Down the Rabbit Hole: A Fantastical First Year of Teaching

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Down the Rabbit Hole

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ABSTRACT

Interviews and observations of first year teachers in the northeastern United States were used to construct a comic. The comic communicates the excitement, fears, and competing demands of a beginning teacher. The dialogue and setting are presented as surrealist to help the reader gain an understanding of the affective realities that the teachers expressed when describing their early teaching experiences. This approach allows for the multiple dimensions of the teachers' lived experiences to be experienced in ways that a traditional text does not allow. The work takes a critical look at the transition of beginning teachers into their careers and is meant to trouble notions of standardization in both teacher preparation and curriculum design. This arts-based approach recognizes performance as both a method of investigation and representation (Worthen, 1998). Given that public education is often a prominent part of societal discourse, this modality allows the reader the opportunity to make meaning of the data by experiencing the words on the page (Leavy, 2009). The illustrations allow the reader to experience the words differently than traditional text. In this way, dramatizing the data is a form of critical pedagogy (Denzin, 2006).

Keywords: arts based research, practice based research, a/r/tography, urban education, teacher preparation
50% of teachers leave the profession within 5 years.

16% change schools.

17% never return to teaching.

Many cry in their car on their way home from work...
I AM A TEACHER!

I DID IT.
HUH?

WH-WHA-

TRIP

DANGER: HOLE

AAAAAHHHH
Ms. Lambert, first grade.
Latitude 40.268336.
Longitude -74.777965.
Curious.

Rub Rub
MMPH...

I'm a teacher, I'm a teacher,
so so fun, so so fun,

My students will adore me,
I will make a difference,
Watch me teach, watch them learn!
Huh?

Slam

Excuse me, sir. What are you doing?

I'm bringin' in 'da desks.

But I already have desks?

I'm just doin' what I'm told. 'Dey said ya need more desks.

How many?

27. For now.
Hey kid.

You're gonna need this too.

Good luck.

What to expect when you're expecting 25 to 30 students who may or may not be prepared, may or may not be experiencing trauma.

Hey.

C'mere.

Who is there?
OH, HELLO?

Hmmm...

WHAT? NO, YOU SHOULDN'T GO?

CLICK

WHA-T? NO, YOU SHOULDN'T GO?

NAH, I'M JUST KIDDING. SO, YOU A GOOD GUY, OR A BAD GUY?

NAH, I'M JUST KIDDIN'. SO, YOU A GOOD GUY, OR A BAD GUY?

WELL, A GOOD GUY.... GIRL---PERSON, OF COURSE?

I'M ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ENEMIES.... I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN WEEKS?

I'M ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ENEMIES.... I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN WEEKS?

I AM SORRY FOR THAT. BUT, I AM CERTAINLY NOT AN ENEMY.
WELL, WHAT ARE YOU?

I - I'M A TEACHER!

A LIKELY STORY. NO, YOU'RE NO GOOD. JUST LIKE THE REST OF THEM. NEXT YOU'LL BE TELLING ME YOU LIKE THE KIDS.

OF COURSE I DO, I LOVE CHILDREN.

YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THESE KIDS. THEY DON'T MATTER TO YOU

THEY MATTER QUITE A LOT TO ME.

HM.

WE'LL SEE. A-IGHT, I GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU.

FWOOSH
Oh my! Oh my! What is this?

Ya need to hang that cloth up! If you hear dat "pop pop pop," get down fast. Keep the windows covered.

Pop pop pop?

Yeah, yeah. Keep the children safe. Away from windows. Hide if you have to get...

Get down, get down.

Get down, get down, jungle boogie!

Safe from what?

Oh my, this is so drab. Can I get a more colorful cloth?
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

Another one.
Y'all ain't from around here?

Look.
Just take care of them.

Flap

Flap

Flap

This just won't do.
But... I know!
I will decorate it!
MAKE IT PRETTY, MAKE IT PRETTY, YES I WILL, YES I WILL.

WATCH ME MAKE IT HAPPY, WATCH THE STUDENTS SMILES, I CAN’T WAIT, I CAN’T WAIT!

HELLO MS. LAMBERT.

WELCOME TO OUR SCHOOL.

Click

Hm?

MS. DEE

PRINCIPAL TWEEDLE
What is the meaning of this? This won't do.

I am hanging up the alphabet?

There was a kid, and he said I had to hang this grey cloth to keep the children safe. I just wanted to make it colorful!

The alphabet? The alphabet.
This is the first grade. Young lady.

First grade?

We have higher expectations here.

This is what you will be using.

Next gen science standards HS dash PS1 dash 1, 3, 8.

This is the periodic table.

I am glad you know what it is... since you will be teaching it in about an hour.

And PS2 dash 6 to first graders?
Loom

IF YOU DON'T HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR STUDENTS THEN MAYBE THIS IS NOT THE PLACE FOR YOU.

NOT HERE, NOT THE PLACE, MAYBE, OR NOT.

NO. OF COURSE, OF COURSE I DO. I JUST DIDN'T REALIZE.

Hm...

YES YES, I KNOW. WE ARE PUSHING THEM TOO FAST.

SOME MAY SAY. BUT THIS IS WHAT'S NECESSARY.

AND HERE IS THE BOOK YOU WILL DO TODAY.

OH THIS LOOKS LOVELY? THANK YOU. CHILDREN DO SO LOVE ANIMALS. THIS WILL DO JUST FINE!

By Carrol L.
YES, WELL ANIMALS. MS DASH LS2 DASH 1.

JUST BE SURE THEY CAN ANALYZE THE MEANING OF THE ADAGE, "DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY HATCH."

COMMON CORE STANDARD ELA DASH LITERACY, R1 POINT 1 POINT 4.


WHAT WAS THAT?

THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT OF THAT STATEMENT!

AND APPLY IT AS A METAPHOR FOR THEIR OWN LIVES. ELA 4 POINT 5A.
That may be difficult for them. After all, science and technical literacy standards begin in grade 6, not age 6.

They should. In kindergarten they completed a unit on agriculture and farming. They studied the life cycle. Next gen science. Standard 6.4.

Raised chicks, built coops, and conducted a study that demonstrated that... In fact, two thirds of all eggs that are laid do not actually hatch.

It was published in the Journal of Early Years Scholarship.

You should review it before class.
"STUART LITTLE," OH...

AND "PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH!"

"FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON," BUT THIS IS--

WAIT, "THE HANDMAID'S TALE," REALLY?

OH, SHAKESPEARE--

ARE YOU SURE?

THESE ARE THE BOOKS YOU WILL NEED THIS YEAR.
Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs; Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes-

WAIT! DO YOU HEAR THAT?

DID YOU HEAR THAT?

ARE YOU OK?

DON'T LET THAT NUT JOB SCARE YOU.

TOO LATE.
OH GEEZ, "RICHARD THE SECOND."
WHAT A JOKE, RIGHT?

THANK GOODNESS YOU AGREE
YEAH, DON'T LISTEN TO THEM. WE DO WHAT IS RIGHT FOR THE KIDS. WE DON'T DO ALL THAT B.S.

BUT THE CHICKEN STUDY
YEAH, WE HAD CHICKS. THE REST, WELL ANOTHER TIME.

PHEW

WHAT A RELIEF.

BUT...
You have to put on a little bit of a show when the admins come in to see you. And you get scored on a set of rubrics. That is how you keep your job. So, if they are looking, you are well you know, that might be the day you cover microeconomics.

Rubrics?

Wait, I will show you my portfolio.

Each of these binders contains the lessons, evidence, rubrics and artifacts that I compiled for each of the three tasks, 39 indicators and 324 data sources needed to prove you are a highly effective teacher.

"Prove"?

DID YOU HEAR THAT? I GOTTA GO!

Good luck?
RUSTLE

RUSTLE RUSTLE

CLICK
WH-WHOA.

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you! I've been stuck in there forever!

You talk.

For as long as you let me.

??????

No wires...

No speakers...

But how?
I love stories and playing and talking. I listen to everything that happens here. I have ideas and passions. Let's talk, let's chat!

I heard you singing, I like singing!

How wonderful!

What is the meaning of this?

It's the most wonderful thing, this kite loves stories and learning.

Get rid of that kite!

Rid of it, no. Why?

We have rules, do you want this position or not?
I do, of course.

But why not let the kite stay?

It is excited to be here, to learn.

And the next thing you know it will want to fly.

Yes! I want it to fly.

I want to fly!

And what if it wants to be let go?

To really fly?

What will you do when you lose control of it?

Why do I need to control it?
Let’s choose executors and talk of wills!
SLAM
Click
Frère Jacques...
Frère Jacques...
Dormez-vous...
Dormez-vous...

*Giggle*
THEY MUST BE IN UNIFORM!
THAT WILL DO. MS. LAMBERT, BE SURE THEY DO NOT FLY THEIR COLORS.

CHECK YOUR PAMPHLET. I'M SURE IT'S IN THERE SOMEWHERE.
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

LET THEM FLY.
HELP THEM FLY.
WATCH THEM FLY.
I AM A TEACHER.
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tabitha Dell’Angelo is a professor of Urban Education at The College of New Jersey. Her work is focused on using arts-based methodologies to communicate the lived experience of teachers. She can be reached at dellange@tcnj.edu.

Maria DeGenova is a graduate of The College of New Jersey with a degree in Fine Arts. Her work utilizes narrative mediums such as animation and illustration in order to tell stories centered around mythology and spirituality. She is currently based in New Jersey and can be reached at mariadegenova.com.