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### Through the Looking Class

My eldest daughter, Hannah, is enthusiastically moving through her first year of formalized schooling in a public school kindergarten class. She has developed a love for the written word. Every night, her mother or I will put her to bed and allow her to pick out a book or two for bedtime. Recently, Hannah chose a much paired down version of the classic Alice in Wonderland story; it took me for a stroll down memory lane...

A few years ago I was enrolled in a Master's class, studying the teaching of composition. My professor, Dr. John Dinan, brought in an article "Interpretation is not Interpretation: A Friendly Reply to Professor West" (1989) that highlighted Alice and Humpty Dumpty within their classical argument about birthdays versus un-birthdays. Alice held the position that it was only proper to celebrate a person's birthday. Meanwhile, Humpty argued it much better to celebrate the 364 un-birthdays a person had year-round. The argument, at its most basic level, was broken down to the traditional versus creative use of language and learning. Alice, being quite prim and proper herself, was steadfast that words could only be used for a singular purpose and meaning, while Humpty, the creative, rebellious talking egg championed the idea that we could use language (and learning throughout the article) to meet our needs.

It was with this in mind that I began to consider the teachers Alice and Humpty would be, considering their philosophy of language and the concepts of appropriate versus creative. If this issue were to carry over to their classrooms, I see an educator in Alice who is very teacher-centered and rule oriented. Meanwhile, Humpty's class would be organic in its attempts to meet the needs of its students.

Thus, we have one teacher, the incredible, edible egg, who would be critical pedagogue, and another, young Alice, who would not.

I imagine Alice's classroom as being a sterile environment. Her desk would be perfectly organized and neat. Students' desks would be in perfect rows and everything would be in its proper place. Learning would be secondary as lecturing would be key. There would be no dialog, no argument, no questions, and no expressing of ideas. Students would sit quietly while Alice methodically deposited information. This would very much be a Freireian, banking concept classroom (Freire). It would be the antithesis to an authentic learning environment. There would only be one way to do things and the slightest variation(s) would be wrong. I can picture Alice bellowing like the Queen of Hearts, "*Praxis?! Off with their heads!*"

As for Alice's assignments, I picture worksheets and quizzes that focus on the great book curriculum. It would be the perfect classroom for the rigid knowledge mongers that feel only the great book curriculum is worthy of teaching (O'Hear, 1991). Things that test "throw away" knowledge (the knowledge crammed for a test and then thrown away when the test is complete). Everyday could start with a quiz over the previous lecture, maybe worksheets, or even a sentence diagramming exercise. Trivialities to keep students busy, without engaging them in the critical thinking process, would be her focus. Alice would teach students to be like her, prim and proper, in the classroom. Her students would learn to memorize, mimic, and respond, but not to think critically, form opinions, or problem solve. This image seemed clear to me because I've had my share of Alice teachers and sadly, Hannah now has her first.

Humpty's classroom is an organized sort of disarray. Desks would be arranged in a horseshoe, circle, or groups to better conduct discussions. The student-teacher relationship would be blurred, as would the traditional power struggle. Students could lead the discussion, help decide direction, and work towards teaching each other. Assignments would be open to choice, allowing students to choose

something that has meaning to them whenever possible. The shelves would be covered in materials for the students to use in their learning. Random stacks of books, magazines, and papers would be common in the Humpty classroom, with a desk most likely covered in rubble. (... with a coffee cup perched precariously on top.)

Humpty would help students learn thinking and problem solving in all aspects of their class (notice it wasn't "his" class...). Humpty would consider student involvement and the different perspectives the students bring to the class, a gift to education, not the hindrance or irregularity Alice would see. Humpty would be the teacher that pushed his students to expect more of themselves than Alice's worksheet and lesson plan ever could.

In my experiences, both Alice and Humpty care about students. That's not in doubt. But they use different methods to try and achieve their goals. I've always been better suited to take a Humpty class. Some of my classmates, though not all, were the same. Strangely, there always seemed to be some students who responded better to our Alice teachers and their birthdays instead of un-birthdays. Though, to be honest, I never have quite understood why.

I read a poem in one of my teaching methods classes that mirrors this topic. The poem is called, "The Little Boy" and was written by Helen E. Buckley. The poem (which reads like a prose piece) details two teachers, one (an Alice) who destroys creativity and imagination, and another (a Humpty) who champions them. I use this poem in my Freshman Composition class to show students that my class and directions aren't randomly ambiguous. I, just like Humpty, mean to challenge my students' thinking and hope that challenge mine as well.

The problem for me is that my daughter is currently in Wonderland and is experiencing life with Alice. I hope she doesn't develop a frame of reference (Mezirow 2003) that leads her to believe that strict discipline of thinking, framed by a "no un-birthday parties" mindset is the only way things should be done. I want her to develop to be her own student, without worrying about the consequences of the

rigid Alice classroom versus the organic Humpty classrooms and the impact they play on the preparedness of students in taking their next step outside of the K-12 environment (Rose 1998, Labaree 1997).

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