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Date April 18, 2001
ABSTRACT

In her book The Human Condition (1958), Hannah Arendt claims that one of the fundamental problems with the world today is that humans have lost sight of what is important in terms of living an active life or the *vita activa*.

Arendt believes that an explanation for this can be found through comparing our society with the ancient Greeks. Their *vita activa* categorized human activity into a three-step hierarchy: labour, work, and action. Labour was the most basic of three and involved the tasks necessary for survival. Work came next and involved the creation of artifacts and the beginning of the establishment of a personal identity. Action was the most important of the three categories; it depended on people assembling in public to create something new. People were expected to participate in this public space; it was considered the moral obligation of each to contribute. For the ancient Greeks public action was the highest form of human activity there was.

This is no longer the case and, according to Arendt, herein lies our problem. The modern world is incompatible with the human spirit because we have devalued action to the point where it no longer exists and have replaced it with labour and work. We are distracted from what is truly important and thus cannot be truly fruitful because there is no longer a venue for action, let alone an expectation for it.

In this thesis, I will view the field of education - specifically, teacher support services like Winslow Centre where I work - through the lens of Arendt’s ideas on labour, work, and action. Although teaching should involve all three, current practice devalues action to the point where it is non-existent and celebrates labour and work to the point where educators are paralyzed. Teacher support centres like Winslow facilitate this imbalance. I
therefore come to this investigation from a point of dissatisfaction with many of the accepted ways of acting as a curriculum coordinator. I feel I am not serving teachers as I could and should be.

This thesis will be developed as an allegory in which a coordinator like me searches for answers about what is missing within the constructs of her job. Arendt’s ideas are taken and situated with the context of my own experiences and explained through allegory, literature, personal experience and relevant research. Chapter One explains how Winslow Centre, an organization dedicated to fostering good teaching, needs to be clear about its mandate; I intend to argue that this involves all three aspects of practice (labour, work and action). Chapter Two explains the current situation at Winslow Centre, which is a place that tends to celebrate labour and work and neglect action. Promoting action requires that Winslow Centre foster natality and plurality, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will describe how action, natality and plurality are dependent on creating webs of relationships or a community. The final chapter, Five, reviews the implications - which include issues around bureaucracy and accountability - for curriculum coordinators, or other educational leaders, who would like to work towards including action in their support of classroom teachers. I hope that reading this will inspire other educators to stop and think about his or her own practice.
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For a minute or two she looked down, watching the few seagulls who had ventured this far inland from the lake move around and around, following the pattern of the current. For the first time, she felt the several parts of her world interlock . . . felt herself part of the whirlpool, a part of the art of poetry.

from Jane Urquhart's *The Whirlpool*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my husband, Scott Morrison; my editors, Norm Olding and Ted Orme; my proofreader, Jackie Russ; and my advisor, David Coulter.

Thank you.
Once upon a time there was a teacher who became a curriculum coordinator. She did this for a variety of reasons. She certainly needed a change of pace and, because the nature of her school was radically transforming, a change of venue. She was considered a good teacher and, by some, an educational leader. She had many ideas about what did and didn’t work in classrooms and often thought about why they did and didn’t work. She enjoyed “writing curriculum” and had contributed several lesson ideas and teacher resource packages to her professional association. She believed in public education and cared greatly about her students and (to a lesser extent) their families. She especially cared about teachers, however. She believed that in general they were overwhelmed by their jobs and did not get the support they desperately deserved and needed and yet still managed to perform miracles with their students. She thought her new job at the teacher resource centre would allow her to showcase her talents and provide the kind of support that she had not received when she was in the classroom.

She packed up her classroom and carefully arranged it in uniform labelled boxes and moved them into her basement.

She went to work at her new job.

Months passed, almost a year. Nothing was different except her levels of stress (which were higher) and her sense of job satisfaction (lower). She did not know what to do but knew she had to do something and so decided to go back to school.

That didn’t help either.
Chapter One

All allegories illustrate some sort of point or principle and this one is no exception. In this case, the point is: why did she struggle? She had the expertise, the will, the talent, the job. In this chapter, I'm going to explore what she didn't have: an understanding of the mandate of the teacher centre, what she intuitively felt was important about the job of supporting teachers, and the mismatch between the mandate and her feelings. That her feelings were intuitive indicates something else she did not have: a vocabulary that would enable her to explain to others (and herself) her feelings and ideas about what was wrong with the teacher centre and its services. Before I explore what she lacked, however, I'd like to give my depressed coordinator a name. I'll call her Judith, after Shakespeare's sister. Like Judith Shakespeare, Judith Coordinator was unable to do what she wanted and was unable to understand or describe the forces that worked against her.

Similarly to Judith Coordinator, I work in a building that is supposed to foster better teaching - Winslow Centre in Coquitlam School District - and find some aspects of my job frustrating. In order to understand both my frustrations and Winslow Centre, however, it is of fundamental importance to understand the school district context because it informs teacher, coordinator and administrator behaviour. The next few paragraphs provide that context.

Seven years ago, Coquitlam began reorganization after thirty years of having K-7 elementary schools, 8-10 junior secondary schools and 11-12 senior secondary schools.

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1 Virginia Woolf invents Judith Shakespeare and describes her fate in the essay collection A Room of One's Own. There, Woolf explores the fate of a female Shakespeare, identical to the male one in all respects except gender. Woolf argues that the Elizabethan age in which Shakespeare lived would have conspired against Judith's developing, let alone using, her considerable talents and predicts Judith would ultimately commit suicide out of desperation, frustration and heartfelt despair, effectively silenced by her society. The reasons behind her inabilities to write are obviously different from those of my coordinator's inability to support teachers; however their sense of being thwarted, and confused by the reasons behind being thwarted, is shared.
The new arrangement, concluded in 2000/2001, also called for a three-building configuration: K-5 elementary, 6-8 middle and 9-12 secondary schools. This has caused a great deal of teacher movement, which was orchestrated by the teacher union and management personnel according to seniority. The result, at the high school level, is large groups of teachers with either junior high or senior high experience working together for the first time; at the middle school level, there are large numbers of inexperienced teachers working with a few very experienced former elementary and junior high teachers. These groups of teachers (junior, senior, middle, experienced, beginning) are spread unevenly throughout seven high schools, and thirteen middle schools, some of which are newly built and others of which were converted from former junior or senior secondary buildings. The long junior/senior history in combination with perceived-to-be inequitable transfer policies and an influx of beginning teachers created tension - there was a resentment-laden pecking order along with a sense of frustration about the decision to create a new district model at a time when new curricula were being developed for implementation by the Ministry of Education.

Winslow Centre itself was reorganized along with the schools. Although Winslow has been - for approximately twenty years - the Coquitlam teacher resource site, several performance reviews indicated that most classroom teachers believed Winslow was out of touch with the field. These feelings exist for a variety of reasons, one of which is staffing - it was a perception that Winslow personnel get hired for the Resource Team and never leave it, which removes the individual from "real classroom life" for too long. This perception has bred cynicism and resentment among the teachers in the field,

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2 These groups are spread out into fifty-four elementary schools as well; however, because my experience and background has to with middle and secondary, I will confine my remarks to those school categories.
especially in those who felt Resource Team jobs are not as demanding as classroom jobs. Coordinators operate outside the school-based teaching community and are perceived by many of their colleagues as being semi-administrative in both purpose and position. This can make them untrustworthy in some eyes, which is a perception that can negatively affect the Winslow teacher / classroom teacher working relationship. Reorganization presented a perfect opportunity to redesign Winslow Centre and synchronize it with the rest of the district, which is why I hold a newly-created position: Curriculum Coordinator for Middle and Secondary English and Social Studies and Secondary Business Education.

The problem was that reorganization never reviewed the mandate of the teacher resource centre in a meaningful way. Winslow Centre has always existed to help teachers implement curriculum and provide professional development for them - to help them be good teachers - and that didn’t change. But what does that mean, exactly? What is good teaching all about and what do teachers need in order to be good? There was no clear vision for this, no definition of terms; indeed, there was no centrally agreed upon vocabulary for “implement curriculum” or “professional development” or anything else. Winslow Centre was never conceptualized as to its purpose of supporting educational achievements. Coordinators were to foster better teaching however they and the district leaders saw fit. And, what they saw fit to do varied from department to department and shifted annually with the goals and budget set by the Board of Trustees. Given that there were no answers to my questions to be found in the district, I began searching elsewhere and started finding my answers to those questions in the work of Hannah Arendt, who was a 20th century German-American philosopher introduced to me in one of my classes. Arendt based some of her ideas around the *vita activa* of the ancient Greeks; her thoughts
on labour, work and action provided a vital vocabulary and conceptual framework for my thinking. I decided that ultimately being a good teacher meant leading a good life oneself and modelling a good life for one’s students and others.

It is easy to consider “leading a good life” as being so much erudite pie-in-the-sky, (and thus to ignore it) but the concept is of fundamental importance. Leading a good life means being happy, being comfortable in the world. It means being centred, self-confident and resilient enough to deal with all the experiences offered by one’s existence. It means participating in one’s own life and in society and having the requisite knowledge about self and society to do so. It means growing as a human being in concert with others over the course of a lifetime. Our job as educators is to foster in our students an understanding of what leading a good life is all about and then to foster an interest and ability in leading such a life. Nel Noddings explains it in this way:

. . . our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people.

. . . Most of us hope that our children will find someone to love, find useful work they enjoy or at least do not hate, establish a family, and maintain bonds with friends and relatives (1995, p. 366).

Good educational practice is centred around living and modelling this good life, around being human. In order to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people, we must demonstrate that we are these people ourselves. Teaching is about human communication and connection; when we teach we communicate with ourselves and about ourselves but we also connect with others. We model what it is to be in the world. We model what it is to be human. Herein lies the problem as far as Hannah Arendt
is concerned. In her theory of the active life, or *vita activa*\(^3\), which is predicated on three components - labour, work and action - Arendt argues we have overly emphasized the importance of labour and work and have lost action entirely. Thus, our world currently lacks something of fundamental importance, which means our teachers lack it, which, of course, affects our students. Because of action’s absence, we cannot be human in the fullest sense of the word, whether we are teachers or students. In order to more fully appreciate this, however, a greater understanding of labour, work and action is necessary.

Labour is what we do to survive. Because it has to do with base-level survival it is on the bottom of the three-tiered hierarchy of labour, work, action. It is done by individuals; each alone is responsible for his or her survival. Arendt explains that labour aligns with basic biology: “Labour is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labour” (1998, p. 7). The realities of labour are experienced first hand by the London-based pillagers of religious antiquities in *The Next Best Thing* when they leave civilization for the wilds of the Burmese jungle. “The moment they entered the jungle the village disappeared from view. . . . Blake looked back over his shoulder with open pleasure, as if to say, ‘Your world ends here. Ahead there is no modern, no medieval, no industrial revolution. Only a world devoted to those with the will to survive’” (Saul, 1986, p. 133). In modern times, many of these biological processes are taken care of by automation as, unlike the pillagers in *The Next Best Thing*, we are separated from the truly natural world. We don’t grow our own food or build our own shelters; we go to the grocery story and pay rent or a

\(^3\) The *vita activa* is countered by the contemplative life, or *vita contemplative*. The first is the life we live in the midst of others, the other is the private life of contemplation we live with ourselves.
mortgage for the roof over our heads. The young husband in Alice Munro’s “Cortes Island” is an example of someone who labours:

Chess worked for a wholesale grocery firm. . . . He left the house before it was light, during this first winter of our marriage, and came home after dark. He worked hard, not asking that the work he did fit in with any interests he might have had or have any purpose to it that he might once have honoured. No purpose except to carry us both toward that life of lawnmowers and freezers . . .” (1998, p. 143).

Whether or not we are engaged in providing the means of survival first hand or are engaged in some sort of employment to earn money to trade for the means of survival, the basic tenets of labour remain the same: we engage in these activities in order to survive and only to survive. They serve us no other purpose or function.

Teaching, of course, is full of survival behaviours that are parallel to Arendt’s labour. If labour is what we do for basic survival, then anything the teacher does to get through or survive a day in the classroom is equivalent to labour. Teachers have a constant need for new versions of the technical nuts and bolts that keep their classrooms running smoothly on a daily basis - the anticipatory set, the sure-fire poem or story, the worksheet, the practice test, the video teaching aid, the reading strategy, the performance scale. All of these are examples of labour strategies in the classroom. There is nothing inherently wrong with this: just as a human cannot survive without basic food and shelter, a teacher cannot survive without the tools of his or her trade. They must have the stuff of labour in order to teach.
The life of lawnmowers and freezers mentioned by Chess’s wife alludes to the level of Arendt’s hierarchy that is beyond\(^4\) labour: work. In the early years of their marriage, Chess and his wife have only the bare necessities: shelter, food, adequate heat. Chess labours with his body to provide their basic survival. However, they are moving toward - and looking forward to - a time of more possessions, a time of owning and creating things. These material goods to which they look forward are the products of work.

Work, unlike labour, is not connected to the human species’ cycle of life in that it has nothing to do with survival. Work “is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in ... the species’ ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. ... this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all” (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). This is markedly different from the world of labour, which does not last beyond the moment of labouring and has to be repeated in order for survival to continue. Labour makes life possible while work makes artifacts or material goods possible (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). Because these objects of desire are concrete things, they often outlast both their maker and the people who desire them.

The work of our hands ... fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice. They are mostly, but not exclusively objects for use and they possess ... durability ... and they bear testimony to productivity. Their proper use does not cause them to disappear ... (Arendt, 1998, p. 136).

\(^4\) The word “beyond” can be problematic. Arendt definitely meant “beyond” in the usual sense, but for us today, “different” might be a better choice.
Rachel Price, in Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* places a great deal of value on the use objects created by work. After escaping from her punitive, evangelist father during the Congo Independence, she made her way to South Africa and a series of marriages. Over time, she acquires black gloves and Dior gowns (1998, p. 460) and later, a hotel called the Equatorial that has twelve rooms and two baths on each floor. Converted from a plantation, the hotel has a bar, patios, a swimming pool, a restaurant and is surrounded by fields of orange trees and coconut palms (1998, p. 461). All these use objects give her joy, pride and satisfaction; they were all created through her work and that of her employees. Furthermore, the Equatorial had been started by Rachel’s third husband, Remy, who died before completing it (1998, p. 460) which demonstrates that the world of work (use objects) lasts longer than the world of the worker (people).

Romantic poet William Wordsworth also alludes to the material goods celebrated by Chess, his wife, and Rachel Price, although in a much less positive light. In “The World is Too Much With Us” Wordsworth describes his disappointment with newly industrialized England, claiming that “we are out of tune” (1967a, p. 289) because:

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! (1967a, p. 289)

The world is in disarray as far as Wordsworth is concerned. The powers of humanity are wasted, “we have given our hearts away”, because we are distracted by “getting and spending” (material objects and money) from what is truly important; in his case, what is truly important is a connection with Nature and a more simple existence. For
Wordsworth, the world at the time was far too interested in the products of Arendt’s work (such as the lawnmowers and freezers pursued by Chess and his wife); these are the same artificial objects described by Wordsworth in an earlier age.

Not surprisingly, the world of teaching offers many examples of work. In fact, the labour examples I provided earlier are also examples of work. This is because while the teacher needs them for survival, anything made by the teacher (a handout, a report card, a graphic organizer) is an object, a thing that is produced. (To delineate between labour and work in this context: their use is labour; the fact that they are a created object means they are the product of work.) Any teacher can demonstrate the plethora of objects created through his or her work simply by opening a file of lesson ideas. If these files are anything like mine, they will contain bits and pieces of handouts made by the plethora of educators who represent the collegial history of the teacher in question - as well as the personal creations of the file owner. Indeed, some of these paper objects have already lasted longer than their creators, just as Arendt claimed would occur - I have Shakespeare handouts from a wonderful teacher who died of a heart attack in 1992.

Teachers, then, clearly demonstrate the vital labouring and working aspects of their jobs. However, there is something else to consider, which is the third and most important level in Hannah Arendt’s hierarchical theory of vita activa - action (1998, p. 205). Action is the only level of the hierarchy where individual adults come together; action is therefore dependent on others. It is also the place where newness is created or defined through this group interaction via speech. Interactive talk - speech and action - are of total importance to Arendt because without it, we are not human beings. “A life without speech and without action . . . is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human
life because it is no longer lived among men” (1998, p. 176). According to Arendt, that is exactly the state we are in today: we live a life without action and thus have lost our humanity. Brian Fawcett describes our loss of action and our celebration of labour and work in “Elegy Written by the Shores of an Okanagan Lake”, a poem that mourns urban development:

This world knows the sorrow
of mere development, consumption
without accretion
of thought

and the market\(^5\) isn’t sacred
nothing at all like eternity
and the ultimate questions
of how we live and should.

That voice\(^6\) gone silent
is no single voice; it needs
no sentimental envoi,
nor an epitaph, but rather

words, and minds

---

\(^5\) Literally, the local farmer’s market where produce is sold but also the global market created by capitalism and fueled by artificially induced consumerism.

\(^6\) Earlier in the poem, Fawcett writes of being beyond subsistence (labour) but that we now stand “on the far bank/of the frozen current/of the human soul” - frozen because our collective voice is silent, not giving attention to the important questions of how to live (a good life) nor anything else.
In Fawcett’s “Elegy” the speaker wishes that society would gather to consider “the ultimate questions” and seeks the necessary words, mind and light in which our collective voice could unfold. He seeks the conditions of and for what Hannah Arendt would call action. Unfortunately, we no longer come together in action as a society as far as Arendt is concerned; this is because we have reversed the essential order of two-thirds of the three-tiered hierarchy of labour, work and action and completely ignored the third part. “In the modern age, labor has been valued above both fabrication (work) and action . . .” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 320). In other words, the problem with modern society is that we have either given labour a higher priority than work and abandoned action all together or, at the least, have confused them and their relative importance.

One of the reasons this abandonment has occurred is because the consequences of action cannot be pre-determined, which means action cannot be controlled. Not only is there no guarantee about whether or not anything good will come about as a result of action, there is no guarantee that anything will come of action at all (Arendt, 1998, p. 220). It is completely unpredictable. “Action, though it may have a definite beginning, never . . . has a predictable end” (Arendt, 1998, p. 144). This unpredictability is demonstrated by Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*.

This book is about Buddy Bolden, a cornet player who is credited with being one of the first to experiment with the form of music later known as jazz. Bolden played in a band with five other men; their music was magical because it was so unique and variable.
... the weather for instance could change the next series of notes ... As if, when he was playing he was lost and hunting for the right accidental notes. Listening to him was like talking to Coleman. You were both changing direction with every sentence, sometimes in the middle, using each other as a springboard through the dark. You were moving so fast it was unimportant to finish and clear everything.

He would be describing something in 27 ways (1976, p. 37).

This new style of playing - action in action, as it were - was in direct contrast to other musical styles that followed a recipe or pre-conceived form. These other styles lacked the freedom of expression Bolden lived for. Ondaatje's Bolden explains the difference clearly when thinking about another musician:

I loathed everything he stood for. He dominated his audiences. He put his emotions into patterns which a listening crowd had to follow. ... When I played parades we would be going down Canal Street and at each intersection people would hear just the fragment I happened to be playing and it would fade as I went further down Canal. ... I wanted them to be able to come in where they pleased and leave when they pleased and somehow hear the germs of the start and all the possible endings at whatever point in the music that I had reached them (1976, p. 93).

Bolden's parade ground and interaction between musician and audience is an example of people coming together in action. Furthermore, it is an example of how action and freedom are intertwined: together the people (musician and audience alike) were free of everyday constrictions, created their own music, worked as equals to create it, and didn't
know from one moment to the next what would be created. They were moving "in a space where neither rule nor being ruled existed" (Arendt, 1998, p. 33).

Currently this space does not exist, however. With action’s abandonment comes the loss of freedom because, for Arendt, freedom can only exist when we act in concert with others, which is what action is all about (1998, p. 177). Right now, we are solely concerned with individual survival; we don’t tend to care in meaningful ways about our fellow humans because we don’t see them as necessary to our own humanity. We do not come together in groups for the purpose of creating something new in the Arendtian sense and are therefore not free. It is this lack of being with other people for the purpose of coming together in action, for the purpose of dialogue, that concerns William Wordsworth in his sonnet “London 1802”:

... altar, sword, and pen,

Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower⁷,

Have forfeited their ancient English dower

Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;

(1967b, p. 288)

The sonnet continues to argue that the English society of the time was in need of "manners, virtue, freedom, power" (1967b, p. 288) and thus demonstrates Wordsworth’s concern with all that had been lost through the various revolutions (American, French, Industrial) that informed his culture. For Wordsworth, manners, virtue, freedom and power were necessary to lead a good life; without them - even one of them - life was

⁷ In Anglo-Saxon times, the hall and bower were the main rooms in the large houses of various tribes. These were used as public meeting and decision-making arenas by a people who were known for participatory democracy and the rights of the individual. Wordsworth argues that England has lost that part of her heritage.
missing something of fundamental importance and thus leading a good life was impossible. There are clear parallels here between Wordsworth’s ideas and Arendt’s ideas regarding the importance of action in the *vita activa*.

There are also clear parallels between Arendt’s thoughts on action and the world of education. Teachers are not strangers to action as many classes have moments of it. The “teachable moment” when the class discussion spirals into unpredicted but exciting and worthwhile ground, the discipline problem that came seemingly out of nowhere, the pedestrian group activity that captivated the students, took on a life of its own and spilled into other classes and the students’ out-of-school lives. Even in meetings with their peers, teachers have experienced action: the meeting that never got around to the written agenda because other, more worthwhile things were being accomplished, the moments at the end of the year when teachers actually find time to breathe, talk to their colleagues and find themselves planning a unique new approach to a unit, the Local Specialist Association meeting that begins discussing textbook supply and ends focussed on a vibrant discussion of what is important in Social Studies education. Because there is no entrenched room for it in the larger institution, however, these moments of action are few and accidental. In general, teachers lose sight of their larger purpose (action) while chasing the small, vital necessities (labour, work) of their jobs. Indeed, teachers frequently have the vision of their larger purpose beaten out of them by the very system in which they teach. There is never time or space for them to discuss the other, bigger issues implied by their roles as educators, issues such as the following:

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8 It is a limited form of action, however, as action is an adult activity for Arendt.
9 This isn’t confined to teachers only; I think every educator in the system experiences this. I don’t mean to imply that teachers have this “done to them” by non-teachers (administrators), nor that there is a conspiracy. I think it is more social ignorance that causes neglect.
• What do we want for our students in our classrooms?
• What is the purpose of education in the classroom, department, school, district, world?
• What is educational about what I am doing in my classroom?
• What roles do morality and ethics play in education? In my classroom?
• How can I foster critically thinking, self-sufficient students who will become good citizens?
• How can I help students have a good life?
• What can I do to facilitate students' becoming liberated, free thinkers?

In the current, very utilitarian world, teachers do not have the luxury of time or space for the action and speech so prized by the ancient Greeks and Hannah Arendt. Their world - the worlds of labour and work - is too much with them.

In order to engage in good practice then, teachers need to get themselves back in tune, which means leading and modelling a good life and separating themselves from a life dominated by labour and work. They need to demonstrate all three levels of Arendt's hierarchy and engage in labour, work and, most importantly, action; even more importantly, they need to do this together. Teachers shouldn't always be focussed on finishing a unit, covering learning outcomes, amassing grades or years of service, going from point A to point B in their classes, their careers, their lives, and endlessly chasing some sort of end. For Arendt and the ancient Greeks, action is justifiable simply because it is what it is - the road to freedom (McGowan, 1998, p. 61) and needs no further defense. Without action, we cannot be truly productive or fruitful; in fact, our lack of action means we are not truly human. "Men may labour or work in solitude, but if they
do, they do not realize their specifically human qualities . . .” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 319). We, as educators need to allow for coming together in speech and action, need to achieve Arendt’s freedom, and in so doing, become truly fruitful. The teaching profession would be much more able to achieve the good life - and help students achieve it - if this were the case.

Instituting action in the context of education is no easy task, but a teacher resource centre such as Winslow could well play a role in this process. In order to do so, however, it must have a clear mandate and the coordinators who work in such facilities must both understand the mandate and be able to articulate it. For this common understanding, they need a vocabulary. Hannah Arendt’s theory of *vita activa* - labour, work and action - provides one. Through using such a vocabulary/concept, we will be able to better understand where we are, what we lack, and what we need to pursue. No wonder Judith Coordinator, confined and confounded by externally caused ignorance like her namesake Judith Shakespeare, was able to do neither.

Subsequent chapters of this thesis will further explore, through continued use of allegory, literature and narrative, Judith’s and Winslow Centre’s problems and solutions. The next chapter explains the current situation at Winslow Centre, which is typical of the current educational world in that it emphasizes labour and work at the expense of action.
Judith spent her time at work running in many different directions. Not only was she responsible for organizing after school workshops in her different subject and grade areas, she was made part of several district cross-curriculum initiative teams, which spawned more workshops. She also created several long-term resource development projects. Additionally, she responded to individual teacher, team, department, and school needs on request and often acted as a liaison between textbook companies and classroom teachers. She helped interpret ministry directives for teachers and schools too.

Depending on the day and the project, Judith alternated between exhilaration at "making a difference" and fear that she would drop one of the balls she was juggling. Sometimes, when she did drop one of the balls - either one of her own making or one that was tossed to her - she became depressed or angry. Sometimes she just shrugged her shoulders. She began to wonder what the point was of the treadmill she was on and noticed that some of the teachers in the field were wondering the same thing about their treadmills.

Meanwhile, the work she was doing at university started to sink in. She began to enjoy herself and wanted teachers in the field to share some of the "aha!" moments she had experienced in class. Why couldn't they talk and think in-district about the things she had had to leave the district to talk and think about? She began to look for examples in her district when this occurred spontaneously and tried to figure out ways for it to happen more frequently.
Winslow Centre, like Judith's workplace, is typical of the educational world in that it emphasizes labour and work at the expense of action. This is, I contend, partially because we have gotten out of the habit of thinking and wondering about our educational ends and the means we use to achieve them. Glances at both the district Professional Development Bulletin and my own agenda book demonstrate this clearly.

The District Pro-D Bulletins provide one snapshot of the Winslow facility. These bulletins are distributed each month and advertise the various professional development offerings organized by Winslow staff for the benefit of the teachers in the district. Workshops reflect perceived district need according to Winslow staff perceptions, district goals, and requests from classroom teachers. The May 2000 Bulletin is a usual one; it offers eighteen different after-school events.

These are advertised according to chronological date but they can be divided, as I discovered, into four categories. I decided to analyze the Pro D Bulletin through the use of a favourite activity of mine from my classroom days: sort and predict (although I didn't predict.) I chopped up the eighteen listings and placed them randomly into piles in an effort to categorize them without first creating labels for the categories. This allows the content to create the category instead of the other way around. When I was done, I labelled the four piles that resulted from the categorization and noted the relative number of items in each. There were a plethora of “How To Teach” inservices, several Local Specialist Meetings (which often tend to focus on how to teach something), one or two workshops that present an overview of a particular resource, and one or two district
events. The May Bulletin, if organized according to these four categories, looks like the following:

How To Teach

- Classroom Strategies and Social Studies grades 4-5
- Parents as Literacy Supporters in the Kindergarten Classroom
- Adapting Materials and Resources for Middle School Social Studies
- Teaching Netball
- Reading Recovery Strategies: Running Records K-3 (part one)
- Reading Recovery Strategies: Running Records K-3 (part two)
- Art Lesson Ideas based on Picasso, Miro, Lichenstein, Monet and Carr
- Generations Can Connect Internet project based on student interviews
- Action Research, Technology and the Second Language Classroom

Local Specialist Association

- Art K-12 Local Specialist Association Meeting re: the Integrated Resource Package (IRP) and district resources
- Primary LSA Meeting re: Father’s Day and Year End Survival Lesson Ideas

Resource Overview

- The Critical Challenge Approach to Social Studies K-3: A Resource
- Textbook Presentation on Sightlines English grades 7-10
- Enrichment Kits for Gifted Middle Years Students
- Textbook Presentation on Identities English grades 7-9
- The BC TobaccoFacts Resource Package

District Event
• District Primary Music, Dance and Drama Jamboree

• Coquitlam Secondary Art Exhibit/Scholarship Display

The contents of the May Bulletin reflect the year’s pattern at Winslow in that the ten bulletins from September to June all fit neatly into the above categories. There were a total of 176 after-school opportunities provided from September 1999 to June 2000; 109 of them fall into the How to Teach category, 13 were LSA Meetings, 28 were Resource Overviews and 26 were District Events.

Glancing at my agenda book provides another, different, snapshot of Winslow Centre. A very usual week at Winslow looks like the following. Each item is categorized using the same categories created for the Pro-D Bulletin (How to Teach = HT, Resource Overview = RO, Local Specialist Association = LSA, District Event = DE). One additional category has been created, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. This is Accountability (AC).

Monday

• meet at Kwayhquitlum Middle School to present new Humanities 8 District Resource Binder and discuss Holocaust instruction (HT+RO)

• write English Language Arts newsletter and distribute to schools via interoffice mail (All)

• begin gathering conference speakers (HT+RO)

• guest-teach lesson at Minnekhada Middle on gr. 6/7 writing experimental poetry (HT)

• work on Secondary English Resource Binder (RO)

Tuesday

• meet with SS teachers regarding new WW2 video resource kit (RO)
• locate schools willing to host public speaking festival (DE)

• learn how to do a PowerPoint presentation (HT)

• meet with district principal and literacy group re: district literacy initiative (HT)

• give a workshop on the writing process for secondary English teachers (HT)

Wednesday

• meet with textbook reps re: Middle English Language Arts Resource Review (RO)

• assemble committee of 4 middle years teachers for resource review (RO)

• meet with district Accreditation Support team to plan approach to support (AC)

• attend Middle School SS 6/7 presentation at Citadel (HT)

• judge a school’s open house student booths (DE)

Thursday

• contact Lonely Planet re: permission to use calendar for district project (RO)

• help teacher with gr. 8 visual literacy by planning team-teaching lesson (HT)

• meet at the CTA with Spirit of Secondary Conference planning committee (DE+HT)

• meet with principal re: mid-year budget review/goals accomplished so far (AC)

• co-host SS LSA meeting with the LSA chair (LSA)

Friday

• give short before-school session on identifying weak readers (HT)

• all day interpretation of district FSA/PLAP results (AC)

• call teacher about doing a LitCircle presentation next month (HT)

Unsurprisingly, the items from the Pro D Bulletin and my agenda book in the four categories of How to Teach, Resource Overview, Local Specialist Association and District Event are almost always examples of either labour or work or both. (There are,
however, three notable exceptions, which I shall discuss later. At this point, the four categories and how they demonstrate Arendt's labour and work are my focus.) Labour and work are dominant and attractive ways of understanding the coordinator role at Winslow, but unfortunately, they are inadequate. They are inadequate because they don’t provide a forum for questioning, discussing or analyzing what we are about. With labour, one simply does the task because it is deemed necessary for survival. With work, one does the task to create a use object. Because it is assumed that both survival and use objects are desirable ends, discussion about them doesn’t take place.

The Pro D Bulletin offerings and my agenda book schedule reflect the assumption that the end is automatically worth pursuing. Nowhere in either the Bulletin or my agenda book is there time or space allotted for wondering if what we do (our ends) is valuable. The events in the Pro D Bulletin and meetings in my agenda book are planned and executed with their value assumed - we take for granted that they are worthwhile events to plan and activities in which to engage, but a discussion about whether or not they really are worthwhile or really are something in which we should pour time and money is rarely, if ever, part of the process. The ends are justified simply because they are ends. We did them last year. Some other district is doing them. The research says they are good. They sound good. So we do them.

Often, of course, they are good. Teachers need to know How to Teach, and because both the realities of the classroom and the knowledge base created by educational research evolve over the course of a person’s career, teachers frequently like to have refreshed understanding of How to Teach. The basic job of a teacher is to teach students; a classroom cannot survive without a teacher who knows how to perform the technical
aspects of his or her job. Therefore, teachers either learn, or renew their learning throughout their career, about netball or reading strategies or adapting resources for different learners in their classrooms. In my experience, teachers are very interested in learning about these things, which is why Winslow Centre offers so many of this type of workshop and why I spend a great deal of time meeting with groups of teachers about how best to accomplish learning for students. Of course, this assumes that all the teachers who come to the inservice have an agreement about the value of the inservice. It assumes that they agree on what “How to Teach” is aimed at. It assumes they agree on the end, both of the workshop and of the purposes of education.

They don’t however. If they did, all teachers would teach in the same way and there would be a lot more consistency than there is in how outcomes are met in the classroom and even what outcomes are met in the classroom. So, the How To Teach category, as exemplified by the Winslow workshops and my agenda book is a good example of people gathering together for a purpose the value of which is assumed without discussion or analysis. Again - there isn’t anything wrong with that in itself, but it doesn’t do justice to the complexity of education.

Another frequently occurring type of workshop/meeting is the Resource Overview such as the May offerings for *Sightlines* English and BC TobaccoFacts. These inservices are where teachers find out about the various resources - both student and teacher - that are available for purchase from an educational resource company or directly from Winslow Centre itself (usually because they are created as a district project). Again, I am not claiming that they are bad - merely that there should be more to them. Teachers cannot get along in their classrooms without resources for themselves and for their
students (nor should they have to), which is why this type of meeting/workshop is so popular. Teachers like to know about currently available textbooks so they can buy the ones that best suit their, and their students’, needs; they like to see which teacher guides are most helpful to them; and they like to be aware of the various Winslow-produced resource packages and teaching tools that will help them. The need these things to implement Ministry of Education provincial learning outcomes, Coquitlam School District goals and objectives and possibly their school’s goals and objectives. They like these things because they need them in order to better do their jobs. However, the end - knowledge of resources and accessing the largest possible variety of them - is assumed to be good. It might very well be, but discussion about it would have been useful.

I will provide a single example of this issue. In my first year at Winslow Centre, I was told to find a way to help middle school Language Arts teachers implement the new English Integrated Resource Package. An elementary project was already underway and that committee, I discovered, had decided to make a resource binder to be distributed to all schools. So, I copied them. I assembled a committee of middle school Language Arts teachers, told them we were going to make a resource binder to help teachers implement the English Language Arts IRP, asked them what they wanted in it, created it with their assistance and, the following autumn, launched it to some critical acclaim. There was never any significant discussion about whether or not English Language Arts teachers in middle schools needed assistance with the IRP and certainly no discussion about whether or not a district made resource binder was the best way to support them. The end - that teachers need help - and the means - that a binder will provide it - were assumed throughout the project. This may have been accurate, but who can say with certainty? It
is certain there were many, many Language Arts resources out there prior to my committee creating another one and it is also certain that the new binder is in sporadic use. Maybe some thorough, informed discussion about the ends - and the means of achieving the ends - would have created a more useful product. We’ll never know about this particular How To Teach /Resource Overview example.

Because the Local Specialist Association meetings usually deal with both How to Teach and Resource Overview topics as they pertain specifically to one subject, I won’t go into more detail about those meetings here, having already discussed the categories that pertain to them above. The District Event category, however, is a little different. It comprises events that allow students to demonstrate their special abilities in a variety of areas such as track and field or public speaking. District events can also be times when performing artist groups - such as a drama presentation or musical performance - are booked into a central location so different schools can make appointments for their students to see the show. Coordinators arrange for these events to take place; teachers may or may not choose to participate in the event with their students. Again, the value of these events is assumed and it is assumed to the extent that there were howls of outrage from drama, art, P.E. and music teachers when district finances began to indicate that some programs might have to be cut\. It is felt that these programs help implement the IRP and provide learning opportunities for students that are significant alternates to the usual classroom routines. However, these ends, and the means of the programs themselves, are not discussed or evaluated on any regular basis and I don’t even know if a discussion took place when they were first implemented. Certainly I can find no record

10 The nature of the protests was also pertinent to my ideas about assumed means and ends. They were mostly along the lines of “You can’t cut that! It’s a district tradition!” rather than “You can’t cut that! It contributes to the development of educated citizens in these ways . . . .
of such a process. It is just assumed that they are good. They might very well be, but something else might be just as good or better. Again, we will never know.

My point, of course, is that the four categories of How to Teach, Local Specialist Association, Resource Overview and District Event are all examples of the district taking for granted the value of particular activities and events and then creating means in order for these ends of assumed value to be achieved. I believe that taking anything for granted in education is short-sighted given the importance of education in helping our future citizens achieve good lives for themselves. Charles Rousculp discusses this issue in a memoir about his teaching career; he addresses it in the context of winning at all costs. “Indeed, one of the great sicknesses in American high schools today is that teachers can grow too much concerned with winning and lose sight of a greater responsibility” (1969, p. 180). We should always be asking ourselves how or if what we are doing is a means to that most significant end of all: the purpose of education is to allow our students to lead good lives. I also believe that the inadequate attention we pay to this fundamental question is a reflection of Arendt’s conviction that modern society focusses too much on labour and work, prioritizes labour over work, and ignores action all together.

This can be demonstrated by another look at the four categories I created when analyzing the Pro D Bulletin and my agenda book. With the three exceptions to be discussed later, the activities in all four are examples of either labour or work. How to Teach is, essentially, equivalent to How to Labour. Arendt states that “the mark of all laboring (is) that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly
consumed as the effort is spent. And yet this effort, despite its futility\textsuperscript{11}, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends on it” (1998, p. 87). This is typical of most classroom activities of the teacher; Winslow Centre provides teachers with support in what they do and thus helps them labour. (Really - is there any more powerful motivator to a teacher than the thought of being in a class of thirty or more students with no lesson plan in mind? Life itself does depend on the teacher’s labour in this circumstance!) Workshops that show teachers how to teach netball, how to incorporate reading strategies into Social Studies 6, and how to base art lessons on Picasso or Miro are as much an example of labour as are meetings on Holocaust instruction and modelling poetry lessons.

Again, this isn’t necessarily a bad thing. In fact, Arendt points out that labour is very satisfying and that it is a blessing. Although the word “labour” is slightly pejorative for many people, having associations with the undereducated “common labourer” and “blue-collar worker”, this was not true for Hannah Arendt. For her, labour is aligned with the basic and pure biological rhythms of life and death and as such is very special. “The blessing of labour is that effort and gratification follow each other as closely as producing and consuming the means of subsistence, so that happiness is a concomitant of the process itself, just as pleasure is a concomitant of the functioning of a healthy body” (1998, p. 107).

Teachers also experience the joy of labour in their classrooms; I have never heard one complain of teaching a new class of students to appreciate literature or the wonders of

\textsuperscript{11} Most teachers would object to the word “futile” describing their efforts until they realize that by it Arendt means the labour must be repeated endlessly. The soil must be tilled every year if people are to eat grain; the fire must be lit every day if people are to have heat; similarly, teachers must teach reading strategies or netball every day of the unit and every year of their career in a seemingly endless (and therefore futile) task.
cell structure. To cite a personal example, I find a certain pleasure in moving through a familiar routine in the classroom; there is a rhythm to my teaching, a certain ebb and flow in my essay unit, in which I take both joy and pride. I am sure the rhythms of teaching netball, art, or the Holocaust are equally satisfying to the teachers in those subject areas. Margaret Atwood’s poem “Apple Jelly” provides another way of looking at the joy of labour. After asking why anyone would bother to make jelly in the summer when it is such a hassle and can be bought cheaper in a store, she answers her own question. Jelly making is worth time and trouble (labour) because in each jelly jar is:

   the sun

   on that noon, your awkward leap

   down from the tree,

   licked fingers, sweet pink juice,

   what we keep

   the taste of the act, taste

   of this day.  (1983a, p. 16)

This joy in labour exists even though the jelly will be eaten, will have to be made again next year and is technically a futile, purposeless act because it leaves nothing permanent behind. Despite the need to repeat production of it each year, the routine of jelly-making is felt to be very worthwhile.

This satisfaction with routine can also be seen in Jane Urquhart’s novel, The Whirlpool. Set in 1899 and about an undertaker’s widow, The Whirlpool provides an example of joy - or at least satisfaction - in labour when the widow maintains the business accounts after her husband has died.
When at the end of the morning, she heard the men climb the stairs with their canvas stretchers, she leaned back exhausted in her husband’s chair .... She was amazed to see that she had brought the account book almost entirely up to date (1986, p. 27). [Two years later] she was spending the morning working on accounts. But now she held the pen as easily as a teaspoon in her hand, and the scratch, scratch of the nib was as familiar as the sound of her own breathing (1986, p. 28).

Again, there is demonstrated satisfaction in the routine. The labour of maintaining the books brings pleasure, if not comfort, to the widow. Furthermore, both the apple jelly making and the account managing have parallels in teaching and coordinating. In each lesson I teach, although I will have to teach it again to new students next semester, next year, or next hour, there is a similar satisfaction. Pleasure in routine also attends my coordinator job. I have given the same workshop on reading strategies at least fifteen times and yet I enjoy the rhythm of the session every time. Labour brings its own rewards, despite Arendt’s accurate assertion that it is futile and leaves no evidence of itself. The How to Teach category is thus an examples of labour.

It is also, however, an example of work. Unlike labour, work is not futile and does leave something behind. Teaching, although very repetitive and routine in nature, also has impact on students. Students who have been affected by their teacher’s efforts can therefore be considered results of work. Some might argue that students are not made by the teacher and are not use objects, which are the products of work according to Arendt, but it would be a damning indictment of education to claim that teachers have no effect on their students. Teachers, through their understanding of how to teach, do have an
effect on their students and therefore the transformed student is an indication of the
teacher's work. This is true of my coordinator role as well, as I would be very
disappointed to discover I had had no impact on the teachers in the district. In fact, I
know the reverse to be true. I have been paid the great compliment of "your educational
presence is felt" and have been told by many how much they appreciate the various
resources I have brought to them. Just as students are transformed by the teacher, teachers
can be transformed by coordinator and/or resource centre efforts.

Another example of work can be found in the Resource Overview category of the Pro
D Bulletin and my agenda book. The textbooks, teacher guides and district-created
resources presented at Resource Overview workshops and meetings are examples of the
use objects created by a person's work. In this case, the means is the process of creation
and the end is the object itself. "The process of making is itself entirely determined by the
categories of means and end. ... In the process of making, ..., the end is beyond doubt: it
has come when an entirely new thing with enough durability to remain in the world as an
independent entity has been added to the human artifice" (Arendt, 1998, p. 143). In
addition to the Resource Overview items, objects such as tests, games, visual literacy
posters and graphic organizers - things with a means and an end - that Winslow
coordinators either create or help teachers create are examples of the products of work. In
this respect, the Middle School Language Arts Binder I described earlier is an example of
a use object created through work.

Instances of work can also be found in other places, such as literature. One example
can be found in The Whirlpool when the young husband surveys the newly built skeleton
of his carriage house.
... he moved around to the opposite side of the tent to gaze at the frame of the carriage house. The sun threw a gridwork of straight timber shadows all over the foliage around him. Architecture making its geometric statement on the landscape. The solidity of the work pleased the major. He knew the beams weren't going anywhere, that they would be there for a long, long time (Urquhart, 1986, p. 228).

The second example is from Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, a novel set in 1920's Toronto at a time of massive immigration and frenzied expansion. In the novel, some of the Italian immigrant population worked on the Bloor Street Viaduct, which still stands. They are road-makers.

On the west side of the bridge is Bloor Street, on the east side is Danforth Avenue. Originally cart roads, mud roads, planked in 1910, they are now being tarred. Bricks are banged into the earth and narrow creeks of sand are poured in between them. The tar is spread. *Bitumiers, butamatori*, tarrers, get onto their knees and lean their weight over the wooden block irons, which arc and sweep... They can feel the bricks under their kneecaps as they crawl backwards towards the bridge, their bodies almost horizontal over the viscous black river, their heads drunk within the fumes (1987, p. 27).

Both these examples correlate with Arendt’s concept of work in that the workers create something outside themselves for use by themselves - a use object - and the object itself is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness (1998, p. 153). The young husband creates a carriage house which is pleasing in its solidity and permanence. The tarrers work to lay a road which serves Toronto’s growing population and is more permanent than the plank
road which preceded it. The road crosses a bridge; together the two use objects contribute to improved transportation (and therefore communication and social complexity) in a major city.

There are strong parallels between these two examples of work and teaching. I have already explained how teachers, through affecting their students, work. The use objects they make during the course of their career are also examples of the products of work and, like the young husband’s carriage house, they please the creator. I know I am still pleased with a set of stations I made to assist students in understanding the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. I made those stations nearly ten years ago, which is tantamount to permanence in education as laminated paper resources tend to wear out quickly. I also know that one of my students still listens to Renaissance period madrigals as a result of becoming intrigued with the ones I played at the music station. I also experienced difficulty and fatigue in creating my stations, although hardly as much as the tarrers did.

I can also cite parallels between the two literary examples of work and my current job at Winslow. Last year, for Social Studies, I chaired a committee that was in charge of creating model lessons for Humanities 8. The committee ended up with thirty different lessons that were distributed to schools in hard copy and CD ROM format. I have had frequent feedback about how these two use objects have transformed the nature of Humanities teaching in various classrooms around the district. Like the young husband, I too take pleasure in the solidity and permanence of my efforts. This year, with the help of others, I will create a series of twenty-five photography stations for Social Studies 6, one for each of the thirteen middle schools in the district. Although I sometimes feel as the
tarrers did, that the road to this project’s multi-stage completion will never end, I am pleased with the kit I have created on behalf of the district.

All these examples of work, however, have the same limitation, which is that the value of the end - the use object represented by the stations and the binder - is assumed. The Humanities Binder, my Middle Ages/Renaissance Stations and the Social Studies 6 stations came into being the same way as did the English Language Arts resource. We just decided they were good things to do and did them. They are simply more examples of the How To Teach and Resource Overview categories from the Pro D Bulletin and my agenda book which I critiqued earlier in this chapter. Labour and work have assumed ends that require no reflection - survival and use objects are taken for granted as valuable. This is a problem because it demonstrates there is no time or space set aside for critique in the daily workings of Winslow Centre. The inclusion of Arendt’s third component of the vita activa - action - would force such a time and space. Thus far, there has been little mention of action in the goings-on at Winslow Centre and for good reason: there is little action to mention. As I mentioned previously, however, there is some. I would like to now introduce these anomalies. They will also be discussed further in chapters three and four.

Of the 176 Pro-D possibilities provided to Coquitlam’s teachers, I attended and/or gave 17, of which two were unique in my opinion. The first was a Social Studies LSA meeting, convened for the purpose of promoting dialogue about Social Studies between K-12 teachers. “The primary focus of this meeting is to get to know one another and to share concerns about the teaching and learning of Social Studies in today’s classrooms. While this first meeting is for K-12 teachers, future meeting configurations (elementary,
middle, secondary) will depend on the wishes of the group” (November 1999 Pro D Bulletin, p. 3). It wasn’t the idea for the meeting itself that was particularly special, it was what happened at the meeting. While listing their concerns about Social Studies, the teachers in the group segued into a discussion about what was important about teaching Social Studies. Most of the meeting ended up being a passionate debate about the purpose of such a course and how teachers could best manipulate the curriculum in order to facilitate the development of citizens who demonstrated critical thinking, political awareness and interest in democracy. K-12 teachers were quite unanimous in the value they placed on this end of Social Studies education and passionate in their debate about the best means to achieve it. When the meeting was over, they expressed great satisfaction with it even though nothing (according to the agenda) had been accomplished.

The other unique workshop was the portfolio fair offered on April 11, 2000. The advertisement for the session explained that “teachers from our district will be sharing a wide variety of portfolio collections. You will see portfolios for Student-Led Conferences, Writing, Humanities 8, Secondary English and much more. Come and learn how other teachers use portfolios for instruction, assessment and reporting” (November 1999 Pro D Bulletin, p. 2). At this workshop, presenters outnumbered participants and the scheduled explanation of each person’s approach to the topic was quickly over. Because the anticipated crowds had not materialized, little time was necessary for people to circulate, view and ask questions of the panel of presenters as planned and so we finished early. However, nobody left. Similarly to the Social Studies LSA, an unplanned and unexpected conversation broke out among those of us who were gathered about the
relatively vast quantity of food. While there was no consensus in the group of educators, there was an enthusiastic debate about the purpose of assessment as linked to the purpose of education, what we want for our students, how assessment will help us help them, and how the system is becoming so rigid the tools that are supposed to be in place to assist teachers with their work (report card templates, bubble sheets, computers, timelines) are in fact dictating what needs to be done and when. Assessment, the group decided, was a means to an end much more significant than simply marks-gathering and reporting. It was the means to students who could reflect on their efforts and self-evaluate; to students who could set goals for themselves and their work based on feedback and analysis; to students who were autonomous human beings and were therefore more equipped to lead a good life after graduating from school. The talk was fascinating and was a good example of action.

A third anomaly was the Tuesday literacy group meeting listed in my agenda book which I believe provides another example of action. While both the Board goals and (therefore) Winslow’s goals reflect Coquitlam’s focus on literacy, this meeting was to brainstorm possible approaches to that focus. So, for forty-five minutes, four coordinators and one district principal discussed what they hoped to see come of the literacy goal, what “literacy” might mean in our school district in the new millennium, what the purpose of literacy initiatives and development might be, what the links between education and literacy are, how these links might best be promoted among teachers who

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Hannah Arendt briefly discusses this in *The Human Condition*. She says “In other words, homo faber, the toolmaker [the man who works], invented tools and implements in order to erect a world, not - at least, not primarily - to help the human life process. The question therefore is not so much whether we are the masters of the slaves of our machines, but whether machines still serve the world and its things, or if, on the contrary, they and the automatic motion of their processes have begun to rule and even destroy world and things” (p. 151).
don’t see literacy as their responsibility, and how literacy practices in the classroom contribute to functioning adults in society. The last twenty minutes of the meeting involved selecting ideas from the brainstormed list and creating a template for the remaining activities for the year - business, regimented planning and agenda-making as usual. The first forty-five minutes, however, were quite unique.

These three examples are anomalies because they all involved questioning ends before establishing means consistent with those ends. In fact, the means themselves were questioned, discussed, and analyzed before being completely established. These are the only cases in my experience at Winslow where the practices of labour and work, in which the value of means and ends are assumed, were to some degree abandoned. These three examples, in other words, contain elements of Arendt’s notion of action.

In chapter one I explained some of these elements. I mentioned that action requires others and is where newness is created. I also explained that participating in speech and action is what makes people human. I described the unpredictable nature of action and mentioned that action and freedom are intertwined; without action, people cannot be free to be themselves because they are defined by the others in the group as much as they are by their own speech and deeds.

There is more to be understood of action, however. Like labour and unlike work, action and speech are futile in that they do not result in any tangible product. And, because newness is created with action, it must be re-engaged constantly to keep introducing newness in the world; this means that, like labour again, action has no conclusion. (It is different from labour in that what goes on in the “repeat performances” is unpredictable and, of course, different each time - otherwise what is created would not
be new.) According to Hannah Arendt, “action and speech “do not ‘produce,’ bring forth anything, they are as futile as life itself. In order to become worldly things, that is, deeds and facts and events and patterns of thoughts or ideas, they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things - into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments” (Arendt, 1998, p. 95). Again, there are parallels to be found between Arendt’s ideas and my three anomalies. The literacy meeting was reified into a year’s plan regarding literacy initiatives for the district. The portfolio fair and the Social Studies LSA were reified as items in this thesis. (And all of these events may well have reified in ways I don’t know of - there were many participants in the action after all.)

Reification is not necessary for action; however, it is what happens in order for the action to be remembered in the future. Many moments of action are forgotten because they are not transformed into something tangible. While this fact is what makes action futile, in Arendtian terms, it doesn’t make action useless. As I explained in chapter one, action is a means to the end of being human. We need action to be human, we need action in order to live a good life. Living a good life is of fundamental importance in itself; it is the ultimate end. Teaching about living a good life is therefore of fundamental importance in education. “In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for [people] during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced” (Arendt, 1998, p. 173). If we don’t make space for action we - humanity - will find ourselves in a world that isn’t worth living in. While it is
beyond both the scope of this thesis and my own abilities to pose a solution to this problem on a national or global scale, I do have some ideas for the small “world” of teaching in Coquitlam. Winslow Centre coordinators, through providing time and space for the analysis of the various ends - and their means - for which we strive, will promote the missing element of the *vita activa*: action.

As I prefer not to pose a problem without offering an accompanying solution, the next chapter is a “solution” chapter, albeit an unconventional one. In Chapter Three I suggest that in order to promote action, Winslow Centre coordinators must foster natality and plurality and I will use my three anomalies as running examples for my argument. Then, Chapter Four will explore the ramifications of promoting action through natality and plurality, and Five will explore the ramifications of the consequent webs of relationships.
While Judith continued to look in her district for examples of the kind of talking and thinking she found in her university classes, she began to realize the significance of the working conditions of her colleagues. To a certain extent, both coordinators and classroom teachers worked in isolation. The coordinators were all “one-ofs” and therefore mostly worked alone; the teachers spent the majority of their time with their students and therefore, in the sense of adult companionship, were alone as well.

Her university classes were the reverse - she was surrounded by her peers for four hours each week during the class. And, of course, all the spontaneous moments in-district that she observed occurred within the context of others as well. Clearly, if teachers were to experience the kind of “aha” moments Judith found so valuable, there was going to have to be a way to get them together under circumstances other than those that defined the usual teacher gatherings.

Chapter Three

If coordinators at Winslow Centre are interested in achieving action with their colleagues, they must find a way to promote it. Hannah Arendt’s *vita activa* theory provides some guidance because the concepts of “natality” and “plurality” are closely connected with the concept of action. This means that in order to promote action, natality and plurality must be fostered - the latter two are deeply embedded, or intertwined, with the former. However, this embeddedness raises yet another question regarding the way in which people come together in action: is it primarily competitive, also known as agonal? Or is it primarily cooperative, also known as associative? The roles played by natality and plurality change somewhat according to the form action takes. This chapter explores
these issues. I begin by defining natality and plurality and then apply those concepts to
the running examples I introduced in the previous chapter. From there, I move into a
discussion on whether action is primarily agonal or associative; here, I add other voices
to my own - those of Arendt’s critics and those found in literature. Lastly I conclude, first
by answering the above question about the nature of Arendt’s action and then connecting
that answer to my ideas about which form of action will best serve coordinators at
Winslow Centre.

I begin by defining natality. Natality is closely linked with action because action is the
source from which new things spring. According to Arendt, this emerging newness
replicates the birth process by which we all entered the world. “With word and deed we
insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth....” (1998,
p. 176). Emerging newness is thus called natality; the potential inherent in this newness is
completely unknown and unique, just as what will become of a child when it is born is
unknown because the child is unique. The concept of newness=natality is similar to a
description of a new beginning by bpNichol in the poem “Seaquence”. He writes “a new
beginning / begging / for an ending / but nothing / no string / to tie it up / neatly . . .”
(1983, p. 256). Through simply existing with others, each human being has the potential
to begin something new; this unexpected something cannot be foretold because there are
no mechanisms in place for prediction. Thus, the new beginning, as described in Nichol’s
poem, spirals randomly and untidily, into the future, uncontained.

This randomness and our own inability to predict it, let alone control it, were
exemplified by the three action anomalies I described in the previous chapter. All three of
those examples - the Social Studies LSA meeting, the Portfolio Fair, the literacy planning session - demonstrate sudden beginnings that beg for endings.

These unexpected beginnings also occur in teaching, of course, as the most rigid lesson plans in the world cannot prevent students from taking things into their own hands if they so choose or prevent the teacher from changing his or her mind based on a spontaneously occurring classroom event. Ultimately, it is our students’ new beginnings that we are in charge of in the classroom, as Charles Rousculp explains in his memoirs. “Every time I begin to work with a new student, I must start anew...” (1969, p. 329).

Even if teachers decide to maintain their lesson plans, which makes the classroom experience either work or labour from their perspective, their students are, I hope, being exposed to something new or are making something new of whatever it is they are exposed to. Herein lies the unpredictability inherent in natality. “Teachers are positioned very oddly in relation to the new, since we are asked to facilitate its emergence even though, as Arendt reminds us, we can neither predict nor control the forms this newness will take” (Levinson, 1997, p. 438). The classroom is the source of much natality; all three examples of action from chapter two also exemplify it.

Natality - creation and recreation - is also connected to freedom, “... by freedom Arendt means the capacity to begin, to start something new, to do the unexpected, with which all human beings are endowed by virtue of being born” (D’Entrèves, 1994, p. 66). Although Arendt’s concept of freedom is not the primary focus of this chapter, or indeed, this thesis, freedom is so integrated with action and natality that in many ways it is synonymous with them. It therefore cannot be completely ignored. Thus, I shall briefly follow this tangent and discuss Arendt’s notion of freedom.
In her essay “What is Freedom?”, Hannah Arendt explains that in order to be truly free, people must liberate themselves from the necessities of life (1993a, p. 148). The parallels with action are, I hope, obvious: action is the third level on the labour-work-action hierarchy and can only be achieved when people are liberated from the necessities of life (labour). Furthermore, Arendt claims that being free and the capacity to begin something new coincide (1993a, p. 166); it is this ability to begin something new that enables people to participate in action. Creating something new is, of course, natality. Arendt also explains that “because he is a beginning, man can begin, to be human and to be free are one and the same” (1993a, p. 167). So not only is being human and being free the same, people are free as long as they act (1993a, p. 153) and to act is to be human. If we don’t participate in action, we are no longer human and we thus cannot be free. It is therefore through action/natality that human beings are able to transcend their daily existence. R.G. Everson demonstrates this phenomenon in his poem “Credo”:

Passionate human love, the scenes of nature,

agony of bringing into life

child, or thought, or sound, or shaped colour

- these triumph over our lives’ horror. (1966, p. 247)

Bringing something to life, whether it be child, thought, sound or shaped colour, is an example of action, while the something that is born is born through natality. The agony referred to in Everson’s poem is an example of the difficulty of action/natality as well as an example of birth-agony. Being with others can be difficult; being with others while potentially producing something for the world can be even more so. However, not engaging in the difficult act means not transcending the mundane existence decreed by
work and labour; it means not achieving our potential as human beings. There is more to life than mere survival or production of use objects; according to Arendt, the “more” is action and the purpose of action is natality - bringing newness into the world. These things are the key to our humanity and it is our humanity that allows us to be free, to triumph over our lives’ horrors.

It is the differences between labour and work and action/natality that allow us to understand why Arendt believes that action/natality alone can make us human and allow us to be free. In *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction*, John McGowan defines natality as “the introduction of something new into the world in the birth of each human being and in the novelties introduced by action” (1998, p. 37). This explanation implies some of the differences between it and labour and work. Natality - birth - is about novelty and newness, which labour and work are not. The products of labour and work can be predicted, which is not true of action or natality. Labour and work are confined by means/end thinking - labour’s end is survival and work’s end is use-object creation - while action/natality transcend means/end thinking and its concomitant confinement in order to provide the chance of freedom to the human race.

Although teaching and coordinating have much to do with labour and work, which I demonstrated in chapter two, ideally they should have to do with action/natality as well because, according to Arendt, we are eliminated from the possibility of being human if we operate only within the realms of labour and work. No-one can lead a good life if he or she is prevented from being human and coming together in action with others in order to potentially create, or give birth to something new (natality) is our way of accessing our humanity. This is closely linked to education, because one of the mandates of our
educational system is to enable students to lead good lives as adults and to allow them to help future generations to the same end through more education still. Teacher Charles Rousculp explains that this is one of his fundamental beliefs about teaching. "...for these reasons I linger in a room where the past intersects the future. Surrounded by the young, I share their spring and their indomitability. What is more, I've talked myself into supposing that some little part of me will travel into the tomorrows I shall never see" (1969, p. 19). Each generation, through education, gives birth to the potential of itself and the next generation. Indeed, Hannah Arendt argued that "the essence of education is natality, the fact that human beings are born into the world" (1993b, p. 174). Education provides the human race access to living a good life; living a good life is dependent upon being human, which humans are not free to do without action and natality.

The above paragraphs have provided a rather lengthy explanation of what Hannah Arendt meant by natality. I turn now to the concept of plurality, which is also connected with the concept of action and must also be fostered if we want to achieve action. In the paragraph immediately prior to this one, I referred to the human race, which is of paramount importance because it reinforces the fact that we are "we"; nothing to do with action can be done in isolation and therefore freedom can only be achieved in the presence of others. Because no one can achieve action alone, one of the conditions of action and natality is a group of people and, ideally, the group must be as plural in nature as possible. This is due to the multiple perspectives offered by a diverse group of others. Rousculp offers his thoughts on the importance of human diversity when he says:

I should hate to think of any monocultured world made up of a monochromatic people living by a monolithic creed. I thrive on variety, I treasure diversity, I need
opposing views. There is a very sound basis for my position, I believe. I have never been brought into contact with other races, other ways of life, other philosophies without growing substantially in my own thought and perspective. 

(1969, p. 275)

Plurality is, essentially, human diversity; it represents the diversity of all human beings and the enrichment of perspective they potentially bring to speech and action (Arendt, 1998, p. 7); it is, therefore, a reflection of the fact that a variety of people live together on the earth. Thus, plurality is the reality of the human race. Arendt, in fact, called it "the law".

Without plurality, there can be no action because action is dependent on the presence of others and only varied, diverse others provide the tensions that can spring into action. If there were no diversity in the world, then there would be nothing to discuss, nothing to disagree about, nothing to create (McGowan, 1998, 134). Nothing new would come about. This is also why it is important to avoid, in certain circumstances at least, groups of like-minded people. If a group is of one mind, it is not plural.

The various attempts that had been made in political theory and practice to invent a single 'people' speaking with one voice seemed to Arendt to betray a complete failure to understand what politics is - namely, the arena within which human beings most comprehensively manifest their plurality. Unanimity is neither probable, nor desirable. ... In so far as unanimity does occur, it seemed to her a danger signal, a sign that people had ceased to think. (Canovan, 1992, p. 227)

What we need at all times, in fact, is disagreement, but disagreement within a group of people that nonetheless searches for agreement and believes that it can be found. Total
agreement, however, is fatal to plurality; achieving it would eliminate speech, action, and natality. Ultimately freedom would be lost as well (McGowan, 1998, 135), because freedom is action; without the one, the other is automatically lost.

This is, of course, exactly what transpired during the examples of action I described in chapter two. There was good will present in all three groups, whether I refer to the Social Studies LSA meeting, the Portfolio Fair or the literacy planning session, but there was also enough diversity in the group to prevent agreement or even easy consensus on most of the issues raised. The Social Studies LSA meeting had representatives from schools across the district, ranging from K-12 (although there was more representation from the elementaries and secondaries than there were from the middle schools); that factor, in combination with the teachers' wide-ranging practice and curricula experience, contributed to a discussion that richly reflected the diversity of participants. "This power to communicate makes possible a continuity of perspectives. When perspectives are multiple yet continuous, they illumine more or less fully, 'from all sides,' as it were, a single person or object perceived in common" (Fuss, 1979, p. 165). The Portfolio Fair and literacy planning session were smaller and smaller again, yet they still had teachers, coordinators and administrators of diverse enough background to make agreement on the issues difficult, although the search for agreement via discussion was fruitful.

The diversity, or plurality, of these groups also caused the discussion to evolve in unpredictable ways, another hallmark of action and natality. An event itself isn't explicable until it is history which is why it is beyond anticipation (Arendt, 1993b, p. 166); however, the unpredictable nature of an event is caused by the contributors to the
event, the presence of others. Each person in a group approaches the problem under analysis (or issue under discussion) from a different, unique, perspective.

All selves are firmly ‘situated’ in particular bodies and sociocultural experiences. They are born with or learn identities involving gender, family relationships, language, cultural and social norms, and habits. But at the same time, individual selves have the capacity to think and act freely, to rise above their situations - never totally, but to some degree - in both thought and action. (Jacobitti, 1997, p. 214)

If these others are not diverse in nature, there is less likelihood of the different personalities in the group interacting in a variety of ways. Each group member represents an individual force, a tangent of idea and thought that will change depending on the other individuals with whom he or she interacts. This is because “in the meeting of the various vectors that make up the lines of force in any situation, ... action is diverted and transformed” (McGowan, 1998, p. 68). Plurality, by its very nature, means that the various vectors - people - will be diverse, multiple, plural, transformative.

Classroom examples of this abound. I can’t think of any of my classes, even in the relatively homogenous classes I taught when I first entered the profession in a small rural district in the Fraser Valley (no ESL students, no students of colour, almost no First Nations students), that didn’t provide enough diversity of background, personal experience and general thinking patterns to cause unpredictable patterns of discussion and behaviour. All my classes were examples of the diverse nature of plurality.

Plurality, within the context of action, also contributes to individuality. Our individuality is defined precisely because we exist in the plural (McGowan, 1998, p. 22).
Diverse persons coming together in action allow each person to develop and demonstrate his or her unique qualities. “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live” (Arendt, 1998, p. 8). Plurality manifests itself in the tension between our collective sameness and our individual difference. We are all the same because we are all human and share certain needs and biological behaviours; we vary because we have different experiences, beliefs, cultures, genders, ages, families, and jobs. When people gather in groups, each person is seen as compared to the others. “Plurality, then, means not only that individuals exhibit unique identities in their relations to others, but also that the full diversity of those identities is displayed only by the involvement of the individuals in a variety of relationships” (McGowan, 1998, p. 23). Thus, it is only in the group that the qualities of the individual can be perceived.

I believe this is true of any group in which I have participated or created. When, as a coordinator, I am in charge of assembling district committees to create a resource document or review various textbooks, for example, I deliberately choose people who I know have varied backgrounds and I try to choose from both genders simply because I am interested in the full opportunities of dialogue afforded me by plurality. And, when those groups gather for their predetermined task, they demonstrate their differences by speaking from their different perspectives. Thus the English teacher with ESL classroom experience will make different comments about a book or an activity than will the Gifted specialist or the Learning Centre specialist. Often, the strategies or resources recommended by the one are radically different from, if not opposed to, the strategies or textbooks recommended by the other. This is simply because the criteria for “good”
strategies and textbooks range due to the different natures of their students. And yet, the job of the district coordinator is to create a resource or select a textbook that is accessible to many students rather than a select few. Inevitably, the various group members contribute to this ultimate end; all of my groups, despite the differences between the individuals that are exaggerated by their juxtaposition on the district committee, conclude their time on the committee with a product that is useful for the even more diverse teachers in the field.

The whole committee process reflects a reality of Arendt's notion of plurality. The teachers are all different; they are unique individuals. They are also the same; they are all teachers. In other words, "...human plurality means that we are both undeniably distinctive, and inescapably more-than-one" (Bickford, 1995, p. 316) and herein lies a problem that has plagued Arendt scholars for a number of years. If we are both more than one (part of a group) and distinct (individual, separate and uniquely special), then how does action work, exactly? Is the primary emphasis on our uniqueness or on our togetherness? In other words, "the paradox of plurality lies in the fact that each human being is a unique 'who,' yet every human being shares equally this quality of uniqueness" (Bickford, 1995, p. 316). The next part of this essay attempts to answer that question with a discussion of two different interpretations of action: the agonal and the associative.

In order to understand what is meant by the agonal (competitive, performative, expressivist) or associative (cooperative, collective, communicative, consensual) interpretations of action, it is necessary to examine not only Arendt's ideas, but also those
of her critics. Earlier in this chapter, I twice used the word “tension\textsuperscript{13}” and this illuminates, I think, the whole issue. There is a tension between the two notions of action: are the people who gather together competing to have their perspective become most-noticed and most-remembered or are they working together to arrive at a new, possibly consensual, perspective entirely? Because the ancient Greek society, on which Arendt’s \textit{vita activa} theory was partially based, was an agonistic society in which members competed or contested for recognition of their deeds, I will consider the agonistic interpretation of action first.

Hannah Arendt herself, of course, recognized the competitive flavour of her theory. She mentions the “agonal spirit, the passionate drive to show one’s self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states” (1998, p. 194) when she describes the ancient Greeks. Personal individuality was disclosed by acting in front of others. “...in varying degrees all public discourses are occasions for identity formation and disclosure (that is, for doing things that reveal who we “really” are to others and how we matter to posterity in ways that are beyond our conscious intentions)” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 247). This issue of identity is always very important when considering action, but for those who favour an agonistic interpretation of action, it becomes key. Dana R. Villa is one of those people, as he makes clear in his essay, “Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation and Critique”. “Arendt values political action for its unmatched revelatory capacity .... The form of being-together implied by the notion of plurality, by a \textit{political} existence, enables the expression of a unique distinctness, a uniqueness that appears through the individual actor’s words and deeds” (1997, p. 189).

\textsuperscript{13} 1. Without plurality, there can be no action because action is dependent on the presence of others and only varied, diverse others provide the \textit{tensions} that can spring into action. 2. Plurality manifests itself in the \textit{tension} between our collective sameness and our individual difference
Bonnie Honig expresses this idea more simply when she says “action produces its actors; episodically, temporarily, we are its agonistic achievement” (1995, p. 145).

Although there seems to be some agreement between critics like Villa, Honig and Calhoun that Arendt’s notion of action provides an identity for the actor at the moment of acting, an agreement which is easily confirmed by reading Arendt’s The Human Condition, there is less agreement about the significance of action’s identity-creating role. Honig, for example, sees this as Arendt’s recognition that because people are products of the multiple forces of their personal beliefs, backgrounds, life experiences, gender, race and what-have-you, they are, in essence, multiple selves. Any one of these selves can come to the fore in an agonistic performance. “Performativity and agonism are not coincidentally connected in Arendt’s account. Arendt’s politics is always agonistic because it resists the attractions of expressivism for the sake of her view of the self as a complex site of multiplicity whose identities are always performatively produced” (Honig, 1995, p. 149). Villa, on the other hand, sees it quite differently. He believes that if action produces a personal identity, or at least demonstrates it to the world, there must be a core self that is revealed; it is this nugget of personal individuality that is revealed to one’s peers during an agonistic performance. “What kind of self then, is implied by the performativ model of action? The expressivist conception assumes a core self, a basic or essential unity of innate capacities that are expressed, actualized, or concertized in the world of appearances” (1997, p. 190). Either way, it is clear that the agonistic interpretation of action is heavily dependent on competition in order for personal identity to be revealed. It is in competition with one’s peers that one’s self is made apparent to them, whether or not the self is core or multiple.
The issue of competition also raises the issue of equality, which affects the willingness or ability of a person to share his or her voice with others. Thus far we have seen that plurality is "... living as a distinct and unique being among equals" (Arendt, 1998, p. 178). The equals, of course, are other human beings and it is these others that allow each person to stand out in distinction (Arendt, 1998, p. 176); the crowd is the background for each person's personal bas-relief as it were.

This distinctiveness is impossible without equality, however, which points to a tension in the action-is-agonal interpretation itself. People who come together in speech and action must be equal - for the duration of their togetherness at least - or it isn't speech and action for which they have gathered. If they are not, then voices might be silenced (loss of plurality) because people are afraid to speak due to possible repercussions from other places in the unequal hierarchy. Or, people might be more inclined to remain with the status quo and not offer any ideas that hint of the radical or new (loss of natality). In other words, this raises the idea of a level playing field. If action is agonal, then the competition must be based on fairness or equality or it isn't really action at all - it is the power-laden dominance of a few over others.

Nicholas Temelcoff, a character in Ondaatje’s novel In the Skin of a Lion, implicitly understands this. He is an immigrant to Canada from Macedonia and in the months and years immediately after his arrival cannot participate as an equal in his new society. His voice is silenced and he cannot offer any ideas, let alone radical or new ones. He was unknown to his peers. "Privacy was the only weight he carried. None of his cohorts really knew him. This man, awkward in groups . . . ." (1987, p. 48) went to school at nights in order to learn English because he knew "if he did not learn the language he would be
lost” (1987, p. 46). Nicholas thus provided himself with one of the keys to becoming an equal participant in society. Later, he would become the owner of a bakery, therefore provide himself, through his newfound status as a businessman, with a key to another group in which he becomes an equal participant.

The role of equality in the disclosure of self through competitive deeds is one aspect of the agonal interpretation of action; the nature of unpredictability is another. An agonistic interpretation of action lends a certain edginess to the notion of unpredictability, a certain danger which has to do with natality. As I mentioned before, natality and action are closely intertwined; in a way, the second is the product\(^{14}\) - or child - of the first. “... action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting” (Arendt, 1998, p. 9). It is because we are born that we are capable of being reborn through action and it is because natality is about birthing something new into the world that it is, like action, unpredictable. Louis MacNeice, in a poem about the daily news, explains how on the “stage of life” anything can go in any way:

We wish to remind you that upon this stage
Slapstick may turn to swordplay,
The cottage flowers may give a sudden hiss
The trees curve down their hands in heavy gloves -
A malediction on the nape of the neck. (1966, p. 141)

\(^{14}\) Action, however, still remains futile - without permanent evidence - unless these products are reified into something concrete as discussed in chapter two.
The tone of this poem illustrates, in addition to the realities of action’s unpredictability, the dark nature of that unpredictability when viewed through the lens of agonism. No human being can precisely foretell what will be the results of a group’s interaction in the same way that although one might predict that a child will likely be born of a pregnancy, the details and particular qualities of that child are unknown until after the birth is over. This is so with action and natality as well. “It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before” (Arendt, 1998, p. 177). Thus, natality limits our ability to foresee the future (McGowan, 1998, p. 55) which makes controlling the future an impossible task.

This, in itself, is not particularly edgy or dark; however, it becomes so with agonism because agonism emphasizes the solitude of each human being. Ultimately, as at the point of birth, we are alone within the context of others. Coming together in a competitive spirit provides the potential for winners and losers, people isolated in their winning or losing states. If we are to define ourselves against the bas-relief of our peers, our peers, however temporarily, become less defined. “[Agonism] is centred not on excellence and theatrical self-display, but on the quest for individuation and distinction against backgrounds of homogenization and normalization” (Honig, 1995, p. 159). While it is always true that any one event could go any way, it is the agonistic version of action that makes this unpredictability more frightening because ultimately we are alone in our competition with others. We want to do well against them as we deal with the unexpected swordplay, hissing flowers and entrapping trees. Hannah Arendt explains it in this way:
... it seems as though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by “bearing” and “finishing” the enterprise, by seeing it through. (1998, p. 189)

The agonal interpretation of action leans more toward the beginning stage of the process, when the actor is acting solely\textsuperscript{15} in competition to stand out. The person strives to be different from others, which, when connected to plurality, creates almost too much of a good thing - too great a diversity in the group - and could potentially lead to chaotic disagreement. Thus, in its relative emphasis on solitude, the agonistic interpretation of action is comparatively edgy and dark, although it still requires the presence of others.

Interestingly, although Arendt looked to the ancient Greeks for her model of life as it should be lived: the \textit{vita activa}, she wasn’t necessarily blinded by the flaws in their choices. She certainly recognized that an agonal interpretation of action, while it did much to explain her views on the importance of being with others for the purposes of disclosing and confirming personal identity, had its drawbacks. She recognized the tension inherent in her model, which some of her critics seem unable to recognize themselves. For example, Martin Jay claims “... there is ... a neoconservative Arendt .... who embodies a performative notion of politics, scornfully rejects universal principles, loudly prefers agonistic opinion to consensus building reason ....” (1997, p. 348). Both Honig and Villa, mentioned above, seem more focussed on the performative or expressivist implications of the agonal interpretation of action than is helpful. Margaret Canovan, on the other hand, notes Arendt’s awareness of the drawbacks of a too-agonal interpretation of action. “Arendt was prepared to be highly critical of the Athenian

\textsuperscript{15} Both possible interpretations of solely apply here - the actor is acting alone; the actor is acting only for the purpose of standing out in a competition.
concern with self-disclosure and glory” (1992, p. 137). Furthermore, Canovan asserts that Arendt was not as enamored of the Athenian model of the public space - in which citizens (white male property owners only) came together in speech and action - as has been portrayed, partly because of the dark side of competition. “Notwithstanding her romantic sympathy with Athens, she was perfectly well aware of the drawbacks of this solution, and prepared to admit that the non-violent public space within which the citizens moved was not only a small clearing in a world of slavery and total war, but was itself poisoned by the acute competitiveness in which the Homeric spirit lived on” (Canovan, 1992, p. 143). These problems with the agonal interpretation of Arendt’s action thus lead me to the other interpretation option: the associative.

The competitive nature of the agonal interpretation of action is quite different from the associative interpretation. When people act in front of others, they reveal themselves as themselves to each other, which means participating in action has to do with personal identity. Identity is thus revealed through acts and deeds. So far, this is similar to the agonal interpretation. However, “this revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are with others and neither for nor against them - that is, in sheer human togetherness.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 180). In the case of action-by-association, the competitive factor is removed, or at least de-emphasized. Portrayals of identity can occur more accurately when the actor isn’t operating under the stress of competition because then he or she is more free to demonstrate his or her distinct, unique qualities as they are compared with others, rather than as they are in reaction to others. In this case, the second
half of the birth experience Arendt wrote about in *The Human Condition*\(^{16}\) is emphasized. Rather than action’s initial solitude, joining others is the key to understanding the associative interpretation of action.

If our distinct, unique qualities are demonstrated in the context of action, then the fact of plurality necessitates that all must participate in speech and action. The loss of one voice is significant if each voice represents a certain, special, perspective (McGowan, 1998, p. 30). George Orwell describes the significance of each human being in his essay “A Hanging” when a group of British soldiers escort a Burmese man to the gallows for his punishment. “It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. ... He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone - one mind less, one world less” (1985, p. 318). In one moment, Orwell discovers the vital importance of plurality; the world is diminished by the loss of the Burmese man because his voice is lost and with it, our potential for action in the presence of diverse others is reduced\(^{17}\).

The importance of plurality is also what Patrick Lewis, the main character of Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, came to understand as he walked home one night. Ondaatje uses the metaphor of music and musicians for society and people:

> The cornet and saxophone and drum chased each other across solos and then suddenly, as Patrick drew alongside them, fell together and rose within a chorus.

> ... He walked on beyond the sound of the street musicians, aware once again of

\(^{16}\) “... it seems as though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by “bearing” and “finishing” the enterprise, by seeing it through” (Arendt, 1998, p. 189).

\(^{17}\) This would be, surely, less of an issue with the agonal interpretation of action: it is easier to do stand out if there is less competition (although the lesser the competition, the lesser the significance of standing out).
the silence between his individual steps, knowing now he could add music by simply providing the thread of a hum. He saw the interaction, saw how each one of them was carried by the strength of something more than themselves. (1987, p. 144)

The value of a multi-voiced interaction, which creates something more than any combination of individuals could create (the whole is worth more than the sum of the parts) is why Winslow coordinators, if they are to promote action through fostering natality and plurality, must consider ways of involving all teachers. If all voices are important, then all voices must participate and be heard.

Both the Orwell and Ondaatje examples point to the importance of every voice, which, in a way, is linked to the notion of equality. If plural people are to participate in action, then everyone must feel free to participate, which means everyone needs to feel equal. If we don’t have all participants (all voices), then we are less plural than we would otherwise be and our associations, which provide identity, are less fulfilled and less meaningful. “Political action, action in concert, presupposes civic and political equality as well as the expression of the new and the unprecedented, the expression of that moment that distinguishes the doer from all others” (Benhabib, 1996, p. 56). In “real life” this can be a very tricky thing to manage. As a classroom teacher, for example, I often spent quite a bit of time constructing the groups I wanted my students to work within; one of my criteria for a successful group was assembling a selection of people who would challenge each other but not shut each other down. One of the rules of brainstorming is that in the initial idea-generating stage, all ideas must be accepted; if they are not and the ideas of one person are rejected, then the group has lost the voice of a contributor and
with it, all the potential ideas that person would have contributed. Thus, I attempt to facilitate associative action through sensitivity to plurality, equality and personal identity.

At the district level, this becomes even more complex as people are very aware of their position in the overall hierarchy and, for one reason or another, may not be as willing to fully participate as the coordinator might like. Equality is a factor whether or not the action interpretation is agonal or associative. This is probably another reason why labour and work dominate the culture of Coquitlam School District because with the patterns implied by those Arendtian concepts, life is much more streamlined and less uneasy. Everyone knows what to do and when to do it; the means are justified because the ends are of assumed value and there isn’t any need to worry about the ramifications of one’s actions and statements. Everyone knows his or her place. A life dominated by labour and work is much more tidy and comfortable than one dominated by action. Plurality and natality aren’t even issues if life is dominated by labour and work.

The importance of equality among participants in the group provides another difficulty for coordinators, and teachers for that matter. According to Arendt, no one person or persons can lead, rule or have more power or voice than any other (1998, p. 234) if action is to occur. There must be “interaction among equal participants. If the participation is not equal, plurality (a full diversity of selves, actions and opinions) cannot result” (McGowan, 1998, p. 26). This is a challenge for those interested in fostering diversity because different people from different backgrounds inevitably reflect the various rankings (socio-economic status, education, management hierarchy) and the power that accompanies those rankings. One approach to this dilemma is found in the salons of 17th century France. “For the salon participants, equality is an ideal based upon their shared
humanity, and their specific talents and abilities as individuals sharing certain tastes and sensibilities. Such equality prevails against otherwise existing social, economic, and even political inequality among salon members. Both the public spheres of the polis and the salons form bonds among their members” (Benhabib, 1995, p. 100). The group must operate, however temporarily and artificially, outside the various hierarchies and rankings that usually inform the relationships of the people.

Although this provides a difficulty, given our usual hierarchical trains of thought, it isn't an insurmountable one. Classroom teachers do it all the time when they ask students to share their honest feelings and opinions on a topic, regardless of what the teacher or other personnel in the school might feel. I remember when students of mine were reading Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and, as a result of a workshop I had attended, I suggested the culminating activity of a waltzing ball. That suggestion spawned talk about how the research for the project would ensue as the students were to invent characters for themselves who would be, of course, “up” on all the news of the day; how the students would go about learning to waltz (I certainly couldn’t teach them); where and when the ball would take place; how they might find themselves Regency-period clothing and; above all, how the assessment component of the unit would be handled. Although I had had the initial idea, the students dominated the conversation about how it would evolve and the end product was quite different from the one I had vaguely envisioned with my initiating suggestion. For example, there was no evaluation as the students thought I had gathered enough marks and there was still time in the semester to gather more later. They wanted to do it for fun. The point of all this is, of course, that the students understood there was a temporary suspension of the hierarchy of the teacher/student relationship
while we discussed and created their Pride and Prejudice culminating activity. They were my equals for that purpose.

This can be true for coordinators as well. Creating feelings of equality is necessary if a group of people are to engage in anything resembling action. The Social Studies LSA meeting is an example of that. Both the president of the LSA and I, as district Social Studies Coordinator, could have altered or ended the free-wheeling discussion if we had “pulled rank” but we didn’t. The assessment coordinator could have done the same thing at the Portfolio Fair, telling people how things should be done and what the Ministry of Education protocol is on the topic that was under discussion, but she didn’t, nor did such behaviour occur to her. The district principal had a particularly strong opportunity to end vibrant discussion and the potential for action and natality (despite the presence of plurality) during the literacy planning session because the division between her position as management representative and the coordinators’ positions as union members is quite a bit deeper than the division between teacher and coordinator. (This is so because coordinators and LSA presidents are still teacher union members, which reduces the division between them and classroom teachers.) The literacy conversation didn’t end, of course, partially because of the realities of plurality. “Because we are plural, action in politics is not a matter of lonely heroes but of interaction between peers; because we are plural, even the most charismatic leader cannot do more than lead what is essentially a joint enterprise ...” (Canovan, 1992, p. 205). In all three examples, participants felt free to talk and share; they all attempted to make their voices and ideas heard and were also all interested in hearing the voices of others, whether or not there was agreement between them. And so the conversation of these plural people spiraled into something unexpected,
but utterly valuable, despite the inequality that existed between group members outside that particular group.

This unexpected spiral is, of course, natality, which (I repeat) is as unpredictable as action itself (in fact, it is why action is unpredictable). Both the agonal and the associative interpretations of action recognize this, although the way it unfolds is a little different in each. The associative interpretation provides for a more holistic, group response to the unexpected. “The One About Coyote Going West”, a short story by Thomas King that reinterprets a native Genesis myth, does an admirable job of demonstrating associative response to unpredictability. In this tale, Coyote travels west while making the things that exist in the world, like trees, mountains, buffalo, and clouds (1993, p. 71). Coyote also makes a mistake (1993, p. 72). The mistake becomes a character in the story and creates everything to do with Caucasian mall culture - snow tires, vacuums, televisions, pastel sheets and golf carts (1993, p. 78), to name a few items. Coyote then works with a group of ducks and the mistake to set things right. The original creations get changed (1993, p. 76), and the ducks create many more ducks (1993, p. 81). During a duck creation dance, Coyote gets over-excited and tries to eat the ducks (1993, p. 80) but gets caught by the mistake. Finally, the ducks transform themselves into the first Indians (1993, p. 81), become unhappy with their new appearance and, blaming Coyote for their predicament, stomp on her until she is flat (1993, p. 82). Meanwhile, the mistake gets away and Coyote must once again reinvent herself. And thus the world changes, constantly creating and recreating - birthing - its

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18 Rather an enormous mistake, I would say.
own future in unpredictable ways - through the combined, cooperative interactions of the beings that inhabit it\textsuperscript{19}.

Although they can agree that it is the combined interaction of a plural people coming together in speech and action that gave rise to the associative interpretation of action, there is some disagreement among Arendt’s critics about the nature of the association. Two differing thoughts on the subject come from Seyla Benhabib and Maurizio Passerin D’Entrèves. Benhabib prefers to call this form of action “narrative”, which emphasizes the connection between the fact that the action takes place in the web of relationships joining plural people (the group) and the stories of action the group can tell after an example of action takes place (1996, p. 125). D’Entrèves, on the other hand, calls the associative interpretation of action “communicative”, emphasizing the fact that while action does provide opportunities for identity expression, it allows people to establish communicative relations with one another (1994, p. 84). “... the public space is a discursive space that arises whenever people act together in concert, establish relations of

\textsuperscript{19} This short story actually demonstrates many aspects of Arendt’s \textit{vita activa} theory. Coyote makes things thoughtlessly, although not as thoughtlessly as the things made by the mistake. Her creating - and the mistake’s creating - is an example of Arendt’s work; they also exemplify my earlier point about means/end thinking. Neither Coyote nor the mistake demonstrate any thinking about their creations before they leap in and start making them, they simply assume the world will be better (fixed, in Coyote’s words) and make yet another object. The current status of First Nations people in Canada today is an indictment of the mistake’s thinking, or lack thereof. Coyote’s predicament once she is stomped flat also has a parallel in Arendt’s theory. Until she can survive, she cannot make anything. She ends up focusing on the necessities of labour until she has her basic survival needs taken care of; only then does she return to working to save the world, although by then she has no-one to save it with as the ducks/Indians have all disappeared. It was only in the context of others - the mistake and the ducks - that Coyote was able to truly engage in action and natality, and she did so through association with them rather than in competition against them. It might have been dysfunctional and unpredictable, but they all acted together.
equality and solidarity, and engage in processes of collective deliberation mediated by speech and persuasion. Here action is a communicative model, that is, in terms of the consensual generation and testing of norms of social interaction" (d'Entreves, 1994, p. 153). In other words, Benhabib looks to the stories that arise as an after-effects of action, or after a particular action-inspired event has transpired (since action has no end) for her particular associative action label while D'Entrèves looks to the relations between people that made action possible, or were caused by action, for his.

Regardless of what her critics think of action, and all the possible interpretations of it, it is important to consider which interpretation(s) best suit(s) the needs of coordinators at Winslow Centre, since that is one of the points of this thesis. Clearly, there is a tension between the agonal and associative interpretations of action; there is also a tension between the different assessments of both agonal and associative interpretations. An obvious problem with the agonal interpretation is that it is possible for an already plural group to never achieve agreement because of competition and individualism. The associative model does the reverse: it allows a plural group to lose sight of its plurality in the interest of agreement and thus achieve "groupthink". Neither extreme is ideal or productive, so I think there is little to be gained from an either-or consideration of the concept of action.

Arendt clearly did not intend such a consideration and did not value one more than the other over the course of her career (although she did seem to admire the agonal more than the associative in The Human Condition). I would argue, with Curtis, that "...to hold both agonistic and consensual moments of political life in a common, if tension-filled, frame is crucial if we are to understand the deepest importance of Arendt's work to us" (1997, p.
McGowan points out that “individual identity is created through competition with others with whom, on another level, we ‘act in concert’” (1998, p. 129). That being said, while I do not forget the agonal and the contributions such a model can offer group interaction, I lean toward an associative-emphasized interpretation of action as being the more useful for education and Winslow coordinators. I prefer to emphasize acting in concert and de-emphasize competition, although I do not ignore its contributions to the group as a whole.

This is because of the reality of the teaching/coordinating day, which, as I mentioned in chapter one, tends to be one of isolation. Because we are isolated, I don’t think it is as valuable a use of our time, when we do (finally) get together, to compete as it is to share. Identity-disclosure will happen no matter what, since that is an inevitable product of action, but it doesn’t need to be the primary goal of the teacher groups I am interested in establishing. “The urge to self-disclosure is not always compatible with the establishment of intersubjective relations, nor is self-realization the same as communicative understanding” (d’Entreves, 1994, p. 91). It is the establishment of intersubjective relations and communicative understanding in education that interests me; I believe the agonal tendencies of any group will provide the critique necessary to avoiding groupthink. Like Fuss, in other words, “I have found it difficult to reconcile her [Arendt’s] ‘agonal’ conception of politics with one that is not merely more familiar to us, but that is at least as attractive: politics as the institutionalization of the arts of persuasion and accommodation” (1979, p. 171). If leading a good life, which is the ultimate goal of education, involves being with the others who share the planet, then a cooperative model
is superior to a competitive one. The primary goal of this thesis is to suggest ways to institutionalize the arts of persuasion and accommodation in the context of teacher groups; clearly, the associative interpretation of action lends itself more to this goal than does the agonal interpretation.

I hope it is now clear how the concepts of action, natality and plurality are interwoven. At the beginning of this chapter, I opened with the statement that the concepts of natality and plurality are embedded in the concept of action which means that in order to promote action, natality and plurality must be fostered. I then stated that action itself is open to interpretation: is it primarily agonal or associative in nature? The answer, of course, is that it is both.

It is important to remember, however, that the concept of action is itself embedded in something: leading a good life. "... action is the supreme blessing of human life, that which bestows significance to the lives of individuals" (d'Entreves, 1994, p. 68). This is, of course, the purpose of education and is therefore why coordinators like me should be interested in promoting action through fostering natality and plurality. Ultimately, my interest is rooted in the connection between good practice and students leading a good life as adults. My interest in action, natality and plurality stem from this root.

Fostering natality and plurality requires the simultaneous fostering of comfort and (oddly) discomfort. Not only must we be willing to abandon our means/end thinking and be willing to accept the idea of gathering together for no purpose other than to see what might come up, we must be willing to live with whatever transpires. The results of action are both unpredictable and irreversible after all. However, through gathering together

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20 There are nearly six billion people on the planet and the number grows larger daily, not smaller. We must be able to get along with one another or we will not survive.
with others in plural groups for the purpose of action/natality, we might rediscover what we currently miss - the action part of the *vita activa*. And thus, we will live a good life.

John Ralston Saul explains the link between comfort with discomfort and living a good life in this way:

> Common sense, creativity, ethics, intuition, memory and reason. These can be exploited individually as a justification for ideology; or imprisoned in the limbo of abstract concepts. Or they can be applied together, in some sort of equilibrium, as the filters of public action. The virtue of uncertainty is not a comfortable idea, but then a citizen-based democracy is built upon participation, which is the very expression of permanent discomfort. The corporatist system depends upon the citizen’s desire for inner comfort. Equilibrium is dependent upon our recognition of reality, which is the acceptance of permanent psychic discomfort. And the acceptance of psychic discomfort is the acceptance of consciousness.” (1995, p. 194)

For Saul, common sense, creativity, ethics, intuition, memory and reason are the tenets of a good life. Without them, a person is missing something that is integrally human and the person is, in Saul’s words, unconscious. This is similar to Arendt’s idea that without action, a person isn’t human. Thus, Saul argues that participation in public action, although what may come of the participation is uncertain, is to become conscious. To be conscious is to be alive.

Saul also raised the issue of corporatism, which, although beyond the scope of this thesis, does remind me of the concepts of labour and work. Like corporatism (which depends on labour and work), labour and work depend on the citizen’s desire for inner
comfort. It is much easier, less stressful, to go through life only worrying about oneself and, perhaps, one’s immediate family than it is to consider others. It is more straightforward and therefore comforting to think about and accommodate personal survival and the creation of use-objects that will make life more pleasant than it is to gather together for who knows what.

Action is predicated, of course, on the assumption that gathering together for who knows what is fundamentally necessary. Natality and plurality, together with action, make good practice possible in education, despite, or perhaps because of, the uncertainty associated with natality and the potential chaos induced by plurality. As educators we need, if we are to achieve good practice, to separate ourselves from a purely labour/work existence every once in a while and attempt to achieve Arendt’s action, which means, therefore, that natality and plurality must inevitably be fostered as an accompaniment. It is because Winslow’s mandate is to foster good teaching that the coordinators who work there should be interested in fostering natality and plurality in order to achieve action.

Action cannot be promoted without fostering natality and plurality which means there must be equality among participants, a diversity of voices, and comfort with discomfort. A choice must also be made about which interpretation of action is best for the purpose: agonal or associative. While the two cannot be entirely separated since the nature of action implies that both are present at all times (I see action as a continuum between the agonal and associative interpretations), I think that the associative interpretation is the more useful one for education. To come together in speech and associative action, then,

21 There is no guaranteed means-end (process-product) with natality as nothing might come of the group’s efforts or something entirely unexpected might come of the group’s efforts. Also, even if something does come, it may or may not achieve reification as a concrete product. As for plurality, chaos is a possibility that always exists when a group of diverse equals assemble for the purpose of speaking and acting with one another. It isn’t inevitable, but it is possible as there are so many voices and ways for the group to go.
which is provided for by natality and is dependent on plurality, the participants need to be connected to each other in some way. Chapter four describes how action, natality and plurality are dependent on creating webs of relationships.
During her quest, Judith re-discovered her district's action research model. This program had provided release time to teachers from any grade level or subject area in order to get together and explore - research - something of interest and relevance to them. The groups met several times a year with a coordinator who acted as an action research facilitator; participants displayed their findings at the end of the year in a district wide action research fair. The program was immensely popular with teachers who greatly appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas with their colleagues, experiment with their classes on the topic of their choice and, in general, discover where their research took them. Frequently, the research questions teachers started with were not the ones they concluded with; the displays at the year-end fair were often narratives of their ever-shifting and changing journeys of exploration.

In Judith's first year on district staff, the action research program received a substantial amount of funding from the district. In her second year, funding was greatly reduced and by year three, district funding had been eliminated except for a couple of groups that were dedicated to researching a coordinator-selected topic. Participating teachers had changed from year to year as well so there was fragmented continuity from group to group and year to year.

Teachers were welcome to continue with action research if their school was willing or able to provide release time because the resource centre could always provide coordinator-facilitators. However, the situation was very frustrating for teachers and facilitators who greatly felt the loss of the overall district initiative and gradually the
number of action research groups died away. By year four of Judith’s tenure, action research was gone.

Reflecting on the story of action research in her district prompted Judith to add more items to her growing list of criteria for establishing teacher "talk and think" groups. In addition to a group of people, she needed the people to feel a commitment to one another, to have some sort of relationship and continuity. She also wanted the groups themselves to be somehow entrenched in her district’s culture so they wouldn’t suffer the same bandwagon fate that action research had suffered.

Chapter Four

If a coordinator like me is to consider ways to promote action in a school district, it is, obvious, I hope, that fostering natality and plurality is of critical importance. That will be impossible, however, unless the people involved have some sort of relationship with one another. In fact, they must be connected via webs of relationships, which means that they must form a community. This community can be completely transient, created only for a short-lived purpose like a conference organizer group or it can be semi-permanent like a district committee. It could also be a group that came together for no stated purpose at all other than the fact that the members like each other and want to see each other once in a while. Either way, a group won’t accomplish much in the way of action if there is no personal connection between its members because it is in the person-to-person connection between plural people that action and natality emerge. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the importance of establishing relationship webs and will argue that establishing such webs helps people engage in representational thinking, which, in turn, allows them to be better teachers and/or coordinators. I will also argue that we don’t have
such webs now, or they aren’t as easy to access as they should be, because the educational system has built-in barriers that prevent establishing and maintaining webs of relationships. Throughout the chapter I will continue to refer to examples from literature, Arendt’s critics, and my own experiences as a teacher and coordinator in order to support or exemplify my arguments.

Coincidentally for me, Coquitlam School District itself produced a document that demonstrates the importance of establishing relationship webs among teachers: the 1997 Winslow Program and Services Review. This was produced by a stakeholder group under the leadership of an externally contracted consulting firm; the group was responsible for evaluating Winslow Services and making recommendations for improvement. The reviewers held focus group discussions with a variety of school district personnel in order to discover how they felt about Winslow-provided services. Ultimately, the topics they discussed fell into fourteen categories: teacher support and resources, service to students, professional development, liaison with educational services and other agencies, roles and expectations, staffing levels, accountability, the facility and

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22 One very typical type of group in education today is the stakeholder group. These groups are comprised of a representative or two from each of the various communities of adults that participate in the school system. For example, a typical stakeholder group in Coquitlam school district will likely include representatives from the Coquitlam Teachers’ Association (CTA), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Coquitlam Principals and Vice Principals Association (CPVPA), the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), the students, the board of trustees, upper management and, depending on the focus of the committee, someone from the local business community. While stakeholder groups are valuable for many reasons, they aren’t the type of group I refer to in this thesis because as a Winslow Centre Coordinator interesting in promoting Arendt’s action, I am confining my interest to groups of teachers only. (I suppose a teacher stakeholder group could exist. It would have representatives from all three school levels - elementary, middle and secondary - and possibly from the variety of subject areas as well, again, depending on the focus of the committee.) Interestingly enough, Arendt herself didn’t like stakeholder groups (Calhoun, 1997, p. 253) because she believed firmly in each person’s individuality and consequent unique contributions to any discourse. Because each person was unique, no one person could represent others that happened to share his or her job description or role in the district. According to Arendt, we can only represent ourselves.
its operation, service model and organizational structure, communication, redundancies, personnel, district reorganization and continuing education (1997, p. 17).

Without going into too much detail about the review itself, which had quite a broad focus, I would like to highlight those comments that indicate an interest in establishing webs of relationships. For example, teachers felt, according to the executive summary of the review, that Winslow Centre should be for them alone (1997, p. 17) rather than administrators, and that Winslow staff should concentrate on discovering and coordinating the various outstanding teachers in Coquitlam so they could become more visible in a variety of ways, including providing workshops, doing demonstration lessons and taking the lead in district projects (1997, p. 19). Later in the review, the word "network" was used when discussing a similar use of the master teachers in the district. "Participants suggested the secondment of classroom teachers to act as leaders, become mentors, provide demonstration lessons and arrange school-based contact. Winslow staff should recruit and coordinate this network of teacher leaders" (1997, p. 21). The review also made it clear that teachers in the field were unimpressed by the bureaucracy that they felt Winslow had become (1997, p. 18 and 24).

Requests for Winslow-sponsored communities were also published in the review. "The thought arose that Winslow staff should establish a district-based team to deal with broader issues of student support and to provide leadership in areas such as early literacy practices" (1997, p. 20). Furthermore, it was requested that Winslow staff work to keep schools in contact with each other, partially to ensure a good information flow regarding provincial, district and school-based initiatives (1997, p. 22) but also to coordinate multiple-school staff development according to similar needs (1997, p. 20). It was also
suggested that Winslow staff organize web pages, email links and voice mail to ensure adequate and timely sharing of resources and ideas (1997, p. 30).

While I recognize that a need for practical information-management is driving a lot of these suggestions and requests and illuminates a view of education that is solely labour and work oriented, I think it would be short-sighted to ignore the fact that these requests also indicate a need for teachers to be with one another, to see each other and talk to one another in some way. These are clear messages about what constitutes good teaching as far as the teachers of Coquitlam are concerned, (and are also examples of how labour and work have come to dominate our educational culture\textsuperscript{23} as explained in the previous three chapters). If teachers request networks, sharing sessions, more visibility of their colleagues from both other schools and Winslow Centre, teacher teams to discuss broad issues, and multiple-school meetings, they are simultaneously requesting a need for community - a need for webs of relationships. The Winslow review, in addition to other things, demonstrates their need to feel connected to one another.

This is because of the nature and implications of associative action. Action and speech take place between people; one human being speaks with and acts in front of, or to, another. An “actor always moves among and in relation to other acting human beings” (Arendt, 1998, p. 190). Even if the topic of the speech and action is about one of the world’s tangible objects, there is an intangible connection between the people who are doing the speaking and acting. D.G. Jones describes this connection in his poem “Nocturne: In the Way of a Love Song” when the speaker discovers “the world has been

\textsuperscript{23} The fourteen categories of the Review tend to be dominated by labour and work; they are survival or object-creation focussed. This contrasts with the statements of need made by teachers regarding networks and meeting coordination, which demonstrate a desire to gather together for speech and action (as well as sharing labour/work tips).
joined / indivisible, everywhere, ever. / I stand on the cobbles and listen / To the
multitudinous voices” (1983, p. 138). The multitudinous voices are, of course, an
example of plurality and thus it is our very diversity that makes us able to connect.

182); it is as real and significant as the world of tangible objects that “we visibly have in
common” (Arendt, 1998, p. 183). It is the total number of intangible connections between
people that Arendt refers to as the web of human relationships. “We call this reality the
‘web’ of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible
quality” (Arendt, 1998, p. 183). Thus, the realm of human affairs is, really, the web of
relationships between them (Arendt, 1998, p. 184). It has always existed, will always
exist and it is because of the permanent existence of the web that coming together in
groups for the purpose of action is even possible. Clearly, without a very diverse
population - plurality - our web of human relationships would be very limited.

It is in this web, moreover, that people expose themselves as unique individuals; while
they are caught in the web (and they are always embedded in it, they are always with
others), they disclose themselves as themselves (Arendt, 1998, p. 182). As Hannah
Arendt explains, participants are defined through group interaction (1998, p. 179). Each
participant brings his or her own perspectives to the action dialogue; these perspectives
are created by the background and life experiences of the participant. This has been
discussed in chapters two and three. It is also demonstrated by Lady Aurelia of Darracott
Place when she joins a group of people as they try to solve the mystery of her son’s
shooting. “She then turned, and looked round the room, with all the lofty contempt
natural to the descendent of eleven Earls . . . . No one saw these august personages range
themselves at Lady Aurelia’s back but (as her appreciative elder son afterwards asserted) no one could doubt that they had all of them hurried to the support of so worthy a daughter” (Heyer, 1993, p. 302). Lady Aurelia, like anyone who participates in a group, is a product of her past.

She is also a product of her present. In a way, the people who come together in action each represent two selves: a “me-alone” self and a “me-in-the-group” self and it is somewhere in the tension between the two that personal individuality exists (McGowan, 1998, p. 64). Because it is necessary to take the views of others into consideration and it is also necessary to measure one’s personal beliefs or opinions against those held by the others in the group, the individual group members mutually experience the tension of the alone/group interaction through their conversation (McGowan, 1998, p. 64). They have their own ideas and opinions, but these can be modified by participation in the group’s dialogue. Also, the “me-in-the-group” self is not only part of the group that has gathered for the purpose of speech and action, it is also part of a multitude of other groups (plurality, again). This multitude of linkages between different people and different contexts is the web of human relationships. Since the web of human relationships is thus comprised of innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions (Arendt, 1998, p. 184), any action occurs in the context of an already existing web of relationships and that same action will create a shift(s) or change(s) in the web.

Wherever men live together, there exists a web of human relationships which is, as it were, woven by the deeds and words of innumerable persons, by the living as well as by the dead. Every deed and every new beginning falls into an already existing web, where it nevertheless somehow starts a new process that will affect
many others even beyond those with whom the agent comes into direct contact.

(Arendt, 2000, p. 179)

This is, of course, an example of natality. The new process is the continuous and unpredictable\(^{24}\) process of giving birth to newness. It is whatever the group’s action produces. In a 1964 interview with Gunter Gaus, Arendt describes the natality aspect of participating in a web of human relationships: “We start something. We weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes of it, we never know” (2000, p. 21).

Natality is part of the action equation because of the web of human relationships; we are born into the web we inherit from our ancestors. The nature of this web will also dictate to some extent whether the action that we participate in will be primarily agonal or associative. (And over the course of our lifetime, it will no doubt be both and all points in between.) “We all begin life inserted into narratives, stories and webs that were spun before us, and that will accompany us, and against which more often than not we will have to struggle” (Benhabib, 1996, p. 113). The realities of the web in which we are born also contributes to the unpredictability of action previously mentioned. Levinson explains it in this way:

The enlightenment dream of perfection eludes us because of the peculiar quality of human affairs - which always take place in relation to what Arendt calls a ‘web of human relationships’ - and the peculiar quality of time, which is not linear but is itself webbed. The mere fact that humans are constantly being born into the world and inserting themselves into the ‘web’ of the world means that what is

\(^{24}\) Arendt offers a remedy for this unpredictability, which is the act of making and keeping promises. She also, by the way, offers a remedy for the irreversibility of action, which is forgiveness. However, although promising and forgiving are relevant to this thesis, they are beyond its scope and thus won’t be discussed further.
new will never proceed in a straightforward fashion toward a recognizable end-
point. (1997, p. 451)

And so, natality, the nature of our action and action’s unpredictability are all connected
to, if not caused by, the complex web of relationships between plural human beings.

The ever-increasing size and complexity of the human web of relationships
contributes to an interesting conundrum. According to Arendt, people are free only when
they achieve action in the presence of others; action takes place in the context of webs of
relationships, therefore, and creates more relationship webs as the act evolves. This
contributes to the conundrum, or paradox, as Peter Fuss calls it. (It also provides one
explanation for the unpredictability of action/natality.) “... the baffling paradox [is] that
men are most free when they are least sovereign. Exercising their capacity for initiative,
the essence of their freedom, they help create a web of human relationships that so
thoroughly entangles them that they seem more the helpless victims than the masters of
what they have done” (1979, p. 164). We achieve freedom through action when we are
trapped in our web of relationships with plural others and we can achieve action in no
other way.

I’d like to consider the implications of all I have said thus far regarding webs of
relationships as it pertains to the everyday realities of my job in Coquitlam school
district. Just as Lady Aurelia is a product of her past and present and brings her
background with her to any interaction with others, so to do teachers, students and
coordinators.

Think about the examples of action I provided in chapter two and developed further in
chapter three: the Social Studies LSA meeting, the Literacy Planning Session, and the
Portfolio Fair. All participants in those sessions were bringing themselves - and their pasts as they contributed to themselves - to the meetings that were in the present. Each person lived the tension between me-alone and me-in-a-group for the duration of the meeting; each person contributed his or her will, belief system, intentions and personal agenda to the dynamics of the meeting; each person demonstrated, through his or her input throughout the meeting, how unpredictable the outcome of action can be. In fact, each person demonstrated that "... the ‘web’ of human relationships and enacted stories constitutes the horizon, in the phenomenological sense, of human affairs. Every speaking and acting human person finds such a horizon as the always already present background within which its life unfolds" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 112). Thus we act on the stage of humanity against the backdrop of our own interconnectedness - our webs of relationships. And thus we achieve freedom while being ever more entangled in the additional webs we weave on our stage, which in turn become the backdrop for the webs of the future (and so on, and so on, ...).

The Social Studies Local Specialist Association (SS LSA) meeting illustrates this admirably. I was at the meeting in my role as Social Studies coordinator, as I am responsible for helping the LSA chair accomplish the goals of the LSA. I'm also a friend of the SS LSA chair, who is trying to accomplish things a little differently than his predecessors accomplished them. Additionally, I was the chair of the district’s Social Studies British Columbia Task Force Analysis Committee, which had met some months previous to this particular LSA meeting. On that committee were some colleagues from one of our secondary schools; the Social Studies department head of that school is another friend of mine and attended the SS LSA meeting to which I refer. The Task Force
Analysis Committee had concluded that the BC governments' findings were inconsistent with Coquitlam's reputation for excellence in teaching Social Studies; my department head friend had initially agreed with that statement but had later changed her mind, which involved disagreeing with the members of her department who sat on the district committee. The SS LSA chair felt strongly that the Task Force findings were incorrect, which put him in conflict with my department head friend. Both of them felt that the resources-availability situation in the district, which was one of the reasons for the meeting, was terrible until they heard information from the other people in the room at which point one person's opinion was confirmed and the other person changed opinions. I was in agreement with one person and not the other at this point, and didn't want to rock either the boat of my friendships or become the "district heavy" through mentioning that it didn't really matter what they thought because the Task Force Committee's findings had been publicized months before and the issue was dead. (Also, the notes I was taking at the meeting indicated one person was right and the other wrong.) I became annoyed with the one friend for taking the group to a useless place (from my perspective) and for changing and not changing opinions at inappropriate times based on inaccurate listening and recall. I was also anxious for my other friend to avoid being hurt. And so it went - shifts and changes, concerns and interests, all of us joined in some or several ways. I'd like to point out that this illustration involves three people and one meeting only - and there were nearly twenty in the room with two more meetings planned for the year. Imagine the actual web of relationships and dynamics that was there, as opposed to the one I have just described!
In order to consider the web of relationships itself, I’m going to return to Arendt’s weaving metaphor for a moment (“We start something. We weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes of it, we never know” (2000, p. 21). It is a useful one for comparing labour and work to action and for thinking about the ways in which a plurality of people interact. Arendt’s third sentence is the key to comparing action to labour and work. With action, we don’t know what will transpire from our coming together; with labour and work we do know because the end of labour is survival and the end of work is a use-object. The end of action, if it has one, is action itself. The second sentence is the key to thinking about the ways in which people interact. Essentially, if action and natality are to occur, the people who are temporarily involved in a community - or weaving a particular web of relationships together - must consider both their individual strand and the fabric as a whole. They must be aware of and sensitive to the viewpoints of others.

Arendt called this representative thinking. Engaging in it is our responsibility while in a group or even while alone because we - people - inhabit this world together, because we are plural. “I remain in this world of universal interdependence, where I can make myself the representative of everybody else” (1993c, p. 242). This is what I attempted - and sometimes failed - to do with my colleagues at the SS LSA meeting. I assume they were attempting - and sometimes failing - the same thing. Many of Arendt’s critics have

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25 By representative thinking, Arendt means that one person in a group should try to represent the others, that is, to make present to his or her mind the standpoints of the others and, if possible, those who are absent (1993c, p. 241). This is different from the kind of representation done by members of stakeholder groups, however, because Arendt is not arguing for a blind empathy with those who are absent, “nor of counting noses and joining a majority” (1993c, p. 241). It isn’t that one person can represent another, because that is impossible as all are unique, but that one should attempt representative thinking when with others in a group, which means to “make present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent” (1993c, p. 241).
explored the notion of representative thinking; I turn to them in the interest of developing the concept further.

Lisa Disch compares the concept of representative thinking to visiting in her essay “Please Sit Down But Don’t Make Yourself at Home”. She writes “as a visitor, I think my own thoughts but from the place of somebody else, permitting myself to experience the disorientation necessary for understanding how the world looks different to that person” (1997, p. 136). McLure explains it as a process: while “imaginatively visiting the place of others, one checks one’s initial pleasure or displeasure in an image by considering it from the standpoints of places where one is not” (1997, p. 76). Another perspective on the concept of representative thinking is provided by early psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung in the novel Pilgrim by Timothy Findley. While discussing the best methods for understanding, and therefore treating, mental patients, Jung explains to another doctor that their “imagined world is real. If they believe these things, then so must we ... at least until we have learned to talk their language and hear their voices” (1999, p. 58). The members of a group must thus behave if they are to successfully interact with each other and thereby achieve speech and action. They must, while weaving their strands into the cloth of human relationships, take the time to understand the strands held by others, no matter how different they are (Arendt, 1993c, p. 241).

I think the best committees I chaired and the best groups in which I participated have all implicitly understood the concept of representational thinking. An excellent example is the Portfolio Fair group, whose members really worked to understand the context of each person’s opinion before responding to it, often by comparing that person’s context and experiences to his or her own. While there was no final conclusion drawn about
assessment in that conversation, the individuals did have their opinions formed by more than just themselves and were thereby enriched. That group admirably demonstrated D'Entreve's contention that opinion "is a distinct form of knowledge which arises out of the collective deliberation of citizens, and which requires the use of the imagination and the capacity to think 'representatively.' By deliberating in common and engaging in 'representative thinking' citizens are in fact able to form opinions that can claim intersubjective validity" (1994, p. 128). Other groups I have worked with have demonstrated the same spirit; they are, in fact, too many to mention here.

This willingness to explore the other person's opinion and position characterizes some of the best classroom discussions I have had as well. I remember when I suggested to my Honours 11 students that they do the waltzing ball for their Jane Austen unit. The class discussion that erupted over that decision, as well as the assessment issue that arose with it was one of those that I will remember after I retire, one of those that confirmed my choice of profession as wise: the students were thoughtful and caring about each other's perspective regarding marking and evaluation, they listened to what each person had to say, they attempted to summarize the other person's thinking especially if they disagreed with it - even over something as relatively trivial as learning how to waltz, which in no way has anything to do with the English curriculum for which they were responsible and therefore couldn't have affected the all-important report card. My students, like my colleagues in the Portfolio Fair demonstrated that "... specifically moral compromises exhibit the structure of pluralistic consent, the willingness to cooperate and act together with those who are not the same as us either in beliefs or ascribed characteristics"

26 And, of course, other groups can't be mentioned here because their members don't engage in representational thinking.
(Bohman, 1997, p. 69). I think they demonstrated that teaching as action depends on representation thinking. I was proud of them. It was magic.

This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer was getting at with his hermeneutic circle and fusion of horizons; he sees communication, dialogue across differences, as vital. It is our obligation as members of the human race, whether or not pure, unencumbered communication is possible, to genuinely consider the views of others. According to Richard Bernstein in Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, Gadamer:

\[
\ldots \text{tells us that it is only through the } \text{dialogical} \text{ encounter with what is at once alien to us, makes a claim upon us, and has an affinity with what we are that we can open ourselves to risking and testing our prejudices.} \text{ (1983, p. 128)}
\]

Engaging in speech and action is one method by which we can test our prejudices, by which we can engage in the dialogical encounters with others that are our responsibility. It does even more than test prejudices, however. Arendt states that “action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries” (1998, p. 190). In other words, through action we are forced to forge new relationships and, in so doing, further open our minds. By participating in speech and action, we are allowing something new to emerge (natality) in the context of the world’s diversity (plurality) while creating new relationships in an already very complex web of them. This is particularly important in schools because it is far too easy to become submerged in the daily routine of labour and work. It is easy to become lost in the intricacies of one’s subject and department and thus retreat to such a narrow space that the closest limit or boundary can’t even be seen. “Freedom of association and the habit of associating force
individuals out of their self-centeredness toward a concern for the good shared with
others” (Benhabib, 1996, p. 71). Coordinators who attempt to achieve action with their
colleagues will be participating in pushing past limitations and crossing boundaries with
them, albeit purposefully. And thus an ever-increasing web of relationships will form.

The ever-increasing nature of the web is also something to consider, partially because
it has what is for some, a dark side. Action has no end, quite literally. Once it starts, it
keeps going forever. “… action always takes place within an already existing web of
human relationships where every action becomes a reaction, every deed a source of future
deeds, and none of these can be stopped or subsequently undone” (D’Entrèves, 1994, p.
81). It is because of the complex web of relationships joining the people who act that
action continues forever. A person’s, or group’s, beginning reverberates along the web,
following and creating paths unforeseen by the actors. Arendt’s word for this is
boundlessness. Natality, because of the new connections and new webs that it provides, is
boundless:

Since we always act into a web of relationships, the consequences of each deed
are boundless, every action touches off not only a reaction but a chain reaction,
every process is the cause of unpredictable new processes. This boundlessness is
inescapable; it could not be cured by restricting one’s acting to a limited graspable
framework or circumstances …. (Arendt, 2000, p. 180)

Boundlessness and unpredictability can be problematic for some, however, especially in
the context of a teacher resource building like Winslow Centre where it is expected that
every dollar and minute count and must, therefore, be productive in some way. Although
Arendt argues boundlessness is “inescapable”, some people prefer to try to escape it or
cure it by confining teacher groups in exactly the way she says is impossible: restrictions such as limited frameworks. Another word for these frameworks is bureaucracy.

The notion of bureaucracy brings me to a shift in this chapter: I turn now to the current situation in education, which is characterized by a relative lack of webs of relationships. Bureaucracy is partially responsible for this; it provides another explanation for how and why teaching (and coordinating) manifests itself as labour or work rather than action. Labour and work are tidier, easily predicted, easily organized, and very easily controlled.

As does every school district, Coquitlam has a bureaucracy that supports, organizes and plans for the district and personnel within it, including teachers. Indeed, schools themselves are mini bureaucracies, mini organizational structures. This organizational hierarchy isn’t even necessarily a bad thing - in fact, it is a good thing - as the daily labour and work of the district must go on. Coquitlam is home to nearly four thousand teachers and thirty thousand students; there must be an organizational structure where certain matters are predictable and stable or daily proceedings would grind to a halt. To a certain extent, this structure is very much like the one described in Patrick O’Brian’s series of novels about life at sea in the early 1800’s. The working conditions, chain of command and absolute power of the leader are, of course, radically different in the school district, but the reliance on established routine and organization are the same:

... a ... demanding routine often enough, but one that at least did bring order out of chaos. An acknowledged framework; commandments from on high, sometimes arbitrary, sometimes archaic, but generally workable and always more immediate, more obviously enforced than the Decalogue. An infinity of problems within that
framework of course, but the order provided answers to most of them.... (1980, p. 204)

Clearly, such a system does not allow for much in the way of webs of relationships. There was a rigid hierarchy and protocol obtaining between the different personnel; the lower deck sailors were forbidden to approach or speak to the captain and the captain was not permitted friends among the ship’s crew in order to preserve the omnipotence of his command. As a result, he was often very lonely. The bureaucracy organized the ship and its people but it also limited them. It defined the nature of their relationships which action does not. This dual nature of bureaucracy is also found in District 43 or anywhere else bureaucracy exists.

For example, the 1997 Program and Services Review of Winslow Centre expresses a tension between the need to limit bureaucracy at Winslow Centre so coordinators can be free to facilitate webs of relationships and the need to create bureaucracy so coordinators can be “accountable”. On the one hand, teachers expressed frustration with perceived bureaucracies, claiming the paperwork and meeting demands of coordinator positions kept them from being visible in the schools and from helping teachers network by uniting those of similar interests or unequal expertise (1997, p. 24). On the other hand, teachers expressed a need to know that Winslow coordinators were busy all the time, suggesting annual goal setting and evaluation at the team and personal levels as well as increased monitoring of district staff by their principals (1997, p. 25). It is very ironic that surveyed teachers expressed a need to both reduce bureaucracy and to increase it.

The need to increase bureaucracy raises several issues that will be further explored in chapter five; teachers’ interest in reducing bureaucracy is, however, linked to a need for
increased connections with their peers, which will be explored here. Increased connections with peers is, of course, another way of requesting insertions into webs of relationships. This is important for good teaching, and coordinating, for that matter, because people cannot be human, as far as Arendt is concerned, unless they are able to come together to participate in speech and action. It also allows people to participate in their lives, to provide actions and opinions that count. “Without the ability to initiate human action, citizens do not have genuine access to the public world, their actions are ineffective and their opinions insignificant” (Bohman, 1997, p. 64). The concepts of action, plurality, natality, and webs of relationships are inextricably linked together. We need our teachers to be human so they can model what it is to be human for their students so their students can lead a good, human, life. And thus, our teachers need to be in contact with one another in meaningful ways (i.e. beyond those established by work and labour). Currently, they are too controlled by the frameworks of bureaucracy for action to be easily obtained.

Earlier, I quoted Hannah Arendt when she mentioned “limited, graspable frameworks”; I would like to cite two such frameworks that currently control the lives of teachers (there are many more). One is the bell schedule and the other is the subject department structure. While I am not necessarily advocating the dissolution of either of these frameworks, it is clear to me that as they now stand, they get in the way of teachers who are interested in establishing webs of relationships.

Both the timetable and subject-departments represent a series of compartments in which teachers either work (the timetable) or belong (the department). Each teacher is less an individual than a representative of either a block of time or a group of people.
Students progress through these blocks of time and groups of people until, ultimately, they have accumulated enough time in enough departments to graduate from the public school system. The problem with this should be evident: 1. people cannot be human unless they work in concert to achieve speech and action and the two frameworks just described prevent them from doing so 2. people cannot represent others; they can only represent themselves as all people are unique 3. personal identity can only be fully disclosed in a group that reflects the world’s plural condition. John Ralston Saul describes these problems succinctly in *The Unconscious Civilization* when he writes “An educational or social system that defines progress as the total of a myriad of more or less water-tight compartments denies the possibility of a citizen-based society. It therefore denies the individual as the source of legitimacy” (1995, p. 168). Obviously, teachers who exist within the confines of the bell schedule and department frameworks are in no position to participate in webs of relationships with their peers, let alone establish them. They are far too isolated.

Teacher and coordinator isolation has already been mentioned briefly in chapters two and three, but the issues raised by natality and plurality being dependent on webs of relationships necessitates it being mentioned again. Coming together for the purpose of discussing issues beyond nuts and bolts (labour and work as discussed in chapter one) would set the stage for achieving Arendt’s action and, coincidentally, do much to eliminate teacher isolation.

Action is necessary in order for people to be truly human and, in today’s world, it is either missing all together or is achieved almost accidentally. In fact, it isn’t even encouraged, let alone recognized as the most human activity there is. The group itself is
the only place where natality - newness - can emerge. Participation in a group of equals is necessary for action to occur so it is ironic that teachers, who are surrounded by people of all shapes and sizes all day every day experience isolation, but they do - and they are. Teachers are the lone adults in their classrooms; they deal with their students by themselves; they are the only representative of their group in the classroom at any given time. Their isolation means it is very difficult for them to achieve action. And, when they are in such a group, such as a staff meeting or after school workshop or conference presentation, they tend to spend their time on issues that can best be classified as either labour or work - they tend to spend their time discussing and sharing nuts and bolts - the tools of labour and the products of work. The need for the new gimmick for the next day’s class is legitimate and thus teachers can never totally escape the boundaries created by the labour and work frameworks of the timetable and subject departments. They can, however, escape these built-in barriers some of the time. And they should.

These boundaries explain why teacher requests for coordinator-created connections with their peers occurred so frequently in the Winslow Review. They need to feel part of complex webs of relationships and they need to occasionally separate themselves, or be separated from, the labour-and-work heavy context in which they spend the bulk of their time. Winslow-sponsored teacher talking and thinking groups (T³ groups), established for the purpose of promoting action, would foster the development of these webs of relationships and the requisite context separation.

... human affairs are in constant flux from the continual irruption of new initiatives and new ideas; it means that each individual is unique, and suffers the consequent pathos of mortality; but what it means in the present connection is
that, being plural, human beings can gather together to form a space amongst
themselves, and in that space can see their common world from different points of
view and therefore talk about their common affairs. (Canovan, 1992, p. 111)

Teachers need to be able to speak to one another about the complexities and
philosophical underpinnings - not just the nuts and bolts - of their jobs. They need to talk
about what makes good teaching good, and why they do what they do. They need to talk
about the connection between good teaching and leading a good life.

These conversations will accomplish something else as well: they both take place
within the context of relationships and create new ones. “...democratic public rationality
depends on the capability of words to create intersubjective relationships” (Disch, 1997,
p. 149). Good teaching thus must include considerations of action - which leads to
plurality and natality which leads to relationships. Teachers need to be actively embedded
in webs of relationships, both the ones that are already established and the new ones that
emerge.

And thus, from the point of view of a Winslow coordinator, fostering natality and
plurality (thereby promoting action) is dependent on creating webs of relationships.
Indeed, the concepts of natality, plurality, action and webs of relationships connect in a
rather web-like fashion themselves. With the creation of this web of concepts, Arendt
imagines “ways of acting in concert (performatives in the space of appearances before
others), and a phenomenology of relatedness (including the crucial acts of promising and
forgiving) that offer appealing images of human arrangements and actions . . .”
(McGowan, 1997, p. 263). If curriculum coordinators like me are to successfully include
action in their support of classroom teachers, they must consider the implications of this
“space of appearances” and these “appealing human arrangements”. These implications, including the ramifications of bureaucracy, will be the topic of chapter five.
The coordinators at Judith's teacher resource centre saw less and less of their school-based colleagues. Teachers began choosing not to attend the after-school workshops that were offered on a daily basis at the resource centre, citing too much work to do and too many students to see after school as the primary reasons for their absence. A few school based teachers offered complaints regarding the coordinators' infrequent school visits; concern was also expressed about the mystifying resource centre personnel titles that made it difficult to know who to call for what. Slowly, the reverse of what Judith was interested in began to take hold: people had increasingly less time for one another. The corollary to this was decreased need for a space in which to see one another.

In truth, Judith and her colleagues cared less and less about what their colleagues thought. National and provincial accountability issues were being discussed with increasing frequency at her resource centre; all coordinators were told to take an active role in raising district performance scores in the eyes of the press and therefore, the public.

Meanwhile, money was harder to come by due to cuts from the provincial and federal governments. Several of Judith's colleagues were "sent back to the classroom" and their job responsibilities unevenly distributed among remaining district staff, Judith among them. The remaining coordinators were instructed to maintain efficiency portfolios in an effort to ascertain how effective they were at their jobs; they were also given more frequent performance reviews as individuals and as a staff. The total amount of paperwork tripled in the first year of these new measures; Judith spent quite a bit of time
at her desk keeping up with the new demands of her job and, as a result, was seen even more rarely in the schools that were her responsibility.

Two years later, amid increasingly frequent complaints of "ineffective", "out of touch" and "expensive", the district resource centre was closed. All remaining supplies and resources were deployed to district schools and the property was sold to a townhouse developer in order to raise funds for textbooks.

Chapter Five

If, as I have argued, good teaching must include considerations of action, then I need to examine why this has not always been the case. What are the barriers to including action in the classroom and in the teacher resource centre? Chapter five examines the barriers to action, which include bureaucracy and its concerns for a particular form of accountability. I argue that if we change our notion of accountability, we will pave the way for including action in our lives. This could possibly take the form of teacher talk and think groups (T3 groups), but there are no doubt other potential manifestations as well.

Unlike Judith, I am still employed at my district’s teacher resource centre. Winslow Centre is a place that remains highly valued by Coquitlam School District despite shrinking financial resources and increased demands on the budget. However, accountability issues are very real right now. The province continues with annual Foundation Skill Assessments in literacy and numeracy, Provincial Examination scores in most grade twelve subjects are widely advertised and all provincial learning outcomes are published on the Internet. If readers of this thesis are interested, as I am, in applying Arendt’s theory of the vita activa to their practice, they need to be aware of the
implications of the current educational climate. Accountability issues and bureaucratic structures will affect anyone who desires to integrate Hannah Arendt's action in their support of classroom teachers.

One of the blocks to achieving action is accountability, and it is important to understand the source of this particular block. Arendt, as usual, has an answer. While she doesn't necessarily use the word "accountability", her thoughts comprise a striking explanation for the accountability mindset. This mindset is something we all share, in fact, as it has been with us for a few hundred years. Arendt sees its development as a by-product of our society's reversal of the labour-work-action hierarchy, which I described in Chapter One. Labour and work are valued more than action, (which isn't valued at all), and labour is valued more than work. Because taking care of survival basics and creating things is of primary importance, it stands to reason that the quality of survival and the number of things are also of primary importance. And thus we slide into our modern focus on productivity. Holding people responsible for ever-increasing quality and productivity requires measurement - and thus our other focus, on accountability, begins. Intangibles like thinking and talking are valueless in comparison.

The modern age, in its early concern with tangible products and demonstratable profits or its later obsession with smooth functioning and sociability, was not the first to denounce the idle uselessness of action and speech in particular and of politics in general. (Arendt, 1998, p. 220)

Society's interest in measurable products and profits are reflected in the education system's need for accountability in the form of measurable test scores, literacy rates and
coordinator efficiency of the sort suggested in the Winslow Review I summarized in Chapter Four.

It is important to realize that accountability is directly connected to means-end thinking and our over-emphasis on labour and work:

Here it is indeed true that the end justifies the means; it does more, it produces and organizes them. The end justifies the violence done to nature to win the material, as the wood justifies killing the tree, and the table justifies destroying the wood. In the same way, the end product organizes the work process itself, decides about the needed specialists, the measure of co-operation, the number of assistants or cooperators. Hence, everything and everybody is judged here in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end product, and nothing else.

(Arendt, 2000, p. 176)

This demonstrates our predilection for tails wagging dogs. If the end is visible, useful and suitable (measurable), then the means for arriving at it are justified. This is how the end becomes the organizing force for the means; nothing else, such as speech or action, fits. If it doesn’t fit, if there is no measurable reason for it, it isn’t deemed worthwhile. Or, it might fit, but there isn’t any simple way to measure it, so it isn’t deemed worthwhile.

(The latter is, I contend, what happened to the action research initiative in Judith’s district.) Visible, tangible products such as mission statements, vision statements, goals and objectives, Foundation Skill Assessment scores and provincial examination scores are easily measured. Not coincidentally, they are most closely linked to labour and work.
Of course, there is no point in wishing that accountability will go away. Its roots are three hundred years old and the plant is well established. Also, I am enough of a modernist to believe that it is a necessary plant. The notion of "usefulness" is appealing.

... under modern conditions every occupation had to prove its 'usefulness' for society at large, and, since the usefulness of the intellectual occupations had become more than doubtful because of the modern glorification of labour, it was only natural that intellectuals, too, should desire to be counted among the working population. (Arendt, 1998, p. 92)

We are all used to considering the adjective "useful" as a positive one. We are socially conditioned to do so.

It is important to realize, however, that accountability in education is connected to the devaluation of all things - their intrinsic worth, in other words. Something has intrinsic worth only when it isn't compared to anything else, when it isn't a commodity produced by work. Once an item's intrinsic worth is transformed into a fixed value, it becomes a commodity and exists only in relation to other things. "Universal relativity, that a thing exists only in relation to other things, and loss of intrinsic worth, that nothing any longer possesses an "objective" value independent of the ever-changing estimations of supply and demand, are inherent in the vary concept of value itself" (Arendt, 1998, p. 166).

Unfortunately, this relative value system, which allows for endlessly shifting worths of things (as at a money exchange or on the stock market), makes people lose sight of very important questions such as What is it for? What ends does it achieve? What good does it do? How does it contribute to living a good life? The questions are lost because in a world that focuses on labour and work, the ends are of assumed value that renders
questions invalid. Margaret Atwood asks the sort of important question I describe in her poem “Use”:

What do I want
you for? If there’s an
answer, it’s nothing, you’re
of no use in my life, a
pure indulgence. What
would I want a picture
on the wall for? To look
at, but why? All such
questions end in stillness .... (1983b p. 17)

In a world dominated by labour and work (and their accompanying accountability), an answer like Atwood’s is astounding: “you’re / of no use in my life, a / pure indulgence.” Imagine doing something merely for the sake of indulgence, no matter how valuable the indulgence is. In our society, if something isn’t connected to survival (labour), or use-object-creation (work), it isn’t considered an acceptable engagement of our time. Of course action, in this paradigm, is the ultimate indulgence as it is technically of no use at all in a labour and work dominated world.

Even Atwood felt compelled to provide a “better” answer to her question in her poem, although I believe her first answer was the superior one. Apparently, it didn’t do to admit that “you’re / of no use in my life, a / pure indulgence”. There must be some value, some use! Atwood provides an explanation by the end of the poem: “... watch me vanish / into darkness, flicker / and reappear, this is my use for / you, shine with it, give / out light”
This need for answers is linked to a need for intrinsic value. People want things to have intrinsic value. This feels stable, while shifting value, however measurable and comparable, does not. "homo faber [the worker], whose whole activity is determined by the constant use of yardsticks, measurements, rules and standards, could not bear the loss of 'absolute' standards or yardsticks" (Arendt, 1998, p. 166). And thus our search for stability, our reliance on the belief that there is intrinsic value in things (like our education system) leads us to not only create measurement tools and ranking systems, but to sincerely believe in them. In our search for intrinsic values, we trick ourselves into believing that if something can be measured, the value is therefore proved, even though ultimately that is the reverse of what intrinsic, or self-evident, values are all about. We can't bring ourselves to the leap of faith necessary to just believe something is of worth. And so, in education at least, we frantically measure and rank the products of our labour and work and squeeze out any chance that something as indulgent as action can exist.

Contrary to what you might expect, I am not about to advocate for a decrease in stability or a recognition that our accountability measurement tools and ranking systems are fundamentally flawed. I am actually quite in favour of stability because action depends upon it (more on this later). Ironically, however, our need for stability is one of the contributing factors to the development of bureaucracy and our concomitant feelings

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27 Although I think some suspicion about how "stable" we really are might prove healthy. Also, in some cases, I think some of our measurement systems are fundamentally flawed, but because we present the results in terms of stable-seeming letter grades, numbers and percentages, people don't understand the flaws in the system. This issue is definitely another thesis, however. Besides, I don't think all our measurement systems are problematic and I do believe that some of them should exist, especially if the use of the data they generate is legitimate. Along these lines, Nel Noddings points out that we "should keep our primary purpose in mind and not allow ourselves to distort every activity in the school day in a mistaken quest for a foolproof system of accountability. Responsibility is broader, deeper, and more ambiguous than accountability, and it describes commitment in interpersonal relations more accurately" (Noddings Care and Continuity p. 5). Sound advice.
of disenfranchisement and helplessness. This is ironic, because bureaucracy is the enemy of Arendt's action. For her, "The sign of the disappearance of power is the growth of government and of bureaucracy. As governments become bigger, more complex, and more hermetically sealed within their own processes, 'the channels for action, for the meaningful exercise of freedom' shut down" (McGowan, 1997, p. 290). Society must be stable enough to allow people to gather together for speech and action, but it isn't bureaucracy, with its careful organization of people and jobs and seeming-stability, that can allow for the spontaneity of speech and action.

Bertrand Russell offers some similar arguments. Over fifty years ago, in the Reith Lectures, he complained of an overly large bureaucracy, arguing that such structures cause a stifling of personal initiative and dramatically increase the wealth and power of large corporations. He claims that the net result is an inability of people to lead good lives. "... individual initiative is hemmed in either by the State or by powerful corporations, and there is a great danger lest this should produce ... a kind of listlessness and fatalism that is disastrous to vigorous life" (1949, p. 29). Larry May offers a compelling explanation for this social listlessness:

Bureaucratic institutions, in [Arendt's] view, impede people's sense of participation because the rule by decree characteristic of bureaucratic order causes them to feel cut off from the decision-making structures that affect their lives. Put in other terms, bureaucratic institutions socialize people to see themselves not as actors but as acted upon. The ensuing feelings of powerlessness can give rise to an acceptance of, and even participation in, harms that one would never have found acceptable outside of the bureaucratic institution. (1997, p. 89)
This analysis of the effects of bureaucracy supports Russell’s belief that vigourous life (the good life) is threatened by listlessness and fatalism. People don’t feel involved in their own lives.

Russell, like Hannah Arendt, wants to see an involved citizenry. People are distracted from what should be their most important purpose and, if they are involved in anything at all, it isn’t in pursuing the good life. Instead, “we are oppressed also by the great impersonal forces that govern our daily life, making us still slaves of circumstance though no longer slaves in law. This need not be the case. It has come about through the worship of false gods. Energetic men have worshipped power rather than simple happiness and friendliness” (1949, p. 91). This is, of course, directly relevant to today’s educational practices. If we, as a society, have worshipped false gods, so have educators. Indeed, it is impossible for educators not to have done so as public education is a product of and a contributor to the society that requires and creates it. In education, we too have come to value labour over work and ignore action all together. Teachers, instead of leading and modelling good lives, and pursuing action in education, have made do with labour and work instead. In fact, as we have seen, they celebrate it and pursue it with the help of teacher resource centres like Winslow.

The reason I mention bureaucracy, means/end thinking, productivity, and utility is because these factors will have a profound effect on any coordinator who wishes to introduce Arendt’s ideas around action into his or her support of teachers in schools.

The trouble with the utility standard inherent in the very activity of fabrication is that the relationship between means and end on which it relies is very much like a chain whose every end can serve again as a means in some other context. In other
words, in a strictly utilitarian world, all ends are bound to be of short duration and to be transformed into means for some further ends. (Arendt, 1998, p. 154)

For precisely these reasons, the current climate doesn’t allow room for action and thus introducing it in any meaningful, long-term way will be akin to swimming against the stream of means/end thinking. Simply put, teachers need a respite from this endless stream of utility. This brings me to the concept of public space.

Public and private space are of critical importance to Arendt’s theory. Of the three parts of the vita activa, action is the part that takes place in public; Arendt was very interested in the preservation of a public space that would allow action to unfold. Indeed, one of her criticisms of the modern world is that true public space has evaporated. “...Arendt’s major complaint against modernity is that it does not provide the proper place - the political realm - where the full plurality of identities could be generated through action undertaken with and in front of others” (McGowan, 1998, p. 38). This evaporation coincides with the development of large bureaucracies or organizational structures that are designed to take care of many of the things that citizens formerly took care of and therefore had a voice about. Our attempt to achieve action must include the opening of a space within our bureaucratic framework: action must happen somewhere, either the classroom, the staff room, a virtual space or possibly the teacher resource centre. This is demonstrated in the autobiographical story “Eunice” by Lee Maracle. In it, she describes a group of female writers as they gather to help organize a reading on a community radio show. Initially, Lee is hesitant about joining the group, but does so because “there is no

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28 Arendt argues that the concerns traditionally dealt with in the private sphere of the household have come to be the concerns of modern politics. She argues that this isn’t political at all and feels that the modern tendency to regard society as one big family, with the government taking on parental roles, is indicative of our tendency to replace, or squeeze out, the public sphere with a new sphere she calls the social.
place for women writers, Native or otherwise, to gather together and engage in the sort of word play which would give them the endless run of story lines or unusual turns of phrases which could ignite their imaginations...” (1990, p. 57). Maracle describes the importance of finding space for writers to gather together; for her, finding such a space is like finding an island of freedom or respite.

It is necessary to have a place, whether literal or figurative, in which speech/action/freedom can occur and “island of freedom” is a metaphor for such a place. As explained in Chapter Three, freedom and action are closely entwined. People achieve humanity through their joint participation in speech and action; without this group participation, people cannot be free (Arendt, 1993a, p. 153) and cannot be human. This island of freedom image is particularly pertinent today as our current world does not automatically allow for a space in which action can occur. “Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance” (Arendt, 1993a, p. 149). Islands of freedom, then, are the places where teachers can have respite from the world of means/end. They are where action can take place and they are what coordinators could sponsor and participate in themselves.

This is why stability is important, although by stability I do not mean the facsimile of it provided by bureaucracy. Perhaps “dependable” or “certain” are better words than “stable” in this context. No matter the vocabulary, it is important to understand that Arendt is concerned about the preservation of a public space, or island of freedom, which she perceives as a place where people perform or act in front of others (Arendt, 1993a, p. 149). Thus, the space has a theatrical quality to it (Villa, 1997, p. 183) where people appear to one another. Without a stable space, this is impossible. “The viability of this
stage for action depends upon the presence of relatively stable boundaries, boundaries that mark and preserve the ‘space for freedom’ . . .” (Villa, 1997, p. 183). In the current world of schools, these stable spaces may take several forms, which I will describe later. The shape they take is less important right now than understanding that having a stable, consistent time and space carved out of the day (or week, or month) for meeting and talking is absolutely necessary.

One suggestion for finding such space comes from John Ralston Saul. In The Unconscious Civilization, Saul sees society’s current state (bureaucracy-heavy, citizen-confining organizational frameworks) as a result of the global economy and the increasing power and wealth of multinational corporations. However, he still sees room in which the individual citizen can operate:

... by simply formalizing the citizen’s participation - that is, by setting aside a certain number of hours a week through our structuring of the official activities of the individual - we would be able to launch large numbers of people into public activity. What effect they would have cannot be judged in advance. But in a society obsessed by structure, we would have officially recognized the mainstream function of criticism, non-conformism, and disinterest. It would be impossible for the corporatist structure itself ever to reward or admire criticism. The necessity therefore is to reinforce the plane on which criticism can prosper and eventually enable the citizen to dominate. (1995, p. 173)

Setting aside a few hours a week - even fewer, in the context of the school district - is a beginning, a way to find space in order for Arendt’s action to take place. In a way, such space/time would be for the opposite purpose than that of the Regency period ship’s
organizational framework. Instead of the order providing answers to the problems that erupt within the context of the framework, the framework would provide space in order for problems to develop. I use the term “problems” loosely, of course. By it I really mean action, which, because it may or may not result in something, is unpredictable, and can be problematic for some.

There are certain norms for this space, however, before it will work as a location for action. Trust is, of course, of vital importance. Action - and therefore freedom - cannot be achieved unless those who are gathered together are equal participants in the process. “To be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed” (Arendt, 1998, p. 33). This won’t occur without certain norms for relationships with others, including, for example, fostering trust. The participants must have trust in the idea that while gathered together for speech and action, all voices are equal, regardless of the position they hold in the district. They must not only believe it, it must be so. Everyone must trust the process enough to attend so that the total diversity of voices possible is, in fact, what gathers together. Participants must trust that coming together in speech and action is worth their time and energy, they must trust that new things will emerge - natality - and that those new things will be worth living with although they cannot be predicted. In short, they must trust that the potential discomfort of the situation is worth their while. They must believe that living a good life (which no one argues with as a worthwhile thing to do, despite that it is a source of continual conflict) is predicated on coming together in speech and action and that the work-and-labour life they currently live is inadequate for living a good life.
Another norm, which is linked to the aforementioned trust, is courage: “Acting and speaking within the human community, allowing oneself to become part of the larger web of human relationships, requires courage, a willingness to take risks, and faith. Courage is needed to expose and disclose one’s self in public; risk is involved in that one is not master of what he thus reveals; and one must have sufficient faith in the community of one’s fellow men to entrust to its care this precious self ...” (Fuss, 1979, p. 163). Action participants must feel the risk is worth it, they need to muster their courage and have faith in the process, for lack of a better word, or the risk isn’t worth it and the faith is unwarranted.

A third norm is tolerance of and desire for ambiguity. Participants need to understand that because the results of action are unpredictable and unchangeable (Arendt, 1998, p. 233), they can cause damage (Arendt, 1998, p. 239). “In acting, in contradistinction to working, it is indeed true that we can really never know what we are doing” (Arendt, 2000, p. 180). Arendt does offer remedies for this damage in the form of forgiveness and making promises, among other things. She emphasizes that people who come together in action must be willing to always forgive each other their wrongs and keep trying to achieve speech and action together:

... trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action’s constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant
willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new. (Arendt, 1998, p. 240)

New beginnings make people nervous, especially ones that admit from the first there will be some untidiness involved. It will be a tough sell to get a district to sanction something as unpredictable as action, let alone to get participants interested in participating, but T³ (teacher talk and think) groups will be worth the effort because they provide something important that is missing from our current lives. We are not human without action; without action we are not free.

So - how to begin this proposed new beginning? In the short term, coordinators will have to work outside the bureaucratic structures of the school district because currently there are no spaces within it for action, or, at best, the spaces are limited and limiting. “In the absence of institutional sites, a feminist politics might well go underground, looking to locate itself in the rifts and fractures of identities, both personal and institutional, and doing so performatively, agonistically, and creatively with the hope of establishing new relations and realities” (Honig, 1995, p. 147). Currently, if action occurs, it does so almost accidentally in our meetings and classrooms, as I demonstrated in my examples of the Pride and Prejudice lesson, the Social Studies Local Specialist Association meeting, the literacy initiative planning session and the Portfolio Fair. This is necessary because there is currently no institutionalized room for action and so making room - or making an interest in making room - must be the priority.

One of our greatest needs today is to find ways, even simple mechanisms, that will help us, the citizenry, to get into the public debate in such a manner as to duplicate the conscious understanding of the jury. We are not going to defeat or
overthrow or even abandon the corporatist structure, in spite of its failures. This is a system that continually grows stronger while the society it controls grows weaker. It is therefore a matter of inserting the citizen as citizen into the system in whatever way we can. (Saul, 1995, p. 172).

Although Saul is talking about inserting the citizen into public debate as a method of registering protest about the forces of bureaucracy and corporatism, his ideas are also applicable to my T^3 groups. Teachers also need to be inserted into a system of debate in order to discuss what is important in education. What these groups look like doesn’t matter as much as that they exist. The T^3 (teacher talk and think) groups may choose to gather using the vehicle of book clubs, internet chat rooms, list servs, or topical meetings or simply meet periodically for the sake of meeting. The time and space would have to be agreed upon by the participants; because these are not institutionalized action or T^3 groups, the most likely option is before or after school in someone’s classroom.

Bonnie Honig suggests a metaphor for the type of time and space I envision:

What if we treated Arendt’s notion of the public realm not as a specific topos, like the ancient Greek agon, but as a metaphor for a variety of (agonistic) spaces, both topographical and conceptual, that might occasion action? We might be left with a notion of action as an event, an agonistic disruption of the ordinary sequence of things that makes way for novelty and distinction, a site of resistance of the irreversible, a challenge to the normalizing rules that seek to constitute, govern, and control various behaviours” (1995, p. 146).

I like the notion of action as an event, as a disruption to the ordinary sequence of things. While I still believe that the time/space is best if regularly scheduled (or it will simply
never occur), the metaphor of disruption does remind participants, who are habituated to meetings with agendas, timelines and clearly stated means/ends, that action cannot be legislated just as a volcanic eruption cannot be legislated. Thus, a very different type of meeting will occur.

The idea of legislation brings me to my long term solution, or suggestion, for action. This is going to be much more difficult to achieve, especially in the current accountability climate, but I would like to see $T^3$ groups as an integral part of the school’s timetable. I would like to see them become institutionalized. Teachers should have time and space to meet within the bureaucratic structures of their day; they should have a legitimised island of freedom, something stable (which Arendt defines as politically guaranteed) in terms of time and space. It will, of course, be necessary to work with teachers so they fully understand the purpose of this island of freedom as current practices and belief systems might incline them to claim the $T^3$ time for other labour and work purposes. Regardless of teacher opinion about it, today’s accountability climate makes this time and space unlikely as it also requires a leap of faith on the part of those who are in a position to provide it: the Ministry of Education, the taxpayer, the Board of Trustees and the district’s upper administration. It will be as much a risk for them as for the teachers and coordinators involved.

The combination of modern world alienation with the late modern escalation of the automatism present in life itself renders the appearance of these ‘islands of freedom’ an even more miraculous event....

What matters is our ability to resist the demand for ‘functionalized behaviour’ and to preserve, as far as possible, our capacity for initiatory, agonistic action and
spontaneous, independent judgement. This project of preservation occurs in a
‘world’ where, as Arendt constantly reminds us, the supporters for these activities
have been radically undermined. (Villa, 1997, p. 200)

Institutionalizing time and space for action, while resisting the temptation to legislate
what occurs within that time and space would contribute to this ‘project of preservation’.
What I call for requires balancing the tension between officially instituted islands of
freedom that exist for the purpose of teachers coming together in speech and action and
our tendency to legislate and bureaucratize everything we come into contact with because
we are so conditioned by means/end thinking and labour/work practices. I ask for nothing
less than “the development of shared spaces - alternative or subaltern publics - in the
interstices of these societies as evidence of the loosening of totalitarian rule and the
reassertion of the self-organizing power of civil society” (Benhabib, 1996, p. 74) and
nothing more than leaving those spaces alone once they develop.

What I ask for isn’t out of the realm of possibility with Arendtian action; in fact, it is
incorporated into the concepts of action and plurality. Through our webs of relationships
and coming together in action, we construct institutions for ourselves. “... because human
beings exist in the plural they have available to them a set of bulwarks against evil which
are more reliable than personal goodness, namely the institutions they can establish
amongst themselves by acting together” (Canovan, 1992, p. 194). This ability to create
institutions allows people to unite together; through inhabiting a public space, they share
their common concerns and ideas and they together create and understand its parameters,
(Canovan, 1992, p. 227). Plurality ensures there will be differences of opinion;
associative action ensures the participants are committed to both the continuance of the
space and achieving a working compromise when their opinions differ - as differ they will (Canovan, 1992, p. 227). Ultimately, of course, creating space for action is about being human and being free, even though the cost of our humanity and freedom is our comfortable complacency. “The idea that human beings are not dependent on transcendent authority, that they can and must create their own laws and institutions, building a human world in the desert that lies between them, is comforting but at the same time unnerving because it emphasizes human freedom and responsibility”, (Canovan, 1992, p. 222). Arendt’s action is unnerving, but the alternative - to live without it - is more unnerving still because without it, we don’t really live.

I don’t want to abandon the notion of accountability in this project, however much I want to challenge our current constructs for it. The existing forms of accountability are tied to labour and work, so they are unsuited for action, but action requires its own form of accountability. In Arendtian terms, this would involve giving an account of the action through telling a story. Indeed, the storyteller is the person best suited for rendering an account of action. “Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor, but the storyteller who perceives and ‘makes’ the story” (Arendt, 1998, p. 192). Lionel Kearns demonstrates this in his poem “Event” when he concludes his account of two Vancouver Eastside policemen picking up a “sick Indian...lying on the concrete edge of the flower planter in Pigeon Park”. He addresses his reader:

This human being is dying of misery
at this particular moment, and you
think you are just reading a poem, but you
are mistaken. This is an actual event
and we are both here watching it now
(1983, p. 158)
Just as Kearns recounts the story of Pigeon Park, so I recount what I have been doing for action through this thesis. I tell the stories of my accidental experiences with action: the Social Studies Social Specialist Association meeting, the literacy initiative planning session, the Portfolio Fair, the Pride and Prejudice waltzing ball. Analysis of these events also provides the criteria by which we can judge the story and thus judge the account of action we are offered through it. Was there evidence of trust, of courage, of tolerance for ambiguity? Was there natality and plurality? Were the individuals connected through some sort of web of relationships? Did the web grow more complex through the interactions of the individuals in the group? Did each individual demonstrate their unique identity through their participation in the speech and action? These criteria shouldn’t surprise because what goes into fostering action is nothing less than what goes into fostering humanity. “... the very human conditions required for action and politics - spontaneity, natality, individuality, and plurality” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 87) which is what action is all about. We aren’t human without action.

So, since action is such a good idea, why don’t we do it already? What are the barriers to including it in our educational structures? Because it is very difficult for people to control events, let alone predict them, and the lack of control and inability to predict are frightening, we tend to move away from action and fall back on the very controllable, predictable and measurable labour and work modes of thinking and behaving. We tend to like the tidiness of tight organization that leaves nothing to chance
- the education system is rife with it in the form of mission statements, vision statements, goal setting and lesson planning - while action requires that we have the courage to leave something to chance. Once action “is distinguished from making and understood as something that goes on among plural beings who are all capable of initiatives, the idea of starting with a political blueprint and putting it into practice becomes preposterous” (Canovan, 1992, p. 252). Paradoxically, although blueprints in one way are antithetical to action, they can also be used to institute it. Currently, our schools and teacher resource centres operate according to blueprints, which is antithetical to their ultimate purpose: creating members of society who lead good lives. The institutions that should be devoted to helping our students achieve the good life, which is based on the three-tiered \textit{vita activa}, have chosen instead to use a blueprint - or bureaucratic - approach which eliminates the action tier. However, those very blueprints could just as easily have incorporated a time and space for action as exclude it.

It is very ironic that it is our very public institutions which do this because they are precisely the institutions which should be guarding natality and providing a place for action. Throughout this thesis I have described how the education system is one such institution, but it is dominated by labour and work; these tiers are described and limited by blueprints such as district goals, provincial learning outcomes, accreditation procedures and foundation skills assessments. While I am not arguing these things aren’t necessary, I am using them to contend that a blueprint approach to living a good life is, indeed, preposterous and that it is particularly so in the context of one of the public institutions that was established for the very protection of society against such blueprints. Fred Wah shows how silly blueprints are in his poem “The Plan of a Tree”. He begins
with a blueprint description of a tree that most of us won’t recognize, although accurate in a cellular way:

the plan of a tree

a system, squares
circles, rectangles
angles, all round
spaces, roads, ways
centres, the plan
of a tree (1983, p. 312)

He concludes with the observation that “spread out /the mind of the plant/... now it seems larger/ the spread is the gate of the earth” (1983, p. 312) and implies that the tree is a much greater thing than a mere plan. “it’s only part of the plan/ ... part of itself” (1983, p. 312). The tree is more than a system; the blueprint of it described in the first stanza doesn’t do the concept of “tree” justice.

Similarly, a blueprint for education doesn’t do education justice. Blueprints are fine for labour and work, but, because they destroy action and natality, they also eliminate the human race’s potential for being human. This is why we need to work into our blueprints of education some time and space for action, for the third level of Hannah Arendt’s vita activa. Coordinators should work to implement time and space for action, should facilitate the development of webs of relationships among and between their colleagues, and should foster natality and plurality so that teachers - and therefore students - can lead good lives. Throughout this thesis I have written about action in the context of the teacher resource centre where I work, but there are certainly broader applications for action than
this. I currently contemplate a return to the classroom as an English department head and I can see how promoting action should be among my responsibilities in that context. As a curriculum coordinator, I am in charge of the District Beginning Teacher Mentorship program, and therefore work quite frequently with first year teachers. From them, I have learned about teacher induction programs at our local universities and can see how promoting action might play a role in that context as well. This means, essentially, that part of the blueprint - whether it is Winslow's blueprint, an English department's blueprint or the blueprint used by teacher education programs - must be obliterated so action can come and with it, a good life. Leading a good life is, of course, what it is all about. "Hannah Arendt’s contention that central to a worthwhile life is building webs of relationships with other human beings that allows us to define who and what we are and what kind of lives we want to lead. Education, for Arendt, involves preparing children to participate in a common world in which people together decide what is good and worthwhile" (Coulter & Wiens, 1999, p. 5). Whatever the context, there is too much at stake to ignore this responsibility.
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