

**THE ARTIST AND TEACHER-LEADER:  
THE APPEARANCE OF HANNAH ARENDT'S  
"IN-BETWEEN"**

By

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## ABSTRACT

Hannah Arendt's, *The Human Condition*, presents a foundation to examine the formation of identity within the context of her triumvirate, labour, work and action or the *vita activa*. I am most interested in her idea of an "in-between" space that captures the "reality [of] the webs of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality" (1958, p.183). However intangible the "in-between" it is no less real and it is in the webs of relationships where we may develop a sense of safety, courage, and the willingness to do what is good, and act in our daily lives. In order to develop webs of relationships in my daily labour, work and action as both an artist and a teacher-leader, I explore the private and public spaces that are available for me to labour, work and act, the conditions that nurture or mitigate against action, and the opportunities for renewal, that is, rebirth or natality, within the plurality of others.

In *Chapter One: Opening*, I explore the formation of my identity as both an artist and as a teacher-leader, the emerging "in-between" space between my practices and how each practice sheds light on the other.

In *Chapter Two: Labour*, I discuss labour in relation to my practices. Labour is necessary and never ending, and has its own pleasures. However, in order to live a full life, it is not sufficient to labour alone.

In *Chapter Three: Work*, Arendt's notion of work as it differs from labour is explained in the context of how work objects place us in the world and serve to remind us of our purposes and

our identities. Work results in a product, but as in labour, work is not sufficient in realizing a full life. However, work may lead to action, considered the most important aspect in the *vita activa*.

In *Chapter Four: Action*, I explain how Arendt contends that for us to be truly alive, we need to become engaged in action where people have an opportunity to re-create themselves or experience “natality” amongst a plurality, or previously existing, others. In order to foster such relationships, we require both public and private spaces in our practice worlds.

In *Chapter Five: The In-Between*, I describe where the “in-between” began for me and how this space is so important in my efforts to live a better life and how it contributes to forming the various webs of relationships as I move from labour and work towards action.

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One never journeys alone in life.

I have been offered so much companionship, support along the way in completing this work, by friends, family and the school community that sustained me; by students who didn't know their comments and conversation affected me; by teachers who continue to show the way to students and to others by the way in which they live their lives; by parents who have confidence in me while they question me; by colleagues who would never give up and encouraged me consistently. I can never repay them for their care of me.

My studio provided a space as sanctuary for the conversations I had with others, for the interchanges with my art I worked on, giving me courage in doing the work or just resting in that space so that I could refresh myself within the studio and return to the world of teacher-leadership.

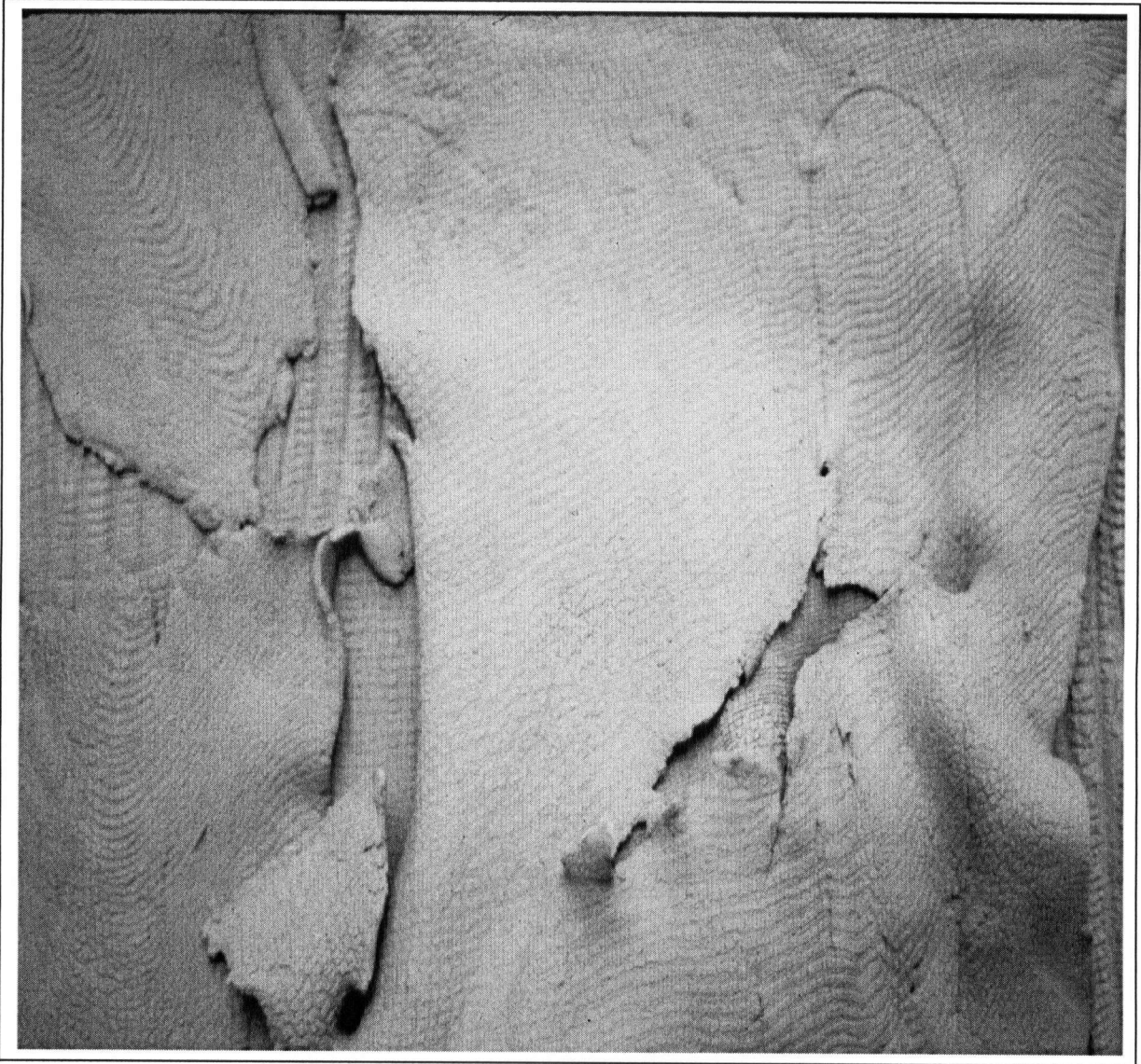
To my dissertation committee, I offer profound thanks. David Coulter, for insisting I write, write, write, and then by asking me, "So what?" encouraging me to continue and learn more about what I was writing meant and could mean. He sees the potential in students and is truly gifted in his relationships with others. I thank him deeply for his energy and inspiration. To Rita Irwin - her consummate knowledge of art both as a practicing artist and teacher; as a woman and teacher-leader who knows the "in-between" space intimately; and Gaalen Erickson, for his wisdom in navigating the waters and in ensuring that I finally reached the conclusion with his guiding hand. Knowing where I rest only temporary as there is much that is ahead.

Thank you.

This dissertation is dedicated  
to the memory of  
my mother Sarah

## CHAPTER ONE:

### OPENING

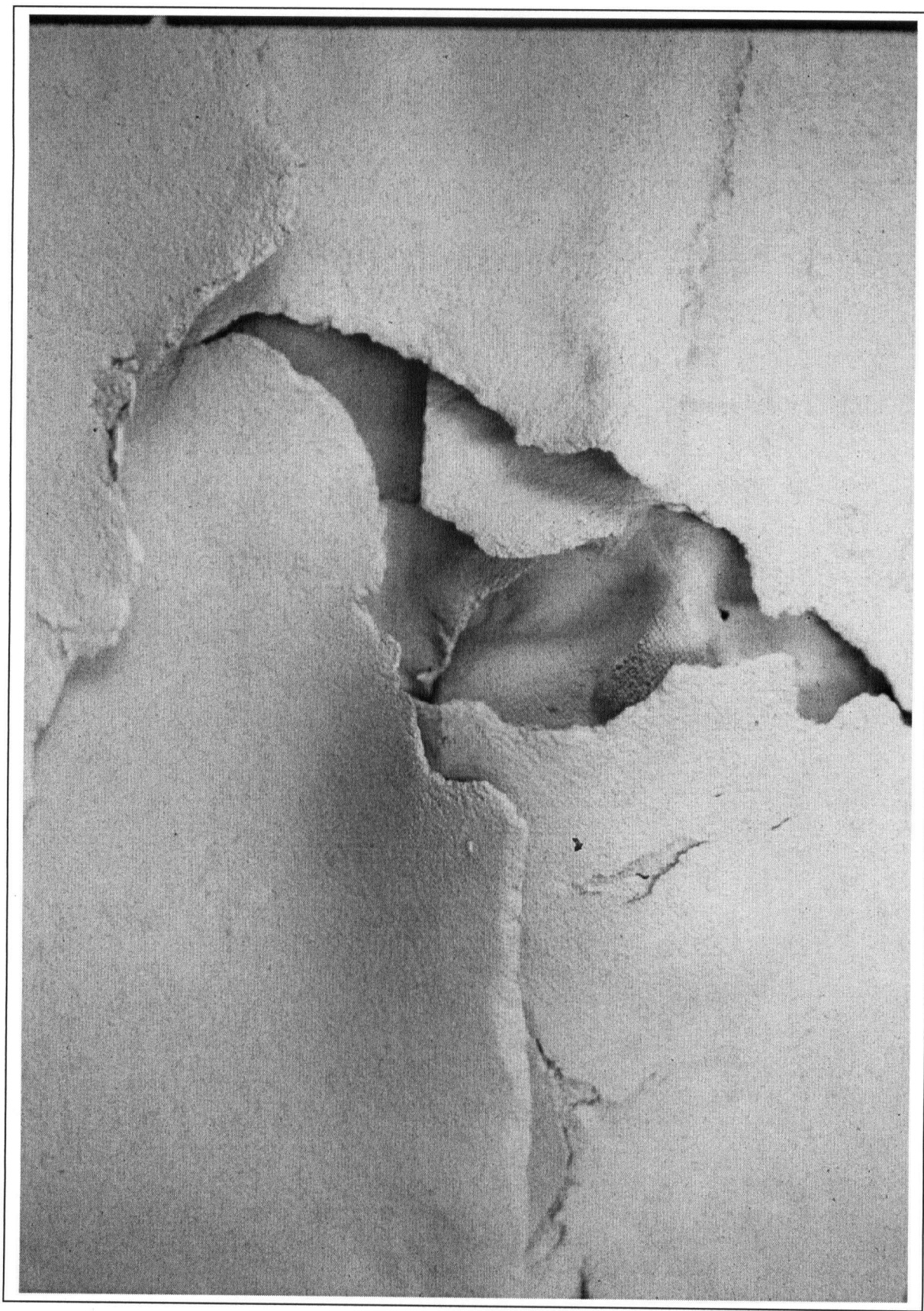


Porcelain clay mask

opening/*n* **1.** open space; way in or out: **2.** beginning: the opening night **3.** process of becoming open: **4.** opportunity. □ *adj* first: opening remarks. (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English, 1974, p.598).

The art work on the preceding page is one in a series I formed at a time in my life where I had become open to exploring places in my heart, other avenues to live my life, to create occasions that nourished my spirit and mind. These masks were fashioned from exquisitely fine quality porcelain clay, feeling to my hands like satins and silks – extremely sensual but with tensile strength that continues to exist through history. Such is the nature of clay. These works held mystery for me as I developed the images, evoking a strong emotional response as I worked with and on them, seemingly speaking to me and later, to viewers. I like to think that we (the viewers and I) recognize an aspect of ourselves represented in this particular work. The making of the masks symbolically offered me an opening, simultaneously remaining cloaked, and somewhat protected, as I ventured into the unknown.

An opening or sense of possibility is where I also found myself about five years ago when I read a notice in the Superintendent's Bulletin in the school district of Vancouver where I was working as an Area Administrator. It called for applications to the Educational Doctorate in Leadership and Policy at the University of British Columbia, promoting the opportunity to examine educational leadership research through the lens of practice. Indeed, to be considered for the programme, one had to be practicing in a leadership position. I felt similarly as to how I felt when I began to work on the mask series, and in particular, as I saw an aspect of my own mask, my face, peeping out from under the layers of clay as in the image on the next page. If I explored this avenue in research and leadership, what might I find?



Porcelain clay mask

In my practice as a teacher-leader and artist, some might say my career path appears more as fiction. I have taken hold of opportunities as they presented themselves throughout the years without much reflective thought as to why I came to be where I am. And, opportunities did just seem to come to me. Perhaps this is one reason why the following passage from Urquhart's *Changing Heaven* resonates with me:

"I'm trying to reach Ponden Kirk."

"What on earth is the purpose in that?"

Ann confesses her fascination with the Brontes and the grass-burner's eyes glaze slightly. Tourists for him have become, over the years, a form of litter on the moor. They rarely appear, though, in this season.

"It's research," Ann says in self-defense, sensing his disapproval, wanting to justify her presence in his territory.

"I myself," he says, "have spent my time without searching, so could not be persuaded to begin re-searching." (Urquhart, 1990, p. 133)

I, too, had asked myself, "Why would research interest me while I continue to explore what is interesting to me in my present practice as a teacher-leader?" What else could I search for? I had been encouraged to enrol in a doctoral programme in the visual and performing arts programme years before, but this pursuit held little appeal for me at the time, perhaps because that research seemed to me so largely theoretical. However, to be involved in a leadership programme that meshed my professional practice with research, to examine and reflect upon what I held important, and how I came to this present place in my practice, captured my imagination.



Porcelain clay mask

I have had no master plan and my work as a professional has seemingly evolved haphazardly from interests and influences upon me. I have been fortunate enough to explore these interests. As a principal in a large urban secondary school, I frequently am asked what my areas of study “were.” Did I stop learning when I became a principal? I reply:

“I have an undergraduate degree in fine arts (ceramics and painting) as well as English,” and further (felt the need to) credential myself with having a Masters degree in Curriculum Studies. “Oh,” I say, (as though an afterthought, as I have been disloyal to my art in my previous credentialing) “and, I am also a practicing artist.”

“Oh,” they say, as eyebrows are raised and the inquirers exclaim, “How on earth did you ever get into this position?”

Thus begins my reply that sounds something like: “Being a practicing artist has influenced my life profoundly and also affects who I am in the world of being a high school principal. I think I lead differently because of my background as an artist, and my artist practice too is affected by being a teacher-leader.”

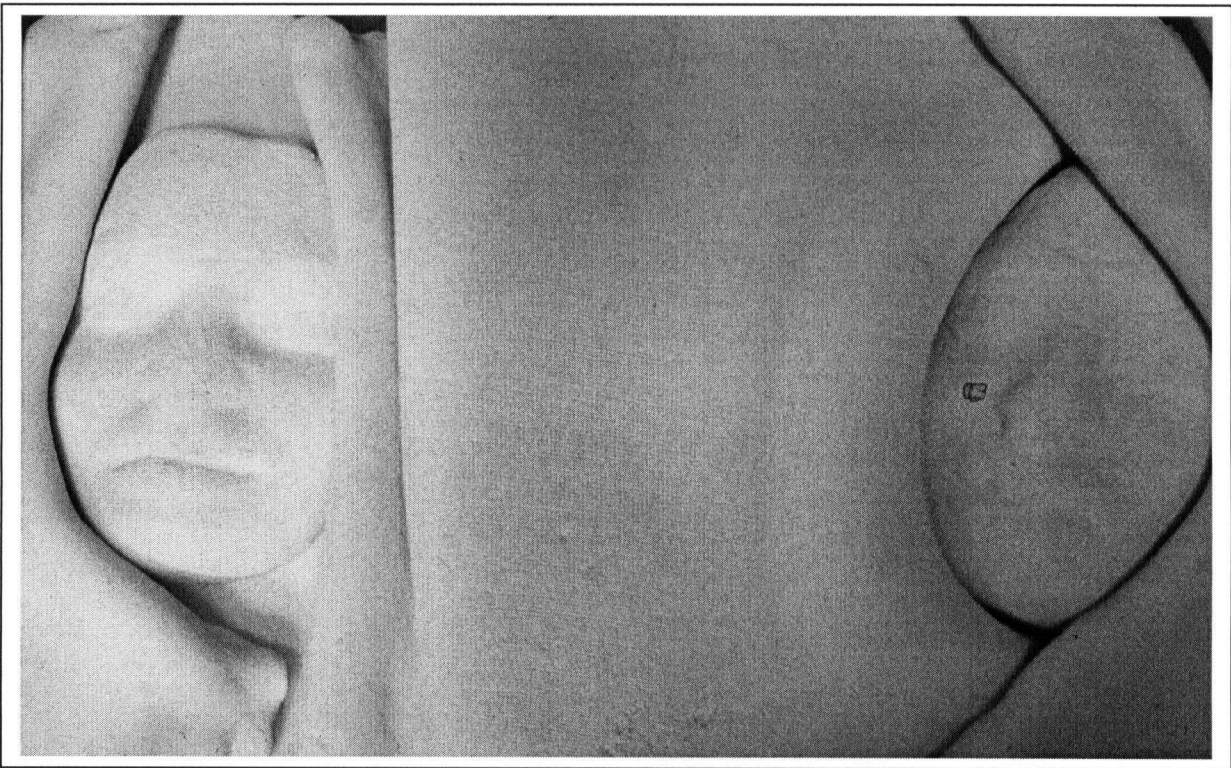
The furrowing of the eyebrows lessens somewhat, but the “face” is not completely assured and indeed, I don’t think many people understand, and this response causes me to reflect and offer my thoughts while researching my practice.

### The Nature of my Practices

I believe my practice as a professional artist helps shape my thoughts on leadership in a secondary school. It is true that my career is composed of two seemingly unlike professions folded into one. It is also true that it is sometimes an effort to consciously relate them to each other, but certainly my life and hopefully the lives of those around me, are richer for the attempt. The life of the artist is lived largely in private, even though my art ultimately appears in public. My artistic practice results in work objects that remain separate from me, yet, in important ways the objects remain tied to who I am. I never need to be in attendance with my art in order for the exhibit or showing to

happen, although I am required to be present in the studio during its actual creation. The art has a life separate from me, independent of me (almost) when it is complete.

On the other hand, my practice as a teacher-leader generally requires me to be in attendance while I engage with others. In the role of principal, many times, there seems to be little privacy and my daily work is primarily in public, in the view of staff, students, parents, and indeed my entire community. Throughout my daily practice as a teacher-leader, there appears to be no refuge from scrutiny, questions, advice giving, solving problems, and pressing issues, etc., except perhaps at the beginning of the day when no one has arrived, or at the end of the day, when most have gone home.



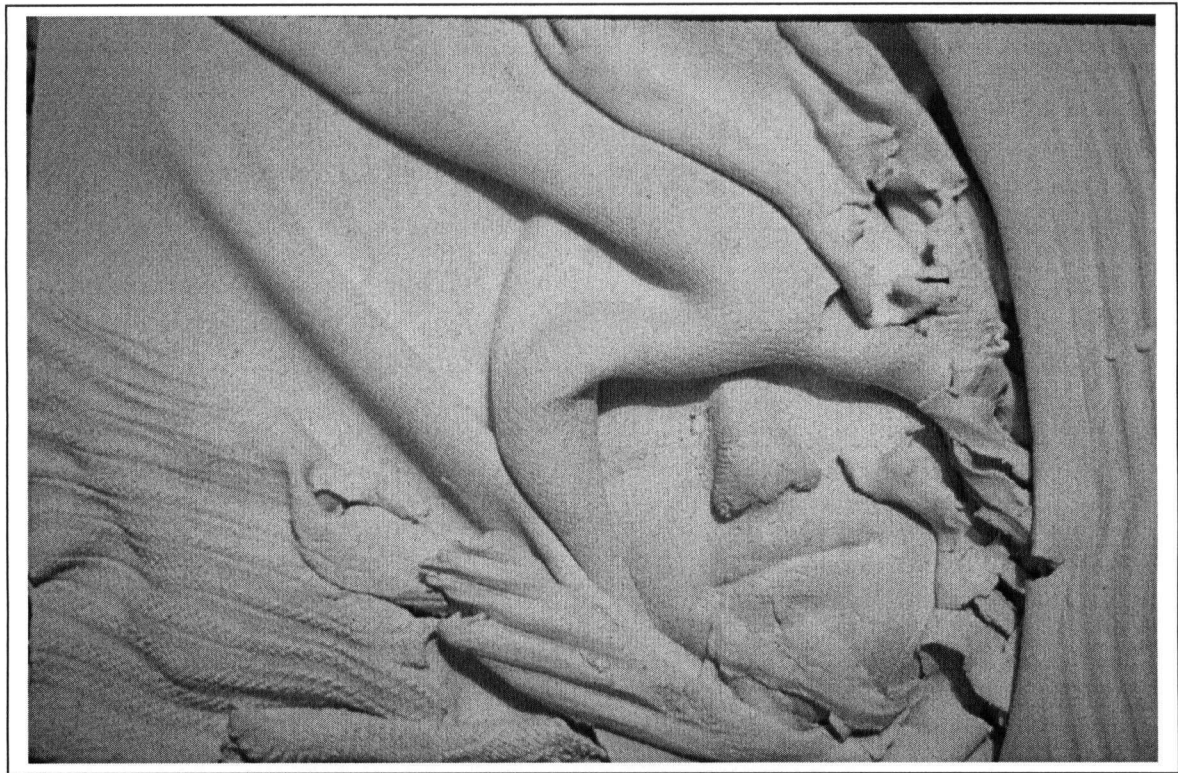
Porcelain clay masks

In my teacher-leader practice, I struggle to bring some of the possibilities I have in the sanctuary of my studio space to the space of my teacher-leader position.

### *Contributions of the Artist to the Teacher-leader*

As an artist, I work in a safe, secure space and I can take risks in the privacy of my studio. If I mess up, I can begin again with fresh clay or a fresh canvas, and no one but me knows. It makes it more likely that I will risk again. There is no embarrassment, no punishment for failing. I can paint over, I can erase mistakes, re-wedge the clay, recycle and completely transform the work. Even though there may be some discouragement when I don't achieve what I desire, in my role as an artist, I remain free to explore, free to try again, without the judgment of others (however, I am not safe from my own constant inner voice and dialogue, and in fact need this conversation). In my artist role, the safety and privacy of my studio offers me a refuge, or what Hannah Arendt calls an "island of freedom" to be who I am, to do what I think is necessary, and to ultimately make the judgment as to whether my work is good or bad before I decide to provide it for public viewing. I can make the art "work" as a piece of art on most occasions and if it doesn't, I can still salvage what is left to begin anew. I can reflect and need to reflect on what I do in my studio, knowing I can always begin again, and there is always hope that the next piece will be successful or better and that I will learn something new while doing it. My role and life as an artist provides a refuge for solace, for comfort, for courage, and to remind me of who I am, to give me strength to do my work in the private space of my studio. Who I am in my studio encourages me to be able to play my more public role as the principal teacher-leader in the manner I would like to play and believe it is important to play. This writing is an attempt to understand and to explain why I believe the role of the artist can inform the role of the teacher leader to better "lead" or work with others in

the school community, to work towards what is important in constructing a “good” school, a school where teachers, students, parents and community members work together for a “good” end. As an artist I work on my art work to move towards a “good” finished piece of art knowing that as an artist, my work is never complete, never completely understood while seeking to understand and explored as follows.



Porcelain clay mask

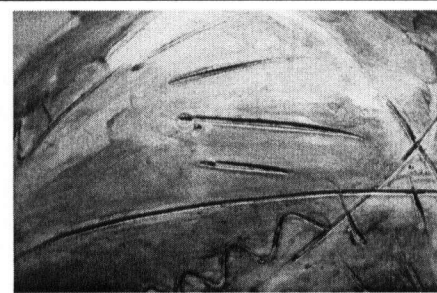
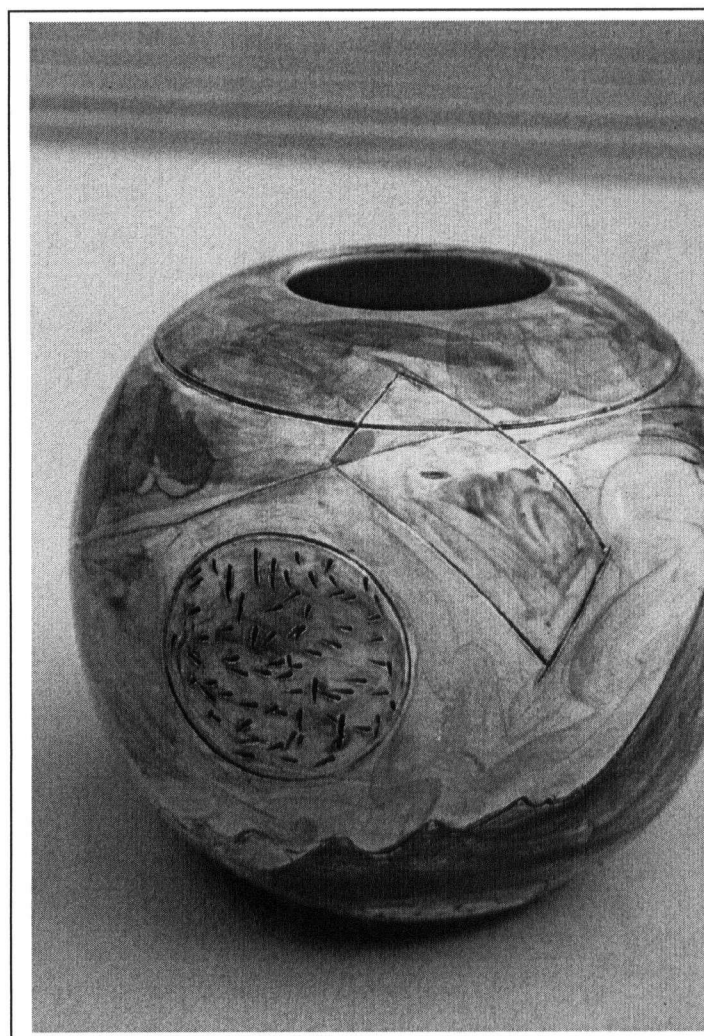
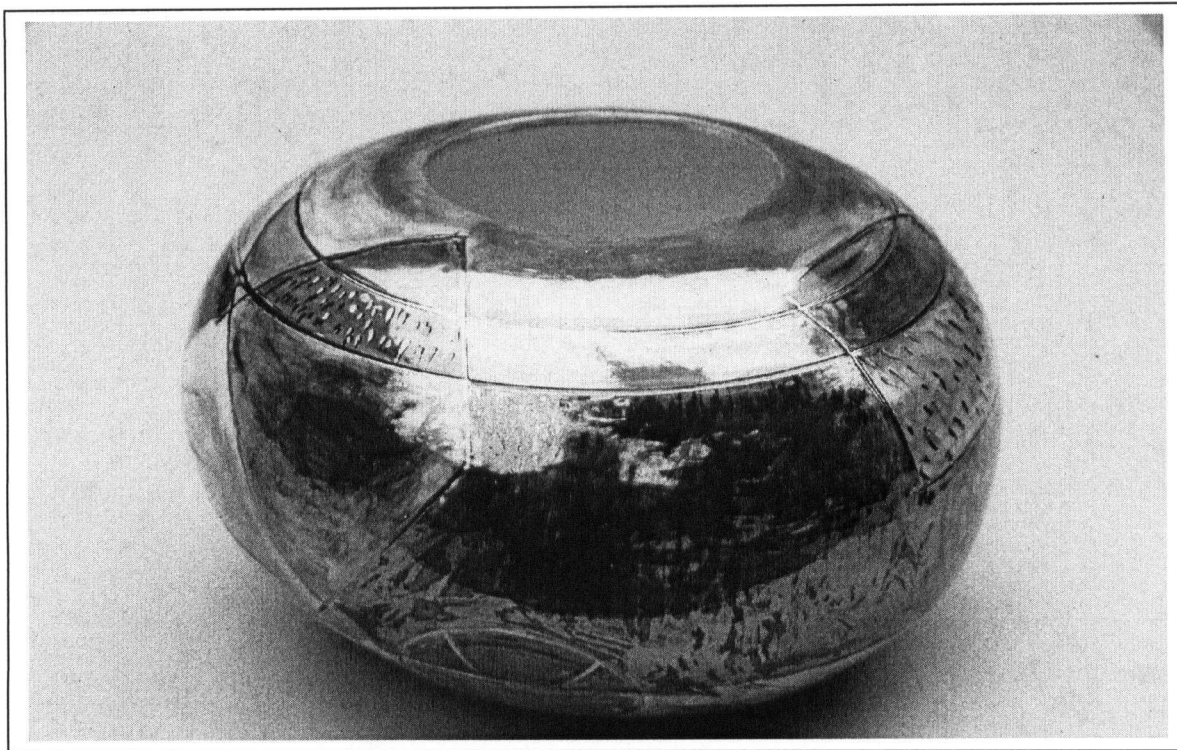
### *About My Art*

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique

shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of “who” in contradistinction to “what” somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (Arendt, 1958, p.179)

It is my hope that the images of my art works inserted throughout this dissertation do disclose something of the “who” I am in reference to Arendt’s quote above. I created these works at various times in my life and they represent my compulsion to “make my mark,” or speak to you the viewer as they have during the time I fashioned them. I have had this desire to create since I was a small child, and many of my marks and images are intuitive, repetitive, without my boundaries of definition, much as those I remember making as a youngster – they instinctively appeared. The works on the following pages are reminiscent of this childlike scribbling, contained within the formal forms of objects that hold my coloured brushstrokes. These functional pieces illustrate works crafted within distinct parameters prescribed by low-fired white clay formed on the wheel, presenting a surface that challenges me as a painter. In the illustrations, the results reflect both functional and decorative aspects possible in clay.

While doing my work, a more articulated meaning with words may not be accessible to me as the artist, or you as a viewer, particularly in non-functional or non-representation features. This is not a concern for me, since it is my internal personal voice I am trying to find in the making of the art form and I am comfortable with, not articulating or



I have long been fascinated with the blending of formal geometric shapes and the intuitive wildness of my strokes within defined shapes. This is one of the wonderful aspects of making and viewing art for me – this keeps me engaged with looking at things from different perspectives while still remaining in a pre-imposed structural form. There are opportunities for me to change within without destroying the context or form – perhaps a possible reference for my teacher-leader practice in schools?

prescribing meaning for others or indeed, myself. The work is as it is, holding the meaning within. In attempting to access meaning, the viewer most frequently might begin by analysing composition, technique, elements and principles of design, and an overall sense of rightness, but the true meaning may never be definable. It is here that exists the most important aspect for me in the art work, that of the “in-between space” of my thought and the action in the making of and viewing the work. The work speaks to me throughout the process and continues to speak on my behalf upon completion to us as viewers. Arendt speaks of this “in-between” space forming in “action and speech” and in the context of the following quote, my view of action and speech in the making art works is not what she intended. Not being a visual artist herself, I believe she did not fully explore the aspect of action and speech in reference to art making, or she would have revealed that the “in-between space” does indeed exist in the relationship between the maker and the art objects during the time artists create, just as it exists in action when the work is on display and there is dialogue between the viewer and the work. Arendt said she wrote to understand. I make marks as an artist to explore an aspect of my identity that perhaps cannot be understood with words but only within the context of the art, and in Arendt’s definition of the “in-between,” this lack of definition makes the feeling no less important or real. This demands that the readers of my work extend themselves to form a relationship with my work, to come to an understanding about my meaning. I explain this further in later chapters, but to assist in understanding her stance and to gain a glimpse in how I have interpreted her thought, the following passage is helpful:

Action and speech go on between men, as they are directed toward them, and they retain their agent-revealing capacity even if their content is exclusively “objective,” concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective worldly interests. These interests constitute, in the world’s most literal significance, something which *in-between*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the subject as an integral part of all, even the most “objective” intercourse, the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men’s acting and speaking directly *to* one another. This second, subjective in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results and end products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common and we call this reality the “web” of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality (Arendt, 1958, pp.182-183).

I anticipate that it will become evident that there is a very real, on-going conversation and relationship formed between the artist and the work through the communication between the thought and the form and while an object is or may be the result, the “in-between”

developed in this conversation is too, no less real that the objects I create. This paper explores the “in-between” space I create within myself, between others and the very real space formed between my practices as artist and teacher-leader.

### *Contributions of the Teacher-leader to the Artist*

In my role as principal, it seems to me that whatever I do (unlike my art work) whatever action I take, is woven closely with the position of teacher-leader and the perceptions of others toward my practice. This of course is coupled with my own beliefs about leadership and the norms that I hold for myself as well as my perceived public expectations. At times, there also seems to be some loss of my individuality that is more and more defined by the position as leader.

As a teacher-leader, many of the attributes I naturally seem to have as an artist, become further woven into my daily practice and the discipline that this leadership, teaching role provides a possibility or opening of making my work in the studio more expansive.

Working within the school setting with such varieties of individuals and groups with all of the vagaries, inconsistencies, individual tendencies, uniqueness we possess as human beings, offers me the potential promise of embracing more readily the tolerances I need and desire whenever I work with others. Might this (most importantly) assist me in being more open-minded, perhaps even forgiving and expansive about my work and my approach in my studio practice as an artist? As a teacher-leader where I seem to be

placed many times in the public eye, could I go as an artist with greater ease into the public space where I exhibit the art I have created in private?

### The Nature of my Research

In writing this paper, I am exploring the underpinnings and formation of my identity and practices as artist and as teacher-leader. I believe that who I am as an artist illuminates and informs my current role as a teacher-leader and also the reverse. The writings of the political philosopher, Hannah Arendt, offer me an opportunity to explore the relationship between teacher-leader and artist, or, the forming of the “in-between.” Does understanding my role as an artist help better inform the action I take while working with others as a teacher-leader? Conversely, do the actions I engage in as a teacher-leader help me better understand my role as an artist? Yes, they interrelate, interplay and nestle/wrestle and inform each other and rather than being two separate entities, could there be what Arendt calls the “in-between” that happens when people develop the “web of relationships” with each other? Could I build a “good” relationship between the roles I play where they become entwined as one? Is this a space where each practice informs the other and if I am better able to understand each role and how they connect or intersect, will I be better able to shift my practice from what Arendt identifies as “labour and work” towards “action,” becoming both a better leader and artist? Within the realm of “in-between” where the artist and teacher-leader roles inform each other, I am pursuing an understanding of the rich complexity of practice within this space.



Porcelain clay masks

### *Why Hannah Arendt?*

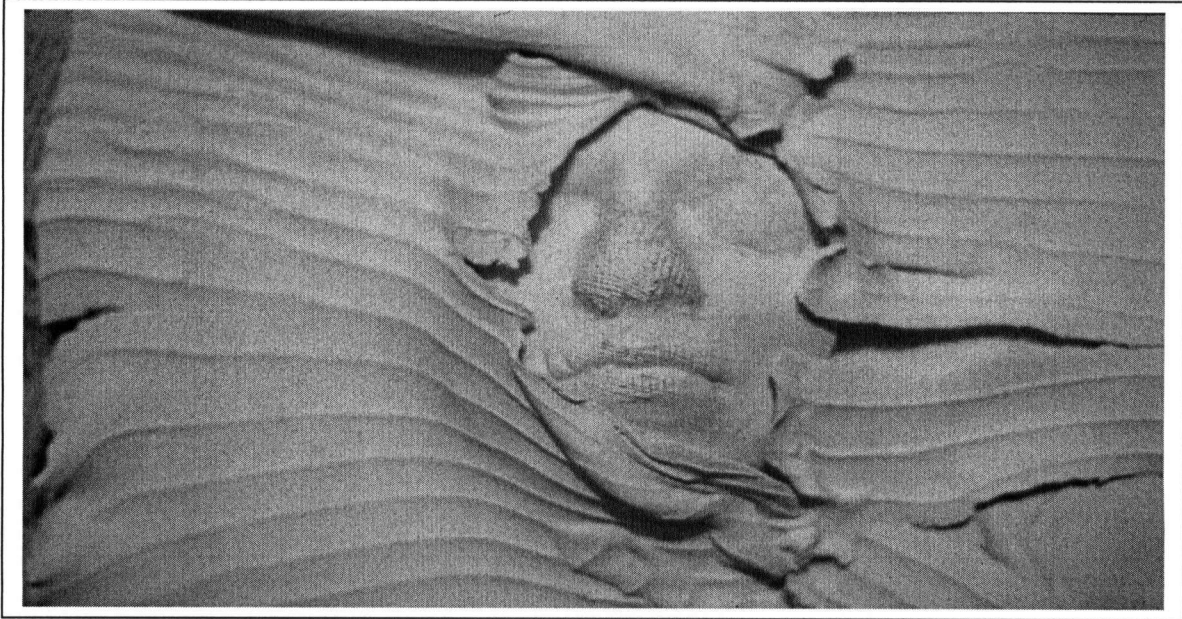
Hannah Arendt's thoughts on how we find ourselves in the world are worthy of examination and no doubt she has some interesting views because of how she came to find her identity in the world. Arendt provides me with philosophical resources that sustain me as an educator and artist by making me alert to and conscious of my practices of the labour, work, and action in which I engage. Her conceptual development of the *vita activa* (the life of action) and *vita contempliva* (the life of the mind) offers an explanation as to why I am fundamentally at odds with the notion of the arts located at the sidelines in schools and given less status and credibility than more traditionally acknowledged intellectual pursuits such as the sciences, mathematics, literature and philosophy. Indeed, Arendt writes about the privileged position in Western history of the

*vita contempliva* or the contemplative, thoughtful, philosophical life with its academic disciplines, over the *vita activa*, the active, practical life of labour, work and action. In Western thought, if one sullied ones hands with labour and work, then the life lived is somehow less worthy. However, Arendt asserted that to be fully human, one needed to experience both the *vita contempliva* and the *vita activa* as part of the “good” life. In engaging in “action” as part of the *vita activa*, this is where we find we are most alive, in the engaging with others to form those most important “webs of relationships.”

### *Who is Hannah Arendt?*

Hannah Arendt was born in 1906 in Germany to prosperous parents in the Jewish community of Königsberg. While her parents were not religious Arendt did attend synagogue with her grandparents as a young child and the influence of the Jewish faith is dominant in some of her writings. Arendt evolved into a woman of strikingly acute intellect, perhaps shaped in part because of her earlier perilous adventure to the United States via occupied France, in 1941 to survive the horror of Nazi Germany. As we know, to remain would have been impossible and improbable for her to have a future as a Jew in Europe. She apparently was socially engaging with a “genius for friendship” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p.xii) and intellectually brilliant. Even though she was not entirely comfortable in English, only learning English upon arriving in the U.S., she became adept at writing and spoke eloquently through her many books and speaking engagements. Arendt has influenced countless philosophers and thinkers and continues

to challenge readers to think, to go beyond what we believe our limits, to stretch our capacity for imagining other worlds and for questioning our constructed realities.



Porcelain clay mask

### Opening the “In-Between”

Arendt’s notion of action as an aspect of the *vita activa*’s triumvirate of labour, work and action, has offered me an “opening” in a similar way that my mask images came to reveal to me who I was at that time in my life, and the “invitation” notice by UBC to apply to the Educational Doctorate programme. Here, I begin to examine and understand the formation of my identity as an artist and teacher-leader and most importantly, the emerging “in-between” space between my practices. How this “in-between” space, sheds light to enlighten my practices is the purpose of this research. I have also outlined how the doctorate in leadership is about my leadership practice in schools and, how my practice as an artist informs this leadership as a teacher-leader. It is not research about

my art work itself, but about how the ongoing process of being an artist illuminates my practice as a teacher-leader and vice-versa in forming an “in-between” space. I should also like to explain that while the artist and teacher-leader role are separate and distinct, the practice I refer to eventually and must inevitably engage in is a reflection of the labour, work and action in both.

In *Chapter Two: Labour*, I briefly explain Arendt’s triumvirate of labour work and action as part of the *vita activa* before labour itself is fully discussed in relation to my practice. Labour is considered the least fulfilling aspect of the *vita activa*, and perhaps something we wish to flee. However, it also becomes obvious that labour is necessary for us all in some aspect of our lives, and while it is never ending, labour has its own pleasures and may also be comforting. Labour is the daily breathing and living of our lives that are necessary for existence. Every living person labours. However, through Arendt’s lens, while labour is necessary, it is not sufficient to labour only if we wish to live a full life.

In *Chapter Three: Work*, I further explain Arendt’s notion of work as it differs from labour. Work according to Arendt should not be conflated with labour, which is ongoing, never ending; work is distinctly different and results in the creation of products that help to place us in the world and provides reminders of who we are in our daily living. Work involves the material world: work is largely marked by the manufacturing of items that assist in placing us in the world and reminding us “what” we might contribute to the world. When we make items that require great thought and effort, Arendt refers to the

process as reification and says the experience may be transformative. It is in this aspect of the creation of work in my practices that interests me most, since this may lead to the third aspect of the *vita activa*, action.

In *Chapter Four: Action*, I explore the Arendtian concept of “action” in which “living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them. The stage is common to all who are alive, but it *seems* different to each species, different also to each individual specimen.” (Arendt, 1978, p. 21)

In my practices as artist and teacher-leader, it is in the “space of appearances” where “webs of relationships” may be formed, I struggle to create “action,” understood in the Arendtian sense. Arendt contends that through much of life most of us labour through necessity and sometimes create works, but in order for us to be truly alive, we need to become engaged in action, which she explains:

To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, “to begin,” “to lead,” and eventually “to rule,” indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action. ... This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself... (1958, p.177).

When one acts, one has the opportunity of being re-born, to be alive to one another, define “who” we are, and to make changes in our world, for good or bad. In action, we may experience “natality” or re-birth, where, as newcomers there is an opportunity for us to re-create ourselves and have influence within the plurality of others, who may also influence the action that is to occur. Our experiences will vary depending upon our previous understandings as individuals and as a collective; the sorts of private and public spaces that are available and accessed; the kinds of relationships that have been established and nurtured to make action possible.

In understanding and exploring natality and plurality in the communities I work in, I need to find the private spaces that I have access to as an artist, those safe spaces that allow for the “webs of relationships” and stories to be told so action may take place in more public worlds. The forming of these “webs of relationships” requires that conditions and norms exist in our practice lives, not the least of which is finding time and space as we learn how to exist and act together. At the conclusion of my fourth year as teacher-leader, I have been able to find some of those safer, more private spaces in the school community for us to engage with one another and prepare to go to a wider public. So it is in the intersection of my practice as an artist and teacher-leader and both my worlds “speak” to one other.

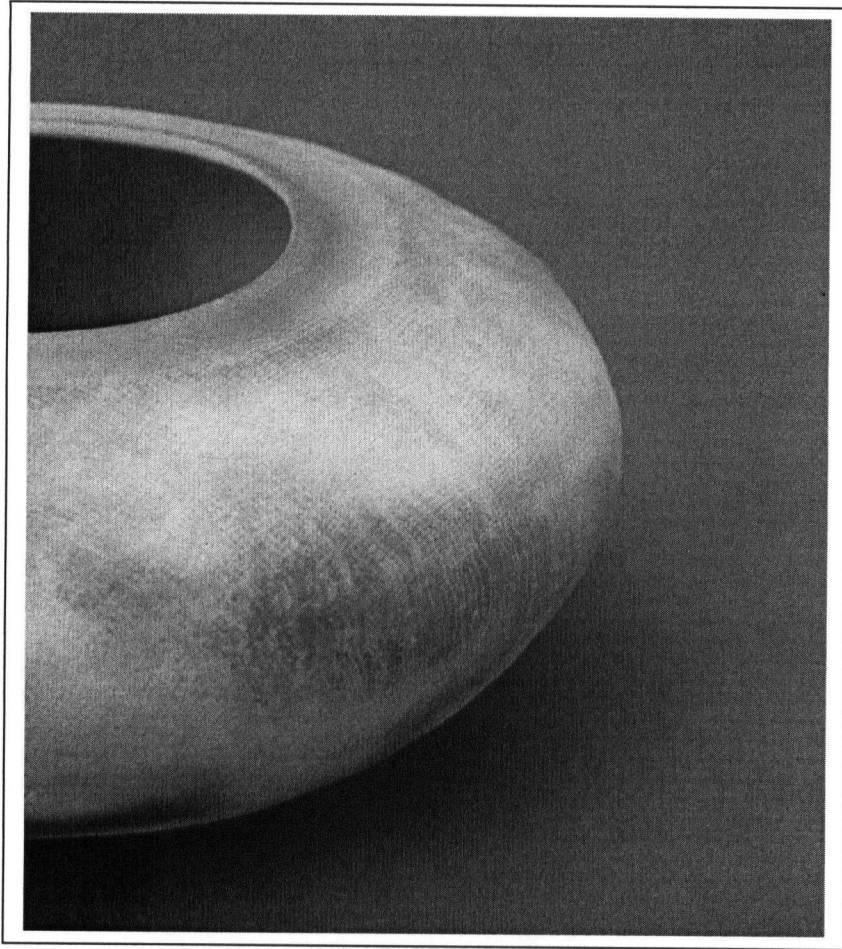
In *Chapter Five: The In-Between*, I reveal where the “in-between” began for me and how this space is so important in my efforts to live a better life and contribute to the lives I connect with in various webs of relationships. The intermingling of my two worlds of

practice offers spaces for renewal and prepare for Arendtian action in practice worlds that seem to value labour and work exclusively.

This paper is about the unfolding of many stories: in maintaining hope as I move from labour and work towards action; in studio and in school; in private and in public; in the formation of webs of relationships; in the struggle for natality in the plurality of existence; and in the appearance of the “in-between” space of my practice as artist and my practice as teacher-leader.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### LABOUR



The hand thrown primitively fired pot (above) embodies many features of labour as understood by Arendt. The wedging of clay, the grinding of oxides, the throwing of form, are all necessary aspects of labour that are required or the finished piece could not exist. Labour, in art and labour in teacher-leadership are necessary but not sufficient for a worthy practice, which, for Arendt, must involve work and action as well. Nonetheless, labour has its own pleasures that are especially sensual and rhythmic and throughout this

chapter, I hope to illustrate how the relationship between the labour of the artist and the labour of the teacher-leader are interconnected, have similar characteristics and form a critical foundation for work and action.

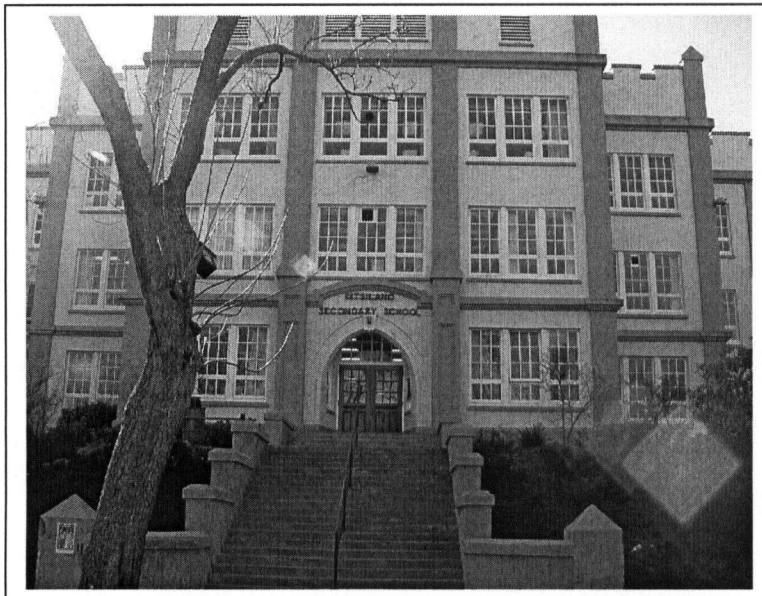
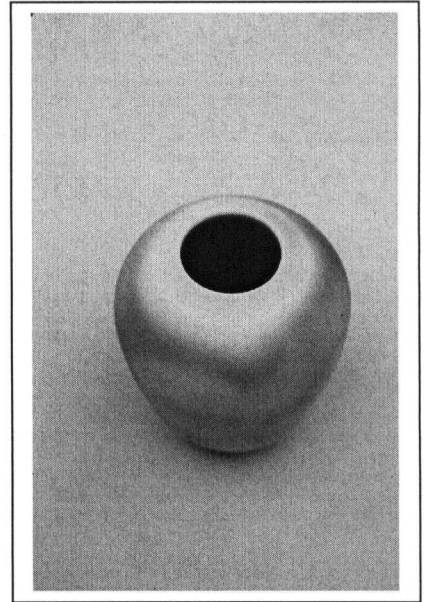
An element of labouring is present in all human activities, even the highest, insofar as they are undertaken as “routine” jobs by which we make our living and keep ourselves alive. Their very repetitiveness, which more often than not we feel to be a burden that exhausts us, is what provides that minimum of animal contentment for which the great and meaningful spells of joy that are rare and never last, can never be a substitute, and without which the longer lasting though equally rare spells of grief and sorrow could hardly be borne. (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.173.)

It is mid-August. I have had a good holiday this summer, four weeks of visiting family and taking in art galleries in England then flying to Italy for a burst of ideas and art in another culture and to “feel” a different attitude, to leave the current turmoil of the education political landscape of British Columbia behind. As an artist, I wanted to consume the work in the galleries with all of my senses, talk with artists, gallery owners, reflect on my own work; I needed to be re-energized and to refuel depleted stores of energy that were low at the end of June. I am now impatient to return to my studio, but feel restricted, constricted by the requirements and needs of my teacher-leader role at the beginning of another year, even though I am committed to my teacher-leader practice. I organize myself to take the time I do have available to work in my studio consistently,

but in “small chunks,” so I can accomplish a body of work. This remains a real challenge to me and, because the needs of the new year are pressing on me, I turn my attention to the role of the principal where my thoughts are and need to be at this time of year.

I feel pressed by the demands of both worlds, to do my best as a principal and an artist and many times I sense I do less than I am capable of in each role while concurrently holding the thought that each role contributes to the other. Somewhat of a contradiction, and somewhat messy, but that is how my practice seems to me.

I return to school in order to survey what needs to be done to make sure we have a smooth September opening after Labour Day. It's my fourth year as principal teacher or teacher-leader in the same school, which in itself is unusual in Vancouver where administrators are generally transferred every few years. I am looking forward to seeing the students, teachers, staff and parents and talking about our hopes and dreams for the coming year. It has always seemed to me that September in schools is the real beginning of the new year, a time for re-birth as a school community in which hope, optimism and the sense of potential are renewed, yet again. I do an inventory of what is required to have the school running smoothly for the return of students and teachers after Labour Day...and as in previous years, there are tasks that more closely relate to 'labour' in Arendtian terms. It also illustrates the labouring aspect of being a teacher-leader: I feel I need to take responsibility for ensuring we are ready, so others are able to do their own labour, work and action.



“An element of labouring is present in all human activities, even the highest, insofar as they are undertaken as “routine” jobs by which we make our living and keep ourselves alive. Their very repetitiveness, which more often than not we feel to be a burden that exhausts us, is what provides that minimum of animal contentment ...”

Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.173

My studio and air brushed thrown pot (top). Kitsilano School (bottom) where I am teacher-leader - places for labour, work and action to foster all aspects of the *vita activa*.

Arendt's notion of labour is very distinct from her idea of work even though in recent times Arendt says we have often merged work and labour under the banner of work. She maintains that there is no end product in labour as there is in work, and explains

...the Greek distinguished between *ponein* and *ergazesthai*, the Latin between *laborare* and *facere* or *fabricari*, the French between *travailler* and *ouvrer*, the German between *arbeiten* and *werken*. The equivalents for labour have an unequivocal connotation of bodily experiences, of toil and trouble, and in most cases they are significantly also used for the pangs of birth. The last to use this original connection was Marx, who defined labour as the "reproduction of individual life" and begetting, the production of "foreign life," as the production of the species (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.170.)

Arendt disagrees with the conflation of labour and work and most closely aligns labour with that which we need to engage in to sustain or create life. She maintains it is important to re-establish the boundaries that have become blurred between labour and work: since labour and work have different functions they should be considered separately. In examining her assertion in relation to my practice as a teacher-leader and artist, will her premise hold up?

Labour, according to Arendt, means very simply to exist in the world. Labour is the daily breathing and living of our lives required to survive. In my role as a teacher-leader, I examine what it is that it takes to sustain the life of the school and in my practice as an

artist, I look at what is needed to give life to my art. What are the elements that I need to address to support the life of the school and the life of my art that are without product, but which seem to be ongoing, repetitive, yet give some pleasure in the doing by the very consistency of the labour?

In both my roles as teacher-leader and artist, there are ample examples of labour; since I am consumed with school opening at this time of year, I will first begin by giving examples of labour as a principal and secondly, as an artist. Thirdly, I will speculate as to how labouring as teacher-leader and artist informs the other, or becomes something else because of the overlapping, or in-between space in these roles. I am particularly interested in this in-between space to understand if there are ways that each influences the other.

### The Teacher-leader's Labour

As principal, I want to do the best possible job I am able to do and part of doing a good job is that I continue to see myself situated as a teacher, both in what is referred to as modeling, but also reminding myself of the many things that I liked to have ready for me as a teacher when I returned to my teaching in the fall...things that don't happen on their own, but need to be done by "someone" and that someone who ultimately is responsible to ensure things are ready is the principal, or in the case of my school, me. I am anxious about going back to school (historically, this is the same at the end of each summer break in my twenty-eight years of practice), yet somewhat irritable about the ongoing concerns

that have once again revealed themselves before school opening. These concerns are distracting to me since I want to be concerned with what I refer to as “the big ideas” for the school year, where we left our conversations with each other in June about what we want to see as a collective to occur in our school. As an administrator I am constantly reminded by my supervisors, the community, teachers and students that they expect me to be the educational leader, and, so do I! Thus, there is somewhat of a conflict between what I see as a teacher-leader’s ‘big’ job and the prosaic labour required to have the school function. While some teacher-leaders might say, “delegate, delegate, delegate,” some reasons why this is not always desirable, nor achievable, follow.

The following exchanges may provide an idea of the importance of labour in schools, but really, they are not exchanges, - more like distressed requests that I have come to recognize as people saying that this is “I need some help!!” kind of statement. I must be easily distracted this time of year, or perhaps inattentive coming back from holidays, because almost everyone has to address me by name to get my attention. Perhaps they recognize my mind remains elsewhere even though I try to be with them in the moment. The speakers need me to be involved with their own labour in opening the school. The accumulation of requests seem overwhelming and all come in the brief space of time in my first morning in the school: all need to be addressed immediately:

“Mary, is there someone you can phone to help us out? Email and SIS (school records) are down, the counsellors are coming in tomorrow and they need computer access and I haven’t been able to get any response from the board to get this done.” Frustrated, the

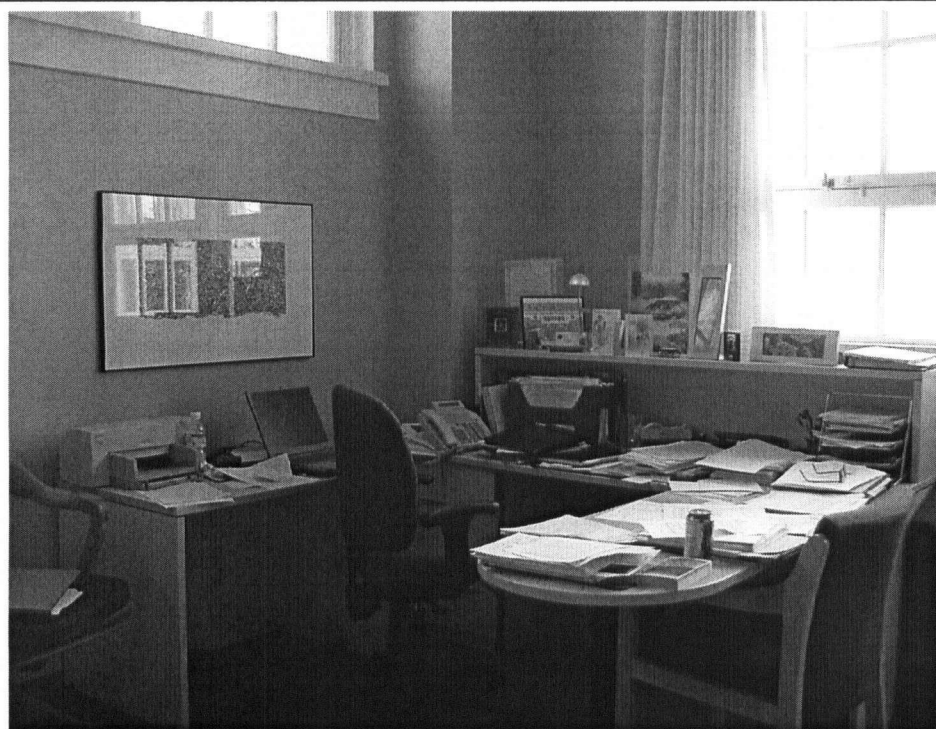
technician was apologetic in approaching me about the mundane technical aspect of this occurrence which seems to happen with regularity, but he felt there needed to be someone with “more authority” to speak with his supervisors to get the work done...

“Mary, the HR manager is calling and wants to let you know about a “placed” candidate,” my secretary says, “will you give her a call as soon as possible?” I am looking at resumes for hiring teachers and short listing for interviews and am frustrated by Human Resources who also have the contractual need to place teachers who don’t seem to fit anywhere - hence someone we haven’t short listed, but who has seniority is placed by Human Resources while doing the dance of seniority and qualifications with the teachers’ union. Suitability and qualifications seem a distant concern to seniority.

“Mary, can we meet to go over the financial statements when you have a moment,” says the ever-thoughtful, efficient, bookkeeper, who wants to ensure I know the extent of debt we have as we begin the year.

“Mary, we seem to be doing okay with the marks entry ...lots of students taking summer courses and also advanced classes...but it will mean some changes in the timetable,” the counsellor says... so necessary for students to have their transcripts, their time tables, a record of where they are in time, so they too may begin again.

“Mary, it’s so nice to see you, ... I hope you’ve had a great summer. I’m just in for a bit to prepare the first few weeks of school,” the teacher(s) says, excited, feeling that sense



My principal's office strewn with seemingly endless piles of paper.

While Arendt accords that in labour, work and action, action is the highest level, it seems to me that what I have to begin with, yes contend with at this time of year [August] is labour, seemingly endless, repetitive, cyclical.



The routine of all the artist's work, the consistency of struggle, the conversation with their personal work and each other again remind me of how important it is to take the time to observe, fill myself up with what others have done as well as being involved in the doing.

My studio with paint box, paper, brushes and wedging table with clay to be prepared for throwing.



of hope at beginning again (although those who come in beforehand always exude this sense of wonder) while they photocopy, plan, and imagine what is possible... "Can you help me with getting more desks before school?"

"Mary, we have endless, endless inquiries from parents and students to register their students for the fall, but we seem to be so full," exclaims the office receptionist who is struggling to be courteous with the ongoing requests.... "I'm wait-listing them and having them bring in the usual documents - seems even busier than last year!" It is unspoken, but hangs in the air that we may again need to turn away some students or find other placements for them.

"Mary," the Parent Advisory Chair says, "will you have a moment to meet to discuss the meeting schedule for us throughout the year sometime this week?"

"Mary," begins the Chief Engineer, "I hope we'll get the renovations complete in the staff room before school as well as the asbestos removal in the hall and the carpet laid in addition to our usual schedule...it has been incredibly busy for us this summer - why in addition to the summer shutdown due to budget cuts and holidays we need to take, if we're in shape for opening, we'll be lucky!" This is the fourth such year I have heard similar comments while workmen and trades men (almost always men) continue to prepare, clean, paint, repair, for our beginning the new year, again.

Labour, - a few examples of the ongoing tasks that are never ending in the school setting - clear examples of means with no end... It has been similar every year I have taught and been an administrator. While some might feel that these are not meaningful activities for the teacher-leader, I know that if I do not assist in making them happen, we will not have a smooth opening, and little other productive work will occur as we need to take the time to sort these issues out. I also believe that an aspect of my role is to help, serve, make life easier and the time and effort I give towards paying attention to this, amply rewards me.

I quell the anxiety that I too feel (and perhaps the requestors intended me to share with them) as the question surfaces, "What if I can't get these things done, sooner than later?" because the underlying text in all of these things is that "time is of the essence, there is some urgency to make these things happen." School opening is looming and will wait for none of this to be done. I begin to organize, prioritize, phone, leave messages, and where possible, meet with people face to face. I shamelessly trade on my relationships I have developed over the years with the people in the field, and it has taken time to develop these relationships which according to Arendt, come into the higher level of "action" in her triumvirate, but which makes all labour, work and action more worthwhile. While Arendt does separate, and stratify the three aspects of the *vita activa* in theory, in my practice the threads weave together, somewhat like the actual weft in weaving where it is constant throughout the making and the life of the piece, and this constancy of certain elements will become more apparent as I describe my practice as a teacher-leader.

Suffice it to say, at this juncture, that the feature of *respect* as one of the goods of "webs

of relationships” which Arendt ascribes to being necessary for action, but is also key in the ability to have labour done well and in a timely fashion. It is necessary that I treat the people and their concerns with respect. For their labour to be productive, there needs to be the understanding that what we as individuals do is important, worthwhile, and has efficacy, and recognizing this as a teacher-leader is significant to people as we labour together.

Labour creates the necessary life blood of our school: a process that never ends, is repetitive, may have some pleasure (or not), but is a means to get to work and action, but not without its own rewards and pleasures. Arendt’s labour is closely related to the pulse of the school, the routines we have in place to function smoothly, efficiently before we begin, which are an undercurrent of all we do and are the foundation for our efforts. It seems much less complicated in my world as an artist where I labour mostly on my own, but I labour nonetheless.

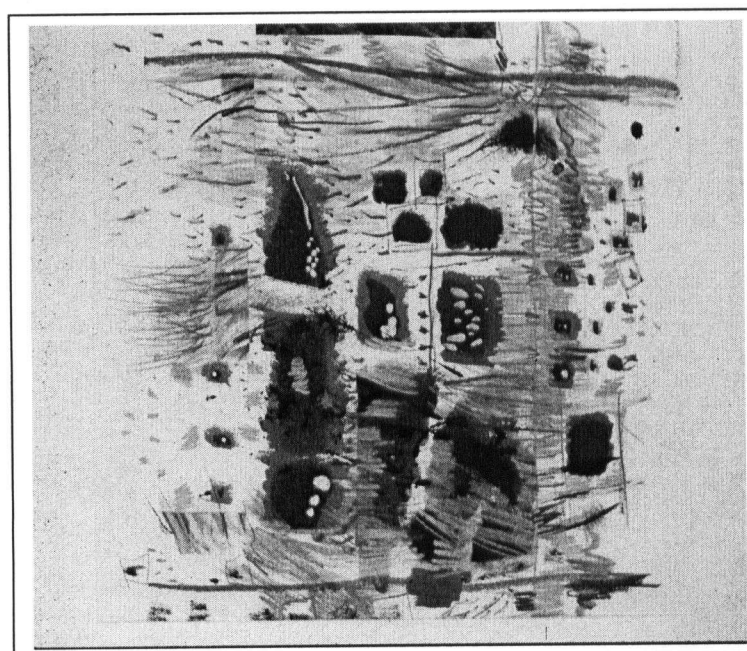
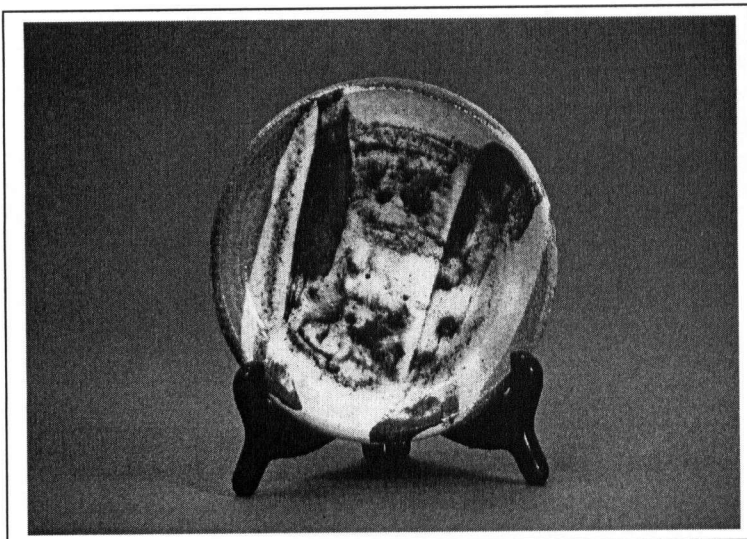
### The Artist’s Labour

In my practice as an artist, my labour seems more solitary, even though Arendt says we don’t labour on our own, but with others. Yet in much of her work, the boundaries blur. One could also say that even though I labour on my own at school, long after people leave, their voiced requests remain with me and perhaps it is similar in my life as an artist. The voices of teachers and other artists and their declarations and exhortations remain with me as I labour in preparing a particular kind of clay or glaze, or in stretching

a canvas. I guess it is more accurate to say that I feel (perhaps an illusion of control) that I have some agency in working on my own, and that the labour of an artist in the studio on my own is very important.

I have painted and sculpted in clay this past summer, but not to the extent I would have liked. I was more of an observer, or Arendt's 'spectator,' which is also necessary to being an artist, appreciating the work of others: the routines of their work, the consistency of their struggles, the conversation with their personal work reminded me how important it is to take the time to observe, to fill myself up with what others have done. Without realizing it, I intermixed Arendt's *vita contempliva* (thoughtful life) and the *vita activa* (active life), connecting these worlds of being.

The travel also refueled me for working in my studio as an artist, but this re-energizing actually began about two months before my summer trip. The following story is important on many levels, but more importantly for this discussion, includes examples of labour required of an artist and illustrates how essential labour is as a 'part' of the art making process. I had traveled to Toronto with some colleagues to a conference, and while there, went to visit the Gardiner Ceramics Museum. I very much wanted to see the exhibit of the renowned ceramic artists Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. My companions said they wished to see the pieces with me, interpreted by me, so they could "visit" the artists and the making of the work in a way they might not otherwise. I perceived (my perception) that it was my role to help take them to the making of the pieces in a symbolic yet very real or immediate way.



Our understanding of the art is so much deeper by understanding the labouring processes that are the necessary foundation to begin to make pieces and our recognition of the importance of these processes to the completed works.

Raku clay piece (top)  
Watercolour, crayon, ink painting (bottom).

The labouring processes involved in preparing the clay, wedging the raku body to have the right consistency of texture to withstand the thermal shock, the grinding of the oxides, the throwing on the wheel, the firing processes, are all somewhat repetitive, endless, so that the pieces may eventually come into being. The quality of the labour I offer in this instance is noticed as it affects the final quality of work completed. The painting was completed during the same time period using different materials but resulting in a similar mark or image by me as the artist.

So it is in the teacher-leader role where the quality of my labour determines the kind of work we are able to do in the school together – it may not result in a product as in my art practice, but it does result in how we are able to bring into existence the quality of work we wish to do, and this quality of labour does matter.

We went early in the morning and I was a little anxious about going with two others, both esteemed academics, who might not know the “language of clay,” yet who would want to be informed during the visit. It had been about seven years since I taught anyone ceramics! What if I couldn’t remember the necessary detail? What if they found my descriptions and insights boring, mundane and uninteresting?

On entering the museum, there was already a small school group crowded around some of the pieces with the docent animatedly describing the pieces. We quickly bypassed them and went into the main exhibit room where my breath was taken away with the forms of Coper and Rie - and I believe the sensation was similar for David and Elaine. The shapes were magnificent, reminiscent of ancient Greek forms from the Cyclade period around 5,000 BC and the exquisite forms were equalled by the added intricate embellishment and surface design. David and Elaine had questions particularly about techniques and processes, and I found myself having many of the answers, though not all, and I also found myself enjoying answering the questions and engaging in our interchange about the work of these particular artists. It was a wonderful morning for me: in talking with them, and teaching them about ceramics and what I knew, (and I did remember more than I thought I would), all the while they acknowledged their appreciation of my contributions in helping them understand the creation of the work. I was enormously moved by the morning and appreciated their thanks. Yet, on reflection, I discovered there was another reason our conversation was important for me. In telling the stories of the clay, and the labour and work of potters, I was also reminding myself of who I am, the labour I engage in as a potter and my relationship with those other potters I

talked about. I returned to my artist self that I had more and more left behind while I pursued teacher-leadership. I had slowly let my relationship with my art ebb away, even though I had spent many years working towards exhibits and shows and sales while nourishing the basic requirement an artist has to labour, work and act. I have always thought that the way I lead as a teacher-leader has been hugely influenced by the fact that I am an artist, but I wondered how I could believe that since I had left so much of my artist self behind in recent months while taking on the role of principal. Talking with David and Elaine about the labouring processes involved in clay works reminded me how important those aspects of the clay and working as an artist are to me.

I have returned to my studio many times since the Toronto trip. I felt compelled to paint and work with clay in my studio in a sense to continue to remind myself that I am an artist and art has always been a part of my practice. But I also wanted to be involved with the life rhythm of what it means to be a potter and painter. It remains a challenge to find the time to fully develop my ideas as an artist though, because unlike school right now, there is no looming deadline in my studio (my choice) and I know from the past that the promise of an exhibit, either solo or group, is a great impetus to do the labour of art, just as the opening of school is the impetus to ensure that the labour of opening is complete.

The conversation I had with David and Elaine was important on many levels and worth examining as such, because our talk was not only about the finished pieces of work, but the processes required to begin and finish the surfaces of the work. For the purposes of illustrating labour as an artist, I'll concentrate on the aspect of our discussions that

centered on what was necessary to begin before the pieces were formed, including the techniques, the composition of clay bodies, the oxides and colourants, the decorative processes such as sgraffito and slip trailing, and the firing processes. Ultimately, we were examining the overall finished work that helps place pieces in the world of “work” in Arendt’s terms, but our understanding of the work was deepened by our understanding of the labouring processes that are the necessary foundation to begin to make the pieces. Potter Daniel Rhodes emphasizes the necessity for the potter in particular to understand this:

Clay is one of the few materials which has no value of its own, yet which can be made into valuable objects. The value is put there by the potter. Clay itself is relatively formless, and the forms the potter makes are entirely of his invention and draw little from the inherent form of clay. (1957, p.1)

Labouring with these materials begins by preparing them to be used to make “works” in clay...as Rhodes says, they are nothing on their own, but it is in the laborious mixing, grinding, and combining, that degrees of quality of labour that affect the final product. I differ with Rhodes’ claim that the work itself “draws little from the inherent form of the clay”; clay itself has distinctive qualities of the region it comes from so that the work ultimately reflects the quality of the clay as well as the quality of the labour that has gone into the formation of the piece. The oxidized clay bowl at the beginning of this chapter and the raku piece on the previous illustrated page required a specific kind of material and labour to obtain the results I desired.

In my imagination I am able to recall the first time I touched clay as a nineteen-year old student at art school; I remember what it felt, smelled, and looked like. I didn't attempt to taste it, but have since when I have needed to moisten a surface to adhere a handle or needed just a little more ooze (slip) that didn't seem to be readily available! This clay was most likely made by my instructor, or perhaps a technician at the art school, and though I had felt mud before, I had not felt such plastic, sensual, pliable, responsive material as that I was being given to work with. The clay "body" as it is called, was made at the school, taking into account the clay we could readily access and the kind of finishing or firing we were doing. I can visualize the spacious room where we all eventually had to make the clay, for students were required to learn how to do this. The "bathtub," literally, took a central position where students who worked on the wheels (throwing) discarded their excess water and the fine particles from the clay that was shed while throwing. Beside the tub, there was a bread dough mixer where we combined and formed our clay bodies. Bags of Georgia kaolin, fire clay, grog and other clays with names that were exotic to me were combined in a measured yet inexact science where we threw on wheels in the same room for a period of time to the rhythm of the clay being slapped against the side of the mixer. We would examine the clay periodically to add more slip or dry clay if it was necessary, and at the right juncture we would roll chunks of about twenty-five pounds out onto the canvas covered table to wedge (prepare) before storing it in plastic garbage cans to maintain the moisture, and left it to cure or age for a few weeks. It was often thought that putting a coke into the mix would help age it faster, so sometimes we would splurge if we wanted the clay to work with sooner than later. This is somewhat different from the custom of "Chinese potters [who] were said to use

the clay dug and left by their fathers and grandfathers while the clay they dug themselves was left for their offspring” (Flight, 1991, p.16). I believe these are good examples of Arendt’s notion of labour in the artist-potter studio where there was also a great deal of pleasure in the doing. Of course, ready-made clays may be purchased or someone may be hired to do the mixing, but I found great satisfaction in making my own body of clay to suit my particular work and I believe that having that opportunity to make my own clay bodies, being encouraged to test clays and experiment led me to feel a great affinity with this material.

Regardless of how the clay came to the artist, it required the labour of someone to make the clay, and because of my experience, I believed that the testing of various properties of clay gave me particular information and knowledge about specific clays that I could not have obtained without my own labour. I learned that clay had individual characteristics and even that a fire clay from one part of the country would not have the exact chemical composition as from another. Though clay was similar in pockets around the world, without exception, the clays possessed their own uniqueness and the same could be said for the chemicals that made up glazes - and also offers some explanation as to why potters guard their recipes so carefully as well as their sources of chemicals. I learned that personally labouring gave me information about the particular materials I was working with that I could not have gleaned had I bought the clay ready made. I would not have made the pieces I did without the intimate knowledge of experience. To say that I was happy working in the studio and my other studies suffered some neglect, would be an understatement. For me, labour with clay

... corresponds to the condition of life itself, it partakes not only in life's toil and trouble but also in the sheer bliss with which we can experience our being alive. The "blessing or the joy of labor," which plays so great a part in modern labor theories, is no empty notion. Man, the author of the human artifice, which we call world in distinction to nature, and men, who are always involved with each other through action and speech, are by no means merely natural beings. But insofar as we too are just living creatures, laboring is the only way we can also remain and swing contentedly in nature's prescribed cycle, toiling and resting, laboring and consuming, with the same happy and purposeless regularity with which day and night, life and death follow each other. The reward of toil and trouble, though it does not leave anything behind itself, is even more real, less futile than any other form of happiness. It lies in nature's fertility, in the quiet confidence that he who in "toil and trouble" had done his part, remains a part of nature in the future of his children and his children's children. (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.172)

Making clay and glazes for me was indeed a labour of love and I still carry that feeling with me whenever I begin to work with the materials. I am carried back to this space where the potential of what is ahead lies in the labour with the material...the potential will never be realized unless the labour is begun. And one of the "gifts" that David and Elaine gave me to remind me how important labouring with clay and glazes was to me, and indeed continues to be; this aspect of labour reminded me of who I was.

Labour is foundational, and distinct from work; as Arendt asserts - labour is without end, it needs to continue, it is necessary, and as such, it is of critical importance that it be done. Further, in my practice, labour is not so much less important than work or action, but serves as a partner that enables me to engage in the *vita activa*. Labour provides the underpinnings for the work to be done.... And the underpinnings for “action” that I hope to have occur.

### “In-Between” the Labour of the Teacher-leader and Artist

There are some similarities in the labour of the artist and the teacher-leader: both ensure the foundation for work and action, yet, ironically, labour is regularly distained. Arendt explains:

Contempt for labouring, originally arising out of a passionate striving for freedom from necessity and a no less passionate impatience with every effort that left no trace, no monument, no great work worthy of remembrance, spread with the increasing demands of *polis* life upon the time of the citizens and its insistence of their abstention (*skhole*) from all but political activities, until it covered everything that demanded an effort. (1958, p.81)

In writing about labour in my roles, I think that, in spite of some impatience on my part, I take pleasure in aspects of labour and assisting others in labouring in both my practices. In Arendt writing about contempt for labour, she ignores its sensual rhythmic pleasure.

There is satisfaction and a feeling of some accomplishment in making sure the setting is in place for work and action to occur. While labour alone is not enough to provide meaning for my life, it is necessary to the life flow of the worlds I live and work in. Where do my labouring practices meet and intersect? Perhaps because there is much labour in my practice as a potter in particular, I am better able to see the need for labour in my teacher-leader world and the necessity of connecting it with my work and action. The practice of the teacher-leader seems to be largely in the public eye - that of the teachers, support staff, parents, students, community and I am aware that they will judge me and those who work with me on how I labour with them. Arendt says that "the case of labouring, an activity in which man is neither together with the world nor with other people, but alone with his body, facing the naked necessity to keep himself alive (1958, p.212). There are times at school or in my studio, mainly facing time constraints, where I am labouring to keep myself not alive, but definitely afloat. But it is worth noting that my labour in the two weeks before school places me on that first day of school, in another "space," which is not the space of labour, but somewhat free from labour, a place where I or others could not have found our way had I had not done the things necessary and requested of me. Teachers, students and administrators were able to have a smooth flow through the day as we moved rhythmically from the activity of checking out books, having photographs taken, sorting through the inevitable, unenviable, but seemingly necessary paper work. It was routinized to a point where teachers took great delight in exclaiming, "I can't believe how smoothly this is going!" (I do recall similar comments in years past but it is always nice to hear them again.) The teachers themselves are participating in making the opening successful as they become part of this labouring

process with others, which also holds some pleasure for them in the smooth routine. As I awoke at five on the first day of school, making sure the croissants (we are a French Immersion school!) were picked up and the coffee made, making everything ready becomes a labour of care, which is also ongoing. The bonus is in the pleasure of things going well so that students and teachers are able to get on with other more important aspects of learning while they are excited, enthusiastic, and hopeful. It would not have been acceptable if, when school opened, the requests asked of me had not been fulfilled. As it was, no one in the school community needed to be concerned with the labour that I looked after. Indeed, most were not aware of the labour that had been required to make the first day and week move smoothly, but they were alert to the fact the day had gone in a way that enabled them to go on with their own labour in meeting their students. When we examine and appreciate a fine work of clay such as Lucie Rie's, it is not generally the labour that we admire, but the experienced potter will know what labour was involved, recognize its importance and will appreciate the labour as a key feature of the final work. This is how I also feel about the labour of the opening of school...what matters is the movement of the day, week, month and year.

While much of my labour as a teacher-leader is in view of others and with others, the converse is true of my labour as an artist. Most often in the privacy and safety of my studio, there is only me to answer to if I miss a deadline, yet on closer examination, I ask if this is an accurate statement? I know from experience that clay is a jealous mistress and once one begins to engage in making the physical body, it requires strict monitoring and timing to nurture it to be ready. The respected British potter Bernard Leach wrote, "A

potter's prime need is good clay" (1971, p.43.) Could I extend this to the world of school where a good school's prime need is good teachers?

Pueblo potters often speak of "picking" clay, as they would pick flowers. Clay is a gift from Mother Earth, and like all of her gifts, it is sacred. Potters pray before taking the clay; they make an offering of cornmeal, asking permission from Mother Earth to take part of her body to use for pottery to support themselves and their children. (Trimble, 1987, p.10).

As a potter I understand the reverence of the Pueblo towards the clay: the clay retains those first marks always of how it is treated in its most elemental form. As a teacher-leader I can learn from this: could the equivalent be that I am preparing a foundation for teachers for their labour, work and action, and that my labour is in essence a signal of my reverence towards teaching and learning? Perhaps. I like to think so. Both clay and teachers are valuable, without which we cannot do what we need to do.

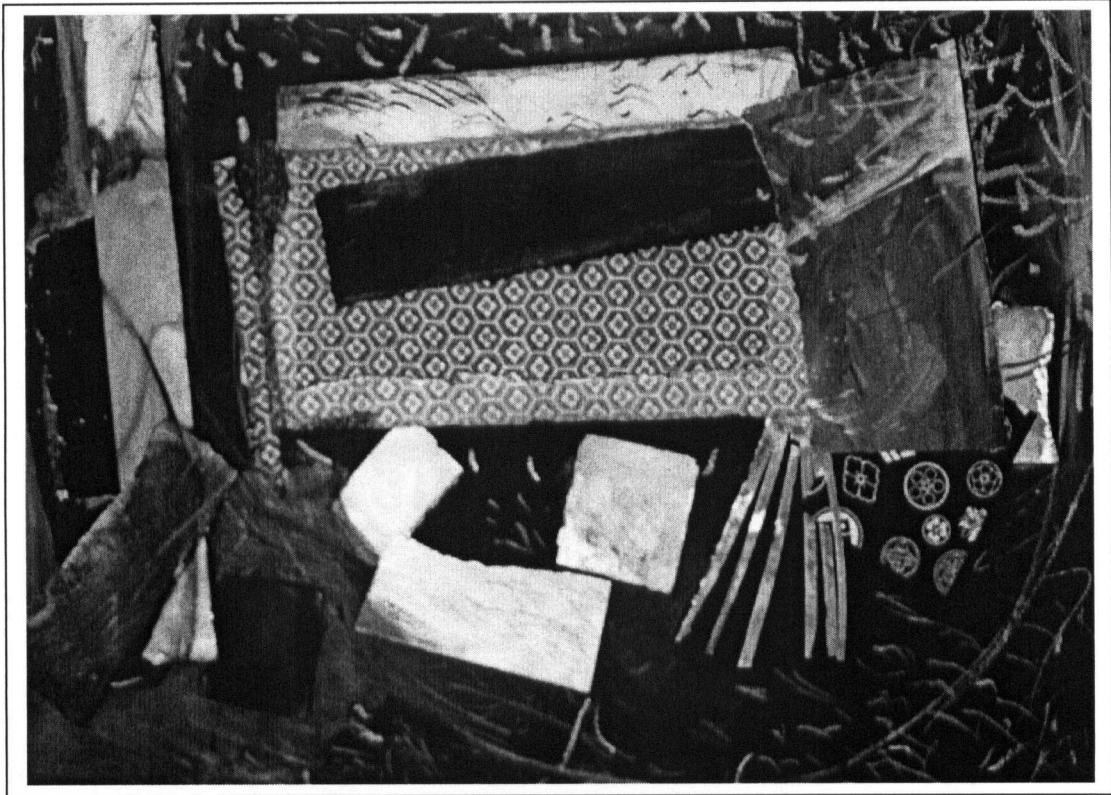
In teaching about clay, I emphasize the similarities between working with clay and with people, and without meaning to be disrespectful, or regarding people as a commodity, there are many. Clay, like people, has its particular disposition which is also dependent upon the environment around it and where it was mined; clay needs to be attended to.

One of the largest lessons from my practice as an artist-potter that I can transfer to my practice as a teacher-leader is the idea previously referred to as the labour of care: tending to the life-blood or underpinnings of the school for myself and others so that our labour

will be more productive, but not productive in Marx's sense of providing a surplus of labour. For Marx, "labour's productivity is measured and gauged against the requirements of the life process for its own reproduction; it resides in the potential surplus inherent in human labour power, not in the quality or character of the things it produces" (Arendt, 1958, p.93). When Arendt distinguishes labour from work, she separates herself from Marx and gives labour an expanded and deeper meaning. Labour is not necessarily more or less important than work or action; however labour is distinct and provides the conditions necessary for work and action. Roland Barth explains that "to the extent our activities in school are dedicated to getting learning curves off the chart, I'd say what we do is a calling. To the extent that we spend most of our time doing something else in school, I'd say we are engaged in a job" (2001, p.12). Labour involves the necessary; perhaps this is more evident in my teacher-leader practice than in my artistic practice, but in both worlds labour has importance. Labour is valued by the audience and noted when absent. While my labour as an artist may be largely invisible, neglect of labour in either practice will result in disaster. Yet, if I remain at the labouring level, I would say that what I do is a 'job.' While labouring in my studio or my office, I recognize that labour is only a beginning, albeit a critical and necessary foundation, for work and action.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### WORK



The work of our hands, as distinguished from the labour of our bodies ... 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 [the] durability.... Their proper use does not cause them to disappear and they give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man. (Arendt, 1958, p.136)

Work attempts to create a thing that will have a permanence the worker does not have. (McGowan, 1998, p. 43)

### Understanding Work

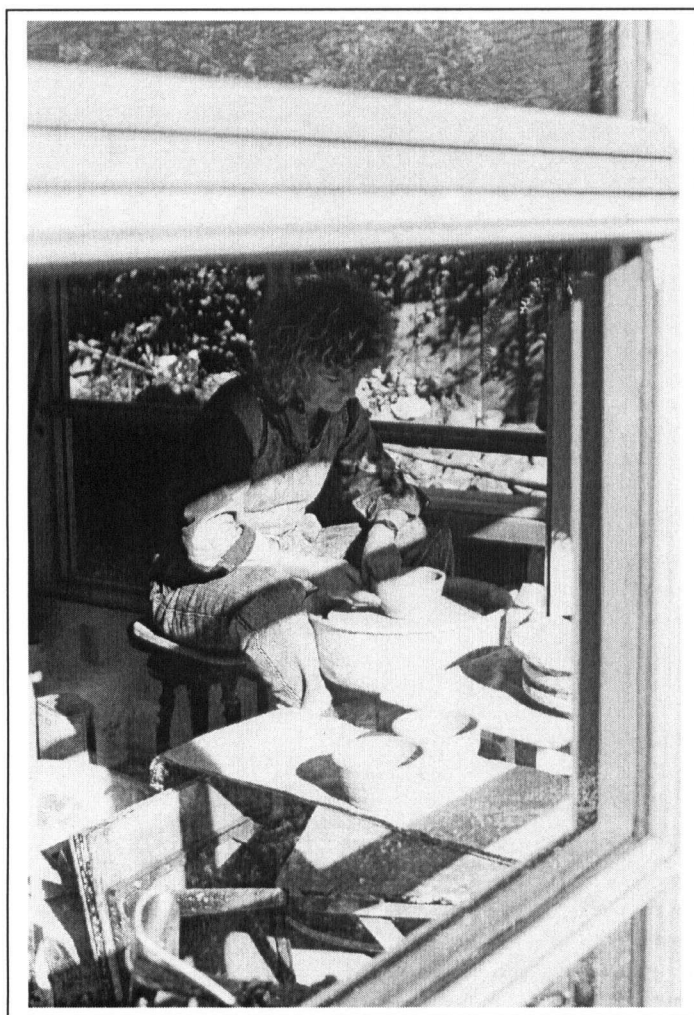
Arendt says 'work' is a testimony to "the durability of the world," that objects made by our 'work' remind us of who we are and give us a sense of stability and substance in our world, and "men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table" (1958, p.137). In other words, the objects of our work, such as my painting on the previous page, or the clay masks and forms in the previous chapters, situate us in the world and "against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made artifice, not the indifference of nature ... Without a world between men and nature, there would be eternal movement, but no objectivity" (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.174).

In this chapter, I examine the role Arendt's concept of 'work' plays in my practice as teacher-leader and artist, and illustrate how Arendt's distinction of work, as discrete from labour and action, is interpreted and contributes to the formation of my identity through the interplay of both my practice worlds. It will also become clear that blurring occurs between Arendt's distinctions as I more deeply examine the triumvirate of labour, work and action within the *vita activa*.

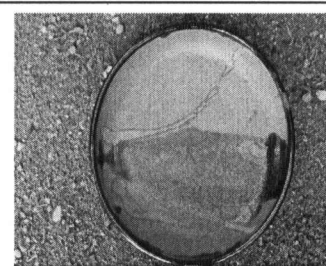
### *Work as it Differs from Labour*

In the previous chapter, Arendt's disagreement with Marx's conflation of labour and work was illustrated. She aligns labour with the effort required to survive the daily rigour of existing. In my roles as teacher-leader and artist, I considered the labour that is required to sustain my practices as a teacher-leader and artist. Labouring in the Arendtian sense results in consuming, or using up our production, in a seemingly endless, repetitive, rhythmic routine and, as a consequence, there is no discrete product of our labouring. I indicated taking pleasure in aspects of labour and also underscored the need to encompass it as part of both practices in order for work and the subsequent action to be possible.

Work is entirely different from labour in that work itself places us in a human-made world of things, or "use-objects" that we have produced. In the realm of 'work,' things we have made and identify with serve to remind us of who we are, who we have been and also, who we might want to become. An example of how work and identity are related is the recognition that I had relinquished my artist's identity without realizing it until I found myself in the presence of the work of potters Lucie Rie and Hans Coper with my friends David and Elaine at the Gardiner Museum as described in the previous chapter. My relationship with my artist self re-emerged in the museum where the clay objects reminded me of both the labor and work I had done with clay and helped to situate me in the world as an artist. I recognized this was a place I missed and by being located with these clay objects and talking with my colleagues about the forming of the pieces, I



My studio space has accessories identifying it as an artist's (left and below), just as my office space (above), has work objects denoting the teacher-leader's space. These spaces and these objects cue me to the practices I engage in.



became conscious of my artist self, ever present though largely silenced until now. So too, entering my principal's office each day reminds me of my past and future efforts. The very colours of the walls, the arrangement of furniture, the selection of art I and others have completed, places me in my current role and reminds me of my teacher-leader and artist identities. The painting, *Shopping Carts*, pictured behind the large meeting table in the previous page, completed by artist friend David Sloan, tells me of the methodical way he works that is so different from my manner of working and painting. It also reminds me of his manner of speaking about his art and the events that he finds important and the way in which he engages me, and I him, in our discussions. Every time a student, teacher or parent comments on his work, I am reminded of the relationship that David and I have with each other around our art work and what we believe is important to both of us. So too, the art work of other artists I may not know, but have identified with because of the exceptionally mastery of technique or delightful images, such as the Gu Xiong woodcuts and silk-screens, also in my office. Even though I do not have a relationship with Gu, I have appreciation for his composition and content of his work. I share some pleasure when people come into my office and they have a sense of relationship with the works themselves. The content of the art may well remind others who they are and what they might aspire to be, just by coming into contact with the works.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt says even as we are making things that are not meant for consumption, that is, creating works we may eventually consume these objects through use, but this use is different from the use of labour:

The durability of the human artifice is not absolute; the use we make of it, even though we do not consume it, uses it up. The life process which permeates our whole being invades it, too, and if we do not use the things of the world, they also will eventually decay, return into the over-all natural process from which they were drawn and against which they were erected. (1958, pp. 136-137)

It is the making or construction of objects or things that Arendt refers to as 'work' which, generally speaking, involves accomplishing a pre-determined end, as compared to labour which is never ending. In my art practice, this will result in objects such as the stoneware or primitively fired bowls, or the studio space and office space designed for my artist and teacher-leader practices; objects and spaces that place me in my practice worlds and remind me of who I am and want to be.

There are variations in the kinds of means/ends objects that we create in our work practice and Arendt quotes Locke's writing that in the world of things, "whole value lies in the work performed upon them" (1958, p.135). In other words, the quality of work completed is important. The quality of work or excellence in making may be partly judged by *techne*, or skill, or art or craft in producing something which may also be acquired by experience or the practice of a craft, such as my art-practice in clay, or in my teacher-leader practice in schools. How we are able to judge whether some 'work' and means/end accomplishments are better than others, or possesses greater *techne*, is a problem in both my worlds as an artist and teacher-leader. Excellence is not just skills or *techne*.

In my work as an artist and teacher-leader, using the definition of work as the production of objects to place us in the world as assumed by Arendt the kinds of works I create both as an artist and teacher-leader illustrate on one level, my capacities to produce, and I desire to create and produce well. Yet, as an artist, my work results in the creation of art “objects” that cannot be judged solely by the degree of skill or *techne* they demonstrate; however determining other criteria to be employed is hugely difficult. This difficulty in judging my work as an artist is further complicated in judging my work as a teacher-leader. While the objects created in my practice as an artist are readily apparent as they “appear” amongst others, what are the work objects that I create as a teacher leader? Further, what criteria might be used in addition to technique to judge the quality of my teacher-leader work? How my work practices as an artist and as a teacher-leader may or may not be judged, and how each practice informs the other, is the subject of this chapter.

### The Artist’s Work

In the sphere of fabrication itself, there is only one kind of object to which the unending chain of means and ends does not apply, and this is the work of art, the most useless and, at the same time, the most durable thing human hands can produce. (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.177)

I looked at the ageless complexion of the Dresden ladies. Things, I reflected, are tougher than people. Things are the changeless mirror in which we watch

ourselves disintegrate. Nothing is more age-ing than a collection of works of art.

(Chatwin, 1988, p.113)

The character Utz, in the book titled the same, *Utz* (Chatwin, 1988) most probably would have disagreed with Arendt's notion that art works are most useless because of the feelings of joy they invoked in the core of his being, and I also believe he would have agreed that his Dresden ladies were most durable, indeed as described, "the changeless mirror in which we watch ourselves disintegrate." Utz waxed poetic about Dresden porcelain in particular and, "to the eighteenth-century imagination, porcelain was not just another exotic, but a magical and talismanic substance – the substance of longevity, of potency, of invulnerability. ... Porcelain was the antidote of decay" (pp.111-112). Fired clay remains fixed, unchanged while we as humans transform physically (disintegrate?) as we move through life, as we age we are reminded by the changelessness of the porcelain and as Arendt conveyed, the solidity and durability of things made. How then can art be useless when Utz so visibly delighted in these objects? Utz would perhaps understand if he discerned Arendt's explanation of "useless" in relation to art objects just as he would expect and ask a viewer to look deeper than the surface of his beloved decorative figurines.

Arendt contends that art works, most probably paintings and sculptures during her particular time (my interpretation), are superior to all other things because they are removed from the necessity of use and without function, indeed, "most useless." Utz's

figurines would amply fit this category as the purpose they serve is entirely without function and use. Arendt writes:

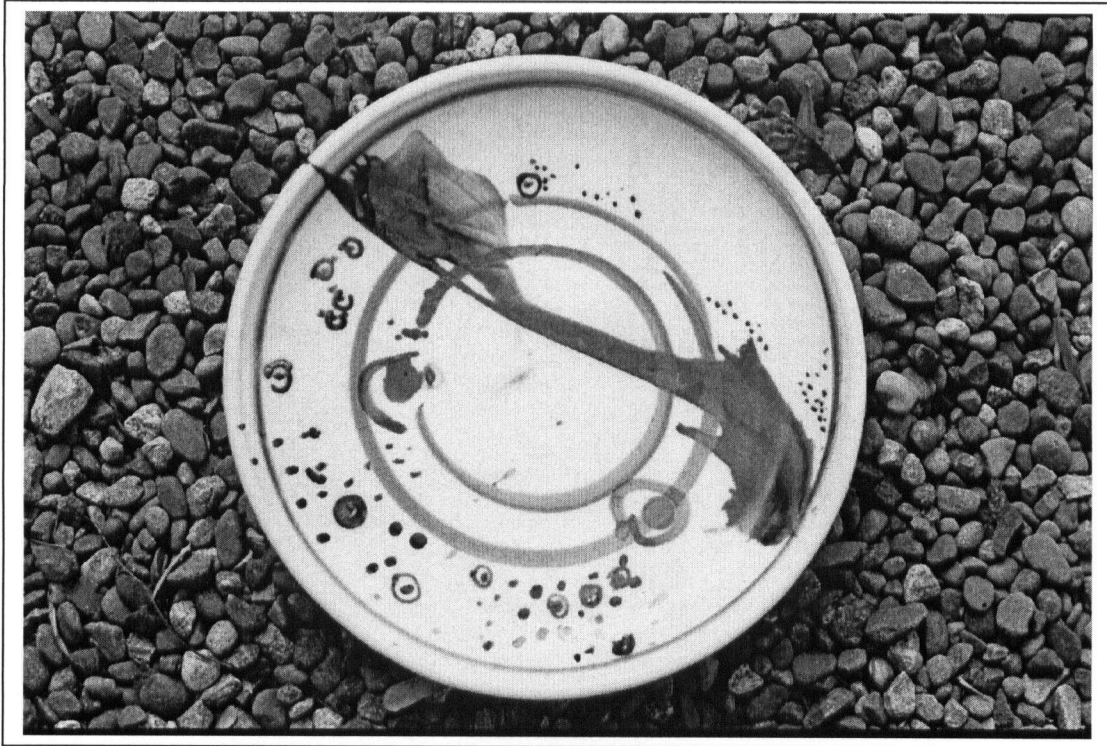
...the proper intercourse with a work of art is certainly not “using” it; on the contrary, it must be removed carefully from the whole context of ordinary use objects to attain its proper place in the world. By the same token, it must be removed from the exigencies and wants of daily life, with which it has less contact than any other thing. Whether this uselessness of art objects has always pertained or whether art formerly served the so-called religious needs of men as ordinary use objects serve more ordinary needs does not enter the argument. Even if the historical origin of art were of an exclusively religious or mythological character, the fact is that art has survived gloriously its severance from religion, magic, and myth. (1958, p.167)

Thus, if Utz looked further as he wished others would, to examine the beauty of his figurines, he would recognize that Arendt equated that which is most useless with the “durability of a higher order” (1958, p.167). Utz, while not the artist of these figurines, fully appreciated all they had to offer the viewer and he sensed his mortality while with them. They were in truth what he lived for, what gave his life meaning and he was more intimate with these objects than with people, and Arendt’s following quote illustrates what I understand when I read about Utz’s affiliation with his pieces, which is not uncommon for those who have been moved by art:

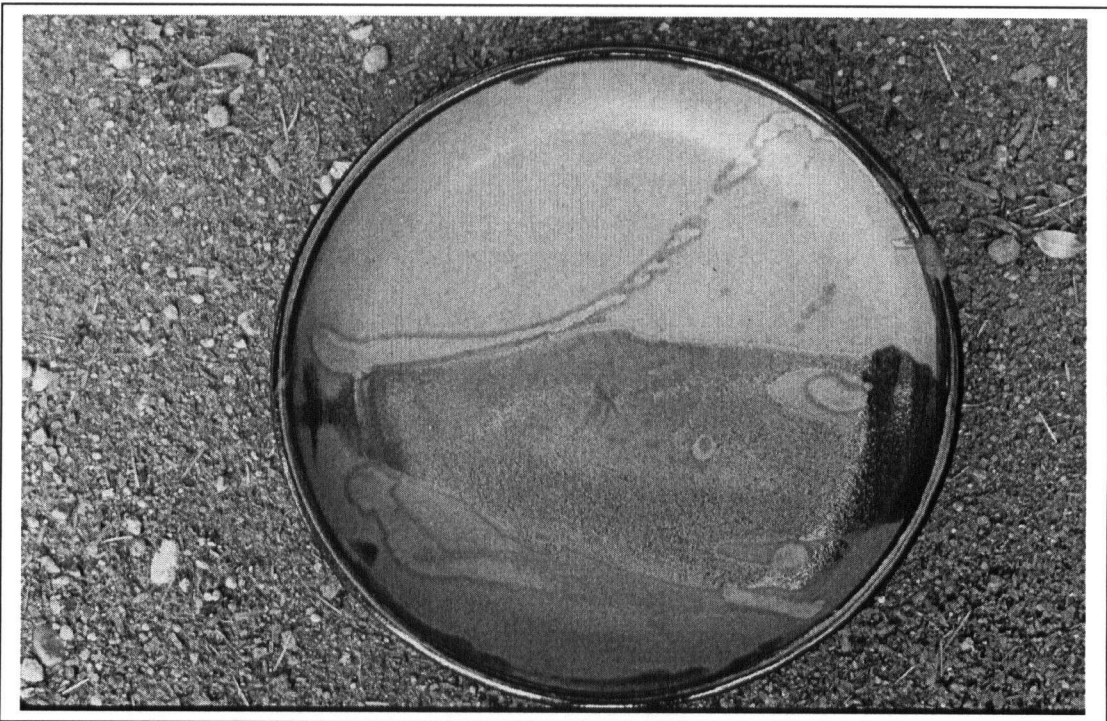
Nowhere else does the sheer durability of the world of things appear in such purity and clarity, nowhere else therefore does this thing-world reveal itself so spectacularly as the non-mortal home for mortal beings. It is as though worldly stability had become transparent in the permanence of art, so that a premonition of immortality, not the immortality of the soul or of life but of something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read. (1958, p.168)

Her words are powerful and speak to her thoughts on the elevation of works of art transcending other work where the “immediate source of the art work is the human capacity for thought,” (1958, p.168) and:

Thought is related to feeling and transforms its mute and inarticulate despondency, as exchange transforms the naked greed of desire and usage transforms the desperate longing of needs – until they are fit to enter the world and to be transformed into things, to become reified. In each instance, a human capacity which by its very nature is world-open and communicative transcends and releases into the world a passionate intensity from its imprisonment within the self. In the case of art works, reification is more than mere transformation; it is “transfiguration, a veritable metamorphosis in which it is as though the course of nature which wills that all fire burn to ashes is reverted and even dust can burst into flames. Works of art are thought things, but this does not prevent their being things” (p.168).



Arendt says that objects made by our 'work' remind us of who we are and give us a sense of stability and substance in our worlds. Art works are 'thought things.'



The "functionality" and usefulness of pieces of clay work does not belie the fact that no one else could have created these pieces but me – even as work, they hold my mark.

Conversely, Arendt would perhaps have classified works in clay as use objects, because they most often, but not always, have some functionality or use, such as the stoneware bowls on the previous page. Regardless, both the “useless and useful” in art works, fulfil the function and Arendt’s definition of “work.” Then again, work itself has another purpose in the artist’s studio where the artist self is no less than compelled to paint, to work with clay, to sculpt with stone or create in a way not yet imagined and the objects realized by this purpose is given to the world to others, such as Utz, to appreciate, to criticize and to form judgment and most importantly, to give meaning to our lives. Arendt’s poetic thoughts on the uselessness of art indicate her understanding of an opposite intention that places us as makers, viewers and judges, where the human heart recognizes excellence and meaning and further finds a home. Uselessness in Arendt’s writing does not mean “without purpose” to our lives, but it means without utilitarian function or use. The most functional piece of ware, designed purposefully with *techne* and excellence, offers an elevation to the spirit that evidently had meaning to Utz, and can offer meaning and richness to our lives.

### *The Artist’s Practice as Work*

I have wanted to be an artist for as long as I can remember. As an adult, making paintings, sculptures and pots is where I am most at home. I embrace this artist’s world when I enter the privacy of my studio. It is possible to have someone else do the labour, but as in many creative art-making forms (except perhaps conceptual art, architectural

structures, printmaking editions, massive sculptures, etc.) the work calls out to me to be completed by me, the artist, alone.

To accomplish my artist's work, I built a studio to shape my work and nurture my spirit. This space has accessories identifying it as an artist's, just as my office has objects denoting it as the teacher-leader's space. The four hundred and fifty square feet of very private studio is in the back of my home. Light filters through the north facing skylight as well as pushing through the expanse of windowed walls on two sides, surrounded by greenery, most conspicuously black and golden bamboo that is ever visible from the open view. A large blue hood vents the well-used electric kiln in the north-east corner. The kiln is worse for wear and shows areas of rust in the metal walls and lid where fire-brick peeps through. A sizeable four by eight foot splattered canvas-covered work table is placed dominantly by the glass panel doors with a sturdy plaster wedging table next to it for preparing the clay, a metal slab roller for evenly pressing chunks of clay, a deep white plastic sink, as well as numerous slabs of wood, pieces of canvas, items for texture, arranged so are all readily accessible. Even the floor of aggregate concrete that is visible when I enter the studio, has a drain designed at the point where the sloping floor meets, affording the opportunity to keep the room clean and orderly, but which truthfully, I choose to ignore much of the time. This cleaning is one aspect of labour I am not too fond of! The studio was designed by me, specifically for my artist's work, and the items within are organized for me, by me, to begin my work. It is pleasurable and comforting to go into my studio, to return to this place of work where I feel I belong, to be among my things and to have these items arranged, reminding me of the work I love to do because it

and the objects in it remind me of who I am. Thus, in my studio I use objects that have been created by others and me, organized by me, to assist me in further creating art objects made by me, to continue to place me in this world. When I enter this working space, I am reminded of the work I have done and have hope and anticipation of what it is I have yet to do as an artist.

Beginning to work, I generally have some idea of what I might make, but often I just begin by feeling the clay, letting it speak to me in a quiet way. Clay, if I am listening to it, is somewhat like a person who has something old to say and is ready to teach. This is the space I am entering now as I venture to make my mark. Clay holds the memory of touch so that years later the maker can identify the work as her own, such as the large bowls in the previous illustration I made about twenty-two years ago. Clay exemplifies the hesitant beginner and the experienced creator; the maker who may be too bound with tools and doesn't let the clay speak; the maker who is concerned with control, and wears the surface out so the work cannot speak and appears lifeless. To an experienced maker, excellence in making is readily identifiable. Recognizing work I have completed twenty-five years ago, it is not even necessary to look at my seal or signature, so distinctly personal is my mark and so readily do I recognize it as mine. Feldman (1988), says:

clay more than any other substance holds the memory of history, - it is almost indestructible. Clay is universal and has an ancient association in our bones with clay utensils and their use in basic human activities. Making things with clay

doesn't go out of style in spite of new inventions of materials and craft became part of our genetic heritage long before the inventions of museums and galleries.

I have in my possession a few of my earliest pieces made in clay: the first piece of raku, the first covered jar, the first bowl that was thrown and trimmed and glazed with me by my instructor, Jack Sures, and the first large piece which would surely be considered lacking excellence in making. But the work holds a particular memory for me, of me as a beginner at that place in time, and again, this particular aspect of work helps to place me in my evolution as an artist, even if it does not have this meaning for others. Again, the work reminds me of who I am as an artist and shapes how I respond to others and their beginning works.

My beginning work was judged in part by the technical excellence, or evidence of *techné*: were the walls thrown uniformly, did the clay "fit" the pieces, were the proportions elegant and graceful, or clumsy and without sensitivity? However, it became readily evident that judging with technical excellence was not enough. It is not only in the attaining of excellence in craft and technique that is important in producing works but it is the further moving beyond craft into another realm that begins to place clay in the more reified or perhaps higher state as being works of art.

Excellence in artworks can only be arrived at through practice and experience although some artists seem to have an intuitive sense of the rightness of proportion, finish and image. This somewhat generalisable knowledge comes through experience and

beginning to judge whether a piece is “good.” Generally speaking, in the arts, there is not specific formula but many guidelines that together create the generalisable knowledge with which to begin the work. An example of this would be my recognition during the construction of a wall mural or vase that there is an unusual rightness in the proportions, the surface “fits,” enhances, and the maker and viewer knows that the work cannot be any better. The work completed, and the viewer (who is also the maker at the completion of the work) knows the piece is beyond the usual and knows it cannot be replicated by any other artist. The work is tied to the artist’s identity and mark as mentioned earlier by Feldman. In the struggle of making the work, there is the excitement of recognition that this piece is “good.” This is different than a more production oriented work piece, such as uniformly thrown bowls, but even then there is a caution to remember and that is that these works still bear the mark of the maker so still qualify as “works,” (and they may be “good” works as well) rather than the solely repetitive mark made by labour. Indeed, Glenn Allison, former curator of the UBC Fine Arts Gallery, while not a potter, had an affinity for pots and those of Charmian Johnson in particular. Charmian creates beautiful functional ware, and as a clay aficionado (unusual for a gallery curator), Glenn appeared at every kiln opening of hers for over ten years. He says, “Her unwavering commitment to formal excellence revealed technical trials preceding every step in an evolving aesthetic. Great potting is damn hard work. And perfection, when it occurs, deserves public celebration” (Gustafson, 2002, p.41)! Charmian’s pots are indeed fine works and while useful, may readily placed in the realm of art. So superior is her work and so beyond my skill level and that of others, but not beyond my ability to recognize the quality of her work and the excellence in making.

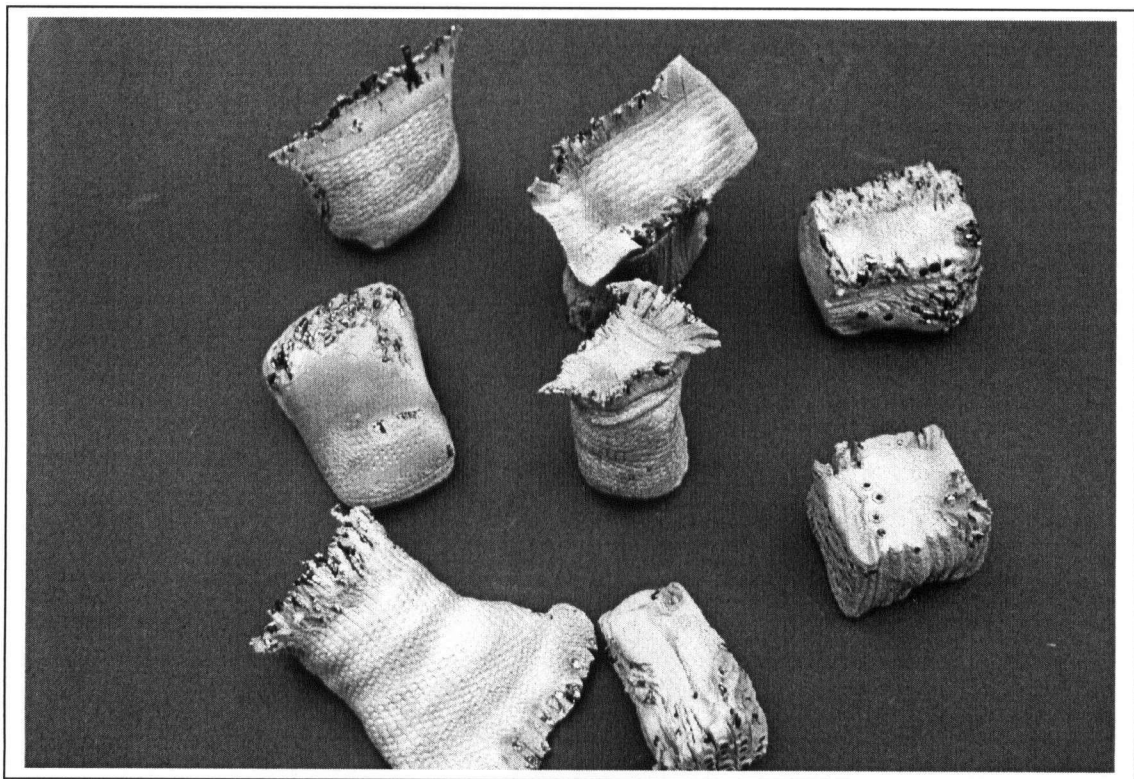
Thus, I have tried to illustrate Arendt's notion of the importance of work to place me in my world as an artist giving me a sense of place and identity. In truth, the very act of creating work products has the sense of trying to be born, or beginning, thus inserting Arendt's notion of "action," to be explored more fully in the next chapter, but to be noted that many times, action has some foundation in work. Sometimes the works created are so beyond the ordinary that they are transformed and transfigured into the most useless of all works, art, and as works of art, they may also transform and transfigure. We judge whether the work is "good," by the display of excellence in making, or *techne*, and further expand our judgment with our learned generalisable knowledge, that may be acquired through observation over time as well as practice. But ultimately, in the creation of works of art, I am granted entry into an extraordinary space of fulfilment where I have an opportunity to anchor myself with my work.

#### *Limitations of "work" for understanding my practice as an artist*

My purposes of working in clay are varied, sometimes just for the pleasure of feeling the clay while making the pieces, or creating pieces for sale only, or to secrete those more select pieces away for an upcoming exhibit, or yet to simply savour experimenting and discovering something new about the work or about myself, but it is almost always to go beyond solely making or producing. What do I mean by this? As an artist, I want to make work that contributes uniquely to the world, declaring itself to a knowing observer who can "read" the clay and say, "I recognize this artist's work!" Occasionally, many elements are magically integrated, creating a sort of "alchemy." This is not something



Objects of work help to place us in the world and remind us who we are....  
 “Sushi cones” (above) and “pieces of cake” (below) earthenware, glaze and lustre



that is particular to me, and many others having an affinity with clay, paint or metal, feel likewise as they work in their studios. The need to present the artist's voice in work is not new and should also not subvert the fineness or excellence in making. The architect Giorgio Vasari in his book *Vasari on Technique*, first published in the late 1500s, put the technical processes of the arts in written form so students would have some sense of what excellence in making meant and have some directions for attaining it. It is a valuable book today and continues to be inspiring. The durability of works of art maintains similar issues in our age as in the age of Vasari when he wrote of the artistic concern in the making of art, such as "Artists must depend on their Judgment rather than on the Measuring Rule" (Vasari, c. 1580, p.146).

Vasari is from the western art tradition that continues to inform today's practicing artists beliefs in their production of works; I believe this approach also informs Arendt's somewhat confined attitude towards art. While I have some sense of her concept of "useful and useless" work items, I would like to see an expansion in her judgment to take account of a useful item being useless in relation to being an art form. I feel sure she would have included Charmian Johnson's exquisite bowls in this category, or the Japanese raku tea bowls that are noted for being extraordinary, yet are useful and purposeful in the Japanese tea ceremony. I am making an assumption here, but perhaps Arendt's ideas about the uselessness of work would have benefited by being applied to other work worlds. I feel confident that her statement that "a premonition of immortality, not the immortality of the soul or of life but of something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to

speak and to be read,” (1958, p.168) can most readily be expanded to include some useful objects as art objects.

I wonder if in our current age where there has been such an explosion of technical capacities employed by artists (as opposed to the medium directing artists) and the facility for immediate world-wide communication, if Arendt’s view would have been broader and if she would now challenge her own statement that: “only where we are confronted with things which exist independently of all utilitarian and functional references, and whose quality always remains the same, do we speak of works of art” (1958, p.168).

I am heartened by Arendt holding art in such high esteem, but cannot support her statement that art and utility are not to be blended, and if work itself has function, it is not art. In a broader view, all art fulfils a greater function than simple utility, since it may give purpose to a life, such as that of Utz and the Dresden porcelain described earlier; or a sculpture if it moves an observer in a gallery or a park to a point where the onlooker is transformed; or a building with the function of housing people or of being used for worship. While Arendt has expansive breadth in her vision of the *vita activa*, her perspective limits art’s purposes. Her conceptual framework of labour, work and action provides a helpful packaging or wrapping for us to begin to discuss the meanings of her terms, but the terms are somewhat rigid when they might better if more fluid, particularly in the realm of art where all aspects of the *vita activa* are important. One cannot have art work, useful or useless, without excellent making, and in the interchange between the

maker and the made, between the object and the viewer, there is the possibility of transformation which is no less powerful or potentially moving (violent?) than the process of reification that takes place in the making of things. While Arendt says these created objects remain as things, they are objects that have the ability to transfigure, transform, or change in the exchange with others while being made or being appreciated and this, the creative process itself is sometimes troubled, somewhat anxious and it there is almost always some turmoil during the making. Arendt meant that reification was the actual violence of physically obtaining the materials, there is also some intensity and even fierceness in the making of the art objects, as well as in responding to the work. Throughout the making of objects, as an artist I am concerned with making good works, using my judgment to determine what is good. This is based on what I know is a series of principles based around "excellence in making, or doing," from past learning with master artists, readings, observing of other works, conversations, and in general, immersing myself into the life of art. The work is imbued with my relationships with other artists even though they are generally not physically present and indeed, their ideas, voices and visual images of their works are with me and sometimes even guide me although I may work in isolation. Arendt says that the work of the artist needs to be completed in isolation (1958) and it is only when the work has been finished and can stand alone that the artist joins others, and not until then can the artist enter the realm of action.

It is not only this togetherness which the master and workman lacks while actively engaged in production, the specifically political forms of being together

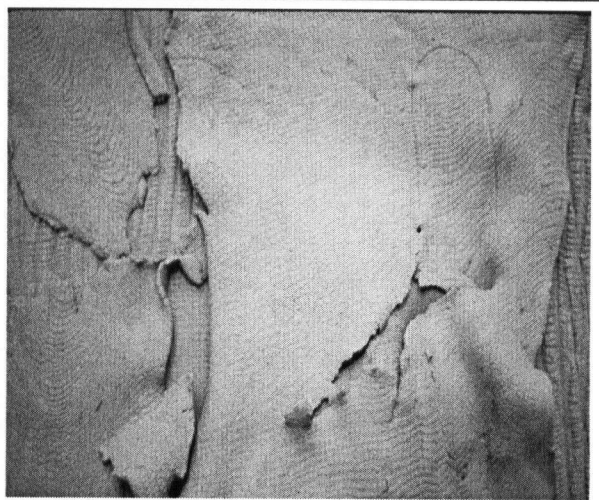
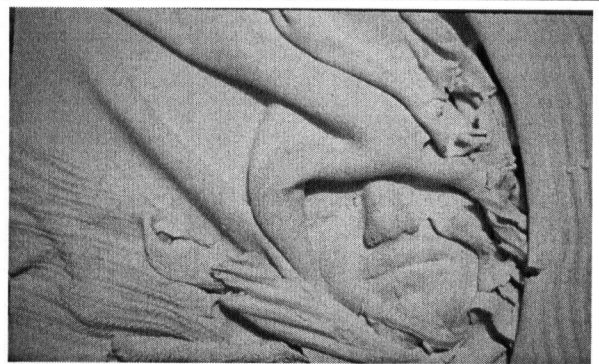
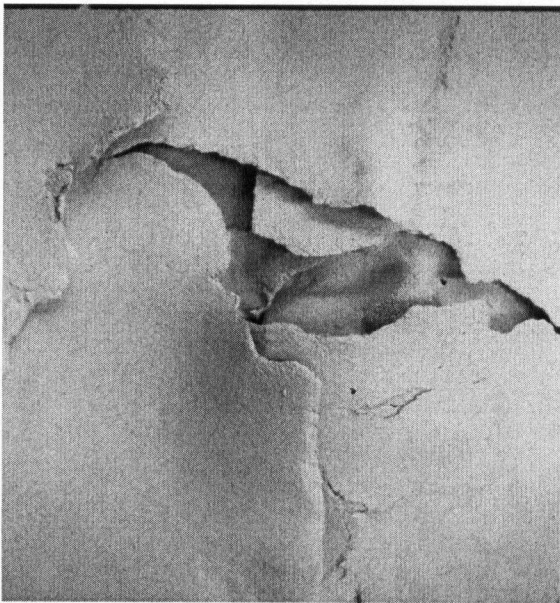
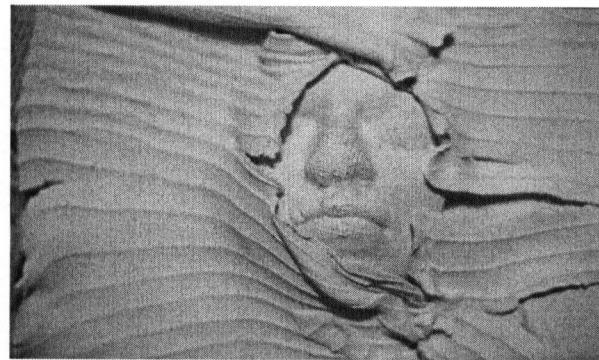
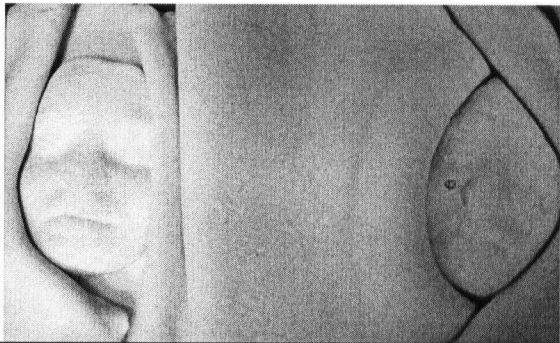
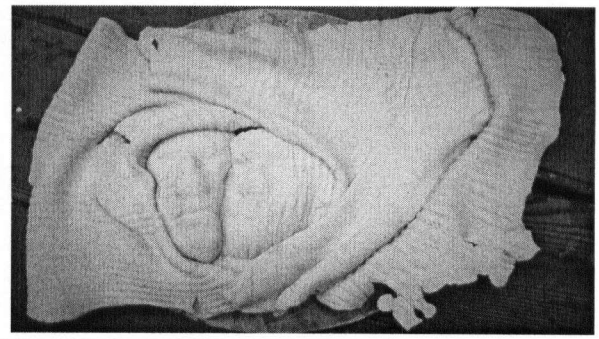
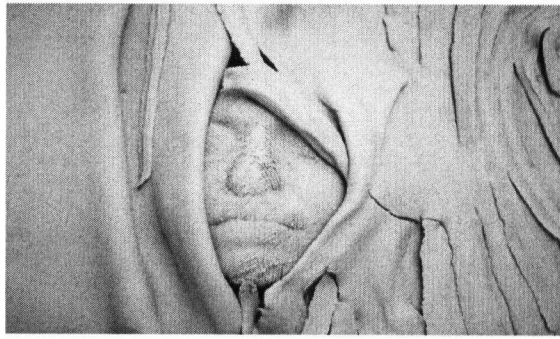
with others, acting in concert and speaking with each other, are completely outside the range of his productivity. Only when he stops working and his product is finished can he abandon his isolation. (1958, p.162)

Today in the art world, there are many art forms that have evolved that do not necessarily conform to Arendt's contention that artists act alone; indeed, conceptual art, performance art, video, film, to name a few, rely upon the input and artistic thoughts and energy of other workers and artists, and in reality, together, such art may be closer to Arendt's ideal of *action* by contributing conditions for action to occur. These are art works that I believe she would have appreciated, since much of this art involves themes of social justice and offers different ways of relating to others with art as the medium. Arendt does maintain that the artist is critical to providing an environment for people to act together, in concert.

...acting and speaking men need the help of the homo faber in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men 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. (1958, pp.173-174)

The making of art can place me in Arendt's realm of action, that is, my art may allow me to insert myself into the world, a form of practice that does not conform to Arendt's account of work. The masks I made on the following page may readily be judged by their technique, but the underlying image that is created is even more important: the images are the result of my thought processes, and especially my imagination, combined with my knowledge of technique or ability to make things well. Neither imagination nor technique is sufficient on its own as I work on my ideas to make art. It is the uniting of the two where the work becomes alive, where I learn about myself and I too feel transformed, and in a sense reveal myself anew to others, and it is in developing my identity with others, that I reach into the realm of action that is the main focus in Chapter Four.

In my life as an artist, what are the work lessons I learn and practice as an artist craftsperson? I learn that while I practice mainly in private, I am participating in art-craft forms that hold the memory of civilizations and that I am part of this clay culture that spans continents and includes work memories of many artists and the viewpoints of an interested public. Fired clay is the least temporal in the scheme of work in the art world, and indeed, as Feldman and others (Speight, 1989, Nelson, 1978, Leach, 1979) articulated, the durability of clay reminds us of what our history has been throughout the ages. I learn that clay holds a memory of me, my identity remaining long after my presence exists, a prime requisite of work. I also learn and continue to learn that clay



Art fulfils a greater function than use, although use and excellent technique are important. Making art gives purpose and meaning to life while helping to insert us in the world by “beginning” in the midst of others, just as making these masks was described in *Chapter One: Opening*.

processes (Raku in particular for me) also speak of work as being both transformative and transfigurative, part of the nature of working in creating objects that are reified. How this experience in my artist self merges with and informs my work as teacher-leader is the subject of the next section.

### The Teacher-Leader's Work

In my first year as teacher-leader, a grade 11 student named Catriona asked me:

“So, Ms Daniel, what does the principal do? I mean, it’s obvious what the vice-principals do.” She wasn’t being precocious. She really wanted to know. She continued, “The vice principals look after all the problems but everything that isn’t a problem eventually looks after itself, so, what work do you do?”

The insistency and simplicity of her question took me aback. I think I mumbled that it was my role to lead and guide the school community in creating the best possible environment for students and teachers to learn and work in. A naive explanation, but it was all I could manage on short notice to a most intriguing query. I wondered how many other students, teachers, parents and community members asked themselves the same question and how my work as a teacher-leader might appear to others. As I continuously grapple with trying to be educational leader, administrative manager, facilitator, mediator, friend, confidant, supervisor, bearer of good and bad news and concert master for all, it is also a question to answer in relationship to my work as a teacher-leader in Arendt’s *vita activa*.

### *The Teacher Leader's Practice as Work*

It's the last Friday afternoon of November. The final day for collecting marks to tally for first term report cards. Students and teachers are anxious, tired and a little cranky as they most generally take their studies and teaching seriously and have been burning the midnight oil. I can feel some tension in the air and no doubt I also reflect the current mood, although I strive to maintain my equilibrium, sense of stability that is my work to do, in the face of this pressure.

I take some time to walk throughout the school, but particularly head to what is known as the Grade 12 hallway. Apart from the main wing of the school, students like this place that is clearly theirs. Teachers feel students lack the necessary supervision in this hallway, and can become too much a force in the school. As the teacher-leader liaison for these particular students, I make a point of spending time here with them. There are so few places in schools for students to call their own and this hallway, helps them have a sense of place, somewhat as my office gives me my cue for my work. The grade 12s are learning who they are as young adults and sometimes this is unsettling for many of us as adults with the authority in the building. I am aware of teacher concerns, yet inherently understand why it is so important for these students to have their own space. I also understand why some teachers want to ensure that students do not: the teachers' sense of ownership may seem limited, their influence lessened. Students begin to have a sense of their own power and influence in the grade 12 hallway where they form links with each other, hang out, and prepare for the world outside. This is a safe place for them in their

last year of high school while also in that in-between space of youth and adult with the pressures of peers, and parents pushing up against their own dreams. I am also aware that it is a place they can remain children, continue the tradition of grade 12 grad pranks, and engage in the social life of the school as well as plan their activities in the outside world. When I lose perspective in my role, I seek these students out, to talk, to listen. I am better at this in my fourth year as teacher-leader and they are becoming more accustomed to me wanting to engage with them as I endeavor to give them their space. Just as my work as an artist reminds me of who I am in the world of the artist, the students in the hallways remind me of who I am and what I have to offer in my work as a teacher-leader. Our students remind me that they are the reason schools exist. Simply said, but there are days in our labour, work and action in schools that when I wonder about the work we do in schools and how it has meaning for people's lives, I need only to make this human connection in the hallways, or go into a music class, or see them involved in their learning. This is what I see much of the time and this is what is enjoyable, meaningful, and what gives me hope for our future. It is those students who do not find their place, or who are not engaged in their learning or with others who are our challenge to find a space for them, to connect them in their lives to their classes. It is difficult for students to insert themselves into the life of schools if much of our days and theirs is labour and work only.

Part of my work is also to spend time in the main office and hallways to greet and meet with staff, to make myself accessible for their "on the fly enquiries," to take the temperature of the current feeling and mood of staff. This work is different than the repetitive nature of labour even if it is ongoing. It is ongoing because I choose to make

this an important aspect of my work and a product of this work is not as physically tangible as that in labour and work as an artist, but a creation does exist as a result of this work. The product is the stability and reliance that people come to equate with my presence and consistency of purpose. Last year, there was a great deal of strife in schools and a contract imposed by the government exacerbated the relationship between management and teachers. This is troubling for someone such as myself who sees my work as principal as that of a teacher-leader. I am, and have been, first and foremost a teacher. My work as a teacher-leader is working with others in a manner that is, I hesitate to say the overused word, "collaboratively." Yet our political work climate seems to generate a separation of management and teachers rather than an attempt to unify us in working towards our common goal of educating children. Part of my work is to provide the balance to help guide our school through these troubled waters without losing sight of our main work.

What is my work practice in my role as a teacher-leader and how can I better understand Arendt's conception of work in this role in the midst of an environment that has been more divisive than in the past? Arendt reminds us that a critical element of work is the making of useful objects that give our world stability. As teacher-leader, it is part of my work to ensure that there is constancy in the environment of the school and this is one of my "products." Leadership authors such as Covey (1994), Senge (1990), Fullan (2001), and Wheatley (1992), to name a few, offer to instruct in the strategic aspects of being a teacher-leader. These are examples of a somewhat formulaic approach that I have been assured will work through the application of general principles. It is not my intention to

thrash out the efficacy of these principles or the objectives of these books, but in my experience as a teacher-leader, formulas and rules do not speak to what I want my work as a teacher-leader in schools to be, that is, the work of moving towards encompassing action, the third aspect of the *vita activa*. Presently, however, I'll speak about my work as a teacher-leader being a necessary platform for action, and indeed action cannot happen unless certain goods are attended to in the world of work where there are some underlying principles that need attention.

Work in my teacher-leader practice is less straightforward than in my artist's work and complicated by Arendt's parameters of producing use items or things. Rightly speaking, people cannot be treated as objects and yet our work in schools is with children.

Additionally, teachers, parents, support staff, the community, other administrators and senior management comprise the body of people I am engaged with. This school of 1630 students, 140 staff and a diverse community is more like a small municipality with the focus of being "a good school" and as such requires an infrastructure to support our diverse needs. As a school community representing a cross-section of society, we have committees to provide structure to our schools, to advise us on the work we do: Staff, Health and Safety, Student Council, Finance, Parent Advisory, School Planning, Athletic Advisory, and Timetable to name just a few. Using Arendt's work theory in the *vita activa*, what then are the work objects or use items that I make in my teacher-leader practice? In the previous section, I spoke of Arendt maintaining that the artist or maker, is critical to recording the events of people acting together or in concert. Arendt reminded us that it is necessary for the worker to give some form to the "story they enact and tell,"

or it would not survive. *Homo faber* or the worker can put the story in a lasting form such as writing, dancing, painting, that is understandable to others and further communicate to others, thus enabling there to be a:

home for men 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. (1958, pp.173-174).

The most obvious forms of work I create include organizing encounters with teachers, students, parents and community members, preparing for the many meetings of committees mentioned previously, providing summaries of those same meetings, writing newsletters informing all constituents of what's happening, and taking digital pictures of students and staff so both can perceive what's happening in their daily worlds of work. In other words, it is part of my work to tell the story of what is occurring in the school and plant the seed of the possibilities of what might occur and this work assists in building a foundation to make action more possible. This communication as story telling as well as information giving is particularly important at this time when we need to be reminded of what we are doing that is good.

Times are uneasy in education, and indeed, this is the most challenging of times for me in my teaching career. We have a government that believes the purposes of education are to create students who are ready to enter the job market; budgets have been reduced;

animosity continues to exist between unions and management; and there is loss of support for public education. However, I know that "this too shall pass," and we will move into better times, but right now, more than ever, my work is to provide balance and stability for our school to provide a rich, stimulating environment for teachers to teach in and students to learn. This is no small feat and there are times that I too am discouraged and need to seek out those who are able to support me as I attempt to support others.

I mentioned that outside of the school as a teacher-leader, I have been involved in committee work, most often in the construction of policy documents, such as School Growth Plans, Accountability Contracts, Professional Growth Model to name a few. However, writing curriculum documents such as the Instructional Resource Package for Fine Arts 8-12 or the curriculum field book on Pacific Rim Arts gave me greater satisfaction in developing since they broaden the spectrum of learning for students and teachers in the world of art. These are definitely use items, and many others arrive at the school on a weekly basis to help me as teacher-leader guide our teachers in the work of educating our students. These use items may guide us to do further work, but these generally are not documents that inspire. Rather, their neutrality and blandness offer the possibilities for us to put our more personal marks on the work as I did with my artist work, to ensure that they have meaning for our school.

Collective caution is essential for implementing these curricula. We need to be mindful of who we teach, how we teach and the norms we form in our classrooms rather than focus predominantly on content. As educators, we need to want students to learn, at least

as much as we want the product or results of their learning to be good. Stating this as a teacher-leader is fraught with awkwardness as the current education agenda focuses exclusively on accountability. I have no difficulty with the necessity to be accountable, and recognize it is part of my work to ensure our school is accountable, but not in a manner that risks our students being regarded as products. While educators are given curriculum guidelines about what we are required to teach, we are not obliged to follow a particular script on “how” we will do our work and we have the possibility for our work to take on that transcendence and transfiguration that I attributed to the work of art ; the work of the teacher-leader can, as Arendt says, also achieve “a premonition of immortality, not the immortality of the soul or of life but of something immortal achieved by mortal hands, ..., to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read (1958, p.168).

Within the *vita activa*, it is in the realm of work that consumes much of my time as teacher-leader. It is my work to ensure that students have “skills, knowledge and attitudes” that we in Canadian society have determined are necessary. Generally speaking, there are basic standards of learning that are to be achieved by the end of each year before a student is to “progress” to the next level. As policy makers, school trustees, senior management, teacher-leaders and students see our work as learning the material, and indeed, learning is what we are about in schools. And, arguably, you might ask, what is wrong with this? I am always fascinated with my colleagues description of their work with others as being “only a job,” or, “I’m not married to my work,” or “it’s not my life!” (These comments are not made in my artist life!) It causes me to ask, “Whose life is it

then? What does it mean when we work if it is only a job, if we are not engaged with what we are doing when we are working? And, why should we desire to distance ourselves from our work? Shouldn't our work have meaning while we are in the midst of our work?" Can we do our work well if we cannot or do not want to use measurements to judge our work's worth?

I enjoy the work I do as teacher-leader and find meaning within the school environment. However, unlike my work in the studio where I have a close affinity with the work objects I am producing, the affinity I have in my school setting is with the adults and children. While my art works remain as things, the people I work with are alive; the work of the teacher-leader differs from the work of the artist as does the place I am situated in while working. When I arrived at this school four years ago, a major school upgrade was just beginning so there was an opportunity for me to shape my physical surroundings. Thus, as I built my studio to support my work as an artist, as teacher-leader I had the prospect of beginning fresh, for even the location of the teacher-leader's office was different than that of my predecessor. Decisions needed to be made concerning carpets, paint, modular furniture, lights, computer and machinery placement while in my first weeks there I worked out of nothing more than a closet. In constructing the general office I talked with the office staff since this is their space and together we created the new office, a product of our dialogue together, and I think, a symbol of future work we were to do collectively. I also selected and arranged "use objects" in my teacher-leader office. While not the result of my teacher-leader work, they do place me in my world in the "office of the principal," just as being in my artist's studio readies me for my artist's

work. The artefacts in my office have been shaped most often by the work of others, and they exist in my office to assist me in my work and to prompt others of my role as the principal teacher-leader. The furniture is solid, well designed and primarily made for functionality. The walls are covered with art reminding me of my artist self, as do the very colours of the walls which are aubergine, slate blue and cream. It is an office with a navy, two-seater couch which the students in particular like, and the actual arrangement of the chairs, my desk, etc., reminds me I like to have a setting for work that may be intimate, comfortable for me, inviting for others, yet dignified and depending upon where I sit, establishes some norms for what might happen in this space. The grouping of furnishings as well as the kind of the furniture and the colours I have selected also helps provide a setting for this. The office and items in it serve to remind me, or situate me as Arendt says, of who I am in this world. The objects also serve to remind others, and “Their proper use does not cause them to disappear and they give the human artifice the stability and solidity” (Arendt, 1958, p.136) that is required in a place of work.

The objects also prompt me about my responsibilities. While this is generally not work produced by me, the arrangement is formed by me and the choice of items is selected by me, to produce a work that represents me so that I may further work in my office. While work is different than the repetitive labour outlined in the first chapter, the element of care that was needed in certain aspects of labouring entered into the creation of my office of the teacher-leader. My office setting serves to remind me and others of a symbolic stability in our world of education and teacher-leadership even when what is actually happening in the world outside of schools may be less than secure.

*Limitations of "work" for understanding my practice as a teacher-leader*

As my artist's studio provides a stage for my work, so does my teacher-leader's office. And, the work of curriculum and policy needs to be implemented in schools and my challenge is in doing this without diminishing the human beings I work with. However, this does not adequately represent the work of the teacher-leader in schools, with our students. I am reminded of two incidents that happened to me as a grade 5 and a grade 12 student where I believe in retrospect the teachers did regard students as products by the labelling of our capacities, in other words, they regarded teaching primarily as work. While these are not recent events in my life, they continue to inform my daily practice, and caution me to be mindful.

I relate these stories because of the manner in which the speakers spoke to me and how as a child I understood their intent and interpreted what the teachers believed their work to be. The forum in which these comments were given was not a forum of equality. In both cases, the spaces were classrooms, generally treated as largely private spaces where students and their teachers are often away from the scrutiny of others. The first story unfolded in front of my classmates much to my mortification and the second took place in a conversation after class with my teacher; as I re-read my writing, I can still conjure up the feelings of the moment, my sadness and subsequent anger in the first instance, contrasted with joy, happiness and elation of the second occasion. Years later, the writing of this story places me again as a child and reminds me of that time.

Mr. Newman began with a question:

“What do you want to be when you grow up students?” Although a shy ten-year-old, I was confident in my answer,

“I want to be an artist!” I could hardly wait to reply.

“You’ll never be an artist Mary. You are far too messy.”

I sat down, diminished (and surprised) at my “wrong” answer. I had been doing my art...in fact, my first artistic scribbles were in the *Books of Knowledge* (purchased for other purposes!) before I was able to read! These first markings did not please my mother, but for me, the sensuous feel of the pencil on those silky onionskin pages is a remembered tactile delight and I quickly backwatered her annoyed comments... I understood from her tone that she was upset, but her comments were about my actions, not about me. Teachers before Mr. Newman had encouraged and praised my artistic efforts, and I was hurt by his criticism. My parents were proud of my artwork and here was Mr. Newman telling me I would “never be an artist.” I thought I was good at art and as an artist, this was the first time I remember coming face to face with the judgment that my work and worth as an artist were not good enough. Mr. Newman did not have the capacity to imagine how his words might affect a ten-year-old girl and most likely the other students in the class. I am assuming he believed that the work of an artist should be neat rather than messy and as a teacher he believed he needed to inform me of his standards of neatness in order to be an artist, and of my misguided intentions.

“What does he know about art, ...he obviously hasn’t seen any of your art work?” (which was true, he just knew I was “messy”). My father and my mother who knew little

about art themselves, offered the supportive comments that parents do. Later, when my mother questioned Mr. Newman, he said that “I didn’t stay within the lines, my colouring skills were questionable, and I should be neater.” I didn’t (and still don’t) place a high value on neatness and staying within the lines, but the damage was done, both to the relationship I had with Mr. Newman and to my sense of self as a fledgling artist. His words continue to sit with me. They also sat with my father, for when I had my first small exhibit (to speak generously) in Grade 8, he said, “I wish Mr. Newman could see you now! He would see how wrong he was!”

This very public comment made in the privacy of the classroom by Mr. Newman was a pivotal one with lessons that have informed my practice as a teacher-leader and as an artist giving advice to others. Had I done something that annoyed him and compelled him to set me apart from my fellow students by being deliberately cruel? Or was he just being thoughtless? Had he noticed my boundless enthusiasm and confidence in my ability as an artist, he could have focused on helping me see the possibilities ahead. So, why did Mr. Newman’s pronouncement affect me more than the encouragement I had previously received from others? I could speculate that it was because Mr. Newman was the principal of the school and he was a “he,” the person in charge of the school and surely, must know what he was talking about? I didn’t consciously know that he had power and influence, but I knew he was “in charge” as so many people in bureaucracies are and most particularly during the time I grew up where parents and students deferred to the credentials that teachers and principals held. Was it because I really lacked confidence and there was this small doubt within me that I never would be an artist and I

felt crushed by his recognition? I cannot truly say I know...perhaps all of those things. As a teacher-leader in the position of a principal, I reflect upon how parents in the community I lead, would respond to a similar comment made by me to one of their children. In my work of teaching and leading I am mindful that the hopes and dreams that students have, may not be apparent in the product of their work, but that I can be more insightful than Mr. Newman's thoughtlessness in his work. Just as I pay attention to labouring and working with my clay to ensure it survives the rigours of beginning, this same gentleness and caring should be no less evident when our work is with our most vulnerable students.

Another story, another teacher, but now I am in Grade 12.

"Mary, you are doing very well in your subjects. Where are you planning to go to university?"

"Well, Mr. Hutchinson," I said, "I actually hadn't thought too much about it, and besides, I don't have the money for university, nor do my parents." He appeared incredulous.

"That should have nothing to do with it nowadays! You can get scholarships or bursaries, or part time work, but you should go to university and make a future for yourself."

I was clearly amazed that my English teacher should be so emphatic and believe that I could go to university! My parents valued education, but were not educated in the formal sense themselves. Coming from poor families, my parents never wanted to experience

poverty again, and their example taught me throughout my life that there was nothing wrong with hard work, and I had no problems with thinking this was the direction in which I was headed without further considering post-secondary education. Now, in retrospect, I can think that Mr. Hutchinson saw potential in me and had the imagination to encourage me to want a different kind of future for myself. But, perhaps this wasn't the case. Perhaps Mr. Hutchinson just viewed the world through this particular lens that said everyone just goes to university and he had little imagination at all to live other kinds of lives!

However, I did go to university after Grade 12, and I principally credit Mr. Hutchinson's kind words; whatever the motivation, he took the time to notice me, to talk with me, to listen to me and to say that what I did mattered. He actually seemed to care about what I did! Perhaps I would have found my way to university another way, but I believe the strength of his words have helped shape who I am today, and as I remember his view of the world and taking the time to offer suggestions or opportunities as I too work with young people today.

Mr. Hutchinson's words also sit with me, but not heavily as Mr. Newman's. His words live with me and because of him, I remind teachers and administrators I work with of the power our actions have to inspire or devastate. We need to constantly ask, "Who do we want to be in the lives of our students we teach and learn with?" I remind myself in my interactions with students that encouragement, genuinely listening to their concerns or just questioning them about how things are going for them is important to do not only for

them, but also for me. Acknowledging, noticing what students and teachers do, what their concerns and interests are, cannot be underestimated. This craft in working with others needs to be at least as caring and as excellent as the craft of working in the shaping of things, or in my case, art objects. While I have talked about how teachers did their work with me altered the direction of my life (as an artist, I still hear Mr. Newman's words), the manner in which both these events encouraged me to challenge my practice as an artist and a teacher and continues to guide me. In my present practice as teacher-leader, there are teachers who seem more concerned about the results of their work, more than the students themselves. Teachers are often judged by their good "results" and this high stakes testing and credentialing is a challenging environment for us all. Part of my practice is to encourage teachers in to find out what students know and don't know, so it can inform their teaching rather than using assessment tools to measure students who then become the product of teachers' work. This shift in focus is profound. Had Mr. Newman, since he considered neatness important, assisted me with becoming less messy, he could have instead encouraged me with my dream, and perhaps I would have come to the same conclusion as he did in time. Instead, he looked at me as product that did not meet his standards of technical excellence, so in his judgment, he said I didn't have what it took to be an artist. The lesson for me as teacher-leader working with teachers and students is to be careful in judging their capabilities and capacities, to respect their hopes or dreams.

In not asking questions about our work in schools, we truly risk becoming workers as Arendt says; in focusing solely on the results of our efforts, students can be regarded as

products credentialing our own work! How do we achieve excellence in the work of teaching? It could be perceived that the implicit and explicit work role of teacher-leaders is to ensure that teachers teach to a certain standard so that students will be credentialed. However, I have heard many students say that one of the greatest gifts their teachers have given them is in “helping them enjoy learning, making the work interesting,” or that “good teachers like what they’re doing, know their material and care about us as students.” In transforming our work with teachers and students, it is necessary I act with the goods of care, respect, and hope, to help provide an environment for both groups to do their best. This is what I do as an artist with my work and no less should be expected of me in working with those in my school community. This effort foreshadows the third aspect of the *vita activa*, the realm of action, in the next chapter.

The primary limitation of looking at practice exclusively as work, is that we risk regarding teachers and students as things, as products to be formed. Educators may think of their practice as “only work” because they have not been able to tap into the transformative and transfigurative possibilities of the excellence in doing or the excellence in making that are part in the artist’s work that occurs between the artist and her work and by extension, the viewer. In making art, the artist goes beyond the *technique* of work and seeps, ventures, slips into another realm. Isn’t this what we want to inspire in our educators, to venture in their work to transform the lives of others?

While we like “the great reliability of work” to count on, (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.175) consistency, reliability, of things remaining the same, as a teacher-leader I also encourage

innovation, and. there may be reluctance or some hesitancy in taking this approach by others. But then, I am comfortable with the innovation required in the creation of art objects which result from Arendt's notion of "overreaching." My work as a teacher-leader is to encourage this "overreaching" and innovation in the work of teaching, to risk with courage, to find out what we can do and in tandem form our identities - all the while recognizing if we rest in the zone of work only, we risk the dangers of treating students, teachers and parents, as work objects.

#### "In-between" the Work of the Artist and Teacher-leader

As a teacher-leader, how does the work I do relate to my work done as an artist, - is there any parallel and do the practices inform each other in any way? I think so, but in a manner that may not be so obvious. The arrangement of my studio and office as places of work, give me the "stability and solidity" of placing me in these worlds of practice, to complete the work required of each position and to work in the way that is important to me. My studio is arranged for me to do my artist's labour and work in private with great autonomy. The interior is organized for my purposes of art making, to create, to move the spirit, to transform and transfigure, not only the work itself, but me as maker and you as the viewer. Wherever I have been fortunate enough to have a physical space to do my artwork, this provided me with the opportunity for growth and development as an artist. My studio is thus a place for labour and work and has been built to suit me and to do my art. When I am finished my work it goes before a public: the action that my artwork generates occurs elsewhere.

My teacher-leader office, while also arranged by me, needs to support labour, work and action and needs to suit me as well as others with whom I interact. While my studio is more private, my office is more in public view (but can be made private as well). I would not consider making my studio public or open to others as my work space at school is. Nonetheless, both artist and teacher-leader spaces serve to ground me, to stabilize me, to remind me of who I am in my practice worlds. I believe my artist space which is a personal space in reminding me constantly of who I am, translates to my office of the principal as teacher-leader. Personal space has been intuitively important to me in my work as an artist and while others may avoid personal accoutrements in a public place of work that identify a space as one's own, I know this is a critical context for my work and action with others. Perhaps this is why I find it perplexing when others do not take ownership of their surroundings and when they say their daily work is "only work," in an attempt to neutralize what one does, to not become involved, to not be awake to the possibilities that are inherent in the work we do. I choose to maintain this tenuous thread with others and, I need to personalize my space, to let my humanness in the selection and arrangement of the objects be evident.

While my workspaces support me, my practices differ. As an artist, I view myself as a more autonomous being who might eventually go public with my work, but I am not always compelled to do so and no one tells me I must do so. As a teacher-leader, I am not so independent. I am working in the service of others and am most often in the public eye of students, teachers, parents and community and often need to consider the decisions and desires of others in my work as a teacher-leader. However, while there is a mandate

about what I am to do, I have autonomy in determining how I do it, much in the same manner I have as an artist. The resulting work or images before me in both areas of my practice illustrate the great variety in the reification of practice. The works may be quite different, but both practices require a degree of struggle and of overreaching oneself to express the elevation that occurs in Arendt's conception of art. The primary difference in the struggle is that in my practice as an artist I work alone in producing work objects whereas in my practice as teacher-leader I work with others in the production of work no less tangible, in a struggle hopefully for a similarly good end.

In my studio, I do what I want while I remain rooted in paying close attention to the clay while it is in its most vulnerable state. If I do not pay attention, I will lose the work I have completed. Perhaps this is a lesson where the work of the teacher-leader may be most impacted: I need to remind myself to pay attention to beginnings. In beginning to work with clay, it is demanding and requires much attention and I know that in my work as a teacher-leader, this same attention at the beginning of work with our school community is necessary. This is essential to create a platform that can be a foundation for eventual action.

Being an artist requires risk taking, working in a purposeful yet sensitive way, knowing there are a series of procedures required to ensure that the clay survives through the wedging, drying, firing and glazing, being patient, knowing that through this process, the clay retains my mark. We know as teacher-leaders that the work we do with others leaves its mark as well and requires mindfulness of our efforts. We know when students or

parents speak of the work we do, they do not praise the product for the most part, they praise the manner in which we have gone about our work, the care, the excellence in practice, and their judgment that we have done something well, or something good. As I continue to work with artistic process, and while I can never be sure of the end product, there is a sense of rightness for the pieces in my studio. Like the alchemy of the art works, I believe there is alchemy in the work we do in schools. We know that in our human interaction in creating the work we do, whether we have made our mark or a difference in the lives of others.

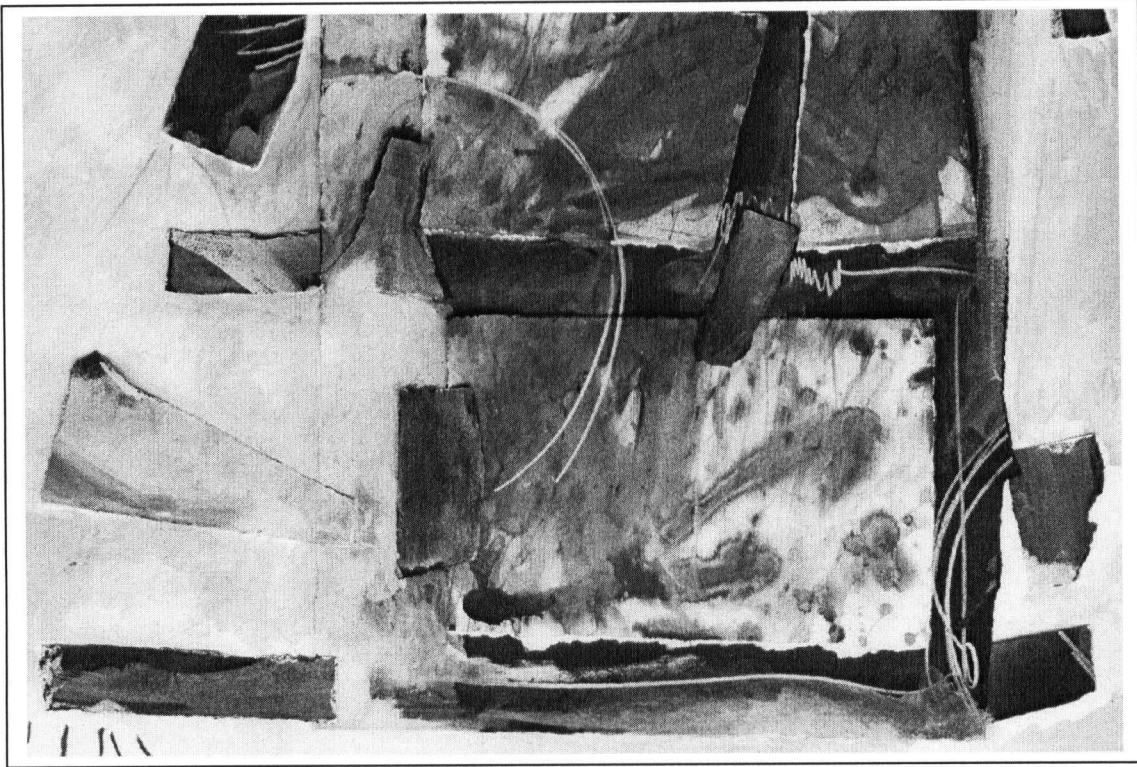
If I view my clay as possessing that aliveness, and again, without being disrespectful, the clay is alive to me and it shows whether I respect it or not by the manner in which it lives in its final appearance or end, perhaps this is a good metaphor for the work I do with teachers, students and parents. The clay doesn't lie to you; it tells you the truth, sometimes in a way that people don't feel compelled to do although they may wish to. Working with clay keeps me mindful that people need, to be treated with the same ethic of care, sensitivity, and thoughtfulness that sometimes seems easier to give to clay than to concentrate on a living, breathing human being that may be putting huge demands upon you; the clay just demands you pay attention. But for those of us who work with people, the message the clay gives is important for our work with others. That is, art will not exist or come into being unless you pay attention. In working with our most precious resources, students and teachers, the lesson I learn is that I must respect the needs of the people I work with at least as much as the clay I mould and hope that this thought can be expanded to others who work in schools.

My work as an artist results in objects and my work as a teacher-leader may also result in objects, or products. However, our students are living beings, and have the capacity to go beyond being filled up with the products of our work. Our students, unlike the objects I make as an artist, have the capacity to act. The art objects have the capacity to make me want to act, to do more, to reach ever further within my capacity as an artist, to go beyond “work,” but the objects made by me, cannot go beyond work. The students we work with are, however, able to go into the realm of action, the most important area of Arendt’s triumvirate of the *vita activa*. The students are creating themselves anew by beginning, particularly if they are in the world of ideas, of contemplation, of discourse, of dialogue with others, developing the webs of relationships with others. As an artist, I dialogue with my work and sometimes with others such as my artist friends, gallery friends, or colleagues who appreciate what I am doing. Many times there are other artists I greatly admire who I carry with me in my studio space, in heart, mind, and in visuals. Sometimes those artists that I don’t admire also teach me lessons that are valuable: as I work and critique my work, reflecting on my doing and making, I can move outside the reification of work, into the realm of action, to a beginning in which one is never sure of the results. Indeed, the building of my studio by uprooting the earth, moving the stones, digging the gas lines, aligns with her concept of reification. “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” (Arendt in Baehr, 2000, p.176). Reification in making art may be extended to the digging, grinding of the clay oxides or the paint pigments; to the intense heating to transform the clay and glazes; to the stretching of the canvases, etc., but I believe that Arendt is also referring to the struggle to attain

excellence in both the making of my art and in constructing my teacher-leader's "manner of being," about which more will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### ACTION



Multi-media work on paper

In the past three chapters I have tried to give an appreciation of Arendt's concepts of labour and work as they relate to my practice as a teacher-leader and artist. She had an unconventional view of labour and work as separate and distinct, yet more expansive than the concepts first appear because of the blurred margins she attributes to them. So too it is with *action*, the third aspect of the *vita activa*. In this chapter, I'll consider the opportunities for action as understood by Arendt within both my artist and teacher-leader practices.

## Understanding Action

To better appreciate Arendt's view of action, I would like to give an explanation of what I believed action to be. Throughout my life, I have viewed action as *the act of doing* something. Thus, the labour I engaged in while crushing clays in my studio or in walking the hallways at school, was to me and perhaps to many others, a form of action: I was engaged *in doing* something. Moreover, the work of creating documents as use objects for implementing with staff and the creation of clay objects and painting too are acts of doing or action in my thinking processes. In other words, *doing* for me was the equivalent of action, at least before I read and attempted to understand Arendt! However, I was also aware that some of my *doings* were inherently more meaningful to me, such as the conversations with others in my practice as a teacher-leader where I learned early on that it was more important to talk with people before I addressed the constant demand on my time to do paper work. Even in the privacy of my artist's studio, I have the "conversations" with imaginary others who signal me what is important for me to do which, in turn, leads to the public action of an exhibit where I reveal my work to others as they come together to discuss my work. This is the most obvious action for an artist; for many artists, such exhibits are the most important reason for making art where the viewers, including the artist, have the opportunity to participate in the process of understanding, perhaps appreciating, and judging the work. It is in the areas of relationships with others in both my practices where I intuitively have found greater meaning in my life. This is one of the most important aspects of action and Arendt says that action is to insert oneself into the lives of others and create a beginning with this

insertion. To begin to have a sense of Arendt's notion of action, it is essential to become familiar with the concepts of *natality* (birth, beginning) and *plurality* (amidst others) that are necessary for action to occur, and the idea of *belatedness* (preordained, maintaining the status quo), which diminishes the possibility for action. For these concepts to be more vivid and understandable to the reader throughout this chapter, I will describe events in my practices that illustrate the notion of natality or the idea of being renewed, possibly transformed, while acting amidst others and the attendant exhilaration when I am actually able to act. My practices also exemplify how plurality is necessary to relationships and provides a significant condition for action, particularly in the forming of relationships so that one may be compelled to act amidst the plurality of others and the concept of belatedness, or that space of potential discouragement, feeling that I am remaining stationary in the realm of labour and work, in both of my practices when I resist acting or do not think to act. In illustrating how natality and plurality are sometimes fostered in action in my practices, the importance of constructing both private and public spaces will become readily evident as being necessary in my teacher-leader practice and my practice as an artist. Private and public spaces are required to foster the conditions for action. Using these stories to access my practices allows me to point to examples of natality amidst the plurality of others while all are affected by individual and collective past experiences, perhaps not wanting to change.

### *Nativity, Plurality and the Formation of Identity*

Arendt declares that it is action, breathing life into our thoughts, which helps us begin anew, and arrive at a place where we see the world with a different lens with all the promise that renewal and re-birth hold. This understanding of action is distinctly different from her descriptions of the routine endlessness of labour or the creation of work objects that helps to place us in the world. While I have discussed labour and work in both my practices and established the manner in which they impact me personally, it is important to go beyond labour and work. Indeed, to Arendt, speech and action are required to live a worthwhile life, and the differences between the other aspects of the *vita activa* follow:

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. With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labour, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. (Arendt, 1958, pp.176-177)

Her assertions are stirring in their potential: to speak and act with others, to take the initiative to insert oneself into the world, to be reborn, to feel compelled to act in the presence of others, for not to do so would mean we were only existing. These are important resources for understanding my practice contexts and Benhabib (1996) emphasizes Arendt's view that "action corresponds to the human condition of "natality" – that we are born or, in Heidegger's terms, "thrown" into a world that precedes our existence and within which alone we become who we are" (p.109).

The birth of the human infant has a biological as well as a psychic-social dimension. The human infant becomes a self by learning speech and action in the human community into which it is born. Through this process, the infant also becomes an individual, that is, the unique initiator of these words and deeds, the carrier of this life story. This condition is a social universal: no human community, as opposed to a merely accidental gathering of primates, can exist over time without teaching its young the language and actions characteristic of its way of life. The crucial point here is that in learning speech and action, every human child also becomes the initiator of new deeds and of new words. (pp.109-110)

Thus, by virtue of being born, we become accustomed to our environment and circumstances that have existed before our arrival. However, Arendt insists that we have agency when we eventually leave our private environs and enter into the expanded public world with others; we are then able to form our identities. If we permit ourselves to be

open to the potential of our natality, we may have what Arendt calls a re-birth, different from our being born into the world, also different from Heidegger's "thrown" into the world, but all the same, being born into another setting with all the promise that re-birth holds. To experience this renewal, we need the presence of others where Benhabib reminds us that "to be alive as a human being, as opposed to being a mere body, is to act and speak with others in space and time. Being is being present, it is to appear; it is to manifest itself" (p.110). However, this rebirth is threatened by the potential for paralysis as Levinson's (1997) reminds us when she describes the notion of "belatedness:"

... the fact that the world does not simply precede us but effectively constitutes us as particular kinds of people [we are in the] difficult position of being simultaneously heirs to a specific history and new to it. As a result, we experience ourselves as "belated" even though we are newcomers. ...Perhaps most disturbing is the potential for this awareness to paralyze our capacity for action, which is to say, for initiating something new. In this way, belatedness not only conditions natality, it has the potential to act against it. (p.437)

An example in my teacher-leader practice is the renewal I experienced as a newly appointed principal. I had a sense of wanting to make a positive difference in my work place with others, yet my ability to do this or my sense of agency in doing something new, perhaps better, was affected by the plurality of others with whom I found myself. This community, as many other communities, was reluctant to consider change since they preferred the comfort of routine, the assurance of stability, and the response to a

suggestion of change was sometimes a chorus of, “Oh, not this again,” or “We’ve done this all before,” or, “What’s the point, same old, same old.” In the face of this seemingly daunting lethargy, sometimes belatedness can overwhelm and prevent me from doing anything like inserting myself in my teacher-leader practice! How I listen, yet not act upon these insistent voices, is hugely important, or we will remain in that space called ‘belated’ where little changes, and our days remain solely labour and work. This is a complicated yet familiar feeling for a teacher-leader and can engender hopelessness: can I ever make a difference in my school because everyone likes the way things have always been done, not because they are good or could not be done better, but because there is comfort in this way of organizing our collective life.

In my artist practice I might feel that there is just no point in attempting to insert myself into the creative realm: I have done it all before and there are many others who have done it better than I, so why bother? I bother because every time I go into my studio, I have a sense of new beginnings, of new possibilities, of my natality within my studio space where as an artist I feel most able to maintain my sense of agency, and ability to act and begin yet again. Natality has an opening for me when I contemplate and work at the same piece of art over and over, using the same elements and principles of design that have been used throughout history, the same symbols and the same style, but I will insert and assert myself differently with the piece in the making, confidently knowing that acting in this way will reveal something in the work and in myself that perhaps wasn’t evident before. Here, I am overreaching by this insertion, I am becoming ‘new’ again, as my art is born in the process as well. The results may not be as I have envisaged, but I

have begun again. Thus, I am using the “Same old, same old, been there done that, etc.” but using the elements differently to experience something I haven’t experienced before, to share with others in a way I haven’t before. As I mentioned in the chapter on work, the collector Utz admired his treasured Meisen porcelains again and again; there was always something new revealed to him, and in his observations, he too was renewed and refreshed. We continue to repeat, and need to repeat in a thoughtful way where we begin again and again with the hope of revealing ourselves anew. With art, I do this to continue to learn with pre-existing elements used since time immemorial and I have found that if I am attentive, the new may be revealed assisting me in recognizing my own rebirth.

This remembrance of past actions in my artist’s studio continues to engage me and give me courage in inserting myself and acting with others in my teacher-leader practice even while the sense of belatedness can potentially smother any insertion before I begin. Indeed, “Nativity suggests the possibility that the world can be renewed, [but] this promise is not guaranteed. Our capacity for action must be nurtured” (Levinson, 1988, p. 440). If we remain paralysed by belatedness, we cannot create Arendt’s action and in many ways the status quo remains, leaving us in the space of Arendt’s *social* as described by Pitkin in *The Attack of the Blob* (1998). Pitkin stresses how we are indeed shaped by our environment and continue to respect what we have previously done, as part of the ongoing nature of living with others. Pitkin explains:

Far more than any other species we humans are shaped by the particular situation into which we are born and in which we are raised, by our relationships to those

who raise us, and by their institutional practices and cultural commitments, which we internalize. Yet those shaping practices and commitments are themselves humanly shaped, historically developed, not just humanly initiated in the past, but even now existing only as they are practiced. (pp.8-9)

If we do not think to reflect upon how we do things and attempt to do things differently, we will remain in this social space constructed by our past and struggle to find new ways to act, to understand. Later in this chapter, I'll relate a story from my school practice in which student behaviour was conditioned by the social frame of mind that had been developed over a period of years and how we tried collectively to create a space for action, the antithesis of the space of the social.

Arendt asserts that taking initiative in inserting ourselves into the world and revealing our natality amidst others requires plurality or acting amidst others, but this plurality is quite different than the social space described earlier. Plurality means we are able to remain distinct amongst others; there is no thought that we all act in the same way. The duality of natality (renewal of self) and plurality (being with others) is fundamental to Arendt's concept of action. Benhabib further writes that, "Arendt restored being-in-the-world-with, or the condition of human plurality, to the centre of our experience of worldliness" (1996, p.50). Thus, others are necessary in the realm of action in the Arendtian sense: action cannot occur without the presence of others, whereas labour and work can be done independently of other beings.

Arendt tells us that in speech and action we create, “ the actualization of the human condition of natality” (1958, p.178). We are born unique, unlike anyone before us, but we are born into a world of pre-existing others. In our natality, we are inserted into a plurality of others, amidst that which already exists, such as my situation of being a new principal placed in an existing staff with its traditions. While the condition of natality shapes us as new, acting in the plurality of others, “living as a distinct and unique being among equals” (1958, p.178) is sometimes fraught with challenges. It is in our unique view of the world through speech or dialogue amongst human beings as equals that allows us to re-create ourselves. Canovan explains that Arendt’s concept of plurality has two implications:

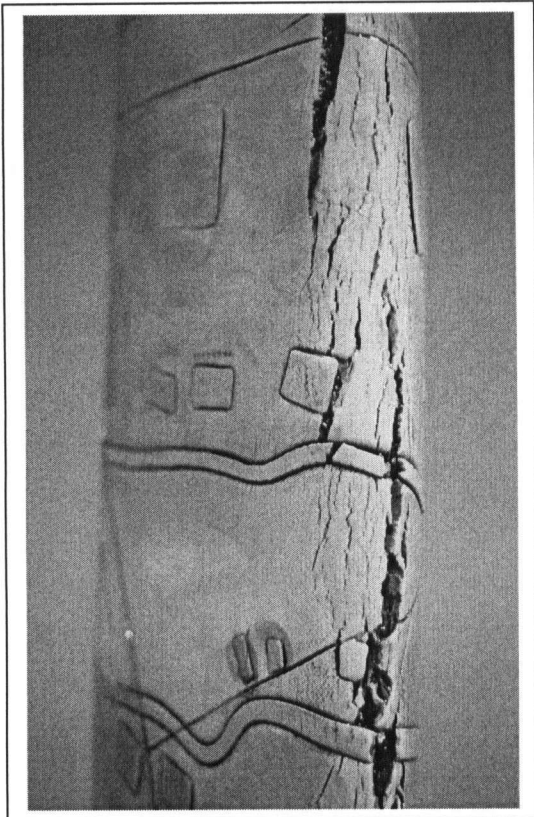
For one thing, it makes possible the continual miracle of newness that gives the lie to the modern obsession of automatic processes.... New individuals are continually entering the world, new actions and new thoughts interrupting the routines and processes already established. For another, plurality makes it possible for us to build a world amongst us. In that world, reality can appear to save us from our lonely imaginings. In it, also, we ourselves can appear as unique individuals instead of remaining specimens of an animal species. (1992, p.154)

When we do choose to act, Arendt cautions us to remember that while we have thoughts and hopes about what we want to occur as a result of our speech and action, “It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from

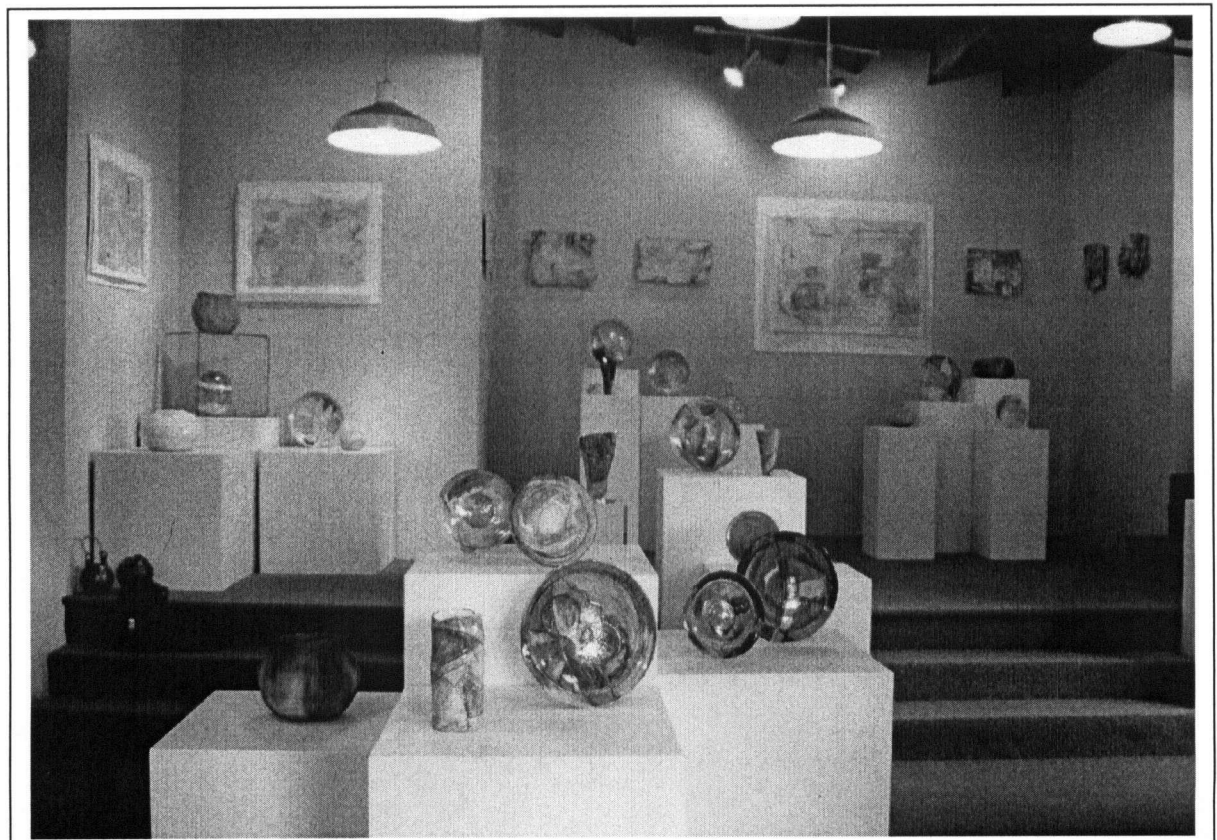
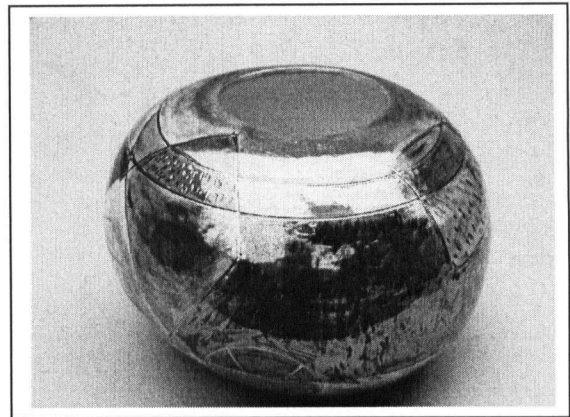
whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. ..." (1958, pp.177-178). This apparent lack of ability to control what may be created when we initiate action is also what is so powerful and energizing about acting. However, knowing that we cannot control the outcome may also discourage us from acting because of our uncertainty about whether our actions will result in desired or good outcomes. Not to act though, will result in the same thing being done over and over, as in Levinson's (1997) explanation of belatedness, and we return to the means-end life of labour and work, the sameness of existence and in Arendt's view, lack of meaning.

### *Space and Action*

It is my role as an artist that may provide some resources for examining the role that natality and plurality play in my artist practice and hopefully translate to my teacher-leader practice. It may appear evident that it is hard to separate the nurturing of natality and private spaces, because this rebirth seems more of a private act just as plurality appears at first glance, to be acted out in a space with others, or the wider public. When first thinking about preparing for action, it is important to provide opportunities for privacy to experience what action might be like, or look like; in a sense, to prepare to go into the wider world. Public and private spaces in both my practices are required to initiate and act. As an artist, I work in the privacy of my studio before I seek a public space for an exhibit, a familiar rehearsal for artists. In the public space of an exhibit, it is



In the public of an exhibit there is the potential for dialogue – hopefully, between the art and the viewer and in the conversation among observers of the works in the exhibit space. The art pieces also have a relationship to other art works within the structure of the exhibit space itself.



my art work that is under discussion, yet it remains a challenge for me to keep my private self separate from the judgment of others. Here, as an artist, I recognize my uniqueness, newness or natality, in putting myself 'out there', in the plurality of others as artists have done since time immemorial, yet I also need some detachment in not completely identifying with my work; my work is not me, but apart from me. In this public we talk about the work and I join the other spectators as we exchange judgments with one another: we have a public forum in which we can talk about the art. Indeed, an exhibit provides a forum for action for the artist as a viewer with other viewers.

I want to explore how the relationship between my private artist space and the public space of an exhibit can be interpreted for my teacher-leader practice in schools. I am assuming that within our schools, we too need private spaces to nurture us and help us to prepare to speak in more public spaces. If we do not provide those private spaces, how will students, teachers and parents be prepared to act? As a teacher-leader, I recognize that while we appear to be in the public eye of students, parents, and community, we require those more private spaces that I have ready access to as an artist to come together, to speak with one another and to prepare ourselves and each other for action in a public larger than the world of schools. In the following pages, I will try to illustrate Arendt's concept of action, highlighting how the creation of private and public spaces encourages natality and plurality in schools and how I have come to understand this in part through my artist's practice. Where can we find those private spaces to support teachers, students and parents as they respect their own natality among a recognition of their own natality among a plurality of others in the public realm? Later in this chapter, I hope to recount

some narratives in the school setting that met with some success where both private and public spaces were found to nurture and foster the conditions of natality and plurality in action.

*Private spaces to prepare for action.*

Everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses – lead an uncertain, shadowy, kind of existence unless they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurs in story telling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. But we do not need the form of the artist to witness this transfiguration. Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality, which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves, and ... the intimacy of a fully developed private life... will always greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private feelings, (Arendt, 1958, p.50).

Arendt writes that there is a need for both private and public spaces and that even in the private realm when thoughts are spoken aloud in the presence of others, these thoughts may become, “transformed, deprivatized and individualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance” (1958, p.50) and in a sense there becomes a possibility for action to occur. Speaking aloud with others changes the meaning of the words and particularly if we exchange meanings with others, we understand differently and our words assume a “reality they never would have had before.”

Arendt spoke from personal experience. In her private life, Arendt held her friendships to be the most formative and important for her and Young-Bruehl (1982, p.xii) wrote, that Arendt “considered her friendships the centre of her life.” As English was not Arendt’s native tongue, Arendt thought she remained unfamiliar with idiomatic English in particular. Consequently, because language was so important to her and interpreted so differently by those spoken and written to, these most important relationships and interactions took longer to foster but she persevered and:

brushed away those who thought only of themselves. But loyalty to those with whom she had established a deep bond was fundamental to her nature, and generosity was its hallmark .... Language was her prime medium for giving – and receiving – but she also gave food packages, parties, tuition scholarships, birthday flowers, dinners, donations, and every emotion her receivers might have wished except the one she feared and despised, pity. (1982, p.xii)

While Arendt believed there should be a strong division between the private and the public she also thought that “a fully human life must include both private and public aspects” (Canovan, 1985, p.182). Arendt’s private relationships were extremely important to her and provided a foundation for her capacity to be able to act in the public space and perhaps more importantly, for her to be able to endure some of the personally aimed public attacks in response to her writing. Arendt was able to speak and act as she did in public partly because she had relationships in her private life to support her and remind her of who she was while she was being portrayed as someone she was not in the public eye. She most certainly could not have predicted the results of her actions in the public realm, and her private spaces and relationships with others provided her refuge when the unpredictability of her actions caused results she had not counted on.

So, what does this mean to my teacher-leader practice in schools? I return to the constancy of my practice as an artist where I have opportunities to re-create myself in the privacy of my studio before I take my work before the public of others. Although private spaces are challenging to find in schools that are not quite public either, such spaces can be created. The very few private spaces students have are their lockers that may be subject to the scrutiny of others. Teachers have classrooms that are quasi private when the doors are closed, and remain somewhat so when students are in class. Teaching is a private activity from other adults and the norms of behaviour and adequate achievement are well reinforced throughout years of schooling. Indeed, the spaces we call schools would fit Arendt’s concept of the “social” where the emphasis is on the appropriate way to behave rather than on fostering action.

### *Social space.*

Arendt says that in modern life (the last three hundred years or so) what has traditionally been private has come to be merged with the public so that we no longer have private or public space but a hybrid where we act with a code of behaviour. She writes, "...society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest" (1958, p.39), that is, what she calls the social.

It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. (p.40)

Arendt would agree that there is a need for some rules and codes of behaviour, but she was also convinced that if we remain in this social space where only behaviour is valued, the result would be a fusion of labour and work at its most repetitive, and the neglect of action. In the social realm, there is no need to speak or act, since we really do not want to cultivate opportunities for new ideas to be inserted into the lives of others. There is no need for persons to be unique or distinct since the required end is a product that conforms to a specific behaviour.

Pitkin (1998) spoke of the Arendt's "social" as "the Blob [that] acquires a will and purpose of its own. That purpose is, of course, evil, and its essence – the nature of totalitarianism – consists in actively depriving people of their autonomy, of precisely those capacities for initiative and judgment" (p.70). Pitkin also remarks that:

Each individual's freedom to choose, create, or change intentionally is severely limited by the practices and commitments of the rest. Collectively, we could do a lot more, if only we could get together. If we are the problem, surely we can also be the solution. But then, why do we keep doing as we do? (p.9)

We keep doing as we do as a people because we really don't think to do otherwise. If we did think that things might be otherwise, we would believe it important to act to have things done differently, that there is a place in Arendt's world for us to be equal and distinct, for us to speak, hear, and act together. Pitkin further makes the following powerful statement, and even though she seems to regard herself as a pessimist, her words speak otherwise:

Though Arendt calls action a miracle, if you wait for your own action to befall you, it will not; you have to just do it. Others may or may not join you. Your action and the others may or may not succeed in extending freedom rather than furthering the social. There are no guarantees. But who will do it if we do not? Reversing our present drift into the social is everyone's task, and one we must do together. That follows from recognizing that the social is not a blob. The task is

not slaying an alien monster but reconstituting ourselves: reorganizing institutions, reforming character, contesting ideas. That may not be easy, but it can never become impossible. We are depressingly the problem; we are encouragingly the solution. (1998, p.284)

Again, if as Pitkin articulates, we are the solution, and are able to reconstitute ourselves while freeing ourselves from Levinson's caution about being wary of belatedness in the space of the social, we have as the way out of this quagmire: Arendt's concept of action. In action, we can be renewed amidst others, but for action to occur, we need more private and more public spaces.

*Public spaces for action.*

If it is in private spaces that we can nurture and prepare for the public space of action, what does Arendt mean by public space? Fenstermacher explains: "A public place is not merely a geographic location; it is also a set of traits and skills possessed by those who would occupy this place, as well as a shared understanding of what must be common to all if each is to have the greatest possible opportunity to pursue his or her own vision" (1997 p. 60). The public is distinct from private, more open and less restrictive.

Arendt sharply delineated between private and public. In the privacy of family life, for example, Arendt claims that one can feel free in expressing oneself however one feels comfortable, because - hopefully - as one is regarded with love and care. In public life such intimacy is not possible; love must be replaced by respect. In order to participate in

a public space, the norms for participation need to be articulated and understood by all so all may speak and be listened to. In the school setting this would be how we agree to behave and speak so all can be heard in their differences. At an art exhibit, for example, there is an implicit agreement that provides for honest, yet knowledgeable, or what Arendt would term, cultured conversation. In both school and studio, ideally, dialogue would aim at understanding and not necessarily defeating varying perspectives. Indeed, in order to understand one another, we need a common language that we agreed to beforehand or we discover in dialogue. It helps to have a conversation when one knows something about what one is discussing.

I have sketched some of the parameters of Arendt's notions of public and private spaces, and illustrated the space of the social and the attendant belatedness which hinders action. Action, with its requisite characteristics of natality and plurality, requires both private and public spaces. Such spaces – unlike the social space – are defined by webs of relationships among actors.

### *Webs of Relationship*

Arendt explains how she understands people to be related to one another in action: "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" (1958, p.180). Later, she explains: "this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly

have in common. We call this reality the “web” of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality.” ( p.183)

Arendt contends that it is within the “webs of relationships” that we are sustained in our lives. Although, importantly, she makes an essential distinction between how relationships are linked in private and public spaces: love connects people in private; respect connects people in public.

Following Arendt, I believe it is often because of the support given to us in private spaces, in the nourishing nature of our conversations, with the love, respect and care of trusted others that we become more able and encouraged to act in the wider public. It is in such private spaces where we are renewed and most profoundly experience natality. The private webs of relationships that have formed throughout my life have also provided a foundation for my identity as an artist and teacher-leader. How is it that certain “goods” became important for me to become a good person, good leader, good teacher, and what are the common elements that thread through these roles? How were the spaces created so trust, hope, affiliation, care and respect were cultivated to encourage relationships while I learned and continue to learn who I am while I also learn who others are?

Yet, the private spaces where we can be linked by our affiliation to one another by love, care, affiliation and trust, are often disconnected from the few genuinely public spaces available to us. Indeed, when we act in the public forum, it is difficult to care about other

people if one has minimal or no relationship with them, but then again, this points to the most important requirement for speaking in the space of appearances: respect. An obvious example would be at an art exhibit where various critics engage in conversation about the meaning of the art for them. If the conversation is respectful, there will be an invitation for the members of the audience, or viewers, to join, and perhaps come to new, better understandings. An example of my teacher-leader practice might be a dialogue with a parent who wishes to talk about her child's education, or about the teaching approach of her child's teacher. We need to respect one another, to try to understand the other's perspective for Arendtian dialogue – action – to be possible. We need to learn to be with the other person to begin a relationship in either private or public spaces.

### The Teacher-leader's Action

The networks in my personal life take on a different tone as these relationships form the underpinnings in my private life, providing a sanctuary for me from the public view. In the private/public that is schools where all inhabitants are exposed to the scrutiny of others, the goods of the private are necessary in forming our relationships and more private spaces or "islands of freedom" need to be found; for us to better make decisions, and act upon what we believe is "good" in the greater public, we need to have as our backbone, the strength that we may find in the more private webs of relationships and spaces that may be best cultivated in private before we go public.

The following stories involving action in my teacher-leader practice occurred in part because time had been taken to develop relationships. Private spaces were found or created allowing us to talk and develop the necessary norms for our dialogue to begin. This provided a context so all could speak and be heard. By articulating the norms for dialogue so all may insert themselves, we make action a possibility. As a teacher-leader, I believe that I have a responsibility to provide openings for dialogue among all affected to *understand* varying perspectives of others, that is, to act in the world.

### *Providing Spaces for Action as a Teacher-leader*

In my work life as a teacher-leader, I like to think I am guided by good intentions, wanting to make an educational difference, hoping to bring about the educational changes I believe are important in the schools I work in. I have a sense of what needs to be achieved, but I can never be entirely sure that acting upon my intentions will work out as I imagine them or that my intentions should be our intentions. I sometimes ask myself, why do I believe I know best about the action to take? This is a question that I, and others in leadership positions need to ask frequently. Arendt explains this notion of action that is applicable to all who act:

To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, “to begin,” “to lead,” and eventually “to rule,” indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take

initiative, are prompted into action. ... This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before. (1958, p.177)

Can there be a more potent statement? The beginning of creating the self comes about by acting, beginning to take an initiative. This beginning of somebody is again Arendt's notion of natality where as individuals we act in relationship with the plurality of others. In this plurality, we require a space to support us as individuals to act or speak in public, As a teacher-leader I have found beginning to act somewhat easier if I begin from a foundation constructed in private before I attempt to go public and thus recognize the need to offer others a similar protected space. I want to speak here of examples of action, with teachers, students and parents that clearly illustrate the fragile natality of our human interactions as well as our struggles to be heard and act amongst all individuals and groupings in schools. The following narratives are about our efforts in developing some private/public spaces for action.

### *Preparing in private*

Using Arendt's notion of action and developing, "webs of relationships" facilitates us in working towards developing a "good life," being good citizens and ultimately constructing worthwhile lives, fostering "islands of freedom" to encourage us to give us

the ongoing courage to act. I particularly needed this courage in the following narrative about the students in our school. If stories help us bear the exigencies of life then this one is rich with many of the trials that teacher-leaders hope to avoid. In nurturing our students in the privacy of our school, I found Arendt's resources of natality and plurality valuable resources in assisting me to understand the dilemma we found ourselves in, and that I had to address as the teacher-leader. As I relate the following story in retrospect, I recognize that our school community offered a staging area for our students to practice in private, where we created conditions for natality so students could perhaps experience agency and the freedom to act amidst the plurality of others in the wider public outside of our school and their homes. In order to comprehend why our students decided to take action, and what we as adults did in the school to assist them in "going public," some background is necessary.

As previously mentioned, the general state of affairs in education last year could cause one to despair. It was particularly challenging in 2002 because the provincial government eventually imposed a contract on all British Columbia teachers after significant labour unrest. Earlier, during negotiations, teachers withdrew their support for extra curricular activities and in response students throughout the province decided that they needed to become involved in making their voices heard. I am not precisely aware when Kitsilano students decided that they needed to rise up (not getting their first term report cards didn't get this response), but students, and many teachers felt that extra-curricular activities were where their existence at school became alive; "This is where the 'juice' is," was a comment I heard made frequently. I listened to their concerns and was

aware that high school student groups throughout the province had developed a list serve on the Internet to talk about how teacher job action was affecting them. Student leaders advocated a provincial student walkout on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. The students of Kitsilano determined that they wanted to take action much sooner than January 23<sup>rd</sup>. They wanted to make their own statement to the media on January 11<sup>th</sup>. This action was primarily compelled by students who were missing out on what they believed to be a most important aspect of their student lives. School for these students was not just the classroom and they knew they benefited from the many hours of time given by themselves and their teachers in forging relationships by being involved in clubs, teams and trips by expanding on being a part of the wider school community. They believed that their interests were not being taken into consideration during negotiations.

The withdrawal of opportunities to participate on the Student Council, debating teams, field trips to other countries were all grounds for student discontent, but the main impetus came from the Senior Boys' Basketball Team. Kits' students had been provincial champions three of the last six years and they were well placed to seize a fourth championship this year. What was to happen? Who was listening to them? It was their senior year and how dare they be used as political pawns to get what teachers wanted? I felt I understood what was happening for them because as an administrator I was regarded again (and indeed I am) management and thus someone to be held responsible in the students' and teachers' eyes in particular for the state of affairs in which we found ourselves. My professional association had not said anything publicly (to further make the issues more complex, my association, (Vancouver Association of Secondary School

Administrators, VASSA) did not belong to the provincial administrator's body, but most of the public were not aware of this. But students and parents were correct. VASSA had been silent, perhaps hiding behind the belief that administrators should not be seen to be interfering in contract negotiations, which is true, but neutrality and silence sometimes signifies consent or indifference. We were in that space of belatedness where we did not feel compelled to act, partly because we felt we had no voice, so what was the point of saying anything? Thus, we maintained the status quo – a somewhat sad comment on our inaction and position as teacher-leaders. However, I did have some agency and some choices I could make within my school community at Kitsilano.

So, with this group of students becoming increasingly agitated at feeling manipulated, in response to teachers asking me, "What are you going to do about this?" and being keenly aware that attempting to shut the students down would be perceived as lack of support for students and teachers, I waited. I thought. I anguished. What was the right action to take? How would the parents perceive this? How would my supervisors regard my handling of this turn of events? I really wanted the whole situation to go away, but I knew it would not. I couldn't wait long. I knew I needed to inform students what the School Act said they should be doing, i.e., be in class engaged in their studies, but I also knew I had to go further. I wanted to listen to what the students were telling us. I am a teacher-leader who believes that students' voices should be heard, that they are in Arendt's term 'equal, yet different' within their plurality; that there be opportunities for students to create new learning for themselves with others, for them to be renewed in our school where frequently there is more labour and work than action. Rather than abdicating our adult

responsibility for guiding our students and leaving them to their own devices which could have readily happened, I decided it was important for me to listen to them and their concerns. Susan Bickford (1996) says, "thinking about listening is central to developing democratic theory" (p.1.) Indeed, if our educational aim is to foster students as critical thinkers and responsible judges of their actions and others, I had to find some way for them to be involved in imagining how their actions would be judged (and mine)! If I believed action is where we are truly alive as Arendt asserts, then how could I insist that student behaviour conform to a situation that wasn't understood or supported by them, when I believed as well that the state of affairs as it existed needed to be addressed? How could I support the social where Pitkin says that "the social view thus not only hides human responsibility for enacting an equality that is not naturally guaranteed but also undermines the very capacity for action by teaching conformism" (1998, p.73). Was one of our roles not to encourage responsible action?

I began by reminding students they had responsibilities to themselves and the school, but that we lived in a democracy, where they, along with others, have rights and privileges that need to be used wisely. I asked the students to think about why they had this sense of urgency to protest, to articulate the reasons to each other, to talk with each other and be sure that there was some degree of unanimity of purpose among students. Using Arendt's notion of action, I asked students to speak and listen to each other. In asking students "to visit" what it was students wanted to accomplish, what the consequences of their actions might be as they inserted themselves into the public realm, and how they might be judged. They began to listen more to each other, and to plan - and the plan

became their own. I was well aware that in the action that the students were beginning, they wanted to make a difference in their own lives, according to what they believed was right for them. In talking with the students I recognized that they had a common purpose in protesting, but there was plurality or a variety of different voices apparent since only some were protesting in support of teachers. The purpose of the protest was to have the school return to the stability provided them throughout their years. Thus students were participating and inserting their individual voices amidst the plurality of each other and this was nothing short of exciting to watch. Much of their discussion took place in the private-public of the hallways: a public for students to be together, but seen as a private space for students by the adults! The hallways are where students are able to create power together. In addition, some teachers opened their private spaces in classrooms for students to plan; additionally, parents invited students into their homes to make posters and plan their strategies. Our school community nurtured and ultimately protected the students in these more private spaces and guided them through the process of speaking and listening amongst others before they went out to act in the wider public.

To say we were anxious was an understatement. Media calls came to the school and as the principal, I spoke on their behalf before the protest. "Well, Ms. Daniel, what are the consequences going to be for students who are walking out?" The media's emphasis was on consequences for behaviour, or departing from the social norms, for "good" student conduct. Parents' attitudes varied greatly, but I recall one who said that I had to stop the protest! Indeed, for me to attempt to stop it (which was not possible and showed me how far people are removed from the reality that is in schools) and insist that students

unthinkingly conform to rules and policies on the pain of consequences would indeed make our school a social space. This was not an option for me. This was an exciting opportunity for all of us in the school, although perhaps we did not understand this in the beginning.

Students believed they had not been heard by the public and determined to tell their story and be listened to. Their natality was nourished and fostered in the private places of the hallways, classrooms, homes that were offered to them. As adults in the school, we assisted them in developing the norms of dialogue amongst one another, asked them to be clear about what they wanted, but also asked them to keep in mind that their action in protesting might not result in what they envisaged. As students, they had different views about why they were protesting: they were equal, yet distinct.

The students began to determine what it was important for them to do and how they wanted to do it, a dialogue shaped by the norms that they had developed. Perhaps this discussion was a result of the students having a keen sense of their purpose. Students were resolute that all students who protested should know why it was the right thing to walk out. They went to classrooms where teachers believed that students should be engaging in the democratic process, presented the issues, discussed their concerns and asked students who were not committed to the cause, not to walk out if they were unable to articulate their reasons, and instead to remain in classes. By acting in this way and by explaining to the student body that these ways of acting were important, students set some important parameters for the judgment of their actions and also added credibility to

their actions as participants. The students organizing the walkout didn't want their action co-opted by others who did not respect their purposes. However, this did not mean that all students had to have common agreement on the personal reasons for protesting, but it did mean that all students agreed with their general purpose to have their voices heard, to be respected. Our students were determining how to insert themselves in acting and speaking in the presence of others. The other condition of action of not knowing what the results would be was certainly there and created anxiousness for all, but it was also exciting to engage in this activity. They were working in the more private/public world of the schools and they were about to take their action public!

The students wrote press releases, delegated speakers, informed as many local media as possible, made posters for the march, talked about being in support for and not in support of the teachers' position. There were also opposing views on whether the teachers' job action was right or wrong, and students listened to those opinions in forming their judgments before they acted, but they all could agree (those 1,000 students who went on the march to their MLA's office who happened to be the Premier of the province) that they needed to act and have their voices heard. In fact, no one talked to them when they arrived at the MLA's office, but this is another story of the lessons this lack of respect taught our students: if there is no one to respond to the action, and nothing occurs as a result of the action, is this a reason for belatedness or not acting in the future, because, what is the point?

In retrospect, one can argue that the students were acting in a self-serving protest, as they missed their extra-curricular activities and wanted "someone" to do something. They wanted someone to hear them, to listen to them and they created an appearance in the public. However, what would have happened, as some administrators insisted should happen, that students be suspended (that they had no rights)? I can only relay the events as I saw them happen at Kitsilano. There are many interpretations of the day depending upon who is telling the story, as I found when I interviewed one of the students who felt compelled to act and when I received phone calls from parents with widely diverging opinions including the decisive (albeit anonymous) comment that students do not live in a democracy, should not be heard, and that I was a disgrace as a principal for allowing them to demonstrate.

It was a powerful day for all of us in the school on this day of protest by students. By working things out together, talking to each other, listening to each other, they became an entirely different entity, newly born as individuals and within a group, inserting themselves into the life of the school and community. Their identity was forged as Kitsilano students in action; they were able to articulate why they were acting as they were and gave their opinions that their actions were necessary and good, for an even larger good. The students were creating themselves and experiencing the natality of beginning while they were inserting themselves into the plurality of others. They did not really consider the fact that they might not be able to achieve what they felt needed to be done in this plurality that included a public that was for as well as against them. That included the many private opinions of their families and the individual teachers and

community members at large. They did not let feelings of hopelessness or belatedness prevent them from acting. They were compelled by an overriding sense of needing to take action in the public eye governed by norms that they had determined were right for their actions.

Along with the teaching staff, I watched out the window as the students assembled on our spacious front lawn beneath the Canadian Flag as their spokespeople held a media scrum; as they closed Broadway Avenue by marching with the police escort they had organized; as they articulated to the press why it was important to protest. We as adults were in awe, in appreciation of their efforts and we also shared a sense of pride in the action they took. We too were at a new opening, a beginning for ourselves where we had some hope for our future. The students had taken responsibility in a manner in which the school was interpreted by the media, they were writing their own story because they had visited in their imaginations before the actual event, and I recall one of the senior students saying to me before the protest, "Don't worry Ms. D., you'll be proud of us." And it should be no surprise that we were. But something else deep happened: the students were creating an aspect of themselves by acting with others. They developed their ability to visit the larger picture, to judge what the consequences might be for them as individuals for acting in this way in the private and public of our school. All of us changed in some small way. Who is to say what the ripple effect in the future will be for all of us involved in this action?

While this narrative is a story about how our private space of the school and family homes provided a staging for public action where natality and plurality were developed and flourished, the following story is one where initially, the space of the 'social' determined the nature of the dilemma in which our school found itself again in the press across the country, but more importantly, within our community and how we defined ourselves as a school.

*The school as a private world.*

The event that follows occurred last fall at Kitsilano. The incident seemed particularly egregious, as the students involved did not recognize that they had violated our schools' private world by being identified in the public in a way that tarnished our 84 year long, proud tradition. I'll begin by talking about the conversation I had with parents, what we decided to do together, and how we engaged in action to see if we could make a difference by having students examine the consequences of their actions and the effect they had on others in our school world and the wider community.

The co-chair of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) said during our meeting about the recent annual scavenger hunt that had gone awry and been covered in the press across Canada that what I was dealing with was an issue that should not have to be dealt with at school. She went on to say that it should have been a private matter for families since the incident had occurred on Sunday morning, around 1:00 a.m., and I was not with the 320 grade 12 teenagers, but quietly asleep in bed.

However, the students were identified as “my” students as the organizers were from “my” school, Kitsilano. This is tricky ground for a teacher-leader, as I could not say these students were not “mine” as the implication was that I take no responsibility for them. Now, the reality is that I do not have responsibility on early Sunday mornings unless it is a school sponsored event (the scavenger hunt was not), but I did not want to make any disparaging remarks, although I thought about how my parent community was really responsible for their children. I delicately danced around the idea of the school having a shared responsibility for its students and that I would speak to the students about how we were being represented, even if this was not the students’ intent to represent us in this way. This blending of the private and the public roles in schools represents more Arendt’s ‘social’ where she argues that in the breaking down of the private and public distinctions that fostered action, the social realm fosters compliant behaviour and it seemed increasingly that the school setting was being identified to teach and enforce some of these behavioural or social norms. The school and the principal were also identified by the media and local police as being responsible for ensuring these norms of behaviour were in place, and chastised because they were not.

There were some arrests in this particular scavenger hunt, but no charges since there was no apparent malicious intent, just thoughtlessness. Some parents said, “This isn’t such a big deal, we were all teenagers once,” and other parents were appalled at the lack of consideration for the property and safety of others and their children’s poor judgment. This latter group was the larger group, which is fortunate for a school principal and I was relieved when the PAC co-chairs said, “This should not be a school issue. What we have

here is a failure to parent and it is our role as parents to help each other do a better job.”

This compelling statement indicated how important this issue was to the parents, how they acknowledged their responsibilities in the private space of their homes. We began a long discussion on what we could do together to avoid something like this happening to our students and our school again. This conversation was very thoughtful and the parents assumed responsibility for their roles as parents without taking away from my role as principal of the school. They let me know in their words and conversation with me that they supported me, but that they also thought that together we could do things better and differently.

In relating the scavenger hunt incident, it became clear that students were following norms determined by former students and acted without much thought, “because it had all been done before, we meant no harm, and what’s the problem?” To me, this is a prime example of belatedness where students did not think they could do anything different (unless they had thought to stay away from what I will call the pseudo-action of being with their peers, doing what had always been done in the social space in their grade 12 year). They were inherently thoughtless in that they did not think about their actions and the impact upon their parents who had to pick them up at the police station or the school principal who spoke to the press on behalf of the school to protect the school from this unsavoury publicity, or their role in changing what the other students and staff had worked so hard to determine, a world where common principles were upheld while acting as a Kitsilano student. The students did not understand, or did not think to understand, that in these actions, they were representing our school in a way we did not wish to be

seen. These students violated the privacy of our school and what we had determined together as a proud tradition and they took this violation public. While the scavenger hunt was viewed as an entitlement to do what was always done in the school, so was the sense of right to extra-curricular activities earlier described. The difference, however, was that in Arendt's notion of action, a space is created when people come together and act where an "in between" space occurs amongst the participants, where their differences are accepted and valued amongst the plurality of others in the space of appearances. In the hunt itself, the students' behaviour was conditioned by past behaviour of others and the expectation was that nothing new would happen. There was no opportunity here, nor encouragement for differences. Indeed, one had to behave in this social space as required by the rules of the game, or one could not participate – this was not action in any sense and again conforms to Levinson's description of belatedness that occurs in the space of the social.

Belatedness poses a problem when students feel so weighted down by their social positioning that they see no point in attempting to transform the meanings and implications that attach to their positioning, and little point in engaging with those who have different self and social understandings. But equally problematic is the opposite response which is what happens when students refuse to see the ways in which they are belated, and insist on their status as newcomers. .... What is lost in these invocations of innocence is an understanding of the ways in which our belatedness not only constitutes who we are, but affects what we do. (Levinson, 1997, p.437)

These students believed that they were required to behave in the same way that past students had behaved; they did not think, or as Levinson says, refused to think and see themselves as participating in this right of passage as a newcomer differently than grade 12s had done in previous years. Perhaps the positive side of the story is that because we were in this place of belatedness and the social, we had the opportunity to learn and to try to teach our students to understand how they arrived at where they were and not have belatedness determine their view of the world to the degree it frequently does for of us as human beings.

The parents and I worked on this predicament and determined together to send out an email to the parent list serve and speak at PAC meetings talking with parents about issues that concerned all of them. These parents were well aware of their responsibilities and even though their children were not involved in the capers, they knew many of the grade 12 students who were. For my part, I advised the parents that I wanted to talk with the grade 12s and let them know my concerns and they agreed that this was a sound idea. However, in talking with some senior students, I mentioned this “sound idea” and they said, “If you reprimand us harshly Ms. Daniel, we will find it difficult to be respectful because we all were not involved with this even though our school is talked about.” Mmmm. Food for thought, so again, I discussed the situation with some parents, teachers and students and in the end took a different approach. I called a very brief, impromptu assembly and had all grade 12 students come with their teachers to the auditorium. The media heard I was “going to read the riot act,” and wanted to attend, arguing that it would be a good lesson for the public and students at other schools to hear. I firmly said that

this was a private meeting and I needed to talk with the students without the glare of the public interpreting as had been happening all week. I knew that this was an opportunity for students to think about shifting their behaviour from doing what had always been done, to thinking about why we act the way we do, how it affects others, how can we do things differently, more thoughtfully. I wanted them to think about how they could insert themselves in a positive way into the world, how they could act in another way. I wanted them to begin to create themselves in the Arendtian sense of action, where they experienced natality in a true public with others in different ways, where they were not conditioned by the past and weighted down with belatedness. I wanted them to recognize their freedom to act in the wider world.

I was apprehensive about this assembly, sad that our students and school had been placed in such a negative light. I so wanted to do this right and I knew there would be no second chances to hold this kind of meeting again. The students entered the auditorium in silence, uncharacteristic for this group of young people and as I stood amidst them, not removing myself to be above on the stage and the quiet continued. I began to speak, telling them how proud I was to be their principal and how I state that I am their principal at every function I attend. I told them that coming to know so many of them over the last three years together, I knew they were good people with their hopes and dreams before them. Because I knew who they really were, I was disappointed in the recent events reported in the news and by our neighbours. I was disappointed that our school's reputation had been tarnished by the actions of a few and that we would all have to work hard to restore what we believed we stood for as a school. I did not berate, but spoke

from my heart and I believe they understood. I talked about their responsibilities to each other, to their families, to our school and how they carry the memory of so many other students and traditions when they call themselves Kitsilano students. I said that if they were not sure as to whether their actions were “good” or not, to imagine someone they really admire, respect, who is a mentor to them and imagine that he or she is standing beside them and to visualize if they would have engaged in some of those actions if they were there beside them. What would have been said or thought by those they admire? There was some uncomfortable shifting in the seats as I paused and they visited the discomfort they were imagining at their relatives/friend/mentor being exposed to their conduct. At the conclusion of this ‘talk,’ it was very brief, perhaps five minutes or so, they filed solemnly back to class.

The next day, I made sure I found my way to the grad hallway, again to chat, to let them know that while the solidity and stability we had as a school was temporarily rocked, our relationships with each other were just fine, ongoing, and we would pick them up again. Many students wanted to know if I was okay because they were aware of my distress and sadness. Indeed, I had been close to tears as I had felt discouraged by their behaviour, battered by the press and was angry and disappointed that the parents in mass did not come forward to claim responsibility. I sensed the students’ affection and caring for me, perhaps something new for some of them, and I received this gift openly and with pleasure. The parents took my talk and e-mailed it out to parents, writing about their concerns and what they as a group of parents and as individuals could do. As an outcome of this unpleasant situation, we now have a communications protocol (or work document)

where parents give each other alerts based on what is going on in the school - i.e.

fireworks at Halloween, the drug and alcohol policy before dances, safety concerns as well as the usual, additional myriad of changes that are always happening in schools.

This is one of many conversations I have had with these parents who are truly becoming partners within our school, where they support me even when they differ with me, where they support teachers as they learn to insert themselves into the life of the school while becoming more involved in the lives of their children.

So while the children themselves did not engage in Arendt's notion of action, an opportunity presented itself for parents to become more engaged in the life of their children and the school. This opportunity offered the parents and me to shift the pattern of labour and work and remaining in the 'social' to a space of action. Perhaps the parents and I had not exercised our responsibilities, but were now taking the opportunity to reinvent the situation and perhaps understand differently if a similar situation arose, and this is where the opportunity for action became possible for us as adults.

The parents did not always hold the same views about their children's behaviour, which wasn't a requirement, but they granted that the overriding concern was to restore our private world, reminding ourselves and others about our traditions, customs and sense of decency and integrity for those within our walls and for the wider public to see. Thus, the parents developed a limited public in which to talk about what they wanted for their children and at the same time, created many dialogues in private spaces with each other and their children to determine how to do things better. One of these dialogues involved

me as the school principal, helping me to think about doing things differently, perhaps more pro-actively. Had I not been able to count on the relationships that parents and I had established by working and acting together, this event might not have had such a positive outcome. Do I think this will end such scavenger hunts? Absolutely not, but again since we have made an opening for dialogue with parents and students around this subject, there is a now at least a forum for diverging views and various perspectives to be voiced before students become involved in this kind of behaviour.

So, in retrospect, this event might have been ignored by me had I held on to my initial conviction that the hunt was solely a parenting issue. In working together as adults, we were able to shift our focus from remaining in the 'social' space where belatedness determined the manner in which things had always been done, where labour and work were disconnected means and ends, shielding students from the renewal of natality and the possible consequences of action amidst the plurality of others. Instead we chose to act together as a community, to view our actions as individuals within a collective, reviewing and renewing the private world that is our school that is in the public view of others.

This third story involves the creation of action by teachers, helping one another to insert themselves into the lives of their students and the life of our school, creating the kinds of agency required for each of them to move beyond labour and work into action.

*Moving from social to private-public: the ends of dialogue.*

My last account concerns my work and action with the teachers in the school. It is perhaps with them that I find it the most challenging to find private spaces so we make speak more openly and freely with each other about the meaning of our practices as seems evident in the following:

My shiver of excitement was genuine during our conversations. It was June of last year, my third year as principal in the same school. Provincial exams were being written, the teaching portion of the year was concluded and teachers had some down time to wrap their year's work up along with the usual responsibilities for invigilating of exams, calculating of marks and sorting out their files, etcetera... concluding their labour and work of the year. I determined that this would be a good opportunity to carve out some time for department meetings to discuss what we wanted for our students for the coming year. Many times our meetings are brief: central and necessary to the mechanics of running the school and we discuss timetabling issues, staffing concerns and financial matters. To call a meeting focusing on learning and teaching was a risk in a labour climate of cutbacks and stripping of contracts. Teachers had been in job action all year so relationships were somewhat strained, particularly with management of the school board, that is, the people I report to in my teacher-leader position. Teachers were feeling disenfranchised, sad and angry. However, I believe that teachers are a professional group possessing deep caring for their students and that they wanted to go beyond the limitations of Arendt's social space that dominates schooling. I decided I needed to

provide and indeed, hoped they would appreciate, the opportunity to have conversations about what they know best, teaching and learning.

I did not wish the conversation to be focused on labour and work; I outlined some possible guidelines and topics for us to talk together about an issue that concerned all of us, the behaviour of our students and how the Social Responsibility Performance Standards might guide us as a school. The social responsibility I speak of is not the same as the world of the 'social' as expressed by Arendt. In Arendt's social realm, students, teachers, and administrators are told how to behave and the norms of behaviour are codified. The discussion I sought to have with staff was to have a different purpose: I wanted to search, examine, and debate, dialogue under the social responsibility umbrella, to engage students, parents and teachers, in formulating the right, or the "good" way for us as a collective to act or to be in the world. I knew these conversations were going to challenge us, but also present opportunities for us, most particularly as teachers, to insert ourselves in these meetings within the plurality of others' views.

It has not been my experience that teachers have access to spaces to reflect upon what is meaningful in their practices with other educators, and they required a framework to begin this dialogue. The communicative virtues (Burbules, 1993) of tolerance, patience, openness to other views, and ability to listen and reframe for others were articulated as being important for genuine dialogue to occur. I anticipated that the teachers would contribute personal views to the conversation with others or reveal their natality within the plurality of others in Arendt's words (I didn't have the bravery to use her terms).

I recorded their observations and responses and entered into the conversation as a participant where I sensed the need as I tried very hard to exercise restraint, to encourage their conversation. In expressing the common parameters for discussion, we came to better understand each other, the students in our school setting and our roles as educators in working with our students. This was similar to the manner in which the students came to understand each other in their dialogue before taking action, and again, this is not to say we all came to an agreement, but we did share a larger understanding of how we could help our students become more responsible students as well as better human beings. I was attempting to encourage a forum for “public appearance” where we as distinctly different teachers would have an opportunity to hear everything what each of us had to say while each was listened to. Thus, the participants came to recognize that differing is not only possible; it is desirable and important to be able to voice these differences amidst others.

Sitting around our large table, a work object reminding us of our task in gathering us together, we began slowly, almost haltingly, as we reviewed some of the social responsibility rubrics that had been developed by teachers for teachers in the Ministry of Education Performance Standards. These rubrics are a good example of the work aspect of the *vita activa*, a document completed for schools to implement, but had our conversation not happened, the rubrics would perhaps have remained as a work object, an unexamined text with little meaning for teachers and students because we had not talked about their meaning and use for us.

In the awkwardness of our beginning conversation, words did not flow easily, but we persevered. The framework of norms supported us as the teachers offered suggestions which I entered into the laptop so all could see the wall screen, as they discussed, struggled with and listened to each other's ideas and thoughts. About twenty minutes into each meeting, their commentary became more animated as they thrashed out what their roles were in working with our students and how they needed and wanted to be the models for the behaviour they saw a need for our students to demonstrate. We intently listened to one another, extrapolated on what others were saying and feeling, differed, agreed, acknowledged what each was contributing. Teachers began some conversation on the roles teacher-leaders, or "administration" in their words, play in assisting, or not assisting. Some began to be open and courageous enough to say that they didn't feel that we (vice principals and I) as teacher-leaders took the issues brought to us seriously enough, that there was more that we could do than we did. This was difficult for me to hear but critical, for if I expected them to engage in dialogue openly, objectively using the norms we had agreed upon, I also needed to listen to their concerns and address issues that were significant to creating our culture of understanding and learning in our school. I tried to distance myself from reflecting from my private, personal point of view, which was not easy, and attempted to place myself in the teachers' positions and "visit" by examining what I must do as the teacher-leader for the public good of our school. This particular aspect of our conversation highlighted how the unexpected may occur when we engage in action and we cannot determine the end in advance. And then, in the social studies group, one young teacher asked the question, "Who is it we want our students to become in life?" and, "what is it we need to do to help them?"

This, to me, was a pivotal time in the conversation. We paused and reflected as we were publicly discussing what we believed was really important in the education of our students. Canovan says that from Arendt's perspective, "the people who share a public interest are united not by a general will but by a common world, so that there is room for disagreement and public debate amongst them on what the interests of that world actually are" (1985, p.199). In providing an opportunity for dialogue, a beginning, I knew that there was no general will to be in that space, however, I hoped we could create a common world. I hoped that they would want to engage and by engaging, come to understand amidst our voiced concerns and disagreements of what we wanted for our students in the larger world. The dialogue in our library conference room offered:

a space of appearances in which free action takes place. Consequently the public interest is an interest not just in the survival of the institutions, but in the furthering of this free activity. Talking about the public interest is like talking about the interests of ballet or opera: it is a matter of preserving and promoting a way of acting and the values embodied in it. (Canovan, 1985, p.199)

It appeared to me that teachers, like me, took pleasure in this opening for dialogue, too rare in our schools. We became animated by the content and were engaged in making meaning without knowing what the end of our meeting might bring. This lack of a need for product, where the focus was on understanding ourselves and one another may ultimately give us a deeper sense of our responsibilities as teachers. I do not want to give

the appearance that everyone was “on the same page” and understood the dialogue in the same ways, but everyone did participate at one level and was engaged in a beginning.

At the conclusion of the meeting, each department had some hopes for the year that some translated to work objects, and I summarized their comments for editing and review.

Now, mid-way through the following school year some teachers are in the midst of trying to make their hopes and thoughts a reality in the daily labour and work of the school. As teacher-leader, I also made a commitment to them in making some changes in my manner of acting. I too, need to model the way for teachers and students to see if we can illustrate how as an administrative team, we have done what we desire them to do in the lives of their students...a genuine insertion into the life of the school.

How did this form of action differ from the previously described student protests? The round-tables with teachers were structured specifically so we could begin the dialogue about social responsibility while the forum of students sprang up amongst them as a group, “they are newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action” (Arendt, 1958, p.177). While the norms for the teachers’ meetings needed to be specific for us to function as a free speaking group, the students began to determine some norms for themselves as protesters. Perhaps this was a result of the students having a keen sense of their purpose, whereas the dialogue of our teachers was to help us determine what our purpose was, or perhaps more correctly, to articulate what our purpose was in the institution of a school. And again, the students in the scavenger hunt were engaged in nothing resembling action, but as a result, they viewed their sense

of agency in these 'traditions' differently as well as the parents and school community where we were compelled to act as a result of their actions.

Arendt's assertion that we "reveal who we are" in the presence of others through our speech and action was fully illustrated in these many department meetings. Whether we acted upon our conversations is an entirely different issue and it is, "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (1958, p.179). My excitement during the conversations with the teachers was not limited to one teacher, but maintained in the conversations with many. Not all, but many. Our interactions engaged us and we left knowing we had begun to know each other better, openly agreeing and differing about many things while expressing thoughts about what was fundamental for our students and ourselves to live a better life not only within our school, but in other arenas as well. I also knew I had done "the right thing" when at the conclusion of the meetings and after the distribution of our summaries, I was told of a conversation in the lunch room where it was stated that it was a courageous and "good" thing for me to engage teachers in conversations about teaching and learning, particularly during these adversarial times. I held those words to my heart as I continue to labour, work and sometimes act.

I have given three examples of action in my role as a teacher-leader and on conclusion, I am not sure they are the best but they are memorable for me and I am sure for many others. In the action taken in our private and public settings, where the conversations happened, there were some explicit norms that encouraged the dialogue. The norms of

reciprocity, respect, care, trust and perhaps most importantly, hope that we can make a difference when we engage in dialogue with each other. We found different physical spaces on one hand that encouraged the “in-between” to develop, where relationships amidst the differences and plurality of others, where all of us as parents, students, teachers and administrators were offered the chance to learn about ourselves, perhaps to be renewed to the fragile natality that is a condition of action. I like to think that even in the space of the scavenger hunt, that the students who thought their actions were just a lark (just what kids do), might understand the occasion as one for growth and should something similar occur again (they are students!) they might choose to act with a different view.

In summing up this section I have tried to illustrate that initiating action leads us to results we cannot possibly know and that, when we begin to act we are opening ourselves to begin again, to experience natality and to be re-fashioned as ‘new’ in the midst of the plurality of others. These relationships are especially encouraged when we seek out those hard to find private spaces for us to connect together, to prepare for a more public world. I would now like to consider these facets of action in my role as an artist.

### The Artist’s Action

In the previous section, I mentioned there are many lessons to be learned in my life as an artist that I assumed could be translated into my life as a teacher-leader. I mentioned in particular that the ability to be reflective and have thoughtful conversations were more

likely to happen in the private spaces available to me as an artist where I can also remind myself who I am and create myself anew. Conversely, I hope to find some ways in which my work as an artist is informed by the work and action I take in schools, but I am not sure if action in this in-between space of practices is closely related.

Action as an artist must be ongoing if I call myself an artist. What I speak of is not solely the act of labour and work that is a part of making art, which in my case are the forms of painting and sculpture, but I mean an artist engaging in the creative act and showing her work in the public. Action may also occur while the artist (or anyone else for that matter) is an observer both at an exhibit and in the studio.

#### *Providing Space for Action as an Artist*

As is in the teacher-leader space, the dualities of private and public and natality and plurality are seminal in the formation of my artistic identity. And as is the case in both practices, the results of action are always unpredictable, and this unpredictability may be more readily tolerated in the private space of an artist where one has many chances to create over and over in a truly private realm, rather than in the more public space of the teacher-leader that is more often than not, witnessed by others.

*The private and public space of the artist.*

Doing art has always been a part of my life, and has always included concerns for studio space. In the beginning, my studio was in the privacy of my family home where my parents encouraged me: it gave us all some pleasure to see me working and to see the results. I cannot think that I would have continued had it not been for the foundation of care and appreciation they gave me in providing me with supplies and all of the supportive positive aspects that come with good parenting. Not to mention a corner of the house to work in! When I later went to art school at the University of Regina, I was fortunate enough, as were others, to be given our own studio spaces as undergraduates. I didn't know how lucky we were at the time, so I weaved in and out of classes with others where we had the opportunity to work with skilled, innovative teachers, while having access to a private studio space where we could work at any time of day and night, which we did. It was in this private space that I became immersed and enveloped in the work I was doing, where I was able to enter another space in my mind, where I could imagine the possibilities of the works I was creating as well as being alert to having something entirely unexpected occur when my brush touched the canvas. For me, the space of being engaged in making art offered me opportunity to begin again, to discover in a space that frequently held the mystery of what was experienced when we take that step to begin to create. Although I am creating an object, this act of creation, with imagination nudges Arendt's boundaries of action for when I create art, I am also creating an aspect of myself. This is particularly true in the privacy of my studio where sometimes it is hard to separate my work from me - we are one when things are going well. Perhaps the work

goes well because of the struggle that often occurs beforehand, but when I struggle, it is more like a dialogue with myself in trying to come to an understanding with the work in the making of the objects. In this dialogue with myself, I need to demonstrate similar virtues that were required in the previous story examples. I need to have hope that there will be a positive outcome, such as I had when things seemed more than a little bleak in the student protest and scavenger hunt; tolerance when things don't go well; the ability to stand back and listen to what is happening and genuinely hear others, such as the teachers who offered suggestions for improving my practice in the school as we were discussing theirs; and courage to continue and persevere when the outlook of the work may be bleak. The same attributes that are needed for dialogue with others in schools are also required to make art in my studio.

The attributes of dialogue with my work may also be expanded to those trusted others with whom I have had conversations through the years, or with those works in exhibits that speak to me, or with the writings of artists who have influenced me along my path. In my mind, I recall and talk with these figures while I work. Their influence is ongoing in helping me stay the course, or in the following conversation, helping me get back on track.

I'll refer back to my conversation with Elaine and David at the Rie and Coper exhibit at the Gardiner Museum. The three of us were in a public gallery space, engaged in conversation about the design elements of these astonishing pieces, coming to a greater understanding about the work of these artists. I recollect that all of us admired the works

themselves, but I also remember the most salient feature for me in our time spent together was the sense of renewal that was reawakened in me about my identity as an artist. My visit to the gallery and conversations with David and Elaine reminded me of my artist self. As a result, I began to work with renewed vigour. In my life as a teacher, I had always found the time to do my artwork and it was only in my current role as a principal that I had let this most important aspect of my identity fade away. The conversation among the three of us inserted into my life because I was able to authentically speak with others about the meaning of other artists' work while reminding myself of my own life and desires as an artist. Our action together compelled me to insert myself into my studio again and I began to recover this aspect of my life. Albert Schweitzer is attributed with saying, "Sometimes our light goes out but is blown again into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light." Our conversation had rekindled my desire to create and my deepest thanks is given.

I have talked briefly about my private studio space and the public space of an exhibit and I'd like to explain a little about the social in the art world, that blending of the private into the public world of art. To me, the private space of the studio is an opportunity to experiment, to try things on, to see if I can get things right in this safe space before I take pieces before the public, assuming this is my focus. So, for me as an artist, there is a more private studio space that shifts to a defined more public exhibit space where others can readily view the work. Private and public are not as difficult to achieve in my artist's realm as they can be in my teacher-leader practice where there is great conflation of the

private and public. However, there can be some merging of the two in the artist's world as well, especially in Arendt's sense of the social. For example, when I was an artist on leave from teaching, I found some of the clay work I was doing sold very well and commanded good prices. I started to ship my work across Canada and it also became popular with people who travelled to Vancouver and they too would ship my work home. Thus, a relationship with gallery folk began to evolve. I was enjoying the experimenting and the direction my work was taking me. I focused on preparing for an exhibit, for I believed this was where the real story was told: the completed work placed before the public eye. However, gradually, I found myself getting caught in the world of sales. I was in a place where the gallery owners very much liked what I was doing, in part because my work was marketable and saleable. Consequently, they encouraged me to continue to produce similar (they would never articulate the "same") work for sale. They asked me to codify my artistic thrust into behaviour for the sake of the market. I recognized that I needed the cash, since I was on leave, but I was under no delusion that I was engaged in the artistic process itself: I became someone enjoying what I was doing, rather than someone creating. I knew this was not the realm of action but more about labour and work.

Can the private space of my studio be in some sense the equivalent of the private space of the library conference room where the teachers had the imposition of certain standards upon their conversation? In my studio, I began to learn the formal elements and principles of design; the technical aspects of working with clay and glazes; the manner in which glazing and firing was to occur. This technical or work aspect eventually became

second nature to me so that I was free to create another dimension, to move into what I determined was action in my studio in this realm of reified work. I hoped for the same thing to occur in my dialogue in the private teacher-leader spaces, where the norms of dialogue would become so second nature that eventually, teachers, parents and students would be free to act in other spaces, particularly the space of the public with others. The constituents of the school would speak around an issue in the same manner that the supporters of art might speak at an exhibit.

*The natality and plurality of the artist.*

If as an artist I attempt to insert myself in the world with the work I do and the conversations my work creates, I am always being shaped (re-born in Arendt's language) and this truly is the nature of natality. This regeneration most often occurs in the safety and privacy of my studio, but it also occurs during an exhibit, whether it is a group show or one-person show. In a group setting, generally, the curator selects artists who are comparable in content, but vary in their interpretations of that content, so the work would appear as equal but individual. Again, if I think back to the Rie/Coper exhibit where there were many variations on a theme. This is different from whether one likes the work or not, the work will stand out because of the particular qualities they possess regardless of the personal taste of the viewer. The different points of view are welcome in an artistic forum where the content of the comments and the manner in which they are given use the same norms for dialogue as described in the school setting; comments are more readily acceptable in a forum of respect, equality and difference.

In an exhibit of my own work, when the work is complete and on display, the pieces become more separate from me in the public forum. When I take my work 'public' as an artist, it is no longer a part of me, I enter into that neutral space, or attempt to at any rate, where I too am a spectator as to what I have completed and become more the recipient as well as the judge as others are of the work I have been engaged in. The objects stand on their own, sometimes more sturdily than others, yet even amongst the objects, the sense of my natality and plurality exists. Indeed, the sense of a broad creative vision is strengthened when I can clearly see a continuum of the pieces themselves, where the work stands as separate yet as whole. Now, I do not believe Arendt ascribed the qualities of natality and plurality to art works, but she did say that physical objects do remind us of who we are, of our traditions, of our past, of our longings. For me, but then I'm not a political philosopher, it is not much of a leap to say that the objects rekindle that sense of beginning, renewal and the fact that I am making my own statement amongst many others with the artwork I complete. What diminishes the possibility of achieving this sense of renewal and difference while doing my artwork is that sense of belatedness, that is, that it has all been done before, I have done it before, so, what is the point? If I keep working, I would keep doing the same thing. Indeed, this is very similar to Arendt's sense of the social space conditioning the behaviour and in a sense if one does the same thing over and over again, the act comes to resemble that of labour alone.

If as an artist I am awake to the fact that one of the joys of creating is to discover the new in myself and my work, if I am true to my artistic vision and not motivated by profit (as I am fortunate enough not to have to be currently), I have the privacy of my studio to

create. I also have the option to take my work public for a dialogue about the worth of my work; I just need to continue to have the courage to do this and the confidence that others will engage in the conversation about the work, and keep the work separate from me and my personhood. This is what I desire for us while we teach in our school community, to engage with each other about ideas, to discuss their worth as distinct and separate from the people discussing them. In the following story, I'll speak about such a person, Hiro Urakami, a fine potter who became a valued friend and mentor, who was able to discuss the worth of the work I created while keeping what I did as separate from my personhood. I believe the manner in which Hiro regarded my work as detached from me, assisted me in discussing and working with the ideas of those of us in the school community in a less personal way than I might have otherwise done.

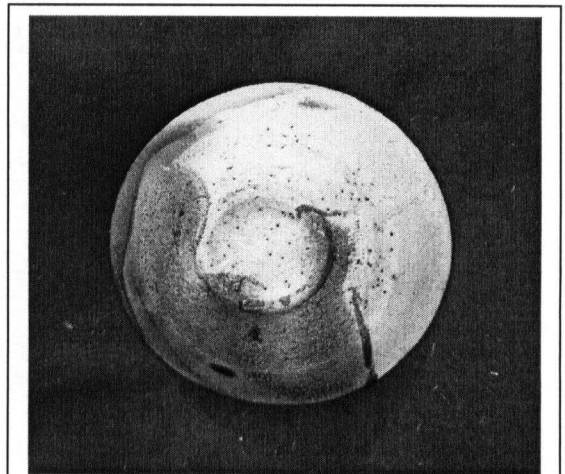
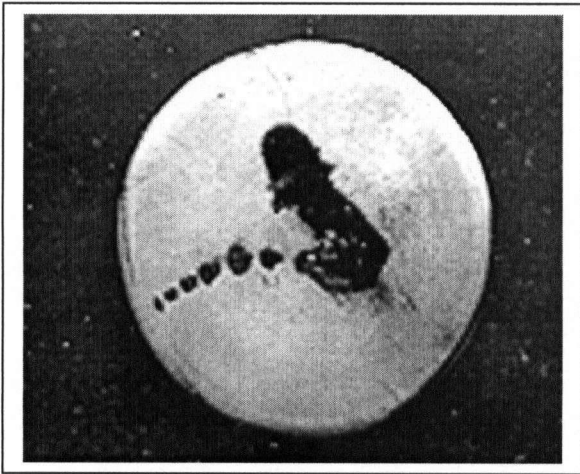
*Webs of relationship in the artist's world.*

I was getting ready for my first big exhibit of Raku pottery at the Gallery of Ceramics in Vancouver. The curator and owner of the gallery was Hiro Urakami, a potter himself, always gracious and always the teacher. His gallery had become a special place and space for many B.C. potters, as well as those who purchased the work for use, collected and critiqued what potters did. He truly valued the works. Those who also held an affection for clay would find ourselves routinely welcomed at Hiro's low lying coffee



Interior of a raku kiln (above) with pots ready to be fired.

Raku bowl (top and bottom, below) as a result of the Raku firing process.



All pottery forms are the result of an interaction between the artist and his clay. This cannot be a one-way process in which the artist exercises a rigid and totally authoritarian control, for the result of such domination is a cold and lifeless product. All good pots, and good Raku pots in particular, are born of a sympathetic dialogue between the concepts and manipulations of the artist on the one hand and the nature of the material on the other. These two entities have to reach an understanding – a state of compromise in which each gives freely to the other (Dickerson, 1972, p.13).

table, laden with fruit such as fresh green grapes and some sweets, always accompanied by steaming hot earl-grey tea made freshly upon our arrival. He enjoyed the opportunity to talk with like-minded others (this meant you had an affinity with any sort of clay work) where the conversations differed in the points of views and frequently were very spirited. The visitors were teachers, full time artists, hobby potters, students, and writers. We were all welcomed as having something to offer. I felt engaged with others here, in part because of the care Hiro had taken to develop his relationships with others and me in this private space, most particularly before an exhibit. If you were a potter, this was the place to show.

I was excited about my upcoming event and had a vision of what the whole exhibit would look like. I had planned a backdrop of photographs showing me involved in the process from the beginning, including large photographs of me at the wheel, the inside of the hot Raku kiln, and the completed work. I think I was compelled to do this because Raku was somewhat new in Vancouver, it was an unusual technique and to form a whole exhibit was somewhat of a feat. What was so appealing to me about Raku was the directness of the firing process, the challenges in the making, sometimes to life and limb, and the chance elements that contributed to the uniqueness of each of these pieces and sometimes of the maker as well, as described by John Dickerson:

Raku firing ... boldly accepts the direct ordeal of sudden fire as an ultimate test of both pot and maker. The pot is plunged directly into a red-hot kiln by means of a pair of tongs and the kiln rapidly closed. If the pot survives the sudden heat shock

its soft glaze melts within a few minutes under the constant surveillance of the potter who watches through a peep-hole in the side of the kiln....The ordeal and the experience are two-fold for, since the pot is in every way an extension of the maker, he too in a very real way is subjected to test by ordeal. The quality of the pot reflects the quality of the man, and the outcome of its trial, be it triumphant beautification or a piece irrevocably scarred or apparently soberly detached, necessarily carries over its experience to its maker. Since each piece and each firing are unique events the results are always startlingly different and unrepeatable, but the value goes far beyond the pot alone, for it represents a chronicled history of one man's direct struggle with the unpredictable forces of nature and a dual involvement in the dramatic 'process of becoming. (1972, p.8)

There is no question for me that Dickerson's description is an apt example of Arendt's concept of reification that occurs while making art. As an artist, I read Dickerson's book over and over and identified with the passages about process that are so inherently fundamental to why I create...doing Raku creates my identity as an artist. Other artist writers such as Paulus Behrenson,(1968) Mary Richards (1962) and Bernard Leach (1940) also aligned creating the work with creating the self. This firing process for me was defined as action because I was in dialogue with all of the elements, the earth of the clay, the fire of the kiln, the air required to maintain the heat and the water to quench the pot as it exited the kiln. To do Raku, one had to be a participant in the process and one could never exactly determine the outcome, which was part of the delight and trials of doing Raku. My dialogue with the clay required respect, for as people, it has limits; care,

for the intense firing process made the piece fragile; affiliation or relationship to the tradition of the clay; patience, for the process could not be rushed; and hope that the result would be a “good” work of art, that it will survive the dialogue it has had with me and the fire.

I had invited Hiro to my studio after completing a pre-selection of my work, setting aside those pieces I was not particularly pleased with or did not fit the standard I had set for myself. I was very fretful as well as eager to hear his opinion about my work as I very much wanted him to like my pieces. I so admired his clay work and generally, the work he chose to exhibit and what I perceived as his fine sense of aesthetics. He, of course found his way over to that corner with those pieces stacked by me as deemed not quite good enough and said, “Mary, why don’t you want these to be included? They are beautiful!” I recall being taken aback by his enthusiasm and saying with deliberate casualness that I really didn’t think they were of a standard I wanted to be selected to exhibit. I so admired his aesthetic judgment and I was startled as he laughed and asked, “What standard is that?” I struggled to articulate the reasons for him as well as for myself and said it was from the forms I had admired that came from the past, forms that seemed to have a readily identifiable spirit, a sense of self, unique, with voice. In talking with him, I recognized that I didn’t really have the words to describe why I didn’t want all my work to be seen and I was an artist. Perhaps I was the doer and not the thinker? I did not want to reveal all and here was someone, whose judgment I valued prodding me to examine and expand my individual system of aesthetics, based on what? It wasn’t lack of technique since even poor technique at times could still result in a wonderful piece of

art. Through our conversations, and through Hiro inserting himself into my life in the studio, he encouraged me to change my judgments of my work and articulate the reasons as to why I did, so his presence remains with me in my studio even as I work today. Just as Hiro assisted me in clarifying what it was I considered important in my artwork, I have also tried to take some of this clarification of purpose to my dialogue with those I work with in my teacher- leader setting in an attempt to expand our thinking.

For my grand opening, (grand to me at any rate) Hiro's assistance extended to determining what the invitations looked like and as the curator, he asked my advice about setting it up, but there was no question that he had the final word. This was his world and there was little room for negotiation as he moved plinths around, searching for the precise way of getting the most excellent result, seemingly an innate sense for him. He was a master in desiring and achieving the best setting and composition of the work. His care, thoughtfulness and trust were invaluable. Perhaps his preparation of the exhibit is similar to the lawmaker/builder of the city walls mentioned by Arendt in *The Human Condition* where she reminds us that the Greeks did not:

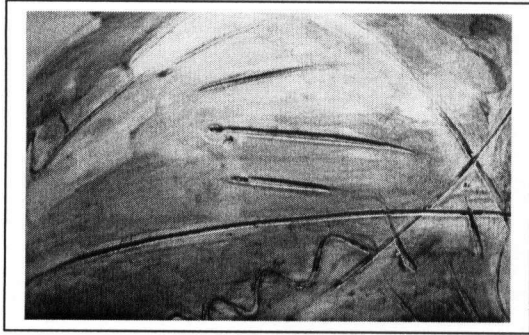
... count legislating among the political activities. In their opinion, the lawmaker was like the builder of the city wall, someone who had to do and finish his work before political activity could begin. He therefore was treated like any other craftsman or architect and could be called from abroad and commissioned without having to be a citizen, whereas the right to *politeuesthai*, to engage in the numerous activities which eventually went on in the *polis*, was entirely restricted

to citizens. To them, the laws, like the wall around the city, were not results of action but products of making. (1958, p.194)

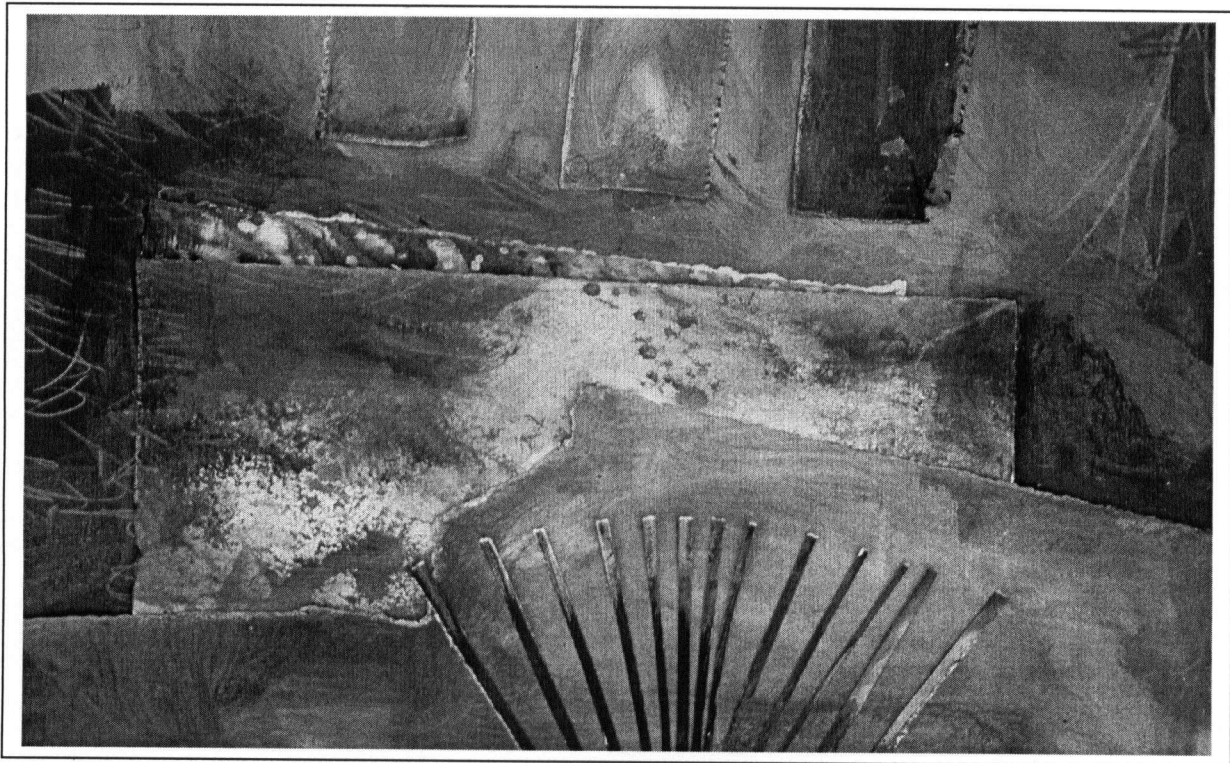
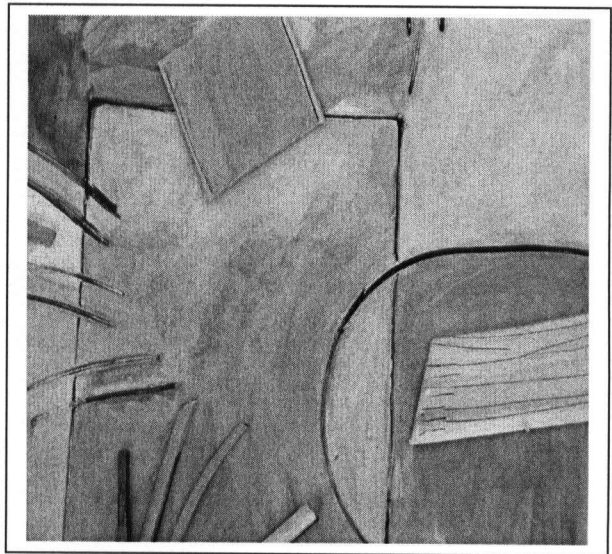
Hirò had to finish his construction, or work, so the action could now occur. The gallery space, unlike other spaces for dialogue, is generally a specific one, but like the dialogic space, there is also a requirement for specific virtues and attitudes. Here, as citizens of a particular art world, we engage in speech and action in that space that is the equivalent of Arendt's political *polis* or the public realm to dialogue to come to some understanding about the work. Arendt also reminds us that traditionally it is the work of the labourer and the products of the worker that enables and provides a platform for speech and action.

During the opening evening, Hiro's friend, Bob Southern, an affable, retired gentleman, generally tended the open bar and noted the works that were sold. This was an exhibit where people arrived early to "scout out" the work many of us collected (there were many collectors we regarded as competitors). Those of us who knew Hiro and Bob would be there early, even when not exhibiting. There was always excitement at the possibility of seeing some art we wished we ourselves had created or being struck with imagining how we could interpret what we saw in our own way. There too was an honouring and celebration of the works completed where the crowd was openly enthusiastic and supportive of the wildly and widely diverging artistic work and this event always included not only those loyal friends but others who were part of an art loving culture, as well as the more credentialed critics who came to view and judge. This is an anxious time for many artists (somewhat similar for me as the teacher-leader before

The artist's "mark" is distinctive so that any viewer who learns to be knowledgeable is able to identify the maker. The work is distinct and separate from the artist and the artist too has an opportunity to view the work as a spectator, alone or with others in the forum of an exhibit.



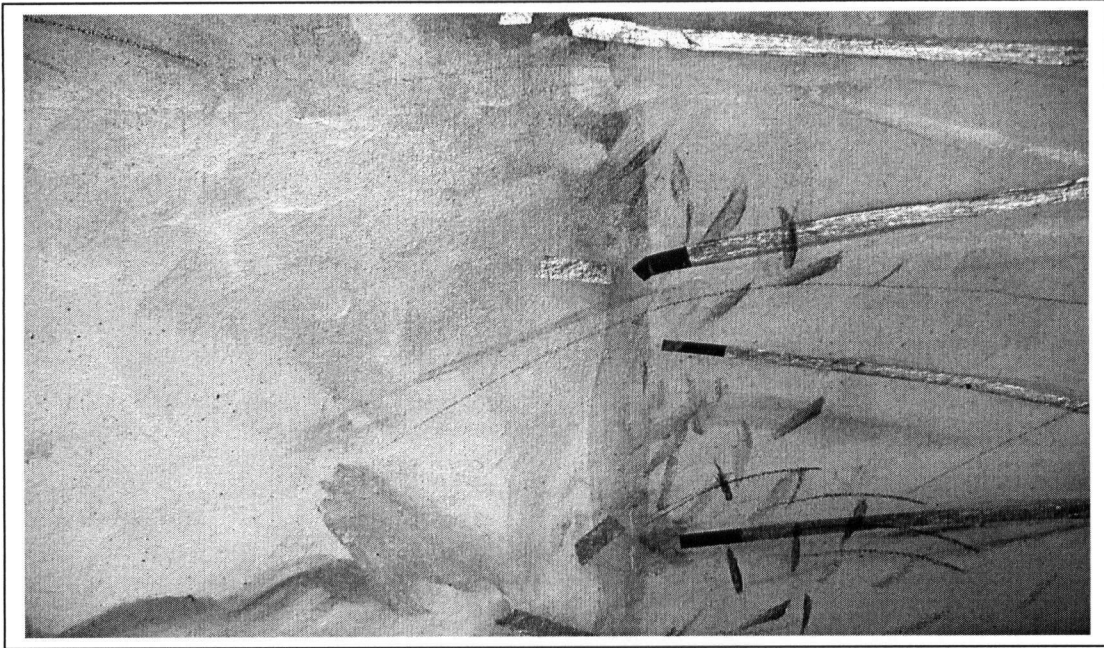
Glaze and engobe on clay (top)  
Mixed-media collage (below)



the student protesters went public). This might be the forum where Arendt says that action needs to be done “in concert” with others where the viewers would or might come together to talk about the merit of the work. This can be a traumatic or triumphant occasion, but it is in the “going public” that allows for the dialogue of action with others.

As an artist, there is the opportunity to re-create ourselves every time we begin, every time we insert ourselves into the world with others, but additionally, in the creation of objects that place us in the world, with the capacity to remind us of who we are. During this time of making as an artist, in private, we are also silently with those with whom we have worked and taught, such as Hiro. As artists, we have the ongoing opportunities while we work to step back and be the spectator, to view what we have done, to reflect while we complete our works and during this process; we are always beginning unless we are going by some formula and know the final product (which would result in works in the truest sense), but most of us engaged in the artistic process do not know what the outcomes will be. We particularly don’t know what the outcome of our action when we put our works before the public but part of the test for the artist is when we do.

*Understanding my Art through Arendt's Lens*



Acrylic, paper, thread, on canvas

“Art, after all, is about rearranging us, creating surprising juxtapositions, emotional openings, startling presences, flight paths to the eternal”

*(The Art of Possibility, 2000,p.3).*

I have attempted to demonstrate that Arendt's ideas about the *vita activa* have affected my art practice, but do they influence the manner in which I regard the *product* of my labour work and action in art? Is there an explicit connection between my art works and Arendt's lens as there seems to be between my art and teacher-leadership practices?

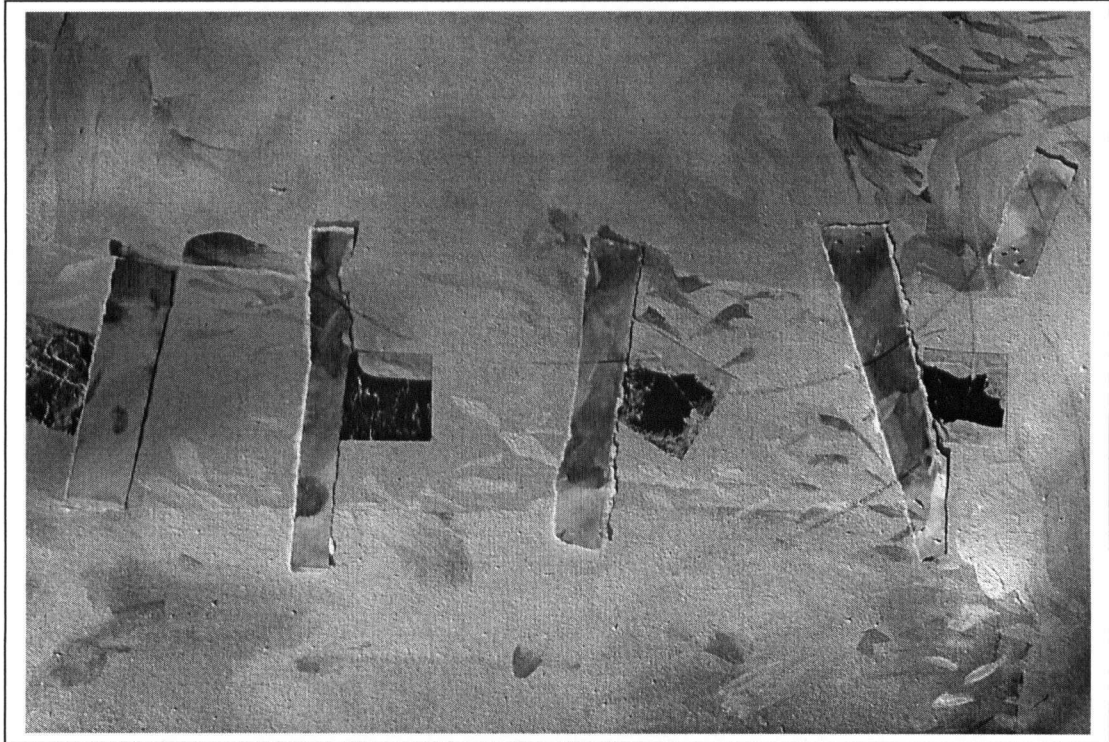
As people insert themselves into the lives of others without knowing what the outcome will be, so Arendt's concept of action as “beginning” and “insertion” occurs in the realm

of an exhibit where the art is judged by others. Coming as a spectator to an exhibit I assess the quality of the form and the spirit it evokes in much the way I attempt to understand the quality of dialogue in a conversation with self and others. Her thoughts assist me in being less critical and more forgiving of what I have often perceived as the imperfections and foibles of my finished “works” as I recognize the work is not me. The pieces are separate from me while having some sense of me as the maker, and perhaps the promise in what might come with further work. As in Arendt’s thoughts on action, there must be some detachment in judging the worth of the work. Those same goods that Arendt is so persuasive in articulating as the goods in webs of relationships, help sustain me in observing those almost human, transcendent measures of the art pieces themselves. My work may be viewed as distinct or new, possessing the natality within the complexity of the plurality of the work. As humans insert themselves with their individual and collective histories when we act, so do the art pieces insert themselves into the spectator’s lives without first knowing the effect upon the viewers. In the process of observing the work, it often speaks back, and says distinctly, “I am here. I am complete in all my frailties, beauty, imperfections. I am unique, individual and possess something of the ‘who’ of the maker who made this transformation of the raw material visible to the observer as well as the maker.”

Just as we speak and act in inserting ourselves in action into the world with others, not knowing what the action will result in, so too do art works insert themselves and “exist” and speak to the spectators and participants who view them. The Meissen porcelain so loved by Utz, awoke something in him, stirred him, and awakened him to something long

enduring. Even my very messy "child-art" elicited a reaction from Mr. Newman that shifted my response to both my art and teacher leadership practices throughout my life. In speaking and acting Mr. Newman revealed who he was. Arendt has helped me understand this aspect of action that the completed art works speak and generate a dialogue not only amongst the viewers but between the spectators and the artworks as well. My present art inserts itself into my world and that of others in messy, unidentified, intuitive ways that I cannot predict when I begin being enmeshed in the processes, nor imagine the final work as it comes to exist and is viewed.

When making art, we venture beyond craft and technique, into the realm of the unknown. We do not expect to have a formula, but when we go into the realm of action, where we engage with our art as we do with people and when the art work is complete, perhaps Arendt can assist me in being a more objective spectator and judge, to help me stand apart, or outside and view what I have done and perhaps even experience the natality of something new in all the similar things that I have completed before. The art itself is representative of my labour, work and action at that time, its history in a public place if I choose to exhibit it, of a private act with the usual intention of putting it out in the public world. Arendt recognizes that in the making of art there may be a transformational experience that causes havoc, but also expands a sense of natality in the plurality of the world, offering reminders of who we are in a most profound way - separate, distinct yet part of all that has gone before me. Yes, my understanding of Arendt's thought does affect the way I look at the completed art pieces, but she has also affected the way I look at my life and all that is in it.



Acrylic, paper, thread, on canvas

#### In-Between the Action of the Teacher-leader and the Artist

The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact. It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it “produces” stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things. (Arendt, 1958, p.184)

In the complexity of my world in schools, the apparent simplicity of my artist's life where I work primarily in isolation accompanied by my remembered and imaginative companions, it might seem that there is little to relate to in my life as a teacher-leader of a large school. Many times, however, I feel that I am more alone in the school even though I am physically with many others, than when I work as an artist. My setting as an artist does hold the challenges of building relationships for me because it is so easy to remain alone, but schools are places where students, teachers, parents are frequently disparate individuals who are placed together where we struggle to find common foundations for our "webs of relationships" for us to labour, work and act together. But in the engagement I have with others as an artist, I generally have some control over who enters my world and there is a degree of choice, and I am more able to be selective than in a school. To be an artist as a teacher-leader in my school setting tests me. Where my school setting generally is in the public/private that has in many ways become the social, the boundaries are more separate in my studio. I inherently know and believe that one of my primary roles as a teacher-leader is to assist in providing more private spaces where teachers, students and parents can be nurtured in realizing their possibilities before they risk going in the public eye. The challenge is to ensure that we do not fall into Arendt's social which is so prevalent in our schooling today. Keeping in mind the creation I experience in the privacy of my studio, in the "going into the fire" process of Raku, taking a chance in the midst of a current educational reality that says I should do otherwise, the confidence I gain by being able to try things on in private, drives me to find these same spaces in schools as often as possible. Maintaining my studio and

working in an ongoing way, reminds me this is important in my daily practice as a teacher-leader.

In the examples I related about dialogue with teachers, students and parents, we began to speak openly, although hesitatingly, with some norms to help guide us. This was a deliberately cultivated environment, much the same way in which my exhibit space was deliberately structured by Hiro, so it was a fitting forum to build the foundation for action. It is not without some risk that one goes public showing one's work before others, just as it is not without risk that school participants go public in the stories I related, but not to do so will result in belatedness and action is not possible. It is in the rich opportunities that are available to me as a practitioner that occur in the "in-between" relationship in my practices, that space that Arendt talks of as being no less real. To get to the place at the conclusion of my fourth year in the teacher-leader position did not happen suddenly, but perhaps began when I first arrived at that school and I asked people what their thoughts were about our school? What was working well, what wasn't and what changes did they believe needed to occur or appear? Some staff were surprised that I cared, some were suspicious and some asked why didn't I go about doing things as they had always been done instead of wasting time talking? I had some replies, perhaps twenty-per cent of the staff, but the school culture was not an environment where staff members were accustomed to speaking openly, let alone with each other about an educational concern. I wanted to engage with people and was perplexed when this apparently wasn't reciprocal.

Perhaps it was my background as an artist, in part, that kept me in the game, kept working away, figuring there must be some way for me to have a genuine insertion (I probably thought in terms of “making a difference”) in the life of the school. For in attaining some expertise in any art, it is the consistency of working at the craft, listening and getting to know the particular qualities of the clays and paints, the patient shaping of the work to a particular image, the understanding of the complexities and many permutations that the same materials can give that made me become even more engaged with the potential of my efforts. In my art many times I am more interested in the process than the product and this was where I truly tried to become involved in that same space with teachers – not determining an outcome, but truly listening to them in the day to day conversations that we had in labour and work that built our foundations for working together. Now, Arendt said that in the world of the polis or space of appearances, few were able to enter. In the space of appearances that is in schools, as the teacher-leader, I need to provide entry points for all who wish to do so and nudge, perhaps push even those who don’t. For as Arendt said *In the Crisis in Education*, (1961) we must love our children enough to create a common world and it is only through acting and speaking and attempting to understand each other that we may begin to do this. In the same manner in which I provide a space for my work to be talked about as an artist, where we may have different views, so must I provide spaces for those in the schools that I work within.

There is another aspect of the exhibit of an artist that bears similarity to the first day of school staff meeting. Everyone looks forward with some sort of anticipation toward both events. At the opening of an exhibit the artist’s work is in the public forum. Even though

I remove myself as much as I am able to from being identified with my work, to be separate, so the work is judged rather than me, there remains an element that is not entirely detached. It is hard to do this as an artist. Arendt says that we may readily judge the work without knowing anything about the artist; it is not necessary to know the “who” attached to the work and “an art work retains its relevance whether or not we know the master’s name” (1958, p.181). She further says that if I as a principal disclose myself in acting, then I reveal “who” I am. Without action, there is no revelation.

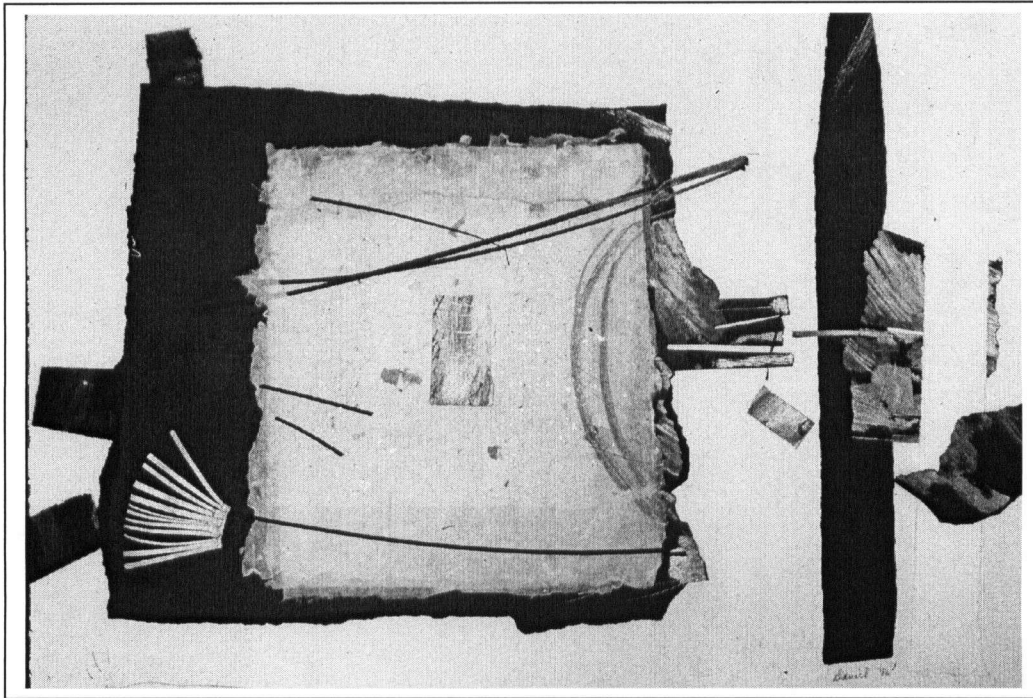
I have done my best in both practice worlds to prepare for “the opening” day of school and exhibit; the judgment of both publics goes on long after that important showing in both settings. As a teacher-leader, I reflect on my work and look to those I work with to inform me about how I have done. As an artist, I too become the critic of the work I have completed. It seems removed from me so that it is almost as though someone else has done it. This remoteness of my work from me is an unusual sensation as I attempt to look at, examine the work through new eyes, to listen to the critics as I become my own critic. However, as an artist, once the work is out there in the public world, much as the work of my teacher-leader position is in the world, the work lives on as an actual mark of what I have completed. The work cannot be changed, but my actions as an artist have the possibility to re-invent my work again, to re-discover an aspect I was not aware of before and so a similar lesson can be learned for my teacher leader work. As I do in the public space of the exhibit, where I attempt to have a somewhat detached stance in observing, listening and participating, these are lessons that are important in my leadership space between my practices.

That leadership practice has the blessing as well as the burden of “how we have always done things in the past,” for Kitsilano benefits from our reputation and tradition of both having good programmes and addressing the needs of all students. In my fourth year as a teacher-leader, I continue to venture into a realm fraught with the potential for dissonance and disappointment. But, again, not to do this would be to keep us enmeshed in the social and the belatedness of not acting. My challenge continues to have what Adler called “courage, courage” for myself as a leader to move forward and to further “encourage” teachers in arriving at a place where they examine their practice as separate from their personhood, much the same way I attempt to separate my art work from who I, actually am, while also wanting them to own how they teach children. I recognize that this distancing from myself is so important in forming relationships where we are better able to act and to love. In working with the clay, most particularly the Raku process, the Japanese tea masters had an air of distance, and the forms have frequently been hand-paddled or thrown on the wheel and then deliberately misshapen, to an untutored eye, perhaps even distorted, always fashioned by masters who have earned the right to this manipulation. Perhaps this state of the artist is similar as formulated in Kant’s perspective (Villa, 1996 p.103) where “genuine aesthetic experience and judgment presuppose the achievement of a disinterested attitude.” These masters of clay are engaged in the experience of making, constructing while at the same time dispassionately with apparent care and love, forming, creating and judging the quality of their wares. It is in a similar state of mind or space that I as an educator wish to approach my roles with the blend of objectivity yet care, respect, love, affiliation and the hope that the same goods of relationships we cultivate in private may lead to better public dialogue. Within

the narratives of both the public and private in schools, there needs to be an understanding of the “webs” of relationships as articulated by Arendt.

In order to form identities in our individual and collective relationships, certain “goods” or conditions are required. I have attempted to show the necessity of developing private spaces to nurture understandings that might be later revealed with greater assurance in public. I hope that providing some of these spaces, nurturing natality amongst the plurality of others in the forming of our relationships, recognizing that belatedness need not preclude action, and struggling with and being awake to our internal dialogues might offer structures to promote Arendtian action.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**THE IN-BETWEEN**



It is the end of May in my fourth year as teacher-leader. The sun is finally shining after a seemingly cold, damp Spring, and our students are feeling that it is time for them to leave the school which has been for some, their second home. It is a challenge for all of us to keep them engaged before the year end provincial exams and cross-grades, before the school leaving ceremonies and I hear the same comments as I have since I began as a teacher, and probably also made myself:

“It’s worse this year than ever before!” I’m not sure what is worse, but the teacher continues, “The students just aren’t working as hard as they should,” Can’t you do something about teachers dismissing their students early? I don’t

know about the others, but I have work to do with them to get them ready!”

“When are you sending a memo out to tell teachers what their responsibilities are?”

I am reminded of the work and labour at the beginning of the year, constant throughout the year in my teacher-leader practice and the practices of others in school. I try to draw on those elements that are so unvarying in my artist’s practice such as my optimism that things will work out, a solution will be found, the conclusion of the piece is in sight, and that the privacy of conversations that foster relationships, are crucial (and the fact I have no time to work on my art at this time of year is truly a frustration). However, the studio in my yard remains undisturbed, a true work reminder of this important practice in my life.

Am I romanticizing the spaces available to me as an artist as compared to those accessible to me as a teacher-leader? Perhaps. I long dreamed of having my own studio space and I have it now. My studio space is a sanctuary in and for my mind where I can labour and work in private and prepare for the public world of exhibitions. In contrast, my principal’s office seems a fishbowl: I struggle to find spaces for sanctuary and for private conversations that might offer others and me the same sustenance as my studio does for me as an artist. The optimistic lens through which I view my artist practice parallels Arendt’s views of the public/private dichotomy where the privacy of home and intimate relationships is a safe haven to prepare to appear in a more public (and dangerous) space.

According to Benhabib, (1996, pp.126-127) Arendt's public space is a place where people are both visible and together. Benhabib writes: "the two....dimensions of the public realm are (a) its quality as *a space of appearance* and (b) its quality of being *a common world*" (p.128). Indeed, by including two criteria for dividing private from public, Arendt softens the dichotomy and creates a continuum: a space is more private or more public depending on relative openness and collectivity. My actions as an artist or teacher-leader might be visible, but others may not be able to influence what I do; in contrast, others may be able to influence what I try to do, but not be able to inspect my actions. Arendtian action involves both dimensions of what she understands as public; labour and work, however, require some degree of privacy on either or both dimensions. Let me try to provide some examples.

In the privacy of my studio, if I fail to labour or work well, I can try again without others being involved or even knowing. Certainly I do not like to fail in my private space, but I know that while creating, I will not always be successful. Indeed, many things may be learned through failure, but it is my experience as an artist that is somewhat more palatable if this failure is not witnessed by others! If there has been no public documentation of this event, then it is easier to move forward. When I showed my clay work to Hiro before the Raku exhibit, for example, I did not show him all of the pieces that I believed had been a disaster during my Raku firings – the pieces that cracked or shattered in the firing process, or just plain didn't attain a standard I had set myself. I didn't want to show him my failures, only those works that I considered beautiful and compelled me to keep on trying; I needed this private space if only to acknowledge

failure to myself and to keep on pressing. My labour and work, however, had prepared me to expand the private world of my studio to include Hiro, that is, to make my studio more public. Hiro, in turn, helped me prepare for the next, more public and dangerous step, the exhibition. In that public, it doesn't matter how removed I might try to be from my art, an aspect of the work still retains my artist's mark; I too am being judged. As an artist, I need to go into the dangerous public world of the exhibit, inviting critical responses in order to develop, to improve, to create new action. I also need to prepare myself carefully for that effort.

In my teacher-leader practice, however, I seem to lack private spaces in which to prepare for the essential, but dangerous, public world. Indeed, my teacher-leader practice is very visible to parents, students, teachers and senior management, who are very much with me in my practice – and aware of my labour and work failures. In advocating the development of more private spaces in which to labour and work in my teacher-leader practice, perhaps I have also romanticized those spaces. While I realize that I need some degree of privacy to work with teachers and students, I know that such spaces can also foster an abuse of authority. There is a potential imbalance of power in private spaces and rather than being places to nurture webs of relationships with others and to prepare for the public of action, such spaces may become spaces of bullying and intimidation. What might have happened during the student protest if teachers had not recognized the sincerity of the students' actions? I think back to the relatively private space of the classroom where Mr. Newman thoughtlessly made his crushing comment to me about my desire to be an artist. I think about my office where by virtue of position there is the

potential to exert good or bad influence on visitors. Indeed, when I have parents visit me, they frequently mention unpleasant memories of the principal's office when they were students and they bring these memories to our conversations.

Benhabib writes that there are negative and positive aspects of the private and the public and ultimately supports Arendt's conception that we do depend upon this duality to maintain a sense of hope and possibility.

The binary of the public and the private spheres must be reconstructed, and not merely rejected.... for, as Hannah Arendt has so well shown, without a robust private sphere, which fulfills our needs for intimacy, domesticity, and individuality, we would exist only in the glare of the light of the public that is all-consuming. The recovery of the public world is impossible and unlikely without a parallel reconstruction of the private sphere. (pp.214-215).

Such reconstruction involves substantial review of the private-public relationship. The hallways of Kitsilano, for example, are both public and private spaces. Clearly the hallways are public in the sense that whatever happens is visible for all to see. But the hallways are also, in important ways, private spaces in which groups of students can be together. In the section claimed by Grade 12 students, young adults struggle to emerge as "who they are" as they look toward the future; they try on and test out various roles with one another. Younger students and teachers often feel like intruders in this area. The senior students are learning significant lessons (not all of them good) that are distinct

from the official curriculum of the school; they are preparing to go into a more public arena. Like the grade 12s I too need privacy in my practices as an artist and teacher-leader in order to prepare to appear in a more public world.

It has become evident to me throughout my writing that the labour and work as teacher-leader and artist are critically important to my practices. Engaging thoughtfully in my labour and work grounds me in being mindful of the importance of ensuring a solid foundation, maintaining links with all aspects of the *vita activa* that my practices require of me. Though the results of labour and work are more predictable, this stability is necessary to foster action; it is more often in action that the unexpected may occur, which is one of the joys when the result is favourable and one of the perils when it is not.

The pattern of labour and work evident at the beginning of the year (and the beginning of this paper) is also in the Spring air as teachers and students plan and prepare for year end exams, post their marks, get ready for concluding their year's labour and work. Adults repeat the same statements to students, exhorting them to be safe in their year-end activities, requesting that they look after each other, asking that they study hard, encouraging them, and hoping they listen as our community gathers to support them. We want to trust that our students will act responsibly, exercise their natality amidst a culture that values conformity, that they will think about how they act in the world, and the consequences of their actions. It is also my hope that by writing my thoughts on Arendt's *vita activa* that I have provided insight as to how her resources have been powerful in helping to shape who I am as I work with others in my practices. As I approach the

conclusion of this thesis, I recognize that if you have remained with me and not wandered off, you have been a good listener and as such I would like to insert the following dialogue to give you my appreciation for the gift a good listener extends to another. I too have valued the listening of others and their presence in my life and I will speak of another forum later in the chapter where listening has been critically important as to where I am in my practices and life. But first, the quote:

“You know, it’s so very rare to find a good audience for one’s story. Most people get restless when a stranger tells them about his life. But you were a perfect listener.”

“Oh, I enjoyed listening. It shortened the journey. Besides, your life is so interesting.”

“You are very kind. Let me tell you a secret: there is no such thing as an uninteresting life.”

“Try mine.”

“I would love to. One day you must tell me your full and complete story, unabridged and unexpurgated. You must. We will set aside some time for it, and meet. It’s very important.”

Maneck smiled. “Why is it important?”

Mr. Valmik’s eyes grew wide. “You don’t know? It’s extremely important because it helps to remind yourself of who you are. Then you can go forward, without fear of losing yourself in this ever-changing world.” (Mistry, 1995, pp.700-701)

Maneck exemplifies the rewards of respectful listening...one of the goods so important to developing relationships to sustain us. He helped Mr. Valmik “remind” him of “who” he was and where he came from. It reawakened Mr. Valmik and offered him an opening for renewal, again as Elaine and David had done for me in the gallery context. Such listening is an essential aspect in the previous chapter on action in addition to the goods of dialogue that are fundamental to developing relationships in private and public spaces. Though Maneck and Mr. Valmik were strangers on the train, they engaged each other for the time they had on the overnight journey, to learn about each other. Maneck was the younger, attentive listener, and Mr. Valmik sought to give encouragement to help him begin to recognize that our stories, all stories, are worth being told and listened to, and that finding opportunities to tell our stories, reminds us of who we are, and our dreams who we might become. Hiro, David, Elaine, and Mr. Hutchinson are a few of the valued, trusted others who have encouraged me by speaking to me, listening to me, while reminding me of my natality and uniqueness amidst the plurality of others. This fostering of my natality encouraged me and further gave me heart to act in the world as Arendt understood action.

#### Where the “In-between” Began for Me

When I began this paper, I posed the following question about my practices.

Is this [the in-between] where each practice informs the other and if I am better able to understand each role and how they connect or intersect, will I be better

able to shift my practice from what Arendt identifies as “labour and work” towards “action,” becoming both a better leader and artist? Within the realm of “in-between” where the artist and teacher-leader roles inform each other, I am pursuing an understanding of the rich complexity of practice within this space (p.15).

While you have interpreted my exploration of Arendt’s labour, work and action, her triumvirate of the *vita activa*, and my explanations of the merging of the in-between in my practices as a teacher-leader and artist within this framework, I have reflected upon how I have come to be in this place of examining my practice in this way. Perhaps it is as Arendt reminds us: our life story is not truly known until we have died and others reinterpret it. While I have not yet, and do not wish to depart this earthly realm, I believe that the writing I have been doing is similar in concept to the work of art, in Arendtian terms. The writing has been an exploration, much the same way I paint or work in clay; it has truly led to a transformation. It has also been a struggle as I conclude both writing and art work, to maintain that separateness and objectivity of the spectator, in coming to some judgment as to the goodness of my writing, the goodness of my art and the goodness of my practices as a teacher-leader and artist. It is a challenge for me to remain a spectator while doing this writing much as it is to remain an observer of my artwork after it is completed. Yet, this distance is important since I too wish to remain a spectator with a somewhat detached view as I attempt to present an exhibit while comments are made about my art. Perhaps this is what people mean when they say, before making a comment that they know may appear spurious, “Now, don’t take this personally, but ...”

I think this may be a generous way of observing this comment, but I also know that the spectator or observer of my art and my practice has an objectivity that I as an artist and teacher-leader need to maintain in my practices. I somehow need to stand outside or at a distance from both practices and I think I can do this on some level in this in-between space where I intermesh both practices with each other, where each practice may contribute to the other.

### The In-between: Observing Practice

In writing this paper, I have begun to recognize the importance of another practice that I am engaged in: that of being a spectator, or observer, by being a student, which also sustains my teacher-leader and artist practices. The spaces I have sought as a student have offered me refuge, sustenance, and have assisted me in feeling apart from others, yet to be with others in three private/public groups where we have been required to be actors as well as spectators. It is in these spaces where I began to see Arendt's concept of action as a possible reality. Again, in my first section, I highlighted the importance Arendt gave to being both spectator and actor and that "living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them. The stage is common to all who are alive; but it *seems* different to each species, different also to each individual specimen." (1978, p. 21)

Further that:

And just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the

location for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence. (pp. 21-22)

In my world as an artist and teacher-leader, in the “space of appearances” where webs of relationships with my “fellow-creatures” may be formed, I have worked towards “action” and understand action in the Arendtian sense to help me become a better actor and spectator in the “in-between” of both professional roles. These groups met in protected private spaces where we tried to be observers of our practices. I think of these meetings occurring more in private even though initially we did not come together as friends or intimates; we were sheltered from the wider public, yet these groups also shared aspects of a public by engaging in dialogue with the primary focus of examining our practices. Bound together to keep confidentiality, to listen, to come to trust and respect while we learned about our common concerns, we also came to common understandings without being concerned about common agreement. Again, it is in retrospect of reviewing my writing for this dissertation and my artwork in the context of Arendt’s action that I recognize how important these groups have been for me to experience renewal and provide encouragement, even courage, to act in both my practices. An explanation of why these groups became so important to me follows, although I doubt I can transmit the exact or true importance of these settings for me in helping me to be able to observe my practices while being immersed in them.

The first group began for me in 1998 when I enrolled in the Educational Leadership programme at UBC where, as a cohort of thirteen professionals, we moved together as

very separate individuals, yet as a distinct group during the last five years. The context of the group provided the opportunity for us to be relatively equal, yet distinct, where we were to speak and act together, yet differently in the plurality of others. Prior to joining the cohort, I had been a sessional instructor in Visual and Performing Arts and the Teacher Education programme at UBC for fourteen years, and I had had opportunities to enroll in doctoral programmes. These programmes, however, held little appeal for me in part because I could see no real relation to my practice life of 'doing' or in Arendt's terms, the *vita activa*. To study for a doctorate, I believed at the time, would remove me from my practice world and place me more in a separate life of thought only, Arendt's *vita contempliva*. Not that this form of life is to be scorned, but like the students I spoke of in the last section who found the meaning in their life in schools in the supporting activities of their education, I too find great significance in my practice lives. So, when I read that there was a professional degree that focused on the meshing of educational research with contributions that my practice makes to teaching and leading, I was immediately interested in this "in-between" of research and practice. And the bonus was that there were also others interested in sharing their narratives and we were being invited to speak to our practices as we listened to others! I believe in the chapter on action, I illustrated the power of speaking, being listened to, acknowledging differences in the realm of action. The UBC Educational Studies programme has been a primary driver for me to begin to act in the way I have in my teacher-leader practice in particular by providing a forum for me to speak as well as to be a more reflective spectator. I'll extrapolate on this area later in this chapter.

The second group I joined three years ago, is a Teacher Research as Communicative Action (TRCA) group where teachers, students, administrators, university practitioners and teacher federation representatives came together on a regular basis to discuss teacher research. The third group is an informal writing group of four of us who are at all stages in writing, where we meet to discuss our progress, or lack of it, with each other.

All of these groups have come about because I am a student, through my continuing to go out into the wider public of education and becoming involved with wanting to make not only my life 'better' but the lives of those I work with better. The groups have provided a setting for me to gain insight into my practices and through being offered the opportunity of being a spectator, I believe I am better able to act as a practitioner in part because of this "in-between" space where we as a cohort were actors and spectators and students.

All three groups are important to me and offer different elements to my life and my practices, but fundamentally, it is in the cohort space in educational studies where our webs of relationships formed, where our conversations opened doorways for me to observe better and be a better practitioner. Indeed, I find it hard to comprehend me acting as I do in my teacher-leader space in particular without having my thinking challenged in the action that occurred during our conversations as a cohort. This has been life-changing for me.

I enrolled in the Ed. D. programme before I became the principal of Kitsilano and the opportunity to discuss my practices within this context has offered me many ways of viewing my world that I most likely would not have found on my own, and it is here

where I was introduced to the writings of Arendt. Having always regarded myself as an artist, somehow, I began to want to further understand how I inserted my artistic self into my teacher-leader practice. I thought I lead differently than other teacher-leaders I knew because of my artistic background and experience, and an in-between space began to develop in this programme that helped me bridge my two practices. The kernel of recognizing the importance of this in-between for me was in our cohort's telling of and listening to our stories, in the following first big 'assignment' on educational leadership.

An aspect of my life story was listened to as intently as Maneck listened to Mr. Valmick by my classmate Larry Sproule in the introductory seminar where Larry and I interviewed each other. While the word 'interview' sounds so clinical, it wasn't like that at all, but the truth was that we had met each other a only few days before and initially, the idea of this assignment held little appeal for me. I think of myself as a private person, I have my own friendships where I express my personal thoughts, ideas, fears and I did not like the idea of revealing these private feelings to those I don't know particularly well, as was the case with Larry. I also was to listen to Larry and write about him and we were perhaps unwitting partners, structuring our time together to come to a common understanding. In retrospect, perhaps this was not all that different a situation than the one I structured last June with the teachers around the social responsibility rubrics. Such a structure, I have come to learn, is necessary to set the norms and parameters so that action may occur. Kristeva elaborates (2002, pp. 16-17):

for a true history to become a narrated history, there are two inseparable conditions. First, the existence of an *inter-esse* within which and through which the second condition is realized. The fate of the narrative depends on an 'in between' where we eventually see the resolving logic of memorization as detachment from the lived *ex post facto*. On these conditions alone, the 'fact' can be revealed in 'shareable thought' through the verbalization of a 'plot'.

Our cohorts' assignment was to unearth incidents, issues, people, who had decisively imprinted our lives as educational leaders and describe how these events informed our educational practices. Larry carefully asked me questions, listened attentively to my answers, gently prodded me for details, and eloquently wrote a fresh truth of his view of my life story to share with me and others. In his completed interpretation, he reminded me of what I thought so important, the roots I emerged from, and offered me a changed understanding and perspective of "who I am." This had a totally unexpected effect on me and again, illustrates the vagaries of action when we speak and act together. It also reminded me of the importance of trying to see from another perspective, or observe anew, that which I thought I knew so well. The poem Larry wrote so thoughtfully, respectfully, continues to resonate with me years later (see appendix 1.) As a matter of fact, the poem so moved me at that time in my life, I still have not shared it with any one in my private personal life – closest friends, family and lover - the only people who have read this story and listened to it so intently, are those who began with me in the cohort as I too read and listened to their stories. I am still not able to answer the reason why fully, but I suggest that much of it has to do with the norms we established as a cohort as we

learned 'how to be' in this world as students. In my private life, we just 'are' and it is in my practice life that I try to bring in more of what we experienced in the cohort. In my private life we have established our norms – and not to say they cannot change, but there is love, understanding, compassion, honesty, openness, that allows us to make assumptions. So, why haven't I shown this most revealing work that Larry completed? Could there be something so private that a stranger could unearth? Perhaps it is because in the context of the family one assumes that there will be the same kind of sympathy, empathy in reading the story a stranger wrote and I am concerned that it will not be taken as seriously because my family knows me so well. Perhaps it is because my family and friends were not a part of the conversation and I don't know how I can, or if I can, bring them into this particular space. The poem is so important to me that I don't know how, or perhaps am not ready to give those same norms to family members before they read it. We are different with family. Perhaps it is easier to insert oneself with a group one is not so familiar with, in a space that is more public, even though it is in the privacy of a classroom. Perhaps because there is little history in this new place, where we can reveal ourselves and be seen as new amongst the plurality of others and perhaps this is the real difference between a private and public space that we live and work in.

I recognize that the constructed context of the situation in this class is important in looking back. It was a sunny summer's day at the UBC campus in lush verdant surroundings. Doors to the low-rise buildings were open and warm breezes moved in and out of our classroom. We were relaxed after our morning class, but we also shared some anxiousness about how the assignment to interview each other would go (in retrospect, I

can well imagine our professor felt anxious about the assignment as well as this is not the usual work of a graduate class!). Our professor had well thought-out the routines for our work together, so there were certain pre-arranged norms all of us knew and accepted we were to engage in: respectful listening; questioning to elicit information and learn, not to trip someone up; trusting that what was said would be kept private unless and until permission had been given to share; and the need and opportunity to exchange ideas, thoughts, concepts with each other to get the assignment done! Each of us also had to bring food, an offering, to one break during our sessions. It represented a norm of care for others as well as a contribution to our time together. These norms were not optional if any of us had any thoughts about disregarding them. So, the webs of relationships that Arendt had so passionately maintained as giving our lives meaning, were being developed in our classroom where we were learning as adults. I don't believe any of us was truly consciously aware of this at the time, but we were aware of how much we were engaged and enjoyed our time together as learners and teachers in this "in-between" space. Again, when I look back at this time, perhaps as a more detached spectator, it became evident to many of us in our class of professionals who were now students, that in our cohort our practice as learners and leaders was shifting from being mainly practitioners to the "in-between" space where we are both actors and spectators in our practice worlds. In my practices, the following illustrates how this began for me.

During our initial dialogue Larry and I were hesitant but soon were able to feel at ease and began to trust each other and feel what we have as a group (most particularly Larry) come to call "safe." Throughout this programme, Larry articulated the importance of

this “safe” more private space of our cohort in the public of others that seemed to be limited in our practice lives. Larry is an agreeable personality who approached me with great sensitivity and care, but as mentioned, our ease with doing this assignment was due in large part to the structure of the course and the care and insistence with which our professor approached us in developing our norms with us for working together. I do not begin to imply that this was easy for him to do or for us to engage in a conscious manner at all times. It wasn’t, but it cannot be emphasized enough how important this setting up of the structured space was for the achievement of our telling, writing and listening to our stories. And I believe achievement is the accurate word.

While on the surface level, Larry and I were telling our stories, we were also beginning to develop a relationship that included an element not readily defined. There was risk on both our parts to share what is important and somewhat private, to each of us. My thoughts ran to, “Will he think I am simple, too much of the heart and too little of the mind?” (Somehow, the heart doesn’t seem to have the same credence as the intellectual capacity we measure ourselves with.) The emotion I had experienced on my mother’s recent untimely death was still so raw for me and while I view myself as reserved and private, if I was going to tell him what was important in underlying principles in forming my educational mission, vision, agenda I needed to speak of some of the formative things my mother had taught me about her beliefs in education. This truly was difficult, but with those elements of trust, safety, put in place by our professor, and Larry’s respectful listening, I hesitantly moved forward in relaying what truly had meaning for me in my educational life. It seems easier to reflect upon what was happening while we were

narrating our personal histories, but I believe Larry and I were nurturing what Arendt calls the “in-between” in our conversations. Arendt, in *The Human Condition* eloquently explains that:

Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. Since this disclosure of the subject is an integral part of all, even the most “objective” intercourse, the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men’s acting and speaking directly *to* one another. This second, subjective in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results and end products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the “web” of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality. (1958, pp.182-183)

During our time together, while Larry and I verbalized “our plots,” listening to and sharing each others stories, constructing our conversations and reading our writings over and over, we began to develop a new understanding about ourselves, and the understanding of the “in between.” I had shared my stories and they had been acknowledged and recognized as being worthy by Larry whose care, respect, and trust,

presented a new view of my story for others and me to reflect upon. While Larry and I developed our relationship, also emerging was the intangible bond spoken of by Arendt, but no less real, as part of our relationship. But this was only the beginning for us in our cohort as we continued on our educational journey. As part of the course requirements, we were to share our written narratives with our classmates. Apprehensive again about this public revealing of our thoughts, our cohort came to develop and know through this thoughtful dialogue and active listening, what Arendt called “the enlarged mentality.” We were moved by the stories we shared with each other and once again, the “webs of relationships” provided an opportunity for very powerful learning for us as students in relationship with the plurality of each other. While learning about one another we were also learning about ourselves and discovering who we were as people in the world with others, becoming part of learning in a greater way than any of us had begun to imagine. This was very powerful for us as individuals, but the question we now asked was, “How can this kind of learning have meaning in our lives as leaders in educational institutions?”

In elaborating on some of my stories Larry wrote about, glimpses of the impact they have had on my practice as a student, artist, and teacher-leader are naturally revealed. While there is overlap in the roles, the role of student is consistent throughout. It seems I have always been a student, and through being a student I have been able to position myself as a spectator in imagining what effects my actions have upon others, and developing new relationships. Being a student to me does not mean only being enrolled in classes, but it means continuing to be a learner, being “awake” to the opportunities around us and I continue to be a learner in my role as a teacher-leader and as an artist. Indeed, I believe it

is because I have been a student in the nurturing place of the cohort as well as the other two research settings, that through speech and action with others, I became awake to what might be possible in my practice worlds. I became more consciously aware of how my practice as an artist helped to shape my practice as a teacher-leader, and those same goods that were offered to me in my private artist spaces before I eventually went public, could nurture natality and plurality within the community I work with as a teacher-leader. I think that being nurtured in these private spaces, speaking to others and being listened to is the foundation for me to be able to act in my practice as a teacher-leader.

Speaking, listening and observing as part of this group in private assisted in nudging me to act and speak with my school community, prompting and encouraging me to offer others I work with the confidence, courage and thoughtfulness for them to act as I had been given in the UBC group. Study in the cohort and my personal research provided further links for me to act in my artist world, where for example, in my conversations with Elaine and David, I was reminded how I had neglected this most important aspect of my life, and how I needed to return to the labour, work and action in my artist's studio. I too was reminded of the importance of the metaphor of Raku in my life where, trial by fire enabled pieces of incredible beauty to emerge. My practice as an artist and the recognition of the importance of this practice in my life has embraced me, protected my sense of creating myself, and offered me a bridge between practices. Creating my art is hard work; creating conditions for action too is hard work. As a teacher-leader, I know that the same care I take as an artist in doing the labour and work must be attended to in my teacher-leader practice so that I might foster the requisite "webs of relationships."

We are frail, strong, subject to belatedness, comfortable where we are in the social, yet we need to be rattled, shook, recognize that we do have agency and that we do have freedom, no matter how we have been conditioned by our earlier upbringing or current surroundings. Through action in Arendt's sense, we have the opportunity for a re-birth, to be reborn into the world, to be renewed amidst the plurality of others. How can we not take this offer?

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APPENDIX ONE:

MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME HOW TO READ  
AN EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY WITH MARY DANIEL

BY: LARRY SPROULE

My mother was old Amish from southern Ontario,

But a teacher took an interest in her and her sister

And encouraged learning.

She had lost her parents at an early age.

The elders would only allow her to go to grade 10,

So one day she escaped.

She couldn't help looking back

And so she was never really free,

Never really free of her past.

In escaping, she sinned you see.

But she never went back, she had us instead.

And old Swiss Bishops like Jacob Amman,

So long dead,

Were never able to set their withering scowls

Upon her again.

Father came from the land,

That jewel set in a silver sea,

Where labour begot labour,

Sweat begot sweat,  
Only privilege begot land.  
He heard the call of the new world,  
And followed the echo  
Across the sea, to be free.

And they, my mom and dad, read to me,  
Or should I say us.  
Four children, three daughters, one son, within six years.  
But I was the first.  
Like something magical,  
The books, the reading and me.  
Beautiful books, poetry, pictures, fairy tales;  
Mother even had the Encyclopedia Britannica.  
One day my kindergarten teacher came home  
And talked with my mother,  
And said, "You see, here's how to help."  
And our mother loved us so.

Oh, to form words and to write,  
How wonderful!  
I have that Grade 2 workbook still  
(kept so carefully all these years by my dear mother).

And music came with the teacher of Grade 2  
Who loved kids and music in equal measure.  
On Saturday mornings  
Dad often took me to piano lessons.  
By Grade seven I thought art my calling,  
But the school principal said, “no way,  
You’re far too messy!”  
But the teacher of Grade eight said, “you can do anything”  
And everything seemed possible.  
Music, art, academics – all valued as the norm;  
Physics, chemistry, and the arts,  
Equally thoughtful pursuits.  
School was good.  
It was a different life than home  
With a kind of order, a different structure,  
And belonging to a group of people.  
Meeting people,  
developing friends  
finding my own way.  
At home I loved authority.  
When mother worked  
I took over and  
Unintentionally

Systematically  
Alienated my two sisters,  
But not my brother.  
I was very independent,  
A better than average student,  
Thoughtful in my own way.  
And my mother loved me.  
When I was a teenager, she  
Bought me this magazine, "Ingenué".  
Her background was so different than mine,  
alone so young,  
she wanted me to know it was alright to  
feel like a teenager.  
  
But life changed.  
Dad was a diesel technician  
On an airforce base where we lived as civilians  
Without rank, without face,  
But more equal because rank free.  
Outsiders in more ways than one;  
Thought it didn't affect me so much;  
Until the change. One day in Grade 12  
We moved from southern Ontario

To northern Saskatchewan.  
A fish on land,  
A bird without wings,  
A social slicker  
Dumped in the country;  
I was isolated and felt it.  
But I worked hard  
And was a good student.  
And when Mr. Hutchison said,  
“Surely you’re going to university?”  
I hardly knew what to think.  
“Why not apply for scholarships,” he said.  
“What a wonderful idea,” mother thought.  
And dad took me away to school  
In his car.  
I was 17, glad to separate,  
Glad to move on.  
For them, always a sense of wonder,  
That was me.  
They both worked with their hands  
So to become more learned  
Was a privilege;  
Ability something to be valued.

Never underestimate the power of a suggestion,

Listen,

The road blocks are coming down,

The doors are opening,

Listen, shift,

And move on. Things change.

But take care my dear,

Remember there is a responsibility

To take care of others.

Your sisters will take care of each other

But remember your brother,

Will you forget him on your journey?

Care for one another,

This overrides everything else.

But I was only 17

And mostly self-centered,

Just glad to go away

To Regina, to university, to art school.

There was a huge buzz

And energy and excitement;

Clement Greenberg (who was he?)

Had just been there  
From New York.  
Painting was my real love  
And there were incredible artists  
At the art school.  
But then I became involved with clay  
And discovered a real affinity.  
To feel and work with my hands,  
My thumbs and my fingers.  
To make articulate in a kind of silence that which I was so unable to speak.  
And oh my teacher, absolutely incredible, who  
Mentored and encouraged,  
Who directed craft and technique,  
(never be hindered by lack of expertise)  
but who saw beyond.  
“They’re only tools,” he said,  
“they can’t say it all on their own,  
they need to be pushed.”  
“Poor craftsmanship is not an excuse for art.”  
  
And my work was chosen, (you’re so young!),  
Chosen to be exhibited  
In urban Ontario, in Toronto.

And I won more recognition  
Than my teacher, my mentor.  
He only gently, and perhaps embarrassed, smiled.  
But I knew whose work was better  
I knew.

Be supportive of others, I learned,  
Be encouraging and provide insight  
Based on substance, and speak truthfully.  
There are different ways of knowing;  
We learn differently;  
Our search for meaning is our own.  
But listen;  
questions asked continue to inform my practice,  
questions asked provoke far-reaching responses,  
like the question of my brother; remember;  
take care.

He quit school quite suddenly  
Two months before finishing grade 12  
And became a heavy duty mechanic;  
A respectable choice like Dad.  
Then we met and talked;  
And he embraced social work; then teaching;

Poor Dad almost went nuts.

My brother John and I

Have a lot in common.

We enjoy being together,

Arguing and talking,

Exchanging ideas.

Like when we went to Mexico not so long ago,

With Mom,

After Dad died.

And we talked about education,

But Mom only listened.

She was very very quiet.

In her silence we suddenly saw her alone,

Alone without Dad.

“You’re so quiet Mom. Speak up.”

But she said,

“I don’t feel I can understand  
your conversation.

You’re educated

And I’m not.”

And I felt so badly,

So badly that today I weep

Though then I slid the feeling out of the way.

"Your interests and knowledge are different," she said.

Education had created a separation,

And I felt badly.

Not so long ago,

My mother died,

Suddenly.

My mother taught me how to read,

But she forgot to teach me,

How to be alone.