a lot going on in her head and her comments consistently revealed deep reflection. When she spoke it was carefully and purposefully, in a measured tone but she had a warm-spirited laugh. She was also very conscious of the tensions and complexities that arise from navigating the world from the position of mixed European and aboriginal ancestry.

Collectively, I felt that these students represented: one who was comfortable with her understanding of dialogue but worried it won't happen; one who had no idea about dialogue but who quickly articulated feeling trapped or held back by something; one who was quiet, an introspective individual who identified his challenge for the semester as getting his ideas out of his head and into the open; and one who used her voice carefully, trying out a new way to communicate, a different way to relate to others, attempting to break out of the patterns she had always found oppressive.

In addition to these four focus students, a number of other students' voices are heard throughout the piece. These quotes primarily came from classroom observation of guest dialogues and class debriefs but they also came from interactions outside of class. In fact many of the students felt compelled to share with me and discuss some of the things that had happened when I wasn't in the room, or things they were thinking about and they often asked me about my experiences in the DLP. I would summarize these conversations briefly in my field notes and used them to add further texture. Any direct quotes from non-focus

students came from the formal class conversations, where I was better situated to capture exact wording of key comments. Some of the other student voices include, Seamus, Marigold, Kara, Callie, Serena, Thea and Jennica.

3.5.2 The Instructors

Dr. Mac is an accomplished scientist and science writer. Much of his writing has examined the interactions between people and nature, encouraging the reader to take a new look at things and perhaps consider a different perspective. He believes in education based on strong mentoring and oriented toward the world, a pedagogy that was “collegial” in nature and which aimed to achieve “the deepest possible understanding without excessive judgment.”

Abbie, a colleague of Dr. Mac, was visiting faculty that semester, splitting her time between Vancouver and her home in one of the northern territories. Abbie is a residential school survivor with a passion for language, learning, and cultural revitalization. She modeled her teaching after her grandmother’s way, which was to try to allow the students to find their answers in a “dignified” way, placing respect at the centre of the relationship.

Peter Tompkins was another colleague of Dr. Mac’s, originally from the North as well. Peter had had a distinguished career as a politician, bureaucrat, treaty negotiator and author. His main role in the classroom was to teach the students about treaties, as well as advise them on their Indian Act assignment.

3.5.3 *The Guests*

Invited guests from the community participated in one of the central learning pieces, the guest dialogue. When inviting guests, the goal is to include as many different perspectives as possible. Guests ranged from elders to the next generation of leaders who are beginning to take their places and included people from sectors as diverse as government, treaty negotiation/treaty law, public health, non-profit, research/academia, the arts, restorative justice, public health, and aboriginal self-governance.

3.6 Researcher as Instrument

According Heidegger, “before we come to explicitly understand anything we already have a preconception of it... human understanding rides on a projection of meaning” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 61), which is either verified or “modified by experience” (Gallagher, p. 63). Underlying all interpretive inquiry is the accumulation of the experiences and understandings of the researcher. Research in the social sciences is distinct from that in the natural sciences in that the object of study is a subject and the researcher is, ultimately, embedded and implicated in the research context; not only can their own “self-understanding” (Flyberg, 2001, p. 33) impact the research context, but there is also the potential for the research context itself to influence the researcher’s interpretations and decisions.

I knew I had to be cautious when assuming what I could know or not know about the DLP class based on my prior experiences as both a student and as

someone who had worked for the program. While both experiences could contribute to my understandings of events, they could also stand in the way by orienting my gaze through the veil of past experiences, obscuring those surprising developments that are the hallmark of discovery. My strongest lesson in self-awareness arrived in the form of the one of the last interviews I was to conduct for my thesis. I was totally blindsided by the student's response; her words shocked me and raised the question as to what exactly I was anticipating.

Ultimately, this incident lay bare my own subtle assumptions and prejudices, some of which, I was to discover, echoed the assumptions I had set out to challenge in the course of my research. While I was skeptical about some of the sweeping claims about the power of dialogue in creating and promoting understanding, I was still quite taken aback at many of the statements being made by this participant. It had never occurred to me that a student might come out of their experiences in the DLP filled with so much defensive anger and expressing attitudes that struck me as being quite racist. I felt a curious sense of having witnessed a failure of dialogue-based pedagogy. At the same time, I realized that I had no idea what it was I was witnessing, or what I should do with it.

In the end I realized that I owed this student a tremendous thanks. Her outburst during that last meeting knocked me off of a pedestal I hadn't even been aware I was standing on. She reminded me of my own previously held expectations based on my past experiences with dialogue, at least those I was prepared to see, prepared to admit. I was forced into a struggle with the undesired knowledge her

words evoked in me, slowly working through my own resistances, my own “passion for ignorance” (Felman, 1987, citing Lacan).

I felt as if I had finally touched something that has remained just beyond my grasp since my very induction into the world of dialogue. What followed was the necessary and painful process of shedding the old ‘self’ and previous knowledge until I was stripped down to stillness and came face to face with my ability to hear something in an entirely new way, as if I’d never heard those words before.

I was forced to confront the questions

Where does what I see and what I read [or hear] resist my understanding?

Where is the ignorance – the resistance to knowledge – located? And what can I learn from the locus of that ignorance? How can I turn an ignorance into an instrument of teaching?” (Felman, 1987, p. 80).

The process would take over a year; a year of intellectual searching and psychic unraveling until I reached the point where I could listen to what she was saying without my own emotions getting in the way.

This event transformed my interpretive process by revealing the limits of the theoretical framework I had been working with. While much of the theory around dialogue and communicative action acknowledged that agreement was not a guaranteed outcome and that misunderstandings occur, I realized that the explanations on offer would be insufficient when attempting to understand what

may have contributed to a student finishing a dialogue-based program feeling so defensive and alienated. Flyberg (2001) and Yin (1994) would refer to this as a “critical case” or “extreme case,” one that is of “strategic importance” (Flyberg, p. 78), in terms of refuting or refining theory, or that reveals the phenomenon of interest in a “dramatic fashion” (Flyberg, p. 78).

3.7 Exemplary Validity

Two years into my research I changed my theoretical framework from Habermas to Arendt, analyzing the Dialogue Program not from the perspective of communicative action,⁴ but from within the framework of human activities outlined by Hannah Arendt (1998, 2006) and her articulation of the realms of the public, the private and the social. Arendt’s ideas resonated strongly with the goals of the program and helped shed some light on how the openness upon which dialogue depends could become so shut down.

Arendt considers “the ‘truthfulness’” that comes from “seeing things from multiple perspectives” (Theile, 2005, p. 708) as a necessary precondition to judgment. Arendt’s notion of plurality, our existence as one among many, “is an embrace of multiple stories with manifold meanings” (Theile, p. 709), echoing the “multi perspective and polyphonic” (Snow & Anderson, 1991, p. 152) aspect of case

⁴ But not completely discarded, however. My previous work with the theory helped me lay the foundation for my research and I hadn’t disproven it, just discovered the limitations of that theory to fully articulate what contributed to the refusal of one of the students to engage in dialogue and the angry, defensiveness that accompanied it.

study research. And as with case study research, Arendt believes in the power of a good example, which she describes as “an ethical principle made manifest” (Theile, p. 710), providing “concrete examples...[to] lead and guide the judge” (Theile, p. 709).

Self-awareness in this type of research grounds and locates the researcher as they engage in the interpretive work of moving from whole to part and back again, travelling in the search of new perspectives. Learning is the result of the meeting between what is known and what is new and the gradual readjustment of what Heidegger referred to as the “fore-structure” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 63). This process requires that “we go beyond ourselves and our situation in the act of interpretation” (Sokolowski, 1997, p. 227). Previous learning and understanding applies itself to the interpretive situation, examining the new in light of what is already known and then shifting to incorporate what emerges, rejecting or revising what was known accordingly (Detmer, 1997, p. 280, citing Gadamer).

These fore-structures, or “prejudices” as Gadamer referred to them (Detmer, 1997) aren’t problematic in of themselves; problems arise only when our previous understanding becomes “frozen” (Sokolowski, 1997, p. 227) making ignorance less of a barrier to learning than “think[ing] one already knows” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 70). Interpretation, understanding and learning are “shaped by our capacity to be open to the other” (Alexander, 1997, p. 324) and it is our “prejudices [that] constitute the standpoint and springboard” from which we engage with “otherness” (Detmer, p. 281).

Hermeneutics offers us a chance to “transcend” the limited horizon of our own subjective experiences and encounter the world from a different perspective. This requires a shuttling back and forth from the particular to the general and back again, never resting on the certainty of either one but in constant conversation between the context and its particulars (Alexander, 1997; Detmer, 1997).

3.8 Data Interpretation

Analysis of the data began with careful reading of field notes and interview transcripts, looking for recurrent themes, surprising events or statements as well as situations that seemed to articulate aspects of Arendt’s (1998, 2006) theories. This distilling of the major themes was a long process but eventually started to yield some strong patterns and compelling examples. What these themes lacked was the narrative thread, the story that would ultimately be told. It was at this point that I returned to the interview transcripts with the purpose of finding the story that each of the focus students’ experiences told.

The focus students for this study were chosen specifically for the diversity of their perspectives and experiences; the decision was primarily based on the intrinsic differences that would situate them within the whole in their own very unique way, providing a distinct view of the experience of the curriculum of the DLP. When reviewing their transcripts I looked for themes that both spoke to their own individual experiences as well as those that resonated with the other interviews and field note data in an attempt to draw out the story threads.

As part of my interpretive process I wrote a series called “According to...,” in which I explored the experience of the semester from the perspective of each student, based mostly on interview transcripts but also on classroom observation, with each perspective providing new insight into the scene of learning and the pedagogy that informs it. The next step was to write four pieces, exploring one of Arendt’s main concepts/theories through the example of a particular student, in an effort to bring the theory and the example together. These pieces were ultimately revised and reorganized into the final piece. This process was necessarily long and iterative as I kept returning to my theory and data as one informed the other and as each reading allowed me to see situations anew.

Sound interpretive decisions “require prudential agents; they do not arise from the automatic application of rules and procedures” (Sokolowski, 1997, p. 227). In fact Arendt (2006b) believes that by addressing issues with preformed judgments, we increase the likelihood of a mere crisis sliding into “disaster” (p. 171). Like the frozen fore-structure, the preformed judgment closes off the opportunity to learn, to expand the horizon; it simply goes looking for what it already knows.

This contingent validity does not follow traditional objective validity and so cannot be judged by the same criteria. Exemplary validity can “legitimate... assessments, evaluations and choices by rendering an account of their development, referencing commonly shared experiences and worthy examples along the way,” with traditional logic and reason still playing a role but “remain[ing] in service to the narrative account” (Theile, 2005, p. 711).

Similar to hermeneutics, exemplary validity is based on judgments arising from the ability to see things, not only from one's own point of view, but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present" (Arendt, 2006c, p. 218), "allow[ing] us imaginatively to 'go visiting,'" (Theile, 2005, p. 710). It is this multi-vocality that makes hermeneutics, "above all, an ontology of community" (Alexander, 1997, p. 323).

3.9 Summary

This research project was initially concerned with how students' experiences learning dialogue could inform dialogue-based pedagogies. As I gathered and interpreted my data, however, my research questions shifted. The students' struggles negotiating the highly charged conversation of "Indigeneity in Canada: Past, Present, and, Future" revealed the emergence of dialogue, or lack thereof, to be a political issue, not just a communicative concern.

The iterative processes and multi-vocality of both case study and philosophical hermeneutics guided me as I moved between the many voices of the semester and the theoretical frameworks guiding my research. Using the spiral reasoning of philosophical hermeneutics I explored the many tensions and conflicts arising from the research scenario until I found a narrative that could hold this complexity. To do so, I had to confront the limits of my own expectations and learn to interrupt my own passion for ignorance.

CHAPTER 4: TRYING TO FIND THEIR VOICE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the students' initial forays into dialogue and the struggles they encountered as they attempted to enter into the conversation. Almost from the outset the students found themselves confronted by any array of social influences that threatened to restrict action and stifle their speech. This bombardment by the many social forces at play in the spaces between individual actors creates a fear, or nervousness, of public speech and action, threatening to keep the actor locked within their own thoughts.

Reading the students' experiences alongside Arendt's political theory reveals their silence to be a troubling indication of the erosion of the public sphere by mass society, which conscripts language into the task of homogenization and conformity, rather than distinguishing the actor from others by the words they speak and the context within which they speak it. In this chapter, I follow the students' initial struggles to find their "voice" and move from the safety of thought into action in an unpredictable world where success and failure are often intertwined.

4.2 Students' Understandings of Voice

It started with silence.

The first day, BOOM!! It was like hitting a brick wall. Nobody's talking, what the hell is going on? This was working theoretically in my head, why is it not working in practice, you know? Are we doing something wrong? Are we not the right people? (Consuela)

The first guest dialogue of the semester is frequently an awkward affair, as firsts can often be. The initial week and a half of the program was dedicated to getting to know one another, becoming comfortable as a group and establishing classroom norms.⁵ The guest dialogue introduced a new variable to the class, an individual from the community, and the students carefully entered into this new space to engage in what they hoped would be dialogue. This first dialogue, it was unanimously agreed, was far from what they had envisioned. Sparks spoke for the whole class when she noted, “that wasn’t a dialogue, that was just him talking to us.”

Difficult, uncomfortable, or “unsuccessful” dialogues can emerge at any point in the semester; the early ones do not have a monopoly on awkwardness or disappointment. But there was something about this stumble out of the starting gates that seemed to reverberate throughout the semester, revealing themes that would become persistent echoes, returning again and again, threatening to drown out the sound of the students’ voices.

⁵ In the form of agreed upon approaches to inquiry based upon curiosity, respect and individual and collective responsibility

4.2.1 Voice as Political Action

A central preoccupation for the students concerned the notion of “voice,” an idea that they connected to a sense of agency. For John, “voice equals inclusion equals autonomy,” a description that resonates with Arendt’s (1998, 2006) discussion of politics, connecting voice to individual agency, the exercise of which announces the arrival of the political actor. To be a part of the world in this way, in speech and action with others is, according to Arendt, the only way to truly be free.

For Sarah, voice implied a sense of “power” and was a way of “claiming space,” citing the absence of “urban aboriginal voices” in the public realm as an example of the connection between speech, representation and politics. In the classroom, the students’ vocal paralysis threatened to keep them as political actors invisible, something Kara alluded to when, in an attempt to rally herself and her classmates during a class debrief, she declared, “we’re under representing ourselves guys.” John continued to describe voice as

having the confidence or the self-awareness, to be able to honestly say what you’re thinking, to get your position out into the open into a place where other people can think about it, react to it, agree with it, disagree with it. I think that it’s communicating with a level of authenticity and that whether someone disagrees with the statement doesn't really matter. They're recognizing the truth and the power and the intention behind

what you are saying and I think that, to me, that's kind of all that's wrapped up in voice.

Voice requires the recognition of others, agreement or disagreement notwithstanding. Without an audience to be both witnessed by and a part of, a person is simply shouting into the wind. And while the link between inclusion and autonomy may initially “seem kind of disparate” John saw

an important link...in creating a space where people are coming together in dialogue. I think it's important that you hear as many voices as possible, so in creating that space, that's kind of what I was thinking about with inclusion...the whole feeling of belonging to a space where you're confident enough to say things. And I think that links to autonomy in that being able to tap into that voice and use it in a public space is very empowering and it allows the person speaking and the people listening...a sense of power...power I think in the ability to articulate your ideas.

4.2.2 The Significance of Silence

Consuela connects the idea of voice to “feel[ing] significant.” An accident when she was one year old had crushed her voice box, leaving her with a voice that “sounded like Froggy from ‘The Little Rascals’...I went to speech therapy for I don't know how many years to get rid of the raspiness.” This experience of having an

“altered voice” for her first years of language, a voice that made it hard for her to be heard, contributed to her doubts about the validity of her own ideas and how they would be received. “Like a lot of times when I think I have something interesting to say, I’ll start saying it and then I’ll be like, what’s that? No, never mind, that’s just stupid, it doesn’t matter.” Consuela lived in fear of being “tune[d] out,” of not being heard.

As Sparks describes it, “a voice is kind of useless if it is not heard by anyone.” She goes on to describe the relationship between speaking and being heard, with voice being

the one side and witness is the other, because in order to really have a voice you need witnesses...a lot of First Nations use that word, you know, we’ve witnessed this ceremony and it is important that people witness it because that makes it valid...the idea like with a witness in court they saw things and they heard things and they remember them and that’s why they’re there right, so, if you witness someone...the more you take in, and the more you remember...If you’re not witnessing then you’re not listening

But the presence of these others doesn’t necessarily mean dialogue will follow. The frustrating silence that the students found themselves facing illustrated how difficult it can be sometimes just to speak in the presence of others, but they

were going to have to gather their courage and raise their voices if there was going to be any dialogue at all. During one of the debriefs they held to try to address their difficulties, Sarah asked, “How much do some people need to be encouraged to actually speak up? What does it take to feel comfortable to speak? What does it take to feel free to speak?”

From the very first dialogue, the students were embroiled in a struggle that is at the heart of the human condition: the struggle between “the risk-averse stay-at-home individual and the courageous, even rash actor in the contingent public realm” (Honig, 1995, p. 141). Many of the students expressed fear and insecurity when it came with taking these first steps and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the situations they encountered.

For Kara “the hard thing is deciding when and where to stand up and speak up,” but she believed that not speaking held a potentially even greater risk because “forcing yourself to stay silent crushes the soul.” The struggle that most, if not all, of the students faced, and the first important hurdle that needed to be crossed, was getting their voices out of their heads and into the spaces that lay between them.

4.3 Roadblocks to the Realization of Voice

The students had come to the Dialogue Program to engage in dialogue, yet it ended up being much more elusive than they had anticipated. They were grasping at the words to help them delve into the topic at hand but felt themselves running into invisible roadblocks. Arendt (1998, 2006) warned of the dangers of the encroaching

social and in the story of this group of students, evidence emerges to suggest that social forces are indeed eroding our capabilities to speak together about the issues that affect our lives.

Arendt (1998, 2006) describes a world that is gradually losing its ability to hold people together in light of the destruction of public spaces by the forces of mass society. Kara hinted at this loss when she said she felt they were, “missing a sense of belonging and ownership.” This is because the social can never be a substitute for that which it destroys; it cannot provide the space necessary for the free speech and actions that comprise the world. The influence of mass society changes relationships between people by imposing rules that shackle actions and undermine our capacity for speech. In this next section, I explore some of the ways that mass society presented itself in this particular classroom and to what effect.

4.3.1 The Challenge of the Topic at Hand

The topic of “Indigeneity in Canada: Past, Present, Future” proved itself to be one of the most challenging topics the semester had ever addressed. As John said, “if this was a semester in dialogue about urban planning it would be completely different and even with the same group of people it would be a completely different dynamic.” Sparks thought that

racial issues are...so huge, I think our class took on probably the hardest possible topic you could think of because it just, it made...I mean dialogue by itself is a bitch (laughs) and seriously like what are you supposed to?

Consuela thought the topic was particularly “hard... because it is such a touchy issue.” DLP topics are chosen specifically because they are complex and controversial but the topic this semester seemed to be particularly infused with an almost hyper-awareness of historical wrongdoing and a pronounced fear of perpetuating harms.

Sparks quickly became frustrated with their attempts at dialogue and questioned her decision to participate.

I think that the problem actually lies with our topic, a lot of it... I was at the point where I really wished I hadn't taken it this semester and that I had waited for next semester or taken it earlier...I'm finding that we are unprepared to deal with the concept of trying to create dialogue *and* dealing with racial issues at the same time. And most of it is very sensitive racial issues.

John felt that a significant contributing factor to “people holding back and censoring themselves” was due to the fact that

it is such a powerful, and real, emotional topic, especially with the guests, we're not (pause), I think sometimes we feel we can't necessarily (pause), it's their lived experience, you're not talking about some by-law they brought up, this is their life.

Kara also commented during one of the debriefs that the topic that semester made it “especially emotional and makes people feel vulnerable.” But what exactly was it about the topic that invoked this sense of emotional vulnerability?

Many of the students of European descent were sensitive to the privilege of their social positioning, as well as to the legacy of colonialism that they had inherited and from which many had benefited. They were afraid of the benevolent harms they might perpetuate, paving the proverbial road with their good intentions. Like Consuela said

there's just a been a lot of negativity about race, and being different and it's not something, unfortunately, that you can just talk about freely and easily, because some jerks have taken advantage of it and dealt with it in an inappropriate way and now society's scarred forever.

Seamus, one of the more vocal students that semester, also struggled during those initial dialogues. At one point during a debrief, Seamus said that he had noticed incongruities between the way a guest was describing an issue and how he

had understood it but was frustrated and perplexed to discover that he “couldn’t figure out how to speak.” He wanted to say something but he, like the rest of his classmates, struggled with the relationship between critical inquiry and respect, usually at the cost of critical inquiry.

Seamus was so concerned that his questioning would somehow come across “in an antagonistic way” that he chose to remain silent. Callie said that at one point she was trying so hard to be respectful that the meaning of her question was lost and the person gave an answer to a different question. The fear of offending, of inadvertent disrespect, left them tongue-tied.

4.3.2 Political Correctness

An issue of particular concern to many of the students was that of “political correctness.” The idea of predetermined rules about who could say what, to or about whom, exerted a strong influence on the discussions that semester, frequently stopping dialogue before it even had a chance to start. Consuela actually felt that she didn’t have permission to talk about certain things.

I want to ask questions. I want to say okay what’s the deal with this and be able to go up to Abbie or whoever and say so what do you think of this and why, but I just feel, yeah, like I can’t ask that, because maybe it’s too personal, maybe I’m not, we’re not allowed to, I don’t know.

She felt restrictions and rules around who is allowed to speak and what they can say, asking

what if someone goes, you can't say that because you're not blah, blah, blah....what if they would think if I was raising an issue about a subject that I didn't have any right or do I have a right? to bring up the subject at all, just because it doesn't have to do with me necessarily?

Consuela seemed to think that one verbal slip or misplaced word could have her “branded” a racist. “I don't want people to say, hey, you're racist because you said that, because you brought that up when really, it's just curiosity right?”

Political correctness is an attempt to curb this uncertainty, establishing which words can be used and by whom, swaddling speech in layers of rules, trading word bombs for word balms in an attempt to smooth over the rough edges of our social existence. During the first post-guest debrief, the students struggled to identify what was holding them back from engaging with the guests in the way that they wanted. Consuela first broached the topic of political correctness, admitting that she felt the pressures of unspoken rules. And while she sometimes felt tempted to say something that she knew didn't conform to the rules “just to shake things up,” she held herself back because she was “still getting comfortable and trying to figure out how to push the boundaries.”

To go so far as to speak up unfettered by the rules of conduct against which she was so strongly resistant was more than Consuela felt prepared to take on at that point. Instead she wished for an outlier, someone prepared to transgress these social “taboos.” She thought that the class could have benefited from the presence of “a complete racist, just a redneck, you know, who had their strong views and didn't care and put them in that class, just to provoke the dialogue in a different way.” Consuela felt stifled and thought that what the class really needed was “someone...to say something controversial to shake up the class and wake us up...I need energy.”

4.3.3 Conformity's False Comfort

According to Arendt (1998), conformity arises from societal expectations of “a certain kind of behavior” (p.40). Rather than free and spontaneous action, society dictates appropriate activities and relationships according to social groupings. As the social began to erode the boundaries between public and private, it transformed the relationships between actors, “demand[ing] that its members act as though they were members of one big enormous family” (Arendt, p. 39). Now, however, rather than living under the rule of “the despotic power of the household head,” mass society operates according to “a kind of no-man rule,” where “the natural strength of one unanimous opinion is tremendously enforced by sheer number” (Arendt, p. 40). Arendt describes this as “one of the cruelest and most tyrannical versions” of rule (p. 40).

John commented on the fact that the students tended to “think as a group,” and described many of their responses as arising from their “group think.” Consuela was as exasperated by the persistence of agreement within the class as she was with her inability to speak through and beyond the forces of political correctness. She picked up on this tendency right from the beginning, commenting that during their first guest dialogue, “everyone was kind of just like, listening to him nodding going yeah, oh that’s right, yeah I heard about that, that was good, that was good, and I was thinking to myself this is dialogue?” The students found themselves caught up in the drive toward conformity that is one of the calling cards of mass society, trapping them in rules and regulations of how to act, think, and react. Incarcerated by convention, they knew this wasn’t what it felt like to be free.

On the one hand, membership in the group provided “comfort” and “safety” (John), a form of the familiar that helped to blunt the impact of the strange. Sarah spoke of the tendency to “gravitate” toward “things I like,” or “people who share our ideas,” although she admitted that it “might not be the best thing” and that “you tend to learn more from those situations [of disagreement] than when everyone is in agreement.” Consuela also admitted to choosing comfort over chance, even though she knew it was having negative impacts on her learning. John felt that they had “created a space that we felt comfortable in quite quickly,” that it may have been part of the reason their dialogues “hadn’t pushed maybe quite as far into dangerous territory as it might have with a different topic.”

Agreement and similarity become safety, with the spaces beyond deemed as “dangerous territory.” John attributed this, in part, to

a sense of safety within a group that you have explicitly created the space with, versus the random element of introducing someone new...an unknown element in the group does take away from that comfort level and the safety level that allows you to feel like you are immersed in the dialogue experience but I also think that’s something that is really important to be able to get beyond.

Dr. Mac made the point that there was a lot more diversity of opinion within the room than they recognized. John talked about how some of the students “with, a little more radical, or stronger opinions in one direction or another, in the interest of group harmony...started censoring themselves.” He thought it was “unfortunate” for the dialogue to no longer hear those voices but acknowledged that, “personally...if I were a person who felt that everything I was saying wasn’t being met with open arms, then perhaps I would start censoring myself a little more.”

During the first debriefs, Consuela and Seamus were both quite vocal about wanting to see the conversation move away from the safe topics and widespread agreement, and dig into some of the tougher stuff. When Consuela sought out Dr. Mac outside of class to talk to him about the need for someone to stir things up, he turned it over to her.

He said, you know what? You can be that person not necessarily with his views, but provoke thought and say well what about thinking about it this way? Kind of opening up a discussion and making people think.

Consuela remained reluctant, but Seamus decided to take up the charge and started putting ideas out there, not necessarily as his perspective, but because they were the perspectives that some people have and he was curious to know, “where do these ideas and opinions come from? What are the possible responses?”

The first time Seamus threw a comment out, his cheeks turned bright pink in knowledge of this transgression, of broaching the area of “some of the bad things people say about Indians.” In this case the guest received the question in the spirit that it was intended, helping to open up an excellent discussion around perceptions and stereotypes. Seamus’ comments definitely evoked discomfort among the students – many of them sat back in their chairs and shifted uncomfortably as they stole sideways glances at one another – but these comments also opened up the conversation into new areas and ultimately helped to lay bare the uncomfortable realities and discordant values that society tries to contain within polite conversation.

4.3.4 Stuck in Our Heads: From Introspection to the Visiting Imagination

A number of the students commented that they felt that both their inability to join the conversation and the shortage of perspectives in the classroom falling outside of their “comfort zone” (John) were having negative impacts on their learning. In the first dialogue debrief Marigold spoke of coming to the realization that there were “boundaries” in her brain that “make it hard to engage in dialogue,” wondering aloud, “did I forget how to be curious?” Sarah referred specifically to the fact that she was not prepared to speak during the one of the dialogues due to the fact that she was still “inwardly processing.”

Callie was concerned that her fear of offending others was going to end up “stunting my growth in my thinking and writing.” She felt hindered by “an internal dialogue that is more cynical,” that would make assumptions about what the guest would say in response to her question. She realized, however, that she was going to “need to get over inward reflecting” and start putting her ideas and opinions out there. Consuela found herself hesitating before speaking out of the fear of “offend[ing] someone but I [didn’t] know another way to say it” and so she decided to “just shut up and I just didn’t say anything and my knowledge about *x* thing didn’t progress.”

The students were also struggling with an education that, according to Sarah, had “conditioned [them] to learn things passively.” John felt his challenge in particular was to move beyond merely being “a passive participant,” connecting this passivity with the distinction between “knowing *about* something” and “acting on it.”

The distinction was important to John because “dialogue isn't going to happen unless the individual actors step up to the plate and put something out there...I think that you have a responsibility to work toward that space.” He then extended the metaphor “beyond conversation and communication...it translates into action in the community.”

Sarah believed that dialogue was about being able to “learn from other people...because they have a different perspective than you” and that “respect and knowing the value in what other people have to say” lay at the heart of dialogue. According to Arendt (1998, 2006), these different perspectives are an essential component of the body politic; without them, there is no judgment and where there is no judgment, action suffers.

“Political thought is representative” (Arendt, 2006d, p. 237) in that it requires a variety of viewpoints that are brought to bear when coming to judgment. Valid judgments transcend both benign empathy and the tyranny of social rule, grounded instead in the ability to travel to another perspective, in “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not” (Arendt, p. 237). As a political activity, judging opens up “new roles for the imagination and for dialogue”(Coulter & Weins, 2002, p. 16).

According to Kant, judgment requires what he referred to as an enlarged mentality, which arises from ““being able to ‘think in the place of everybody else’” (in Arendt, 2006c, p. 217), requiring the judging actor to go beyond any agreement arising from the introspective “dialogue between me and myself” (Arendt, p. 217). A

“good judging actor” (Coulter & Weins, 2002, p. 19) is one who, “accept[s] the responsibility for travelling to all relevant viewpoints, especially those that are unlikely to be in the public world and attending to those perspectives” (Coulter & Weins, p. 18).

Judgment is by definition a political act; it arises from the commonality of the shared world, that objective place outside of the cloistered regions of the mind that can be collectively witnessed and interpreted (Arendt, 1998, 2006). While Arendt’s emphasis is on the public nature of judgment, she acknowledges the necessary role of the ‘two-and-one’ dialogue of reflective thought. Her resistance was to the “subordinating” (Coulter & Weins, 2002, p. 17) of action to the *vita contemplativa*.

“Thinking should not be an escape from experience,” and any withdrawal from the world “must be only temporary” (Coulter & Weins, 2002, p. 20). Even when withdrawn into contemplation the judging spectator must maintain the link with the world by taking into consideration the diverse viewpoints of the public in anticipation of meeting them upon return to the public realm (Coulter & Weins, 2002).

The flexibility of the imagination necessary for travelling to other viewpoints is matched by the necessary flexibility of the thought process of reflective judgment, which requires the ability to move between the particular views of plural others and a generalizable explanation (Coulter & Weins, 2002). If this process becomes rigid, thinking hardens into a set of “preformed judgments, that is...prejudices,” which

when applied to the dilemmas of the modern world, spells “disaster” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 171).

John felt that having “the flexibility to change” an opinion or idea and the willingness to “integrate other directions and other input” was key to success that semester and that those possessing this “flexibility” ended up “giving the most and getting the most out of our class.” For John, a significant part of dialogue was the chance to hear someone else’s views and experiences, and it was the exposure to these different perspectives that he believed “kind of opened our eyes and made us think about things a little differently or, you know, more willing to consider the opposite viewpoint.”

One of the students that he felt demonstrated this flexibility of thought was Sarah, and he frequently mentioned her as someone he watched in order to learn from. Sarah described herself as “one of those types of people who likes to look at everything first and then I make my decision based on what I see.” She valued “learn[ing] how other people see the world, growing up in different places all over Canada with different parents, different cultural and sexual identities,” and made an effort to remain open to reconsidering her own perspectives in light of what she learned.

During a conversation about Wilson Chambers, their first guest, she revealed that she had been caught off guard because she “really hadn’t heard a lot of aboriginal people speaking in such an economic, excuse my words, kind of ‘white’ kind of sense about the world.” Catching herself succumbing to “ingrained...way[s]

of thinking,” she challenged herself to examine her own beliefs, asking, “should Native people still be in the trees? No, probably not...it’s that idea of authenticity in our culture and really questioning why *do* we question aboriginal people when they take advantage of economic opportunities?”

Meeting a surprising perspective that challenged her preconceptions about aboriginal people, Sarah used the opportunity to examine her own thinking and prejudices, which resulted in the opening up of new questions, reinvigorating inquiry as opposed to shutting it down in favour of the familiarity of previously held beliefs.

4.3.5 Perspective, Control and the Unpredictable

Political judgment requires that the actor be completely disinterested in their own wants and needs, that “neither the life interests of the individual nor the moral interest of the self ”(Arendt, 2006c, p. 219) cloud the ability to truly see the world from the perspective of another. Sarah seemed to recognize that the quality of a judgment, “depends upon the degree of its impartiality” (Arendt, p. 237), identifying the ability to examine a challenging situation by “just distancing myself from it” as her “saving grace.” In doing so she is able to “see the value of what we have or haven’t learned (laughing).”

The perspectival distance required for political judgment is grounded in the ability to leave your own vested interests and assumptions aside and in doing so, relinquish control over both the process and the outcome. This, according to Kara is

the reason why “some people are afraid of dialogue, because it makes you give up control. It is about influencing it but being open.”

The idea of control is anathema to politics as far as Arendt (1998) is concerned. Any illusions we may entertain about our ability to direct and predict the course of events “is forever defeated by the actual course of events, where nothing happens more frequently than the unexpected” (Arendt, p. 300). All actions take place in and among other actors, themselves capable of action, meaning that no act can be contained within “a closed circle and can never be reliably confined to two partners” (Arendt, p. 300). This is what Arendt refers to as the “boundlessness” of action, the infinite potential of “one deed, and sometimes one word...to change every constellation” (p. 190).

Sarah felt that it was this unpredictability that kept some of her classmates silent, “they just don’t have the confidence to bring [their ideas] up and deal with the repercussions” and as a result, action stalled.

It’s almost like playing basketball and doing those drills in the circle and you’re playing with a group of inexperienced people who are just too afraid to catch that ball, or to...grab the ball and kind of throw it back...a couple of other people too who tried to do the conversation thing like Kara or Callie and it’s just like they have this ball and they throw it and...it just goes splat! And we’re all kind of looking at it (laughs)...it was frustrating but funny when you take a step back and look at it.

For Sarah, this unpredictability and lack of control was something intrinsic to the practice of dialogue and most certainly to the practice of learning dialogue. “It almost hinders the process, when somebody tries to take too much control,” she said.

The roadblocks and frustrations were not failures but simply the side effects of the boundless nature of action, and Sarah seemed to understand that their faltering was part of the process of learning.

I don't think we are here to be given directions...we're not supposed to be perfect at it and I think it is going to take us a lot of the term before we can even begin to get a good dialogue going but I think we have to go through it and like today, we made all these mistakes and we all pissed each other off and frustrated one another, but it was probably one of our bigger moments.

Their task, as she saw it, was to learn to be “more self-directed” and “take action...if things aren't working.”

Sparks, on the other hand, was having some serious doubts about the process, voicing her concerns with Sarah at one point saying, “I'm not getting anything out of this, and I'm really like beginning to wonder, like we have no direction in here, and I just feel like I'm wasting my time.” She was looking for

“real dialogue” and seemed to consider anything that fell short of that a failure. In fact she couldn’t comprehend how someone could feel “satisfied” with how things were progressing.

What frustrates me is some people’s attitudes, saying ‘oh well this is what I was expecting you know, coming in here’ and I’m like ‘oh my god, how can you honestly think that what we did today was real dialogue?’...I was stunned when people told me that.

Sparks was looking for more “control” and her words reveal a sense of insecurity with these classroom encounters, which she thought could have been alleviated if she had felt “a little more secure in my knowledge, if there had been a little bit more grounding.” In fact her words reveal a profound sense of unsteadiness, vulnerability even. “We’re really trying to find our feet (pause). It’s kind of (pause), yeah we have no feet (laughs). We’re still trying to stand up I think when it comes to guests, hopefully that will change. Soon.”

As events continued to throw her off kilter, she looked for tools with which to produce dialogue, in the form of “lectures” and “panels of past dialogue students” sharing how they dealt with difficult situations. But each situation and each semester is unique and what may work in one situation is not guaranteed to work in another.

Sparks’ desire for a formula for success reveals an instrumentalism that is the hallmark of *homo faber*. This is seen in Sparks’ desire for “strategies” and “tools” “to

deal with dialogue,” as if dialogue was broken and needed someone to fix it. It was almost as if she felt that there was a set of rules and tips that could have alleviated the difficulties they were experiencing as a class and assuage some of her fears arising from the unpredictability of it all.

Sparks asked for a “safe topic” for dialogue, which she defined as “a topic we had talked about before,” and she entered into dialogue with a purpose. “I’m very much a goal oriented person so it’s like, if it’s important for me I’ll know this information, okay, we know it already move on.” The difficulties the class was experiencing were making her lose hope. What she felt she needed was “someone” to show her that dialogue “is a viable possibility...either prove to me that we can dialogue about that type of thing or let’s move on and try to find something that we *can* dialogue about, you know?”

Sparks wasn’t alone in struggling with the overwhelming unpredictability and uncertainty of dialogue. Sarah described one particular attempt she made to turn the conversation back to the students during a guest dialogue that had turned into a monologue on the part of the guest.

I just was sitting there the whole time trying to take notes to try to pick up something I could jump on and use to throw back to the class and I missed it so many times and then finally I just put my hand up or something and said ‘that was really interesting from the federal perspective’ trying to be polite to [the guest] and saying, ‘I’m wondering

how we could bring it in’ I was trying to give the class hints ‘how can we bring it down to like a grassroots level? As people what can we do to make change?’

Immediately after she put the question to the class, one of her class mates “put up her hand and then just asked another question and I’m like [exasperated sound]. I got really frustrated and just dropped my book and said to the person beside me, ‘I give up!’ (laughs).” Sarah was not immune to frustration but she did not let it overwhelm her either, accepting it as part of the process. She focused on finding ways to learn from each experience and laughed off situations that escaped her control while Sparks attempted to reign in the unpredictability.

Subject as they are to the boundlessness and uncertainty that infuses all human affairs, dialogue and judgment both require the relinquishing of traditional notions of control. *Homo faber* finds comfort and stability as the director of process and fabrication, but the comfort of this control is an aberration in the realm of politics, where the unpredictability of human action is multiplied by a plurality of actors.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter I explored the students’ first reactions to, and impressions of, the process of engaging in dialogue. Their words revealed significant frustrations as they continually ran up against the invisible barriers of social mores. The students

struggled with the historical burden of the topic, a preponderance of agreement that most of them felt was getting in the way of their learning, and a persistent silence that had political implications. Cognizant of the historical and contemporary injustices of colonialism they frequently expressed a fear of inadvertently perpetuating these harms, resulting in a mute, political paralysis.

The body politic is “the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together,” (Arendt, 1998, p.198). Political action is located in and among these relationships and the history of humankind written by the actions and interactions of a plurality of people. We never act alone. This chapter explored some of the challenges the students experienced in attempting to use their voices in order to put their perspectives out in the open, beyond the confines of their minds. In the next chapter I will explore in greater detail how the students responded when they encountered other members of the public in the class dialogue.

CHAPTER 5: ENSEMBLE (ENCOUNTERS WITH THE OTHER)

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I described the political importance of voice, relating it to some of the social and historical forces contributing to the students' difficulties joining the conversation and their hesitation at leaving the comfort of the mind for the world of action. In the presence of certain guests the students appeared invigorated and inspired, while in the presence of others they looked almost as if they were being punished. Power came to play in that classroom in many fascinating ways, not the least of which was the rule of "the expert."

This chapter describes six different encounters, exploring some of the ways that student, guest, and instructor met during that semester and the effect that different approaches had on the students' perceptions of the authenticity and genuineness of an encounter.

5.2 The Expert Trap

Most classrooms are based around a familiar dynamic—a group of novices who are there to listen and an authority who is there to teach, or instruct. The authority of knowledge extends beyond the classroom into society, in the guise of the "expert" or "consultant." In the DLP, a wide variety of experts and consultants are invited into the classroom to engage in dialogue with the students, an activity

requiring a reciprocity not necessarily associated with consultation and expert advice.

As a central pedagogical practice of the DLP, the guest dialogue is intended to give the students an opportunity to learn about the topic at hand while interacting with people with whom they might not otherwise get the chance to associate. It is the hope that during the conversation the students will have a chance to discover the individual people behind the title. As Dr. Mac described it,

each guest is quite unique...our main objective with the guests is to, as deeply as possible, understand who they are, how they reached the positions and opinions they have and what they do to be effective in the world.

Guests arrive to the classroom with any number of understandings about what dialogue is and about their role in the conversation. The students may be novices, but there is still a good likelihood that the guest may be even less familiar with the type of communication that dialogue is, a possibility borne out in the class's first guest dialogue.

Field Note Vignette: The First Guest Dialogue

Wilson Chambers was a prominent individual in the area of aboriginal governance. The moment he walked into the classroom he commandeered it, announcing, "I've been in

lots of meetings” and proceeded to run the session something like a meeting, or perhaps more accurately, a lecture. According to the class schedule, the topic for dialogue that day had been Oral Traditions but the guest either didn’t know that or he had forgotten. From my observation point outside of the main circle I noted feeling talked at and that the atmosphere in the room had begun to feel heavy, stifled by what felt like an endless barrage of words. Mr. Chambers stopped briefly once or twice to open the floor for questions, which resulted in pretty much the only student involvement. In the first 45 minutes, only two students had managed to speak, and for the most part the class sat in what seemed like stunned silence.

As the session progressed with no real opportunity for the students to contribute, I watched as they slowly began to fade and drop out—some slouched, others picked at their nails or fiddled with their hair, and some just stared at a wall. I began to wonder where Mr. Chambers was; I did not feel that he was very present at all. Rather, it seemed to me that he could have been speaking to anyone. Many of the points the guest was raising were interesting but there was no sense that he wanted to know what the students were curious about or what their thoughts were. Dr. Mac finally intervened, trying to pull the conversation away from what sounded like a “lecture,” steering it toward a conversation that could potentially include more of the students but it seemed they weren’t quite ready to enter the arena, something he pointed out to them in a subsequent debrief.

As often happens with the guest dialogue, the conversation seemed to pick up more after the mid-way break, a time for huddles in the hallways and washroom foyers as the students try to collectively understand what was going on and what they could do to respond, what actions they could possibly take to influence what was going on. After the break Mr.

Chambers asked if there were any questions, opening the floor to the only real exchange that session. It preceded more like a “Q&A” session but the class had begun to shift a bit. The energy lifted and they began to engage with one another, which helped to loosen the stranglehold that had been established by the powerful presence of this guest. Mr. Chambers entered the classroom, assumed a position of authority, ran the session, and chose the moment the class would end, calling it to a close half an hour early and immediately leaving the room.

So ended the first guest dialogue of the semester, leaving the class frustrated and confused, wondering, “What went wrong there? Why did it feel so uncomfortable and so difficult to speak up?”⁶

5.2.1 May We Speak?: The Question of Legitimacy

For the majority of the semester, it was widely agreed among the students that they only managed to achieve “real dialogue” when it was just themselves. Sparks noted that “as soon as someone else comes in, even Dr. Mac or Abbie sometimes, it’s like, boomp! It’s like it shuts down.” Mr. Chambers’ attitude toward the class was confident and take-charge; he didn’t approach them as equals but as a captive audience and the students were overwhelmed by the sense of power and authority he wielded. Initial hesitations solidified into sustained pauses under the added weight of Mr. Chambers’ community positioning and cultural status, revealing one

⁶ from field notes September 11, 2006

of their greatest challenges that semester – developing a sense of legitimacy in public conversation.

According to Dr. Mac, one of the central goals of the Dialogue Program is to help students “get... over feeling silent around people who impress” them and to ultimately “finish [the] class feeling more comfortable around powerful, important people.”

One of the biggest things that came up for the students as it often does is their sense that ‘the guests are important but I am not’ that sort of thing, the guest has experience, I don’t, the guest has wisdom, has spent his whole life working in this field I know nothing and they are intimidated.

Consuela in particular struggled with this, feeling as if her lack of knowledge precluded her from being part of the conversation. “I didn’t know really any background information about what the problem was and so for me, I had to sit there and be quiet.”

In the debrief that followed their dialogue with Wilson Chambers the students’ comments reflected significant dissatisfaction with how things had gone. They wondered if Mr. Chambers misunderstood his role; perhaps it would have gone better if it they had been a little clearer about what dialogue meant, maybe if they knew more or if they had more experience. They discussed how the physical arrangement of the room could influence the conversation (i.e. moving speaker from

traditional head of the class) until Dr. Mac stepped in and encouraged them to look at the situation at a deeper level of analysis.

Seamus felt that a one of their bigger problems was their tendency to “place the guest in the ‘expert’ position.” This posed a serious problem for dialogue because it established the guest as the holder of superior knowledge, resulting in unevenly distributed opportunities for action. His classmates’ comments in the first debrief revealed their concerns that a classroom setting such as this one, which encourages their voices as much as the expert’s, was so outside of the norm that it required forewarning the guests.

During one of the debriefs, Callie suggested informing the visitors to the class “about how dialogue works so they won’t be offended when the students speak up.” Callie and many of her classmates seemed to feel that offering a perspective different than the guest’s required caveats so as not to offend. Sarah also struggled with the power dynamic somewhat, saying that she and her classmates were “still getting comfortable with how to talk to guests if we [were] being more critical so I tended to be more quiet.” Consuela was reluctant to speak up around someone she considered an expert because “he knows more than I do so who am I to question?”

Sparks was particularly frustrated by the lack of opportunity for critical engagement, acknowledging the authority of the guest as a significant contributor to her silence. She was disappointed that their conversation with Mr. Chambers had stayed in the “safe zone,” pointing out that he had made some fairly controversial decisions in his leadership capacity and that she really wanted to hear from him why

he did what he did. She didn't ask him, however, because she was nervous about being perceived as disrespectful if she disagreed with him. Sparks, and many of her classmates for that matter, seemed to conflate disagreement with disrespect. Differing opinions, especially from those with more power and authority, seemed to have carried the threat of being received as offensive.

Consuela felt that her options were automatically limited due to Mr. Chambers' status. "With Mr. Chambers, it was like, you're an elder and, from what I know, I'm supposed to respect you regardless." During the first debrief, Serena commented on the difficulties she experienced during the dialogue with Mr. Chambers "due to his status as an elder, especially within his own culture, so there is the double imperative of respecting both him as an individual and also extending the respect to his culture's values." Thea felt a "cultural pressure to refrain" due to his status while at the same time struggling with "the pressure to contribute to the dialogue." In the encounter with Mr. Chambers, the students ran up against the forces of status, title, and culture, all of which contributed to the overwhelming silence.

5.2.1.1 Warner Jackson

Another early guest whose visit elicited a strong reaction from the students was Warner Jackson, a high-ranking government bureaucrat with a number of years of experience working in treaty negotiations. Mr. Jackson seemed quite friendly, making a few jokes with the students when he arrived, but once the session had

formally started he quickly assumed control of the conversation. In my field notes, I observed that Mr. Jackson spoke very quickly, that it felt like he had a “piece” to say and that he almost consistently failed to acknowledge the students when they indicated they wanted to speak. If he did stop for a question he would answer quickly before carrying on with his story. Many raised hands ended up back in the students’ laps once they had tired of trying to get his attention. The students quickly appeared frustrated. There was plenty of shifting in seats and furled brows as well as other expressions of discomfort on their faces. I saw many of them stealing side-glances at one another, rolling their eyes and sighing deeply.

In a debrief that followed, the students expressed frustration both at how one-sided the conversation had been but also at the “inauthenticity” of the interaction, of having been visited by the “position” but not by the person. As Consuela described it,

a lot of the people I *do* see just as their positions because when they come in they *are* just their positions, they don’t make an effort to be themselves. They’re who everyone else thinks they are and should be. Warner Jackson...came in and he was who we thought he’d be. He was *definitely* who we’d thought he’d be... it’s like they put up this wall and they don’t want people to get close.

Sarah felt that by “drop[ping] all the big names,” Mr. Jackson essentially created barriers to dialogue by further establishing his status. In the debrief that followed many of the students said that they were less interested in how well he knew a former prime minister and more interested in what the treaty process meant to him. In the introduction rounds many students stressed that they were interested in his *personal* views and perspectives, like how he felt as a “human working in a bureaucracy” (John). Wanting to get beyond rhetoric and “government speak,” they were looking for that sense of honesty and authenticity present in those who, as John said, made them “sit up and listen.”

Sparks had a slightly different view on things and was in fact quite upset with the attitudes of some of her classmates’ criticisms of government representatives being “less authentic when they were giving the ‘government line,’ quote unquote.” Sparks believed that “we invite the title in, more than we invite the person, most of the time” and that the guests should be received according to

the position [they] hold ... the suggestion that these people were being inauthentic when really we’re not, we’re not asking for them to be themselves, we’re asking them to be a representative...he was being a representative, he was being authentically government and there’s nothing wrong with that.

Sparks and her classmates may have disagreed on who exactly they were hoping to encounter but their comments indicate a significant amount of agreement that Mr. Jackson had arrived in their classroom as his position in society and stayed there. The students in turn fell into the socially scripted role of the novice in the presence of the expert and, instead of acting against type, many of the students simply tuned out while the few attempts on the part of some students to get dialogue going fell flat. The power and influence of the expert as demonstrated by these encounters demonstrates “evidence of the hegemony of instrumental thinking and the triumph of the social after all” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 404).

5.2.1.2 Peter Tompkins

Peter Tompkins, the instructor who was facilitating one of the group projects, was another relationship that the students found challenging. The class’ interactions with Peter evoked themes of power and position reminiscent of their experiences with Mr. Jackson and Mr. Chambers. The situation with Peter was much more complicated, however. Whereas the relationship ended once the other guests had left the classroom, Peter would be working with the students over the course of the semester as their advisor on a major group project.

Peter is a highly accomplished individual who has held numerous impressive titles over the course of his career. He has a somewhat imposing physicality and gruffness to his mannerism. In previous interactions with him I had found him to be

amicable, collegial and a little self-deprecating. The students however, encountered him rather differently.

I was not present for their first session together but based on the stories many of the students shared with me,⁷ it is safe to say that they got off to a pretty rocky start. I was present for their second encounter and witnessed a similarly strong response by the students the moment Peter left the room. There was a brief moment of silence before Sarah blurted out, “Okay, can we talk about what just happened there?” In my field notes I observed that the energy in the room lifted immediately as the students began to share their feelings of confusion and indignation.

Sarah referred to Peter as a “bulldog, and “adversarial” saying he approached them like a “machine gun.” Consuela admitted to feeling that she needed to follow different rules for interacting with him as opposed to her classmates. “He is still an authority figure, we know what we are supposed to be doing [in terms of speaking up and participating] but he, we haven’t broken those boundaries down...instead we just kind of like...we shut up.”

From the students’ perspectives, Peter was wrapped in a mantle of knowledge and power setting him apart from their “circle” (Consuela). He was an authority and the students deferred to his expertise with their silence, which was curiously turned

⁷ As mentioned in my methodology, the students would frequently volunteer information about events that took place in my absence as well as share their ideas about some of the complexities they were encountering. This first interaction was explosive and the next day when I returned to class I was approached by many of the students saying, “oh my god Taigita did you *hear* about our class yesterday with Peter?” Interestingly, this encounter with Peter resulted in an impromptu student-led dialogue, which the students largely referred to as “our first real dialogue.”

on its head when the students themselves get an opportunity to step into the expert role.

5.2.1.3 Crystal⁸

Approximately mid-way through the semester the class was visited by a young woman who worked for a non-profit organization aimed at trying to improve the lives of impoverished children. Crystal had visited the class in order to get their feedback on a leadership curriculum that her organization had created specifically for aboriginal youth. When Dr. Mac first broached the possibility of her visiting for this purpose, it prompted concerns among the students that they themselves might fall into “the role of being the expert” something that Sarah described as “walking into dangerous territory.”

Both Sarah and John mentioned that one of their classmates had expressed concern the day before the dialogue about how they might conduct themselves, saying, “We really need to be careful how this runs. We’re going from being students to being consultants, we’ve really, really got to be careful about what we say and how we present ourselves.” John initially thought these concerns were “valid” but brushed them off somewhat as “being overly cautious. Then, on the Monday we had the meeting, and I sat back and went, wow, (laughs) some people are really

⁸ I refer to Crystal only by her first name to reflect the different relationship the students had with this guest, which was more as a peer than a superior, calling for a more causal reference.

talking like they are the experts, and I was kind of shocked.” John said that he hadn’t anticipated that kind of a response due to

where our group is coming from and who we are and what we’ve talked about and the way we’ve been in other situations, with other speakers to suddenly have some pretty definitive statements being made, declarative statements ‘you gotta do this, you shouldn’t do that.’ It was surprising.

Sarah felt that day “did have a very different feel, like a consultation as opposed to dialogue.” She and John both mention that one of the contributing factors was an honest desire to apply the knowledge they had been gathering.

It could just be that we’ve been taking in all this information, processing and trying to figure out what the hell can we do and in some way there was this opportunity ‘What? Oh is that what you want to do? Oh. Well do it this way. Oh don’t do that. (John)

Sarah acknowledged that “it was also good for people to listen to one another too and you know, see where people have grown,” but she and John both seemed to share a concern about how the students had so quickly stepped into a role that had previously held so much power over them, evoking such a profound sense of inferiority and gripping silence.

John thought that the developers of the curriculum “obviously hadn’t taken a lot of consultation into consideration,” and had left plenty of room for comments. While he conceded that the students’ suggestions “were quite on target,” the fact that they had been offered as definitive statements and directives had concerned him. The class had been emboldened by their newly acquired knowledge and were eager to share it but John attributed their slipping into the expert role primarily to the fact that the guest that day “was young [and] she was white,” which helped to remove some of the barriers they encountered when engaging with other guests.

5.2.2 Equal Ground

The students’ experiences revealed multiple examples of how the forces of status and power came to play in the classroom, frequently leaving them silenced. Consuela expressed a widely held assertion that, “after a guest leaves and the instructor leaves for a meeting and it’s just the class left, we had some of the most amazing dialogues...no boundaries.” They were most comfortable with each other and the network of relationships they had developed. This comfort extended beyond friendship. As Sarah pointed out “when there are no guests or professors in the room the power dynamics change and we are all equal.”

At the core of Arendtian plurality are the paradoxical aspects of “equality and distinction” (Arendt, 1998, p. 175). Equality is necessary for us to be able to understand one another, to comprehend our history and plan for a future together. To be among equals is to be among ones peers, who neither rule nor are ruled by

one another, allowing equal opportunity for action. But the public is also “permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit” (Arendt, p. 41) that calls to the actor to distinguish his or her self through speech and action. Without distinction individuality succumbs to a conformity of “identical wants and needs” (Arendt, p. 176) making speech and action redundant. These students’ experiences raise important questions about the nature of equality in classroom settings (see Ellsworth, 1989).

Consuela expressed feeling on very unequal footing with most of the guests.

[T]he way that society is set up, when you have a guest speaker, and for me I was trying to break out of this, but the speaker has authority and he has more knowledge than you that is why he or she has been invited to talk to you, to teach you something, but you know, in the class, we’re told or suggested to treat him as an equal and to maybe teach him something too

Dr. Mac was also aware of this dynamic, observing that

many of the best discussions...were class only discussions, where they felt more equal I think...we had some very spiritually and politically effective and powerful people in the room, the students, on average, didn’t feel as comfortable sharing with the guests on an equal basis and I don’t think we took that as far as perhaps some other semesters.

Traditional imbalances of power, combined with the political and emotional complexity of the topic, meant that more so than in other semesters, the students “initially were very reluctant to voice their own opinion, share their own perspective” (Dr. Mac). At one point Consuela indignantly declared that “people in power should just get off their high horse,” but then she stopped, saying, “I don't know, maybe it's us, maybe it's everyone else that's putting them up there?”

The extent to which the students could influence or change the direction of a conversation in the face of such unequal power relations is debatable, but Dr. Mac felt that they could still be doing more to try to shift the dynamic and find space for their voices. In response to their concerns about guests approaching them from the “expert position,” Dr. Mac advised them, “people act like an expert when you let them” and that they were “not recognizing the equality [they had] in the room.” The students continued to express dissatisfaction with how their dialogues were progressing but appeared reluctant to take action and so Dr. Mac gave them a pep talk to try to nudge them into taking a risk in their dialogues.

Dr. Mac emphasized the collective and individual responsibilities when it came to creating that space. “You have a responsibility to one another to have the conversation proceed in a curious, respectful way...think of it as a collective how can we carry the conversation forward,” as opposed to an exercise in “sound[ing] smart,” reminding them that “the quality of the situation that you step into depends upon the quality you bring.” In other words, what you do matters. Dr. Mac reminded

them that there was room for their voices but he also acknowledge their sense of intimidation with the guests, reassuring them “that’s okay, that is why we [the instructors] are here.”

Consuela felt that they were asleep at the wheel and needed something to wake them up. Dr. Mac agreed but brought the responsibility for this back to them saying, “this is your class...the energy comes from you, not the guest. Guests feed off of the energy in the room.” He gave an example from the dialogue the day before, where he tried to bring them into the conversation, pointing out that he had asked for their perspectives and no one spoke up. “You have to walk through that door,” he reminded them.

5.3 Getting to Know You

What would it take for the students to feel comfortable enough to start “taking risks on the other side” (Dr. Mac)? What could they do to temper the impact of the socially based inequality that materialized in their classroom and the inferiority complex it created? “Knowing” someone it would seem, a knowledge based on discovering the person behind the title that helped to bring a person “down to [their] level.” As Consuela explained it

[A]s a group we know each other better than we know the instructors or some of the guests that come in, and just knowing more about each other, we can talk more freely I think...we’ve built up our relationships to a point

where we can be more open with each other than, say, with an instructor or a guest or something...we know each other more, we know what makes each other tick, a little bit, we know how each other feel about certain issues.

5.3.1 The Lure of the Familiar

The discussion around the guest dialogue invokes the metaphor of the visiting imagination, or the stranger within our midst. The encounter of diverse others in the public realm opens up questions regarding the existential qualities of the stranger versus those of a friend and the conditions upon which the stranger may join, or even approach, the inner circle. The already unpredictable nature of action, multiplied by the arrival of the unfamiliar, increased the students' sense of risk and their hesitation to act. Sarah felt

it's easier when you have close relationships where you kind of build a sense of trust by getting to know each other and...I think we're kind of at a point where we can say those things in front of each other.

Sarah was referring to the strong sense of camaraderie that developed between the students that semester. The emotional intensity of the topic, their feelings of inferiority and their explosive initial encounters with Peter created a

sense of insecurity and instability that they ended up countering with the relationships among themselves.

Sparks was surprised at how quickly they had come together, saying that she “wasn’t expecting us to bond. It’s a good thing, at least in our class because I think otherwise it would be a lot harder to talk about some of the subjects.” By the same token, she felt that this bonding created a set of new problems “because you introduce this guest into our midst where people aren’t comfortable discussing, and it’s like, oh no!” It is in their relationship with Peter that both the upheaval created by the arrival of the newcomer and the comfort of the familiarity that comes from getting to know someone is perhaps most clearly illustrated.

In her first interview, shortly after the class’s first encounter with Peter, Consuela said she thought he “seemed so heartless and uncaring about some issues,” and admitted to being “scared of him.” Consuela didn’t feel comfortable speaking up to Peter because they “didn’t have that relationship yet...I would have loved to just say, whoa! Back off dude!” As a class, she said they “didn’t feel comfortable with [Peter] in the dialogue, I guess. He was like one of the outsiders. We were like ‘dude, we don’t want you in our friendship circle any more, leave!’” Then she added, “I don’t know, I don’t know him personally, maybe if I got to know him better, my opinion would change.”

The students were concerned about knowing who the person behind the persona was, which seemed to involve knowing something about “his private life” (John). As they spent more time with Peter, things seemed to shift a little. John

describes their relationship as “weird...at first” but that it changed. “I don’t think Peter changed, I think our reaction to him changed.” John felt that “it was quite clearly a process of getting used to each other and feeling comfortable with each other.”

John pointed out that while Peter comes across as “a really direct kind of guy and perhaps...doesn’t mind stepping on toes a little bit,” he also felt that Peter “was very conscious himself of sort of being a stone dropped in a pond and seeing the ripple.” Through the process of working with him on their class project, the students were able to see past Peter’s, at times, gruff exterior to receive his “genuineness and his intelligence and his depth of knowledge and his willingness to hear other opinions...people warmed up to him, the whole class kind of warmed up to him.” For John personally, it was the discovery that Peter “was interested in [First Nations] issues for very personal reasons and very, very deeply held convictions” and the fact that his involvement in those issues was not just a theoretical exercise that helped to shift his perceptions about Peter.

Sarah admitted that she

did soften up and warm up to him more, getting to know him a little bit better. His bark was worse than his bite I think. He’s still Peter, he’s definitely a personality and definitely somebody that you have to take in stride.”

She attributed the shift in relationship between the students and Peter as a result of him “mellow[ing] out a bit.

Consuela was quite direct, saying that she

started out hating him, I, I hated him with a passion and then all of a sudden...I guess it was gradual or I don't know if it was just like...I liked him...at the end of it we bonded too...and I was like, cool, I never thought that would happen.

It is in the space of appearance where the actors of the world meet that the uncomfortable relationship between the familiar and the strange emerges. Before Peter became a person to the students, he was received as a caricature, a “typical government white guy in a position of power” (Sarah). An unpredictable world full of unfamiliar faces and surprise actions can trigger a longing for predictability and familiarity, longings that can easily become distorted into stereotypes and broad generalizations.

5.3.2 Stereotypes and Their Foils

Distilling unique individuals down to a list of traits, characteristics, and behaviors robs them of the possibility of self-distinction through action, blurring the plural actors who make up the common world into the mass of society. The essential uniqueness that is the precondition for plurality, and thus for action, becomes

obscured when we are received merely as a member of our social group, as one of among others of our type. And while we may greet such treatment with resentment or hostility, we end up treating others very much the same, as someone we have met before, a pre-judgment that springs from “some deep place of cultural memory or in more recent encounters with people ‘just like them,’” (Levinson, 1997, p. 440).

According to Dr. Mac, one of the biggest challenges from the outset of the semester

was in people bringing biases and stereotypes about Native Canadians and they did bring a lot of that into the class, in two different directions. One was in viewing Indians as poverty-stricken, substance-abusers, violent, socially dysfunctional and personally troubled individuals and the other extreme was mythologizing the Indian, ‘there was the great sage warrior,’ intuitively nature-based, spiritual, a deep understanding of the universe kind of thing.

Dr. Mac thought that the students did a remarkable job in shifting their perspectives and he attributed Abbie’s participation contributing significantly to this shift. “Abbie is just totally a person, she is not a symbol of anything and that, plus the attitude that we took, quickly drove those stereotypes away.” By approaching others merely as “representation[s]” of those they may resemble, their unique

“personhood” is dissolved, robbing them of their “unique story and singular opinions”(Bickford, 1995, p. 318) and in doing so, a place in the world.

Tropes of otherness are so deeply conditioned within us that even with the intention of being open to another, our subtle prejudices precede us, distorting the scene before we even arrive. Many of the students were struggling to work through the layers of conditioning that at times revealed surprising preconceptions or prejudices. At one point in the semester Consuela caught herself thinking, “wow, this is cool, they’re like urban natives, and it was kind of like, what am I thinking? They’re not like...tigers in the city, they’re people!” It was the insidiousness and tenacity of these ideas that upset many of the students and they were desperate to shake the dangerous misconceptions they occasionally found themselves operating under.

Marigold and Kara both struggled with the extent to which these stereotypes were “ingrained” in their thinking. Marigold expressed feeling so infiltrated by these ideas that she was trying to find ways to “attack” herself in order to “break them down.” Kara was frustrated because she had been raised to be aware of prejudice and the harms of stereotypes. She felt that her mother had been “so diligent yet the stereotypes still popped into her brain,” adding that “racism is something you are trained not to look at...there are so many things you don’t notice.”

Marigold agreed but pointed out that just because you can’t see them, things like “race, class and gender” still have implications on “your perceptions about your ability to move around the world,” although she was still confused about what to do

with this knowledge. “It’s hard to unlearn attitudes by educating yourself,” especially when they are so pervasive. Sarah agreed, saying

we’re all a little racist in some aspects, like I am in certain ways and if anyone was to say that they’re not, well then that’s bullshit...we all...come up with certain conceptions about people because you don’t know them and you have these certain ideas in your head...you know like all Chinese are bad drivers, things like that that are, totally racist, stereotypical and creating, perpetuating these myths.

Consuela also commented about society being saturated with prejudicial thinking but struggled to come to grips with her own responsibility for her thoughts and actions, explaining,

I guess that’s just how I was (pause), I don’t want to say it was how I was raised because I wasn’t, but it’s just the society that I live in has made me (pause), I hate blaming things on people or institutions, you know.

In politics we address others as we believe them to be but the danger posed by the rise of the social is that we begin addressing each other as types, failing to see the person behind the presumption. “It is our strangeness that makes us familiar” (Levinson, 1997, p. 440); to be the same is to be indistinguishable from one another

and it is our essential distinctiveness that puts us in the position of being able to recognize and witness the others with whom we share the world. And while superficially it may seem that ‘they are all alike,’ “[o]ur multiplicity and distinctiveness as individuals means there are differences even within groups that are seen (from without or within) as homogenous” (Bickford, 1995, p. 329, citing Reagon, 1983).

5.3.3 *An Authentic Relation*

Arendt (1998) warns that as the public realm is increasingly jeopardized by the homogenizing forces of the social, we risk losing the one place where we may truly appear and reveal our “specific uniqueness” (p. 181) or *who* we are. “The rule of the social” demands a “predictable ordering of self as subject” (Orlie, 1995, p. 339), trapping autonomous, unpredictable actors into socially generated “characters” (Arendt, p. 181), predictable and familiar. *Who* a person may be is obscured by *what* they appear to be as communicated by their “qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings” (Arendt, p. 179).

Arendt’s distinction between *who* and *what* a person are resonates with the students’ interpretation and use of the word “authenticity,” a concept they connected with action and speech as opposed to mere talking and doing. For John “voice and authenticity” were directly related to “the genuine nature of the communication that [some guests] put forth into the space.” He described an

“honesty and immediacy” present in those moments when he felt “real dialogue” is achieved, when something in the guest’s presence made him “sit up and listen.”

John believed that guests conveyed a sense of authenticity by “speaking meaningfully in the moment.” Both John and Sarah linked authenticity with the idea of “coming from the heart,” or “speaking from the heart,” a “clichéd expression,” John felt but he also felt it was the best way to articulate something so intangible. *Ex animo*, Latin for “from the heart,” means sincerely, which is related to the honesty John looks for in a person’s words. Conseula was also looking for a similar sense of honesty.

some politicians or some guests we had...they say [things] in a way that makes you think that's what they want you to hear. That's their strategy and in a dialogue that feels comfortable, words that they are saying are the words that they are meaning in the way that they are saying them and you don't have to question it.

5.3.3.1 *Georgia McFarlane*

Georgia Macfarlane was a guest whose words appeared to do just that. She had been invited to talk about her political achievements as well as her personal perspectives on aboriginal and European Canadian relations based on her unique positioning in relation to both groups. The students were surprised when they didn’t encounter the “very polished political animal” (John) they were expecting but

instead discovered a “real person,” as Consuela described it, someone who knows “that there's different ways to connect to people and you don't have to hide behind this persona or title.” Consuela was struck by the way “she slowed down and tuned in...I could hear her. And that was like, the best. I don't think I'll ever forget talking to her.”

At the close of the dialogue Dr. Mac thanked Ms. McFarlane for her presence, commenting on “how here” she had been, something Seamus also commented on during the impromptu debrief the class had after she had left. John felt that Ms. McFarlane approached the students in a “very human way,” one that conveyed a sense of “honesty and immediacy.” Sparks thought it remarkable enough to comment on the fact that “she’s a politician but sincere.”

5.3.3.2 Judge David Clifford

Another guest to whom the students felt a strong connection was Judge Clifford, an accomplished individual both on the bench and within his community, who began his legal career at a time when aboriginal people needed special permission just to attend university. Jovial, thoughtful, humble he appeared almost more excited than the students that morning, arriving early and heartily greeting them as they came into the classroom. As the class gathered into a circle, he waited eagerly, leaning forward in his chair, smiling widely.

Reflecting on that day, Sarah recalled, “the feeling when I walked into the classroom, it was so different...he was just a bundle of like...positive energy, you

could just feel it.” Sarah attributed this in part to “the way that he himself as a speaker, approached [the encounter]...because he was so humble.” This sense of humility and his ability to “speak from the heart,” made her feel that she was “in the presence of greatness...what a beautiful person, it is sooo rare to come across people like that!”

Sarah felt that it was more “typical” for some one to “go into the discussion sitting up [at the head of classroom], taking a centre role.” This is pretty much how Wilson Chambers and Warner Jackson entered, as expert and station, and the students received them as such. Sarah compared those experiences to the dialogue with Judge Clifford, who the students felt was not hiding behind anything, “you could just feel that he was open, that he didn’t have an agenda or anything.”

What made these encounters with Judge Clifford and Georgia McFarlane so strikingly different than their earlier experiences? Both guests directed their full attention toward that classroom in that moment, as opposed to being wrapped up in their own story or agenda. They intentionally made space for the students to speak up and appeared to listen carefully and give consideration to the ideas being put forward. They did not approach them as an audience, ‘young people,’ or even as students in a classroom but as people in the world.

Importantly, they both arrived as *who* they were, with their social positioning as an addendum, not their entire persona. At the outset Judge Clifford announced, “I am not my title,” and told them that a true measure of a person is what they do in the world. Ms. McFarlane similarly took steps to even the playing field by trying to

diffuse the impact of her social title, something that certainly registered with John: “she doesn't put herself on a pedestal just because she's a politician...she didn't talk down to us – she stepped down or we stepped up or we were all on the same level.”

5.3.3.3 Dr. Mac

Dr. Mac showed a similar willingness to step from behind his title and allow the students a chance to get to know him a bit more as a person when he agreed to a dialogue the students called, “Getting to Know Dr. Mac.” They felt that they had shared a great deal about themselves as they got to know their fellow classmates and that this sharing had helped them grow closer. Dr. Mac, however, still felt a little distant to them and they wanted to know more about who he was. This was a novel request; no other group of students had felt compelled to ask this of him but he happily obliged the request.

Dr. Mac shared stories about his youth, early political activities, and a variety of personal and professional decisions. He answered questions about the things that scared him and what, if anything, he regretted. The students were visibly happy knowing these personal aspects about Dr. Mac, thanking him at the end “for sharing and for being honest.” Kara said that she “appreciate[d]” him sharing his stories because, “it's helped to deal with those preconceived notions of power and authority that can creep up when I'm in your office. Hearing these experiences gives us something to relate to.”

Linking the idea of self-disclosure and trust, John talked about the importance of “being able to open up and share parts of yourself, particularly to create trust...even in a public space you have to show part of your private self in order to create trust.” John is referring here to something far subtler than the cathartic purging of inner hauntings made so familiar by our confessional culture and most clearly evidenced by the popularity of the “talk show” approach to public secret sharing.

[I]t doesn't necessarily have to be everyone, telling everything. If one person makes an effort to open up...in doing that, they're creating a situation of trust, you know, I trust you enough to tell you this, I'm doing this for a purpose and we can move on from here...everybody doesn't have to give a piece of their soul. If someone opens up and creates that space, then you can have dialogue in that space.

This is what distinguished the authentic interactions from the ones that were less authentic – it was the willing openness of their guests, and Dr. Mac for that matter, to step from behind the barriers of social positioning. Those interactions that the students felt were most authentic were the ones where visitors recognized the disproportionate power that they held. Arriving to the classroom with no agenda but with a genuine sense of curiosity, these guests made an effort to connect with the students' interests, questions and concerns, at times offering their own personal

perspectives, a personal disclosure offered as a gesture of good faith and, perhaps, an invitation to join them.

5.4 Summary

Under the conditions of mass society, we meet one another not as distinct individuals but as caricatures, broad sweeping generalizations that attempt to tidy up human affairs into neat categories, letting everyone know their place and the places of others. The effect of these generalizations is the de-humanization of the actor, prevented as they are from appearing in public as their own distinct self, relegated to be only one of many.

Those guests who were prepared to break from their socially scripted roles and who refused to act according to type helped to create the conditions for an authentic relation by they revealing *who* they were instead of hiding behind *what* they are. This self-disclosure becomes an essential part of living among plural others, helping to build trust in a society where not everything is as it seems to be. The process of revealing ourselves, however, can be a fearful process, and this fear threatens to keep us trapped within our own subjectivity. The following chapter delves into this “fear of exposure,” as Sarah referred to it, exploring some of the personal risks involved when we venture from the security of our own minds and into the world to be with others.

CHAPTER 6: BEHIND THE MASK

6.1 Introduction

In “Finding Their Voice,” I described the students’ responses as they encountered the forces of the social, a world of unspoken rules that left them struggling to find their political voices. In “Ensemble” I described some of the students’ fears that arose in their encounter with others. I also explored the idea of the “authentic relationship” according to the students and how labels and stereotypes, imposed or selected, interfered with the realization of this relationship by shaping how they interpreted one another and their guests. An authentic encounter required the shedding of socially determined roles and a willingness to disclose something about *who* a person is.

In this chapter I take a closer look at the process of disclosure and the potential emotional responses that wait in the wings of any public encounter. According to the students’ perspective, self-disclosure is key to building trust. But this could potentially lead to an overrun of self-interest, which poses a serious threat to action if left unchecked. Focusing on the interrelation of action, identity and emotion I explore how each manifested and influenced the other within the DLP pedagogical encounter.

6.2 Into the Flux

One of the earlier assignments during the semester was an oral presentation about some aspect of each student's life history. Many of the students chose to share very personal stories making for an intensely emotional day that was quite significant for the students. Sarah described it as

a day of revealing...a way for everybody to come out with their weaknesses or things that shaped them in kind of an emotionally charged way, when they were younger and made them into the person that they are now...it felt like a coming out for a lot of people.

Sarah compared the day to an AA meeting, saying that she found some comfort from the process of sharing these stories. She said that "it kind of puts things in perspective, like you're not the only person that struggled with whatever issue; there's so many other people that have all these things going on." Dr. Mac was also surprised that so many of the students chose to reveal "some very deep, very powerful, very troubling aspects of their background," remarking that "they went very personal very fast." Sparks was "definitely" surprised by the personal and emotional depth of the stories saying, "I was expecting like 'I was born in a little town' not so much the really emotional things."

As “the quiet guy in the corner,” John often spoke of the importance of “truly listening” in dialogue but he also believed that “being able to open up and share parts of yourself,” was essential, something which he felt he did

fairly easily one-on-one or with two or three people, but never really in a group context, never really in a context that wasn’t personal...I recognized that I needed to be more open in the public space, willing to say what I think.

Both John and Sarah spoke about needing “the confidence to speak up...and not feel you need to be defensive” (John). When referring to some of the “more personal” stories, Consuela talked about having “so much respect,” for the stories and the story tellers, especially with “some of the harder stories...to tell, it was kind of like ‘whoa, I really respect you for getting through that’... it must have been super hard for them to tell those stories.” What was it that made these deeply personal stories so hard to tell and something to ‘get through’? And what did John feel he needed to be defensive about?

6.2.1 The Fear of Exposure

Referring to her experiences in the regular university classroom, Sarah said that it had felt “dangerous...to reveal too much of who I am.” There was a perceived risk inherent in the process of self-disclosure, which left Sarah and her peers feeling

vulnerable, exposed and questioning whether or not they “really want to put [themselves] out there.” For Sarah, her biggest fear that first week of classes “was the fear of exposure to my peers, and not really knowing how that was going to be received.”

Sarah’s fear of exposure is a signature of the “paradox of plurality” (Bickford, 1995, p. 328), which means that even as we are unique human beings, our appearance in the world is inextricably intertwined with the “receptive presence of others,” (Bickford, p. 328). It is only as things and people appear in public that they become ‘real,’ but there are no guarantees as to what kind of reception an appearance might receive.

Sarah worried at times about “not knowing the proper way to say something,” that something she was going to say wouldn’t “be received on a good level” or that her words might be “received...in a really defensive way.” She admitted that one source of her silence was the fact that she didn’t feel “prepared for the possible negative backlash...I don’t really know what people are going to respond to or how they are going to respond.”

We appear like the Greek *daimon*, which is “visible only to those he encounters” (Arendt, 1998, p. 180), and while action may reveal the agent, “this agent is neither author nor producer” (Arendt, p. 184). Once a story has been set in motion through human action, it is taken up into the web of human relationships as “soon as the fleeting moment is past” (Arendt, p. 192), which is why Arendt says that “to do and to suffer” are “opposite sides of the same coin” (p. 190).

In the oral history exercise, the students told their stories and it helped to create a strong sense of camaraderie by helping them to get to know one another. During her final interview, however, Sarah disclosed an interesting development; in the process of getting to know her classmates over the course of the semester she ended up feeling quite misled by the story shared by at least one person.

[B]ecause the stories that were shared gave an illusion or impression, at least to me, gave an impression of a much different experience than some of the things that came out [over the course of the semester]...I had this impression in my head that was based on some of the stories that people shared thinking that maybe they're coming from a similar perspective as I am, or are on a certain level of understanding.

Sarah provided another interesting example of agent and audience being on different pages when she shared the story about feeling some tensions in the first week of class. She couldn't quite put her finger on what it was but it had caused her a certain degree of "discomfort." The mystery was solved later in the week when a classmate approached Sarah and asked what she thought about "non-native people working with native people." Sarah was a little astonished replying,

I think that's wonderful, why wouldn't you build coalitions and why wouldn't you want to do some things together to make people more strong?

And she was like, ‘oh I’m so happy you said that, it’s been bothering me all week’ and it kind of made me stop and think, wow, is this why everybody is kind of keeping their distance with me because they’re afraid, of, afraid of something, I don’t know?

In the first example, Sarah is surprised to find her self confronted with actions that contradicted what she thought she knew about a person through the story that they shared. In the second example, Sarah finds herself confronted by a surprising interpretation of herself as someone to be feared. She had been written, not as an individual or a peer but as member of a group bearing a grudge against the dominant culture and, temporarily at least, held apart from her classmates.

6.2.2 Surprise (Re)actions

The stories of our self and of others are subjected to the same stereotypes, labels and generalizations that created many of the roadblocks to dialogue. The weight of these socially imposed identities and the narratives that sustain them threaten to paralyze our capacity for action. Sarah observed that “we are pretty hard wired a lot of the time and you just sort of end up responding in sort of the same ways.” In Arendt’s view “we are both irresponsible and unfree when we behave predictably” (Orlie, 1995, p. 343), according to social ‘norms’ and associated behaviors. Doing so “limits our freedom to act” by increasing and extending “social

rule” (Orlie, p. 343). It is only by “[f]lowing” against the stream of “social norms” through spontaneous action that we are able to determine the effects of our actions upon others, intentional or otherwise (Orlie, p. 340, citing Arendt OT 139-147).

Similarly connecting self-disclosure and action, Sarah thought that “voice and identity” were “intimately entwined” and it was this connection that kept her silent at times. “I feel like I’m hyper-sensitive to my own voice and that’s what stifles me at times,” she said, and in certain situations “I really don’t like the person I become.”

The revelation of a *who* through the act of disclosure is, at the same time, a “moment of self-discovery” (Levinson, 1997, p. 39; Honig, 1995). Action, and the self it gives rise to, “springs up ex nihilo and, most disturbing, it is self-surprising” (Honig, p. 140), making “uncertainty...the decisive character of human affairs” (Arendt, 1998, p. 232) and “courage...the political virtue par excellent” (Arendt, p. 36).

Sarah described engaging in dialogue as sometimes “like going into a battle,” a description that resonates with Honig’s (1995) description of an “agonistic politics.” Within these political spaces the realization of identity is always marked by a struggle with competing social forces and the actions of others. The revelatory quality of action calls to “the self’s agonal passion for distinction, individuation, and outstanding achievement” (Honig, p. 140), offering the opportunity for self-realization. But this can only be achieved if we are willing to leave behind *what* we know about ourselves and expose ourselves to the “risks” and “dangers of the radically contingent public realm where anything can happen” (Honig, p. 140).

6.2.3 Taking it Personally

The fear of being misinterpreted and the disorienting qualities of self-discovery loomed large in the classroom. Sarah felt that being “thrown into a dialogue situation where it’s all very personal does make it a lot more difficult” and that there were times when it was “hard not to take it personally.”

Consuela frequently expressed reservations about speaking up out of a fear of being misunderstood or of saying something foolish, or dangerous, and forever being associated with that act. Her description is particularly graphic, conjuring an image of seared flesh that leaves a permanent mark.

[C]ertain taboos you can't talk about them...or maybe you don't want to express yourself as freely as you really want to just because you don't want to be branded, you're a racist, you're *x*, you're that.

Sparks also talked about social pressures, what it meant to fit in and what it felt like to be on the outside. She described two instances where she had not been accepted as part of a group. The first one she said, “nearly killed me.” In the second instance, in response to some classmates not interacting with her because they didn’t share some of her opinions, she said, “normally that would have just, that would really have killed me, but you know it totally didn’t.” She laughed breezily as she said this, but the way she described it, it was as if her life was on the line.

Arendt (1998) traces the infiltration of life concerns into the political realm to the break with the ancient world heralded by the rise of Christianity. The offer of immortal life subverted the relationship between the individual and the world, shifting “the most mortal thing, human life,” into a “position of immortality” previously held only by “the cosmos” (Arendt, p. 314). The “worldly immortality” achieved through action became “meaningless”(Arendt, p. 314) in the face of an individual human life everlasting and “individual life” ultimately displaced “political life of the body politic” (Arendt, p. 315).

Under the conditions of modernity, public opinions and beliefs are driven underground to be “cultivated privately, individually, and without public effect” (Brown, 2006, p. 40). Keeping these beliefs locked away in the realm of the private means that there can be no public judgment. Opinions that can no longer acted upon are reduced to identifiers and markers that assume the place of the *who* that can only be revealed in action. The modern subject shifts from existential being to essential being, the “beliefs and practices” of whom are “presumed to issue from the essence or inner truth of the person” (Brown, 2006, p. 43). Identifying and naming someone according to their opinions and beliefs becomes the “means of ordering, classifying and regulating individuals in the age of mass society” (Brown, p. 41).

Things are suddenly very personal – under the conditions of modernity one’s identity is on the line with every action and every word, creating high stakes for public encounters. Protest against, or disagreement with, a belief cuts to the core in a manner that now feels mortal. As the social pushes the beliefs that once motivated

public action deeper and deeper within the realm of the private it creates suffering for the political actor and private citizen alike.

6.3 Borderlands

6.3.1 Emotional Upheavals

The erosion of the distinction between public and private that drove political concerns underground also allowed formerly private activities and preoccupations to infiltrate the political realm, resulting in the pronounced self-consciousness and self-concern that are the hallmarks of mass society. Action must be disinterested; it exists only where preoccupations with the mortal and emotional self have been abandoned (Arendt, 1998, 2006). Levinas agrees with this need for “disinterestedness,” which he defines as “the noninvestment of one’s conscious ego” (in Todd, 2003, p. 11). Levinas claim that “affect is precisely what gets in the way” of ethical interactions with others, through the blurring of “the borders delineating” the interior subjective world from the exterior world (Todd, p. 11).

“Listening is fraught with emotional landmines” (Boler, 1999, p. 179) and at times the classroom felt like an emotional minefield. Sparks said she was surprised

at how emotional our whole group is, I was not expecting that...every once in a while it just hits you over the head like a hammer. It’s almost like we create this storm, and everyone gets caught up in it; it’s very strange.

Dr. Mac commented that he was a little surprised at the outcome of the Oral History presentations and how personal, “deep” and “troubling” some of the stories were. He felt that the topic was definitely responsible for eliciting particularly strong responses but that the personalities in the room most likely contributed as well. For his part, he found it “a challenge to manage that [level of emotions] in a way that everybody would feel safe.” Sparks talked about “coming home every day emotionally drained,” and wondering “is the whole semester going to be like this? Am I going to be able to survive?”

Sarah worried about “com[ing] out as being overly emotional” and talked about “try[ing] to separate myself from those emotions and know that I’m saying things in a good way and in a way that I’m not hurting others.” Noting the impact of emotion on dialogue, she believed that

letting too much emotion getting involved in the dialogue process can really hinder it...a little bit of emotion is okay but getting drawn out emotion really just makes other people very uncomfortable...they get really uncomfortable and get frustrated.

Some students experience the project of “critical inquiry,” with its demands to examine one’s own beliefs and positioning, as “profoundly threatening to their very survival” (Boler, 1999, p. 194). Critical inquiry can put the student’s “precarious sense of identity” (Boler, p. 191) at risk by creating the possibility for their

perspectives and beliefs, so deeply associated with their identity, to be altered or changed. Defensive anger and guilt, the two common emotional responses to this risk, help the learner in their attempts to deflect attention away from this sense of “vulnerability” (Boler, p. 192; Todd, 2003).

“I hate to say it,” Sparks said, “but they are the kings and queens of guilt.” “Who is?” I asked. “The First Nation community.” It was the final interview we would have together and this statement emerged very early on in the interview, taking me completely off guard. It was not the kind of comment I was expecting at all. Different perspectives and opinions yes, but the moment I heard it I realized the extent to which I hadn’t been expecting that opinion as an outcome of the DLP.

Sparks’ preoccupation with guilt emerged early in the semester and remained a consistent theme. Sparks and Sarah both shared the story of when Sarah had been talking about being at a conference recently where both English and French Canada were recognized, yet there was no aboriginal inclusion. She had mentioned to the organizer that, as an Aboriginal Canadian, she would have appreciated acknowledgement of their culture within the Canadian matrix as well.

Sparks questioned the appropriateness of Sarah speaking up, wondering if she thought guilt was the best way to go about things. Sarah welcomed the question because “it wasn’t provocative but respectful and I said, well you know I see it more as inclusion and I don’t see it as guilt and I told her my reasons.”

Sparks viewed guilt as a tool or weapon, one that gave the wielder some kind of social or political power. “They [First Nations people] just assume once they

bring up all that guilt that everyone will back down. And it's not something I think I'm willing to do any more." She resists the "inevitable responsibility" (Todd, 2003, p. 94) that guilt calls up, denying it altogether and replacing it with anger. "I don't feel guilty anymore...I've given that up and now it just makes me feel angry when people go guilt tripping or um, you know... yeah, when people go guilt tripping it just makes me angry."

Levinas believes that a sense of guilt can "giv[e] rise to an inevitable responsibility" to others (Todd, 2003, p. 92). For example, Serena described her "growth" during the course of the semester as being "related to my relationship to the aboriginal community and the residual guilt I've felt of being a white person but realizing that I can contribute even if I am not aboriginal by approaching with respect." But it is not "[un]common for students to protest their innocence and their anger at 'being made to feel guilty'" (Todd, p. 93) and confront educators with an "unproductive guilt," which frequently devolves into the kind of defensive anger that forecloses on further "complex self-reflection or critical inquiry" (Boler, 1999, p. 187).

In the first two interviews, as Sparks struggled with the contradictions and confusions she detected around her, there was an element of compliance or resignation. A few times she questioned what she perceived as unfair double standards but quickly brushed it off with a "but whatever," a shrug and a smile. There was a degree of lightness in her delivery that was mostly absent by the final interview, which was infused an air of finality, as if she was washing her hands of the

whole thing. “I just don’t want to have patience with the whole situation anymore. I, I’m just so over it.”

6.3.2 *The Social Pariah and the Parvenu*

Arendt describes the *social pariah* and the *parvenu* as embodiments or manifestations of the emotional responses to the demands of public action described in the previous section. The *parvenu* is a person so disoriented by human plurality and its effects that she either chooses to ignore her positioning or attempts a “willful transcendence” (Orlie, 1995, p. 345; Levinson, 1997). A common response for the *parvenu* is to declare the issues on the table as the result of “actions they themselves have not committed,” “injustices” that occurred in the past and therefore they are not responsible because “they personally have done nothing wrong” (Todd, 2003, p. 94).

Sparks had talked about how her younger sister and most of her friends agreed with her that “it’s not worth it [addressing First Nations concerns], you know I don’t want to take ownership of this because it has gone on for so long.” Sparks insisted on locating First Nations concerns and issues in the past, saying “these are people we are talking about who are healing from major, major issues in the past.” She felt that the class was “only...able to have decent dialogues with people like Judge Clifford who completely focused on moving past everything.”

Sparks didn’t believe that they could have a “real dialogue” unless they could split this moment in history from the greater context from which it emerged and

archive the historical burden of colonialism. She felt that “if we’re going to have a dialogue...there needs to be something behind it other than, you know like, who else can we blame, how else can we whine about this,” demonstrating the “lack of historical consciousness” that is associated with the *parvenu* (Levinson, 1997, p. 446).

The *parvenu* attempts to reduce the weight of history and smooth over the profound social and political differences in society by emphasizing the bond of humanity and the similarity of all their concerns (Orlie, 1995). Sparks articulates this particular preoccupation with humanity-as-one, arguing “in the end, I mean, we’re human beings who want the bond” and “it’s the divide that makes me angry because as far as I am concerned we are all human beings, culture or no.” Sparks’ words echo Rodney King’s plea, when she asks “can’t everybody get along?” a statement Brown (2006) considers emblematic of the “terribly thin vision of membership, participation, and social transformation” present in modern society (p. 87).

Sparks insists on a type of equality that is “based on the conformism inherent in society” (Arendt, 1998, p. 41), ultimately reducing the unpredictable complexity of human plurality to a manageable sameness. Dialogue is described as “doing round robins and everyone having a say,” and comprised of “an equality of speakers and witnesses, where the speaker will become a witness and then witnesses become speakers...there has to be that two sided, equal, equality thing around the table,” which she felt “should be...automatic.”

One of the greatest inequalities to Sparks was what she perceived as different sets of rules for aboriginals than for European Canadians. On a number of occasions

she expressed frustration that the perspectives of aboriginal people on aboriginal issues were seen to be more valid than hers and asserted her right to have an opinion. She was quite upset after a conversation with one guest, saying that she thought it was unfair because “she is entitled to have her opinion be more important because it revolves around a First Nations issue, her opinion is automatically more important than anybody else’s and it’s just, it’s just not true.”

She also felt that her First Nations classmates “[had] it easier, because I mean they’d make comments in class like you know, for anybody else would be racist but they can say it because they are First Nations, and that...it’s not fair.” She felt similarly about a fellow she had worked with who thought she was “a useless white girl,” saying, “of course, you know, being First Nations, he’s allowed to make racist comments like that, which is another thing I don’t get but whatever, I’m used to it at this point.”

Sparks’ views weren’t winning her a lot of support in the classroom and while there was bound to be some amount of silent agreement, the majority of her peers did not share her perspectives. John felt that “being a progressive within the status quo is something that most of us don’t see as going far enough to right the situations that we see around us.” He mentioned “a voice” in the class “that is a little more...mainstream and in another context, like a Political Science class it would be...the liberal, progressive voice,” but admitted that an “opinion [can be] difficult to defend in a dialogue space when it seems like no one agrees with it” and he sensed that this more “mainstream” voice was “shutting down.”

Sarah commented in class that she thought it was “noble” of Sparks to say things that might not be very popular. In fact the early class dialogues where she spoke up she was often thanked or commended for taking some of the more controversial positions but eventually she stopped putting them forth. She talked about getting tired of taking all the heat for her less popular view points when others admitted outside of class that they agreed with her but were too afraid to speak up.

Sparks wasn’t feeling heard and she was frustrated because she felt that actions she had taken were not being acknowledged. She felt she had “made a positive contribution” through some of the work she had done with treaties⁹ saying, “I’ve done a lot and I’ve pulled a lot of strings to try to make sure that things are better.” She ultimately gave up trying to justify her actions, switching to the past tense as she admitted that she “did feel really badly” but conceded that she felt powerless to implement the necessary changes saying “I wish I could turn back time...but I can’t.” Her voice trailed off, sounding tired when it returned, “it’s just, like, I don’t know.”

Sparks was struggling under the weight of a history that had begun to feel unbearable and beyond her power to remedy. Arendt (1998) refers to this press of history as “belatedness,” the idea of being a “newcomer and a stranger” to an already “existing world” (p. 185). We join the world as the new and are surprised to be “treated as if we have been here before,” (Levinson, 1997, p. 440). The promise of new beginnings inherent in natality is tempered by a world that precedes our arrival

⁹ Sparks had spent a co-op term working in a treaty office

“constitut[ing] us as particular kinds of people...simultaneously heirs to a specific history and new to it” (Levinson, p. 437).

Repeatedly denied the reception she feels she deserves, “as a ‘human being in general,’” the *parvenu* eventually “grows resentful like the *social pariah* (OT 79-88)” (Orlie, 1995, p. 345). By the final interview, Sparks’ resignation had flourished into pronounced anger and frustration; she was “over it,” had “lost patience” and “turned kind of sour,” (Sparks) accepting her “what-ness as a given” (Orlie, p. 345) and giving up on any attempts to “transform...the political meanings that attach to [her] social position” (Orlie, p. 345), relying instead on the “certainty” (Orlie, p. 345) of her fixed positioning.

The call for critical self-reflection is resisted as an “assimilationist demand” based upon “denial of herself and her pain”(Orlie, 1995, p. 345), tendencies reflected in the reactions of “those white students who feel so fated by their social identity that they resign themselves to it” (Levinson, 1997, p. 445). Sparks declared that she didn’t

want to get adopted into a tribe just so that I have, you know, some kind of status, I have status already, and I don’t have to be First Nations to have place in the discussions or have opinions about them.

She said that her experiences in the Dialogue Program put her “on a different career path,” moving away from working with First Nations issues, at least for the

immediate future, saying that if the “opportunity presents itself” she may get involved but it was not going to be something she would “be actively looking for.” In the final class dialogue she emphatically asserted, “I am not an activist,” something she claimed to have discovered during her participation in the DLP. When asked what kind of lessons she was taking away from her experience, she offered “self-advocacy” as the most important lesson she felt she had learned.

6.3.3 The Contingency of Identity

The DLP is an example of the type of education that Boler (1999) refers to as “a pedagogy of discomfort.” This form of critical inquiry calls the students away from the comfortable familiarity of “learned beliefs and habits,” for the unfamiliar and “risky” world “of ethical and moral differences” (Boler, p. 181). This requires a willingness on the part of the learner to step out from the subjective inner world of the self and experience the world from other perspectives.

Similarly for Arendt (1998, 2006) self-realization is, paradoxically, only possible when we are prepared to “put all of our identities in question and refuse merely and passively to reinscribe” the rule of the social (Orlie, 1995, p. 339). Personal identity must be “flexible: leading to a willingness to reconsider and undergo possible transformation of our self-identity in relation to others and to history” (Boler, 1999, p. 178-179).

“Flexible” is a word that John used to describe Sarah’s thinking and way of being in the class, something he greatly admired and aspired to emulate. Sarah

revealed an aspect of this flexibility in a story that she shared during an interview about her own experience of growing up “sort of ‘white’” in a native town. While the majority of the other aboriginal students in her community went to a separate school, Sarah “tri[ed] to ‘pass’ as being white,” for a while but was confronted about her identity by others, who “would call me chug or other odd racialized comments.” These comments initially “scared” her, but as she got older and was exposed to more racist comments, she started to “identify primarily as Indian and start[ed] talking back.”

Sarah admitted to struggling with a “duality” that she connected to her mixed heritage saying

I believe that some First Nations people do feel that way [prefer to exclude non-aboriginal people from being involved in First Nations concerns] but I would be denying half of myself to say something like that...That’s the thing I always have trouble with, I mean I have to recognize that my father is European, and that my grandmother is [European]...I can be quite critical of Euro Canadians in terms of their treatment of aboriginal people but I also have to recognize that it’s part of me too and so how do I reconcile that?

She talked about how “its always interesting when you’re in a room, what identity you take on, especially being different cultures....I just think about being

comfortable sitting within that tension within myself that I sometimes feel.” This process isn’t necessarily easy Sarah conceded, saying, “it is more difficult to navigate when you...[have] to decide which hat you’re going to wear or if you have to wear any hats.”

Sarah’s words show an identity always in motion, shifting between different viewpoints. In an earlier example, she interrogated herself for placing judgment on an aboriginal leader for talking like “a white man,” stepping outside of herself to examine the statement and consider where her judgments may be unfair or incorrect. And while she appeared a very confident thinker and actor, her words reveal the real challenges of navigating a constantly changing landscape of personal and political identity.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter I moved the analysis from the external world of politics to explore the inner private world of the actor and the, at times, tenuous boundaries between the two. Modernity’s deep investment in self-image and the tangling of political acts with private emotions create a world governed by fear and self-consciousness, where political action is a potentially life threatening activity and self-protection trumps worldly concerns.

The actor must be prepared to weather the demands of an agonistic public and brave the unpredictability of others in the act of self-disclosure implicit in all other acts. An education oriented toward the public is still at least a semi-private

activity, straddling the line between home and *polis*. The project of consciousness-raising or transformative education is to encourage students to learn to see both the world and themselves in new and surprising ways, a project both freeing and terrifying.

Personal self-image is a private affair, more dream-like than worldly — tame, contained, familiar. Appearance in the world on the other hand is unpredictable and agonistic, casting the actor into a plotline they didn't write, confronting the actor with versions of his or herself that may or may not be appealing and which call into question their positioning in the world. By allowing our sense of our self to shift from the false comfort of a frozen identity made of ego and dreams, we can change our relationships with one another and speak from places free from familiar binary traps of right and wrong, good and evil, colonizer and colonized, collectively creating new relationships and new histories.

CHAPTER 7: ACTION'S AGONIES

7.1 Introduction

The research for this study was guided by two questions: 1) what are students' experiences in the Dialogue and Leadership Program? and 2) what can these experiences tell us about the possibility of creating dialogic classroom spaces that support the emergence of the political actor?

In the following chapter I draw key insights from the students' experiences in the DLP and explore them alongside Hannah Arendt's discussion of politics. The students' experiences in the program tell a story marked by profound struggles for political voice, authentic relations, and a sense of equality; their experiences also illustrate the variety of social pressures that confront the actor in an already "agonist" public sphere. In chapter 8, I focus on my second research question.

7.2 The Struggle for Voice

The topic of "Indigeneity in Canada: Past, Present, and Future," was arguably the most challenging topic that the DLP had tackled to date. From the very first guest dialogue, the students were blindsided by a variety of social forces that threw the possibility of dialogue into question. Time and again they were confronted with forces that left them struggling to find their voices and to connect with others in authentic ways. The students were engaged in a quest to act in the face of political

correctness and conformity, the overwhelming uncertainty of the public realm, and the inadequacy of language that left them struggling to “figure out how to speak” (Seamus).

The students’ experiences in the DLP exemplified the “agonistic public” (Honig, 1995, p.140), where the realization of voice is pitched in a struggle with competing social forces and the actions of others. Actors appear to one another in speech and action in a space of appearance riddled with tensions between one and many, the familiar and the strange, and the past, the present and future. As an agonistic public, the space of appearance is both a space of freedom and of profound struggle and suffering. Each actor in the public realm must bear the actions and responses of other actors in a paradoxical relationship where the appearance of an autonomous individual depends upon the presence and reception of others in order to appear at all (Arendt, 1998, 2006).

The central struggle for the students was the struggle for voice. They wanted the opportunity to contribute to political conversations and to feel as if they were truly being heard. From their first guest dialogue, they sought ways in which to get their voices out, asking for formal debriefs with the professors to reflect on dialogues as they occurred, looking back for missed opportunities or fumbles that might shed light on how to be more successful the next time. This struggle was a constant concern, especially near the beginning of the semester, and the students could frequently be heard discussing their dilemmas among themselves over lunch, in the

elevator and walking down the halls. Consuela even began to wonder if perhaps they were “not the right people.”

Sarah talked about “voice and identity” being “intimately entwined” and how this interrelationship can be both a motivator and a hindrance to action. Although she was eager to contribute, she found herself holding back. She felt “hypersensitive” to the sound of her voice and nervous about the unpredictability of how she might be received, something she felt had contributed to her reluctance to speak.

Arendt (1998) believes that the “disclosure” of *who* a person is lies beyond the will of the individual and yet it “is implicit” (Arendt, p. 179) in everything they say or do. *Who* a person is revealed to be is a public identity that emerges from the “the living flux of acting and speaking” (p. 187). Through the public exercise of judgment, the actor reveals more than just their judgments but at the same time “discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is” (Arendt, 2006c, p. 220).

This revelatory capacity distinguishes action from “mere productive activity” and speech from “mere talk” (Arendt, 1998, p. 180), which Benhabib (2003) illustrates through the comparison of the *praxis* of action with the *poiesis* of “making.” With praxis, “the doer and the deed are one; the doing is the revealing of who one is” (Benhabib, p. 107). Whereas the made object can stand alone as a “thing” independent of the maker, for example a work of art retains its significance whether or not the artist is known, “[a]ction without a name, a ‘Who’ attached to it, is meaningless” (Arendt, p. 180-181).

The quest for voice meant more than finding the right words at the right time; voice, as the students understood it, was an existential sign, an announcement of their appearance as distinct individuals and as political actors. John summed this up wonderfully when he commented, “voice equals inclusion equals autonomy.” By engaging in political speech and action they gained the opportunity to communicate who they were beyond mere wants or needs and distinguish themselves as human beings as opposed to, for example, a rock, a chair or a goldfish (Arendt, 1998).

The common world in which actors meet is a space overlaying all conversations, and which is beckoned into being through an interrelationship based upon “acting and speaking directly *to* one another” (Arendt, 1998, p. 182). Distinct from that of earth, nature or organic life, this “in-between” (p. 182) world made of deed and word is no less present, no less necessary for its intangibility. Arendt compares the common world to a table, which is located between those who sit around it, an “in-between, [that] both relates and separates, gather[ing] us together and yet prevent[ing] our falling over each other” (p. 52).

The students’ initial forays into public speech, however, didn’t reveal this sense of stability. In fact, the students’ comments and reflections, particularly in the class debriefs where they felt they could be most candid, revealed encounters in a confusing world that left them “floundering,” according to Sparks. When I asked her at one point if they were still trying to find their feet in the dialogues she just laughed saying, “we have no feet. We’re still trying to stand up I think when it comes to guests.”

7.3 The Struggle for an Authentic Relation

The instability the students were feeling was evident from the first guest dialogue. In the follow-up debrief many of the students were perplexed and confused by what had happened during that particular session. The students' comments revealed that they had been taken off-guard and somewhat shaken by the difficulties they experienced. Nonetheless, they seemed keen to work their way through these difficulties, using the debrief time to collectively examine their actions, looking for things that may have either helped or hindered the conversation and thinking about what they might do differently the next time.

The students continued to struggle through many of their early dialogues, finding ways of participating to various degrees of success. However, three of their encounters in particular, occurring early in the semester, left them feeling disappointed, defensive and excluded. The students' encounters with Peter Tompkins, Warner Jackson and Wilson Chambers revealed the silencing powers of title and label and how these external, socially derived markers can stand in the way of the authentic encounter.

In the cases of Warner Jackson and Wilson Chambers, both men entered the room in the role of expert and consultant, and didn't make any real attempts to engage with the students beyond their official capacity. Both men had approached the students as an audience, there to listen to what was being said but not

necessarily to contribute. These encounters left the students feeling shut out, relegated to the role of silent spectators.

Authentic relations are born in the space of appearance. They arise from the risk each person takes when they step from behind social roles and reveal who they are, beyond their own design or control. Some guests, like Georgia MacFarlane and Judge Clifford, clearly understood the difference between playing a part and being yourself. Both chose to step out from behind their titles to engage with the class, making space for the students' contributions and speaking with an "honesty" (John) that came from "the heart" (Sarah & John). Consuela particularly appreciated how Georgia MacFarlane connected social policy ideas to her own experiences and values, and how she explained her motivations as a person, rather than as a politician.

Other guests, like Warner Jackson and Wilson Chambers, held fast to their social masks, evading any deeper glimpses in to *who* they were and leaving the students with a feeling of an "inauthentic" encounter. Sparks, however, took a slightly different view than many of her classmates, maintaining that the students should approach the guests as their title. As far as she was concerned, "we're not asking for them to be themselves, we're asking them to be a representative."

Sparks wasn't the only one having difficulty seeing past titles and labels, however. The students all struggled to a certain extent with the power and prestige associated with the social positioning of many of their guests. Many of the students

of European decent also struggled to find a sense of legitimacy in conversations about First Nations issues as a result of their ‘whiteness.’

The difference between engaging with *what* someone is as opposed to *who* they are is perhaps seen most dramatically with Peter Tompkins. From the outset he came across to the students as a strong, aggressive personality, which, combined with the power they attributed to his positioning, resulted in a profound withdrawal of the students from open and spontaneous discussion and into the comfort of the group. As time passed however, the students’ initial perceptions began to shift and many of them grew to like him.

John thought that Peter may have adjusted his approach to the class somewhat, but he attributed the shift in relations primarily to the students themselves relaxing into the process and becoming more comfortable with the topic, which helped to dissipate some of the defensiveness they were feeling. As they worked through the persistent problems of feelings of inequality and a lack of legitimacy in dialogue, many of the students finally started to see Peter as a human being, rather than a politician, a professor, or a “scary” man (Consuela).

In Consuela’s case, this shift came as a result of a chance shared elevator ride, where she had the opportunity to encounter Peter’s sense of humour. When she told me the story, she related it with a sense of wonder and surprise saying, “it was kind of like a buddy relationship that just kind of blossomed all at once and he was cool.” Consuela said that the people with whom she felt an authentic connection with seemed to realize “that there's different ways to connect to people and you

don't have to hide behind this persona or title.” She felt that by stepping out from behind their social roles, the relationship shifted and helped to bring the speakers “down to [their] level.”

7.4 The Struggle for Equality

The students did not feel equal to many of the visitors they had to the class that term. For Arendt (1998), equality is critical for action because it is “the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality word present in rulership” (p.33). Under the conditions of the social, however, rulership takes the form of conformity and the adherence to established social roles and their related appropriate behaviors. Mass society establishes participation based on *what* a person is, rather than *who* they are, ushering in phenomena such as the rule of the expert.

Reflecting on the dialogues, Sparks remarked that they had “never been really free.” Consuela acknowledged that she held back from speaking because she believed that society is set up in such a way that the person who “has more knowledge than you” possesses greater social power pointing out that “that is why [the guests] were invited.” In the presence of the expert, the students fell into their socially prescribed role as students in the classroom, inferiors according to standards of knowledge. This thinking was so ingrained that many of the students felt the need to warn guests in advance of the dialogue that the students might disagree with them.

Sarah agreed that, “when there are no guests or professors in the room the power dynamics change and we are all equal.” This was amply evident in the class-only dialogues, which the students widely agreed were the dialogues that most frequently approached the authentic moments they were looking for with their guests. The students’ sense of inequality, combined with a variety of other social forces, suppressed spontaneous action and resulted in a collective silence and a frustrating sense of conformity, which John referred to as “groupthink.”

John defined “groupthink” as those perspectives and approaches that resonated with the majority of the students and which he admitted lent the class identity a pronounced “radical voice.” Affiliations according to “taste” (Arendt, 2006c, p. 218, citing Kant) or opinion are a significant part of the public sphere. We join one another based on shared taste, approaching others or inviting them to join us based on their public judgment and publicly expressed opinions. But in this tendency to “gravitate” (Sarah) toward those with whom we agree lies the dangerous temptation to remain in the “comfort zone” (John) of like minds and shared opinions.

The social forces of conformity and political correctness further complicate an already agonistic public by bringing the struggle for distinction into direct conflict with the social drive toward sameness. Conformism is a product of the assumption “that men behave and do not act with respect to each other” (Arendt, 1998, p. 42). Social rule “excludes the possibility of action” (Arendt, p.40) through the imposition of rules of behavior, which aim “to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave”

(Arendt, p.40), distorting equality and plurality into conformity and sameness.

Socially imposed identities, such as those established by political correctness or connected to title, “paralyze our capacity for action” (Levinson, 1997, p. 43). Rather than distinguishing themselves via spontaneous action, individuals become “the bearers of social roles,” such as “the bureaucrat, the businessman, the executive,” in the process “concealing” the actor “behind the social mask” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 24).

Another tool of the social that had considerable impact on the relationships that semester was political correctness, which establishes the rules of engagement that bolster the forces of conformity. Consuela was very concerned about what she perceived as unspoken rules and she frequently questioned her right to ask a question about something she was curious about because of which social grouping she belonged to (i.e. European descent, non-aboriginal). Marked by their social positioning, the students struggled to work through layers of conditioning that at times revealed their own surprising preconceptions or prejudices. At the same time, they found themselves greeted or responded to as something or someone that they were sure they were not.

7.5 Struggles With the Boundlessness of Action

In addition to contending with the social forces of conformity and political correctness, the students also found themselves held back by a persistent fear and sense of apprehension about ‘what might happen.’ This fear is a result of the boundlessness of action, the fact that every action invites a reaction, which “apart

from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others...action...never move[s] in a closed circle” (Arendt, 1998, p. 190). The moment an act is initiated it is subject to the unpredictable interference of a public full of actors, each with their own motivations and priorities, propelling action well beyond the will or the control of the actor who began it.

Sarah commented on the fact that she and many of her classmates were nervous about the possible “repercussions” of their words and the potential “backlash” they might evoke. Fear of this unpredictability similarly contributed to Consuela holding back from speaking because of concerns about how she would be received. Her particular fear was of inadvertently revealing some latent, hidden prejudice beyond her awareness that was just waiting to be expressed, exposing her as the rest of the world sat in judgment.

The human condition of plurality is “the basic condition of both action and speech”(Arendt, 1998, p. 175) and exists through the relationship between “equality and difference, or...equality-in-difference” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 196). Plurality means that we are “both undeniably distinctive, and inescapably more-than-one” (Bickford, 1995, p. 316). These relationships form “the ‘web’ of human relationships,” a “pre-existing web” (Arendt, p. 183) marked by the “notorious uncertainty” present in not just “political matters but [in] all affairs that go on between men directly” (Arendt, p. 181-82).

In the paradox of public appearance, we depend upon an audience of others in order to appear but the revelation and reception of who we are is “as

unpredictable and uncontrollable as the other citizens with whom we must necessarily engage” (Bickford, 1995, p. 328). This unpredictability is why Arendt (1998) believes that “to do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin” (p. 190). While the actor may tell their story with their actions they do not write it; the actor is constantly being confronted with others’ ideas about who they are. The “double subject” position of the actor is not as the “author or producer” of the story of their life, but as “its actor and sufferer” (Arendt, p. 184).

Sarah had an experience early in the term of being written as someone her fellow student should perhaps be afraid of based on the history of relationships between First Nations and European Canadians. Later in the semester during a group project, someone raised the question of whether or not Sarah

should be a part of an interview, because, being a native person I might affect the quality of the interview if the other person was native...me and this other Native person would instantly have a rapport and other people would be silenced...I was like, you think that I would cause the interview to be biased because of my presence?

Sparks similarly expressed feeling “annoyed” at the fact that she had been “pigeonholed at the end into being the girl who worked for the government.” And Consuela’s hesitations with speaking were out of the fear that someone would jump

on a statement she made and say it back to her in a way that made her look racist or stupid.

As “newcomer[s] and...stranger[s]” to an already “existing world” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 185) the students carried the burdens of upsetting histories that positioned them in specific ways toward one another, their guests and the topic. Arendt (1998, 2006) referred to this as the human condition of belatedness. Sometimes the pressures of these histories created subtle effects, like thick spider webs across the face, sticky and elusive; at others their presence was painfully obvious, seeming to exert a crushing weight on conversations. Many of the students, Consuela in particular, felt they had to tip toe around the issues or risk waking a hurtful memory of the past. “Racial issues,” with their long and convoluted histories, were “probably the hardest possible topic you could think of” (Sparks).

There is an exhausting quality to these encounters, a troubling familiarity, the feeling of somehow having ‘been here before’. The sense of belatedness that arises from the press of history, combined with the paradoxical nature of plurality, “temper” the promise of natality “making encounters across difference...appear to ‘go nowhere’” (Levinson, 1997, p. 438). Arendt describes political action as “possibly the most futile of human activities.” This is not to say that action doesn’t accomplish anything, but that “it rarely accomplishes what it sets out to achieve (HC 184, 197)”(in Levinson, p. 438). At one point in an interview Consuela threw up her hands and exclaimed “it just feels like I’m trying to save the Titanic from sinking but

you can't because so many things are breaking and going wrong as it's going down and I feel like, what's next? You know?"

The sense of futility that Consuela was referring to is not an uncommon phenomenon. It seemed everywhere they turned that semester the students were confronted with an array of social forces that threatened to undermine their efforts at dialogue. Many of these encounters left them frustrated, afraid and, sometimes, simply bored. The temptation in situations like the students were encountering is to leave these troubles behind in the search for a little stability and security. It was here, in the DLP classroom that the students came face to face with one of the key struggles of the modern human condition – the struggle between the public and the private.

7.6 Public Place, Private Lives

The struggles that many of the students encountered during the DLP were ultimately the “struggle between the private and the public self” (Honig, 1995, p. 141), made all the more difficult as the forces of mass society continue to blur essential distinctions between the two. As the students discovered, the world could be full of unsettling surprises and unsolicited actions, and the invisible spaces of the private offered the strong draw of predictability and safety.

Choosing to remain shielded from the actions and comments of others, wrapped in emotion and personal narrative, the personal private manifests at times as the “comfort zone” that John had alluded to, a comfort that some may be

reluctant to leave. Something, it seemed, was holding them back, something Marigold referred to as the “boundaries in [her] brain.” Consuela similarly referenced a sense of being hampered in her attempts to speak because she was “still trying to figure out how to push the boundaries.”

Arendt’s (1998) private is a space distinct from the demands of action and appearance, providing a necessary respite from public life. Although Arendt casts this private realm of necessity, futility, and shame in opposition to the freedom, permanence, and honor of the public, she reminds us that the private provides functions beyond “the necessary, the futile and the shameful” (Arendt, p.73). In fact, the public and private can “exist only in the form of coexistence” (Arendt, p. 59).

Arendt (1998) considers politics to be “the highest possibility of human existence,” but by the same token, “to have no private place of one’s own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human” (Arendt, p. 64). “There are some things that must be hidden...if they are to exist at all” (Arendt, p. 73) and it is within the realm of the private that the activities of life such the sustenance of bodies, the labours of birth, and the caring for of the young are sheltered. It is the realm “in which to unfold capacities, dreams and memories [and] to nurture the wounds of the ego” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 213).

As private property, the “domestic-intimate” domain of the home provides us with “the sense of a tangible, worldly place of one’s own” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 212), providing a space that “nurtures and makes the individual fit to appear in the public

realm” (Benhabib, p. 213). The gradual erosion of the boundaries between the domestic-intimate and the public-political replaces the “twilight” (Arendt, 2006b, p. 183) of the private realm with the “merciless glare of the public” (Arendt, p. 183) exposing those things that thrive only in the conditions of privacy, “destroy[ing]” the very “vital quality” (Arendt, p. 183) the private is meant to safeguard.

The “moral and political goods” invoked by the concept of home include “intimacy, domesticity and the space of individuality” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 214). In stark contrast to a public defined by the inherent unpredictability of action and the interpretations and responses of others, the private, as the realm of individuality, removes these dangers by providing the “security of an inward realm in which the self is exposed to nothing but itself” (Arendt, 1998, p. 310). Any retreat to the private, however, should only be a temporary withdrawal with the intention of an eventual return to the public, rather than a wholehearted “escape from experience” (Coulter & Weins, 2002, p. 20).

Honig (1995) suggests thinking about the public and private not simply as topographies (i.e. the forum, the home) “but as a metaphor for a variety of (agonistic) spaces, both topographical and metaphorical” (p. 146). In this sense, then, the private is always with us – to leave it behind constitutes more than a simple matter of walking out the of the house, locking the door and heading off to greet the waiting public. Rather, we carry these spaces with us, as dispositions or “sensibil[ities]” (Honig, p. 143), ideas about what we think we can do. A labourer, for example “is

driven by necessity...because he considers himself as driven, incapable of action” (Honig, p. 143, quoting Pitkin, 1984).

Politics as related to the self is seen in the “agonistic struggle between the public and private self” (Honig, 1995, p. 142). “Wherever you go you will be a *polis*” (Arendt, 1998, p. 198) but the private is never far behind. Politics and the public must be protected from “sensibilities, attitudes, [and] dispositions” that are simultaneously “engage[ed] in a struggle for dominion over the self” (Honig, p. 143). It is in the ability to leave private, life “concerns behind [that] is the mark of [a person’s] capability to act” (Honig, p. 142), something that is becoming increasingly more complicated under the increasing sway of mass society.

An agonistic public demands more than “a polite silence in which everyone’s voice can sound” (Bickford, 1995, p. 327) and can only come into being with political actors prepared “to engage with one another, challenge, question, argue” (Bickford, p. 328). Some conversations, however, are more difficult than others. Conversations around race and colonialism are among the most challenging public conversations to engage in (Boler, 1999), with the potential to elicit strong emotional responses, imbuing these topics with a profound sense of risk.

The students’ experiences reveal a world full of conflict, turmoil and paradox. It is for this reason that Arendt (1998) referred to courage as the “political virtue par excellence” (Arendt, p. 36). Each new foray into the public presented the students with challenges and surprises that shook their confidence. Tentative first steps quickly backtracked into the shadows as they tried to figure out what was going

wrong. The blurring of the lines between public matters and private concerns confuses opinions for personhood, and the modern subject begins to take every disagreement or challenge to heart as a personal attack, filtering all speech and action through the screen of “me.” Self-consciousness, ultimately, becomes a dead weight to action.

Many of the students found themselves torn between the fear of exposure and the need for “the visibility without which we cannot truly live.” (Bickford, 1995, p. 330, quoting Lorde, 1984). This tension is why Arendt (1998) believes that “the connotation of courage” (p. 186) is demonstrated in the “willingness to act and speak at all” and that “disclosing and exposing one’s self” in public requires both courage, and “boldness” (p. 186). As “the miracle that saves the world” (Arendt, 247), action provides the possibility to interrupt “historical processes,” which appear automatic, “but are in fact propelled and sustained by acting beings” (Levinson, 1997, p. 349). But we must first recognize this capacity to act and accept responsibility for the future of the world. With the forces of mass society relentlessly eating away at the space of freedom, authentic relations, and self-actualization, “[w]e cannot wait for ‘the final luxury of fearlessness’” (Bickford, p. 330, quoting Lorde, 1984).

7.7 Summary

The students’ struggles during their experiences in the DLP highlighted both the importance and the difficulty of maintaining the distinctions between public issues and private desires. While some of these difficulties are the product of social

rules many also stem from the unique positioning of the classroom. Neither home nor *polis*, the classroom shelters and supports future actors as they make their early forays into the world of political action.

Classrooms like the DLP exist specifically with the intent to introduce the new ones to the old world that awaits them. The professor is there to encourage and support the students but also to guide them toward being capable, competent and committed actors oriented toward the world. The next chapter explores this tenuous space and the nature of activities in the “not-quite-public, not-quite-private” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 307) space of the contemporary classroom.

CHAPTER 8: THE CLASSROOM AND THE POLIS

8.1 Introduction

In chapter 8, I focus on my second research question: what can student experiences tell us about the possibility of creating dialogic classroom spaces that support the emergence of the political actor? I explore three insights. First, pedagogy is always uniquely positioned within the realm of human activities. Second, learning always has an emotional dimension. Finally, pedagogy, though replete with possibility, can never have a project.

8.2 The Classroom at the Edge of the World

In a departure from the traditional philosophical fixation with mortality, Arendt (1998, 2006) premises her political theory on the promise of natality, or the miracle of the new (Benhabib, 2003). The power of natality lies in its ability to defy the “law of mortality by interrupting “the inexorable automatic course of daily life,” (Arendt, 1998, p. 246) with the promise of rebirth in action. To initiate something is to act and in this sense, “an element...of natality is inherent in all human activities” (Arendt, p. 9). The promise and possibility “inherent in birth” and made manifest in the world by the words and deeds of those who comprise it finds “perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression” in those “glad tidings” found in “the Gospels...‘A child has been born unto us’” (Arendt, p. 247).

“The fact that “human beings are *born* into the world” (Arendt 2006b, p. 171, italics in original) is what calls education into being, making natality, the “essence of education” (Arendt, p. 171). The future of the world depends upon the “foster[ing]” of judging actors, which makes it “a critical moral-political, and educational, problem” (Coulter & Weins, 2002, p. 22). Arendt cautions, however, about confusing the classroom with the world. The classroom represents a unique, “not-quite-public, not-quite-private space” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 307), that serves to shelter the next generation of political actors as they transition between home and the *polis*. Mediating this transition is the person occupying the role of the teacher.

The educator is responsible for creating a space in which students can learn to mitigate “the private forces of the family, the social forces of their peers and the critical scrutiny of public life” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 307). Situated between home and world, the public and private, the educator must teach through, with, and despite the influence of private concerns and the tensions and paradoxes of public action. The process is further complicated by the influences of mass society, which have found a foothold in the modern classroom and are threatening to undo the pedagogical endeavor before it has even begun.

8.2.1 Muddled Boundaries

Society first emerged in “the disguise of an organization of property-owners who, instead of claiming access to the public realm...asked for protection from it for the accumulation of more wealth” (Arendt, 1998, p. 68). This specifically non-

political activity had traditionally been associated with the household and “the activities connected with sheer survival” (Arendt, p. 46). As private interests continued to seep into the public realm, the actor became increasingly distracted from the world, shifting priorities to those ensuring “the continuity of one’s own life and the life of his family” (Arendt, p. 321), rather than working toward the continuity of the world.

The private likewise suffered under the condition of the social. The erosion of the boundaries between public and private allowed the glare of the public to infiltrate the shadowy depths of personal retreat, chasing individuals deeper and deeper inside of themselves where the only view of the world to be seen was through a lens of self-consciousness. Under social rule, everything is oriented to and through the self, and its perceived fragility is consuming. Where once the rally cry was “*Fiat justitia, et pereat mundus*” (‘Let justice be done though the world may perish,’) (Arendt, 2006d, p. 224) the modern day equivalent would perhaps sound more like “protect yourself though the world may perish.”

The capitalist exchange society was also responsible for the infiltration of the instrumental, or means/end thinking, of *homo faber* into the realm of action. *Homo faber* views everything, be it an object or another person (Benhabib, 2003) “in terms of its immediate usefulness and ‘material values’” (Arendt, 2006c, p. 198) and the extent to which they may serve a particular end. Instrumental thinking is antithetical to action because it is always guided by the idea of a terminus product; *homo faber*

can never appreciate an object or subject for itself, but only as how it can serve a predetermined need.

The incompatibility between the mentality of *homo faber* and that of action was most dramatically demonstrated in the students' experiences of learning to negotiate dialogue. Regardless of how much the students yearned for it, worked for it or talked about it, time and again dialogue seemed to hover beyond their reach. Reflecting on this in one of the class debriefs, Kara observed that, "dialogue...makes you give up control. It is about influencing it but being open."

During another debrief Dr. Mac reminded the students that they were "engaging for the engagement with others, not just to have a successful dialogue." Sarah had commented that while it is, of course, more pleasurable to be in a dialogue that is going well, she regarded any roadblocks and frustrations they encountered in their dialogues not as failures but simply the side effects of the unpredictability of action. She seemed to accept that faltering was part of the process of learning, saying

we're not supposed to be perfect at it... I think we have to go through it and like today, we made all these mistakes... and frustrated one another, but it was probably one of our bigger moments.

Sparks, on the other hand, was having more difficulty with letting go. A self-described "goal oriented person," Sparks wanted "strategies" and "tools" "to deal

with dialogue.” She seemed to have some kind of outcome in mind that she felt she was not getting, commenting at one point that she wanted someone to “either prove to me that we can dialogue about that type of thing or, you know, let’s move on and try to find something that we *can* dialogue about.” When instrumentalism meets the unpredictability of public action, our attempts to direct and predict the course of events “is forever defeated by the actual course of events, where nothing happens more frequently than the unexpected” (Arendt, 1998, p. 300).

8.3 The Perils of Learning

Pedagogy, dialogue and action share the characteristics of unpredictability, contingency and inter-relationality. Like action, the “pedagogical encounter” (Todd, 2003, p. 37) is marked by the uncertainty of action with others where “we tentatively come together in anticipation of an encounter of which we cannot predict the outcome” (Todd, p. 37). This is further complicated by the “liminal” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 398) position of the classroom, situated as is between the privacy of domestic life and the turbulent public realm. At the best of times, learning is tinged with the emotionality that frequently accompanies the development of new perspectives (Boler, 1999; Felman, 1987; Todd, 2003). In particular, pedagogies concerned with ethical action, social justice and critical engagement, Boler’s (1999) “pedagogies of discomfort,” can result in heightened states of emotionality in learning, what Levinas refers to as the “traumatism of astonishment” (Todd, p. 36).

The very project of “pedagogy turns on the ability of the nascent subject to change, to alter, to become something other than what it was” (Todd, 2003, p. 19, citing Castoriadis) which is accomplished through the negotiation and renegotiation of meaning as related to the objects and people in the world. The “insight” that may be gained from this process however, raises the risk of “altering the very parameters of self-perception and one’s place in the world”(Todd, p. 11).

The “ontological crisis” (Todd, 2003, p. 18) of learning often “manifests itself through the [emotional] dynamics” (Todd, p. 11) of “defensive anger and fears” (Boler, 1999, p. 179) as the learner attempts to “defend against, identify with, or disavow” that which is new and strange (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 53). “Resentment” (Orlie, 1995, p. 344, quoting Brown, 2003) is a common response to the stresses of the public realm and the demand to change, illustrating how “affective obstacles” (Boler, p. 169) may undermine the pedagogical encounter. This was something Sparks definitely wrestled with, making resentment a topic for her final project, which focused on “blame and guilt and how we are basically raising a generation of people who are non-Aboriginal who feel very resentful.”¹⁰

“[A] call to action is not a demand or requirement but an invitation” (Boler, 1999, p. 183). The challenge in education is to encourage students to “willingly undertake change,” a particularly difficult task when the person being asked to change “is materially and ideologically safe and comfortable” (Boler, p. 181). Boler asks what one might “stand to gain by engaging in the discomforting process of

¹⁰ She ultimately ended up abandoning this topic for one that was less controversial.

questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions?” (p. 181). Another compelling question is what might one stand to lose by questioning these beliefs and learning to see the world differently?

The risk of seeing the world differently and possibly changing as a result is a risk that some students are reluctant to take. Sarah talk about how some people hold on to their opinions “and there’s nothing going to change it...they don’t seem to want to open themselves up to any other possibilities or really open themselves up at all” but acknowledged that this was something that “to some degree everyone struggles with.” John felt the resistance was related to comfort or security and that the reluctance some people demonstrated when encouraged to “shift [their] stance” was because they weren’t “confident enough in themselves to open themselves up to different opinions.”

The process of representative thinking in public judgment requires that we “position ourselves differently in order to do justice to the presence of others” (Bickford, 1995, p. 321). But witnessing the world through the eyes of another and adopting a different viewpoint, even temporarily, has the potential to put “the very parameters of self-perception and one’s place in the world” (Todd, 2003, p. 11) in jeopardy, particularly if it reveals to the actor instances where their actions are implicated in harm done to others (Boler, 1999). This was something that Boler noticed in her own teaching, describing the angry and confused responses of her white students in particular, who interpreted the invitation to examine their beliefs as an accusation that they had done something wrong.

Boler (1999) describes how “collective witnessing” as distinguished from “individualized self-reflection” or “spectating” can be a “catalyst”(Boler, p. 176) for learning to shift our perspectives. This examination of our own positioning and the potential privileges that come with it are essential to acting. Positioning is the result of “particular unstated norms...that make specific structures and arrangements seem ‘natural’” (Bickford, 1995, 320, citing Martha Minow, 1987) and “not only constitutes who we are, but affects what we do”(Levinson, 1997, p. 437).

Witnessing doesn’t merely change the way we see things, but “reveals that how we see or choose not to see has ethical implications and may even cause others to suffer,”(Boler, 1999, p. 195) the realization of which may be read as a “threat to our precarious identities”(Boler, p. 195). This collective examination helps us to “recognize how we become what we are and examine the views and habits that our locations encourage” (Orlie, 1995, p. 348). Failing to recognize how our particular locations impact others and refusing to respond to the inadvertent harms arising from our locations “intensif[ies] the social necessities that circumscribes our own actions” (Orlie, p. 341). The refusal of “our historical responsibilities and co-implication” (Boler, p. 186) in acts and events arising from our locations and the boundlessness of action, create “a gaping distance between self and other” (Boler, p. 184) turning the actor into spectator.

Sparks’ response to the discomfort of her positioning was the refusal to bear witness, demonstrated in her fierce reaction to a First Nations protest against police brutality that she briefly attended. She knew that “by refusing to witness something,

you're invalidating it" and as far as she was concerned, the ability to shut her ears and walk away was "the only power I [had]."

Finding herself in a bewildering situation that appeared beyond her control, she attempted to regain this control by walking away, which "took their [First Nations protesters] voice away...the less people who witness an event the less voice you have really. So by refusing to witness..." Sparks further articulates the difference between witnessing and spectating saying, "if you witness someone...the more you take in, and the more you remember...If you're not witnessing then you're not listening...you close your mind and your ears for whatever reason..."

"Meaningful changes in perspective require political action" (Orlie, 1995, p. 350) and are demonstrated by changes in how a person lives their life, impacting "who we are in our locations and how we live them" (Orlie, p. 350). It is this action that distinguishes "additive change" from "transformative" change (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 96). For this to happen the learner must be open and receptive to the invitation, something John and Sarah both referred to when talking about barriers to learning.

Our positioning, or *what* we are according to "history, institutions, and patterns of social rule," are aspects we are not directly "responsible for, nor can we substantially change" (Orlie, 1995, p. 342). We may, however "become responsible for *who* we are: how we carry and pass on the social effects configuring what we appear to be" (Orlie, p. 343). The *social pariah* and the *parvenu* are both examples of what happens when an individual becomes overwhelmed by their social positioning, and gives up on any attempts to transform the meanings of their identity through

action. The *social pariah* solidifies into *what* she is, perpetuating the frequently unintentional trespasses of her position with the dismissal of “that’s just the way it is, there is nothing I can do about it.” The *parvenu*, on the other hand, attempts to escape “the relevance of who she is,” and in doing so completely ignores her positioning, *what* she is, and the often unintended consequences of this positioning on others (Orlie, 1995).

Orlie (1995) suggests the idea of the “*conscious pariah*” who “politicizes what she appears to be” (p. 345). By examining and accepting responsibility for her positioning she opens up the possibility of acting in spontaneous ways not foretold by *what* she appears to be, disrupting historical patterns of actions and interactions and therefore interrupting the damages coming from her social location. Settling for the predictability of *what* we may seem to be ultimately perpetuates social rule and bolsters the forces of mass society that are steadily eroding our world. “By acting with and *against* the social rules that would determine” us (Orlie, p. 346), *who* we are may be revealed.

Identity, in respect to *who* a person is, should not be considered static or sedimentary. In the worldly relationship between actors a “multiple-voiced consciousness” or “plural self” is politically important because “it allows perception from a variety of perspectives” (Bickford, 1995, p. 324). Like the two-in-one split that allows an actor to imaginatively go travelling and compare what is encountered with perspectives temporarily left behind, an “ambiguous sense of self” (Boler, 1999, 187) and flexible identity are keys to action. A calcified sense of self stands in the way of

representational thinking central to judgment and the change intrinsic to learning. In this way representative thinking and education are related in their orientation toward gathering new perspectives and the need for a flexible agent open to the possibility of change.

8.4 The Refusal

The “professor” occupies a unique position in the world as “a scholar *and* an educator *and* an actor” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 400, italics in original). The professors’ challenge is to introduce students to the world without directing or endorsing the manner in which they choose to act, if they do so at all. Teachers will inevitably encounter “students not just disposed but quite committed to non-critical modes of thought” (O’Byrne, p.404). While “education always involves a political or social agenda”(Boler, 1999, p. 179) a pedagogy honouring the natality of the ‘new ones’ must refrain from “enforc[ing] a particular political agenda, or to evaluat[ing] students on what agenda they choose to carry out, if any” (Boler, p. 179).

The challenge for the educator is to hold open opportunities so that students may begin “exploring possibilities for bringing about a different future” (Levinson, 1997, p. 442) in way that spring from their own impetus to act. Teaching is more than “the transmission of information”(Gallagher, 1992, p. 76); it is an invitation to join “a conversation precisely where the conversation is uncertain, indeterminate...where the question remains a question” (Gallagher, p. 76). It is about introducing the new to a constantly changing world in such as way as to not

foreclose on the possibility for them to “undertake something new in relation to this world” (Levinson, p. 449) and “direct the course of its transformation” (Levinson, p. 443).

This description of the teaching scenario evokes the “impossibility of teaching” (Felman, 1987, p. 70). The issue lies in the “governing expectation” (Levinson, 1997, p. 448) that pedagogy, especially one based on dialogue “will get us to a predetermined somewhere – a utopian post-difference space” (Levinson, p. 448). What is required is the abandonment of “the model of product or project” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 406), which, on the individual level “involves disrupting any tendency to think of [students] as projects moving toward completion”(O’Byrne, p. 406).

Education is one of those “endeavors[s] that can never reach a goal or produce a desired outcome,” yet it is by the very “virtue of its indeterminacy,” that education can simultaneously be considered an undertaking through which “a great deal is possible” (O’Byrne, 2005, p. 408). The educator’s task is to “hold open the chaotic moment” and create “a space – for non-instrumental thinking” (O’Byrne, p. 407) to help ensure the possibility of the students enacting their own future and creating their own histories.

The educator’s job is to help students recognize the possibility of new beginnings present in every encounter, regardless of how familiar they may seem and how “to recognize the social effects of belatedness without resigning...passively to them” (Levinson, 1997, p. 437). The teacher does their part to influence the world

through the act of teaching but can only do so from, as Abbie described it, the bounds of “human dignity,” in a way that pays homage to the miracle of the new. What the students make of it is up to them.

8.5 The Students’ Experiences

The Dialogue and Leadership Program on the topic of “Indigeneity: Past, Present, Future” was a semester full of surprises. The students were confronted with a new form of curriculum, the curiosities around something called ‘dialogue,’ and the tensions and complexities of the topic of First Nations issues in Canada. It was a semester marked by profound emotion, perplexing silences and startling breakthroughs.

Sarah thought that even though at times it could “be really frustrating...it was much more creative and a more interesting way to learn than a typical classroom.” John felt that the DLP “contextualized” the issues by putting a “the human face on the things that [he] knew.” Consuela described her experience in semester as having “been very real,” connecting action and freedom when she observed “it’s just kind of liberating, to be able to speak freely about something.” She hoped to take her experiences from the DLP to help inform her own teaching.

John said that in the end his questions hadn’t “necessarily been answered” but he “realized that finding out the questions as well as looking for solutions is what life is about. The panic about not having answers is gone.” Sarah realized that the process of revealing had “actually been quite a liberating experience for me, I

think it has been empowering...it's made me realize that I do have something to contribute and something of value." "It was an interesting semester," Sparks observed. "You know I'm really proud of all of us for making it through, (pause) it was a huge risk."

8.6 Parting Words

The particularities of this classroom exist within the wider context of the world, and to a great extent these students' struggles are our struggle. Their challenge and ours is to find the courage to act in the face of overwhelming unpredictability and the long shadow of history, enduring the actions of others and occasionally suffering, or attempting to escape, the outcomes of our own actions. The emotionality of the pedagogical encounter and the difficulty of action under the rule of the social entangled the students in the fine lines separating the public and private aspects of the self, leaving them insecure and confused about their roles, their rights, and their responsibilities.

The private realm and the public realm are defined by a tenuous co-existence. Both are essential to the human condition but with the rise of mass society we are steadily losing the distinction between public matters and private concerns. For the most part we don't even recognize that there is a difference and fail to notice the gradual erosion of a common world of action and freedom as it is replaced by the disorienting and inscrutable social: a realm preoccupied with public catharsis, empty but ravenous voyeurism, and carefully fashioned personas that signal our special

location in society. But for all of our accessorizing, trapped in this form of relationship and with dwindling possibilities to distinguish ourselves through action, we are rendered monotonously the same. For this we are trading our place in the world, negating our own natality, committing subtle suicide.

The power to act is still ours, in the form of witnessing and testimony. By embarking on imaginative journeys to other perspectives and accepting the role in history in which we have been cast we can transform our social identities. By interrupting the automatic social processes that establish behaviors and relationships with novel and spontaneous actions we cast off the superficial judgments that would leave us just one more anonymous face in the crowd. Our actions announce our arrival, telling the world who we are.

Human history is a tapestry of texts, the weaving of multiple strands of story that emerges from the web of human relationships. From within this web we act in an attempt to distinguish ourselves and find freedom among others. This freedom, however, requires risk, “the courage...[to]insert oneself into the world and begin a story of one’s own” (Arendt, 1998, p. 186). If it all seems overwhelming, it is because it is. This is what lends action and natality their “miraculous” quality, because when action does occur “it always happens against overwhelming odds” (Arendt, p. 178).

In its original connotation, a “hero” was simply someone “about whom a story could be told,” a person demonstrating the “courage and even boldness” required to “leav[e] one’s private hiding place” and disclose who they are (Arendt, 1998, p. 186).

We don't have to be "half-god" to be an Arendtian hero, just fully human, prepared to take a risk and set the story of *who* we are motion.

Epilogue: A visit with Jimmy Bob and the promise new beginnings

James Robert was a compact man, small but sturdy with sparkling dark eyes, a silvery crew cut and a lively, kind demeanor. He simultaneously conveyed the distinguished qualities of an elder and hereditary chief, and the hopeful, anticipatory qualities of a child. When asked how he would like to be addressed he chuckled and said, “Call me what everybody else calls me, Jimmy Bob.”

Jimmy Bob spoke of sad stories that day, telling us “the story nobody wants to hear,” as Thea had once described the legacy of residential school. He told us of being torn from his family and taken to an unwelcoming home that aimed to “kill the Indian in the child.” He spoke of addiction and despair, of tears and loneliness. He described in great detail that day his friend took him to the sea. Something opened up inside of him as he realized that there were other possibilities, other paths and he put down the bottle and went into the world, sharing his stories of healing and forgiveness while attending to the stories of others. On that day, in a boat on the sea, Jimmy Bob was reborn and he turned toward the world, looking for his own unique way to set things right.

One of the key pieces of advice he had for the students was on the power of relationships to help heal communities, defining relationships as “perpetual sustained way of supporting each other,” and he continually stressed the importance of each person’s contributions toward a healthy community. The key, he told them, was to “be open minded and sensitive and recognize each person’s right to be here.” He reminded them that “not

everyone is in the same place,” and that they should be prepared to “honour a multiplicity of ways.”

Throughout the semester the students had been desperately curious to know what they could do to contribute positively to Aboriginal/European Canadian relations, how they could act in a way that wouldn’t offend or perpetuate historical harms. Jimmy Bob didn’t share stories of elaborate gestures or tactical brilliance. He shared stories of people sharing stories. He told them it came down to “people sitting around together and listening” to one another. He told of the time he had disclosed his history in residential school to a non-Aboriginal woman he had met and how deeply her response had touched him. She looked at him and simply, but genuinely, said, “I’m sorry.” This short phrase didn’t erase or change history but in this context it did say, “I have heard your story, and I recognize the injustice. I accept my responsibility to bear witness to the difficult things in the world.”

Dr. Mac talked about how important it was in the post-war Jewish community to collect and share the painful stories of the Holocaust and what this process meant in terms of both healing and learning. Jimmy Bob reciprocated by sharing the story of his visit to the Holocaust museum. He was so moved by the evidence of so much human suffering that he felt compelled to apologize to his Jewish colleagues, not because he himself had done something wrong, but “on behalf of humanity,” wondering aloud “why we keep allowing people to be killed.”

It was a day of many breathtaking moments and profound realizations, the most profound of which popped up in the middle of a story Jimmy Bob was telling. He stopped and looked around the circle of students with a happy but slightly astonished look on his

face. “Wow,” he said. “You guys are all listening to me. For most of my life I felt like no one listened to me.” He paused and said, “I’m flattered you guys are listening”

As he was leaving the class that afternoon, he thanked them again, “You have validated me. You made me feel like I have value”

The boundlessness that comes from action’s location “within a web of relations” (Arendt, 1998, p. 240) means that “harm and grievances are an ineluctable effect of human living” (Orlie, 1995, p. 340). These “trespasses” are most frequently not the result of “our intentions per se” but arise from “our identities as they are conditioned and constituted by social rule”(Orlie, p. 339-440). It is this condition that causes the *parvenu* to flee, refusing to accept responsibility for any harms done, and the *pariah* to harden into defensive anger, maintaining that she shouldn’t be held accountable for grievances she didn’t intend to commit. The unavoidability of the trespasses that result from human action raises questions about how the responsible actor may respond to such inevitability and resist the political paralysis definitive of the *social pariah* and the *parvenu*.

Boler (1999) suggests the process of “collective witnessing” (178), an act she distinguishes from mere spectating. A position of “privilege,” spectating locates the person at a safe and comfortable distance from others as well as the responsibility that goes with being among others (Boler, 1999). Collective witnessing, on the other hand is an act, “understood in relation to others, and in relation to personal and cultural histories and material conditions” (Boler, p. 178), one that insists that as

“witnesses, we undertake our historical responsibilities and co-implication,” (Boler, p. 186). As Sparks said earlier, “if you witness some[thing]...the more you take in, and the more you remember...If you’re not witnessing then you’re not listening.” The story that Jimmy Bob shared that day, of the experience of residential school, was the breaking of a political silence among a community of witnesses.

John recalled being deeply struck by Jimmy Bob’s words, saying it was,

kind of a revelation given the depth of that experience and the stature he’s achieved and the things he’s accomplished, to still feel that he doesn’t necessarily have a voice, that people wouldn’t want to listen to him...I think it is a comment on how fragmented our everyday, and even professional, interactions are, where people are feeling like they are talking but nobody’s listening.

Seamus likewise admitted to being “emotionally moved,” by the conversation, echoing Bauman’s idea of “transcendence” (in Todd, 2003, p. 48). This transcendence is a freedom attained in moments of human togetherness (Arendt, 1998, 2006; Todd, 2003) and found in “the immediacy of an interaction,” that goes beyond all self-interest, ego investments and “one’s own best intentions” (in Todd, p. 48; Arendt, 1998, 2006). In this sense, emotion is more than “the baggage that is brought to the encounter but about the potentiality to be moved in such a way that the self becomes egoless in facing the Other” (Todd, 2003, p. 11-12).

From this togetherness “a *commitment* shoots up, apparently from nowhere” (Todd, 2003, p. 48, quoting Bauman, 1995, italics in original), a commitment Arendt (1998) refers to as a promise. A promise lies between a trespass and forgiveness as a “valid and binding” (Arendt, p. 245) agreement “to live together in the mode of political speech and deed,” bringing us together into the “political spaces where we answer to one another (HC 244-45)” (Orlie, p. 349).

The sharing of stories such as those shared by Jimmy Bob, the students, and many of their guests that semester were ultimately political acts; the underlying hope in the telling was the possibility of beginning something anew. Political action offers the hope of breaking cycles rather than repeating the “trespasses of those who came before” (Orlie, 1995, p. 348). “Ethical political relations” require that “we think together about the ruling and the violence that dwell in all locations” (Orlie, p. 347). Forgiveness temporarily ruptures and disrupts social rule as we step out of socially predetermined roles that “render us predictable creatures of necessity” (Orlie, p. 247).

The ability to promise and forgive depends upon the “constant willingness to change [our] minds and start again...to begin something new”(Arendt, 1998, p. 240), creating “islands of certainty in a sea of uncertainty” (Arendt, p. 244). Arendt cautions, however, against “misus[ing]” the faculty of promising “to cover the whole ground of the future and map out a path secured in all directions,” rather than viewing promises as “isolated islands” (244), which Orlie (1995) describes as the

distinction between “promised futures” and “fixed futures” which “would be to close the future, not open it (Orlie, p. 350).

Forgiving is “the only reaction which does not merely re-act, but acts anew”(Arendt, 1998, p. 241) and opens the way for new beginnings “by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly” (Arendt, p. 240). Forgiveness offers “the freedom from vengeance” and recrimination; as spontaneous action it serves to disrupt the “relentless” cycle of revenge and recrimination (Arendt, p. 241) and is “evinced by a commitment to act together (Orlie, 1995, p. 353).

The human text is written in action and held within a web of human relationships. It is this very “the ability to produce stories and become historical...[that] together form[s] the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence” (Arendt, 1998, p. 324). At the close of the Jimmy Bob dialogue, Jennica remarked with wonder, “we can contribute just by sharing stories and listening. No one in my life ever told me I have that power.”

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) **Examples of questions used to elicit reflection in all interviews include:**

- How are things going? What's going on for you?
- Could you talk about anything that you have found to be “tricky”?
- Tell me a bit more about it. Could you talk a bit more about that?
- Why do you think that is?

2) **Examples of questions for first interview:**

- Tell me a bit about how you decided to apply to the program
- What are your expectations for this semester?
- Do you have any concerns about the semester?
- What do you hope to learn this semester?
- What is your understanding of dialogue?
- Tell me about how the first week of class was for you.
- Tell me about the first guest dialogue you had. What was that experience like for you? How did it compare to your ideas about dialogue?
- Tell me about your relationship with Peter Tompkins
- What are some of the things that you feel you can contribute to the class?

- Can you describe your relationship with your classmates? What are things like for you as a class?
- Tell me about the day the class shared their stories for the Oral History project? What did you think about that exercise?

3) **Examples of questions for second interview:**

- Tell me about your experiences in the class so far. How do they compare to your initial expectations/impressions?
- How do you feel the semester's going both for yourself and the class as a whole?
- How do you see yourself in the class?
- How do you feel about dialogue right now?
- What would you say is your biggest challenge right now?
- Has anything occurred during the semester that has surprised you?
- Thinking back on some of the dialogues we've had so far, does anything stand out for you, either positively or negatively about i.e. a guest, the class, or dialogue?
- How do you understand the relationship between talking, listening and dialogue?
- How well do you think the class is at making room for disagreement or contrary opinions?

- Tell me a bit about Dr. Mac and Abbie? What do they bring to the classroom in your opinion? How do you relate to their teaching styles?

4) **Final Interview**

- How have you been? How were things for you in that first week or so after the class ended?
- What types of memories come to mind now as you think back to the semester? Anything in particular stand out for you?
- I'd like you to think about some of the dialogues and just talk a bit about the ones that pop into your mind. What sort of impression of them are you left with?
- What does the idea of “voice” mean to you? Can you tell me anything you may have learned about voice this term?
- What are your thoughts on the process of learning about dialogue? How would you describe the process? Did it work for you? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Could you describe for me, what it is like when you are in one of those “amazing dialogues”--either a specific one or just the general feelings you have, or the way you experience the dialogue that makes you think “that was the real deal”?
- What does respect look like to you? What would respectful versus disrespectful disagreement look like?

- What are your thoughts about responsibility in dialogue?
- What do you think about Dr. Mac's insistence that you all had something valuable and important to say? Did your thoughts/feelings differ at any point during the semester?
- Can you talk about anything you might have learned from your classmates?
- How would you describe the group's process of learning to work together (project/dialogue)?
- What have you learned from your professors?
- What would you consider to have been your biggest challenge this semester?
- When you look back to your first few interactions with Peter (as a class), how would you describe that situation now as you look back? Is this pretty much how you felt at the time (or in the weeks immediately following) or do you understand it differently now?
- Is there anything you are particularly proud of in regard to what either you or the class accomplished or achieved over the course of the program?
- What do you think is the biggest or most valuable lesson you've learned from the program?
- Do you think there is any difference in the way you see yourself or understand yourself now as opposed to the beginning of the semester?

Have you changed at all? If so can you describe it?

- What do you think now about “Indegeneity in Canada: Past, Present, Future?” Have your ideas changed over the course of the program? If so, how?
- Tell me about the debriefing process: did you like it? Was effective in your opinion? Did they happen too little/not enough for you or did you think there was a good balance?
- Which of the assignment did you enjoy the most or thought was of most value?
- What did you think about being required to interview people in the community? How was that exercise for you?
- Tell me about how the writing process was for you op-ed and final project.

5) Examples of student specific questions based on earlier interviews

Consuela:

- You had said in your first interview that when you had previously tried to educate yourself about First Nations culture, you felt you didn't necessarily learn the things you needed to know. Could you talk about how the semester in dialogue compares to these previous experiences? What do you think contributed to the differences?
- You also expressed frustration with not being able to effect some of the

situations around you and that influencing your ability or willingness to engage in the dialogue. How do you feel about that now?

Sparks:

- What were you expecting at the beginning of the semester in terms of dialogue? Have your expectations or opinions changed at all?
- Did you learn anything else about dialogue you weren't anticipating?
- How comfortable did you feel in the class and with your classmates when it came to expressing unpopular ideas?

John:

- Could you please talk a bit about the comment you made during a debrief, “voice equals inclusion equals autonomy”?
- You described yourself at the beginning of the semester as “the quiet guy in the corner.” Is this still how you see yourself or do you think it’s changed?

Sarah:

- Looking back to your surprise at hearing Wilson Chambers “talking like a white man,” where do you think that surprise came from?
- What do you think you were expecting? What does you think about that expectation now?

6) Interviews with instructors:

Sample questions that will be used to elicit reflection include:

- Tell me about your teaching practice
- How do you understand the role of dialogue in education?
- How do you see your role or position within the classroom?
- What do you feel is the most important thing about your work?
- What do you find is the biggest challenge about teaching?
- How do you understand and try to cultivate the student/teacher relationship?
- How have the students done in supporting one another in dialogue?
- What were some of the challenges this particular group was faced with in learning dialogue? How would you describe their process in meeting those challenges? How much has the topic impacted things?
- How much room do you think there has been for differing points of view?

7) Questions specifically for Dr. Mac

- Where did you get the idea for the topic of “Indigeneity in Canada: Past, Present, Future?”
- What are some of the things that you hoped to accomplish with this particular topic?
- Tell me about your process: how you plan each semester, how you deal with issues that arise, how you prepare for the daily business of being in the class.

