

Celeste or staircases, landings, jetties

In this series of works/activities in progress- hybrids of drama and literacy- we're creating a fictional world- a realm of possibility set in the future, starting from a hypothetical scenario and open, speculative questions. This is an imaginative inquiry, derived from a drama by Saxton and Miller (their starting principle is that teacher language should be in the conditional) that may lead to presenting devised works. One thing- already it is developing the ako relationships beyond the friendship zones.

Pretexts, unfinished materials, and other texts: it's 2035...a woman is found on the beach..Venice Beach, LA we made it. She doesn't remember who she is, and the only clues are a letter and a photograph she has on her. The letter is from a mother to her daughter. The puzzle invites the children to take up inclusive group roles in which they play their older selves, and then morph into teams of investigators. We interchange between discussions in teams of six and the whole class; the purpose is to establish and negotiate with what we know, what we can infer, and what we don't know but need to know as we find new texts. The other pretext was a photograph a blurry image of an unidentified group standing by a rocket-launching tower that turns out to be astronauts, with obscured name tags, that we reconstruct physically. What if you were a crew member on a space mission- make the group photo. It's the day they first went to see their rocket. Then make one the day they first assembled as a crew, and then one after..the day of the launch. So we have a compound pretext, and texts to follow, like a news programme about the crew, or influencer videos, or a TikTok Dancing on Mars. There are numerous text-to-text connections to make, especially to quality works from the sci fi canon.

Building narrative: telling a day in the life of, eavesdropping, still images, cross cutting etc: assemble accounts from eye witnesses, re-enact encounters etc. involving Celeste in order to present a story or documentary, and even to turn into a short group performance. Eavesdrop groups in the crowd watching the launch, collect twitter feeds, and influencer videos- all these plus text can be brought together for online storytelling in role using writing only, or making a podcast series. for example. Combine a series of still images- say arriving at the Mars Colony- and unfurl them into performances. Present still images from contrasting scenes such as Celeste's mother's 30th & 40 th birthday parties; the colony on Mars versus Celeste's Camp America holiday. Thought tap these still images to slow down the drama, reflect on the action. Telephone call: an intercepted call between Celeste and her father, Celeste and her commander calling her to tell her she's selected for the mission. Teacher in role kicks in here, adds detail too.

From improv to scripted characters: As we develop our fictional inquiry, we come up with improvised roles, some of whom start to develop and get scripted into the drama as characters in present and past episodes, in the longer running stories: Now: investigators, police, social workers, the doctor, the person who takes Celeste in. Recent Past: The astronauts, her family, friends etc. 2020: her younger self, her mother, siblings etc. *#firstwomanonmars* researching and presenting Celeste's digital footprint to the investigating team enables children to move from the written (a shared doc where kids perform a twitter stream) to the oral, maybe using a slideshow for visual material. Find photos on the internet and digitally alter them to make a gallery of those involved, a role on the actual or the digital wall. Celeste's decisions and the

events that led her to lose her identity, we use reflective conventions that can like the watchers- a group of non-human witnesses wearing masks who offer alternative perspectives to the events, or a group of her followers, the Celestials- who have a chorus they sing for her etc.

Small group performances, forum theatre. The children decide texts and scenes from the work above could be rehearsed and performed for the participants e.g. the end of lockdown party. These performances could include different media, and might even be combined eventually into a longer scripted one. Forum theatre, in which the audience intervenes in a performance is an effective strategy to promote critical thinking, to consider different perspectives, and also to improve performance quality. Individual performances can be combined on a Fligrid.g. Different influencer vlogs, to make a chorus. Children's love of acting develops their ability to whakamana and to express and share their voices and their changing sense of themselves. The stage space can heighten and develop the roles and meanings for further inquiry and devising; the sharings across the syndicate develop ako and manaakitanga.

Letter

Mount Zion Hospital,
New York,
29 March 2019

Dear Celeste,

You know how I said you could ask me anything? You remember, it was my thirtieth birthday. It was one of those quiet, cool autumn days when the leaves hardly fluttered. You said I was looking sad and you wanted to know why. You wanted to know if you'd done something wrong. And I said honey of course not. You know how it is sometimes. You just feel sad you don't know why.

And you were your own sweet self. You said quietly Mom yes I know that feeling. And then Mom you whispered...we should never have secrets... promise..pinky promise.

Well now it's my fortieth birthday and you're sixteen. We aren't going to see you today. I can't talk. I can't call you either. And I wanted to tell you something I was keeping a secret until you were older. When I was your age, I wanted to play the sax in a jazz band, but I wasn't strong enough - you know, my asthma. I became a teacher instead, and your Mom

And I tell you this because you told me your dream, just before I got sick. You told me you wanted to do something daring, really daring, like be a colonist on Mars. And I said nothing then but I wanted to. I wanted to say life isn't what I said it was. I think that's why I was sad on my birthday those ten years ago. life isn't about following your dreams. I didn't want to tell you this but I don't have much time.

I don't want any harm to befall you (*letter discontinued*)

Resources: Patrice Baldwin, *With Drama in Mind*; Saxton and Miller *Asking Better Questions*.