



Working the iceberg: A staffroom morality play

A play for 5 actors (3 females, 2 males)

Catherine Doherty
Faculty of Education



Queensland University of Technology

'Working the iceberg: a staffroom morality play'

by Catherine Doherty

© 2015 Queensland University of Technology

This publication is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of study, research or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission of the author.

Enquiries concerning performance rights, publication, translation or recording rights should be addressed to:

Catherine Doherty,
Faculty of Education, QUT,
GPO Box 2434,
BRISBANE, Australia 4001.

Email: c.doherty@qut.edu.au

Graphic design: Visual Communication Services, QUT

This project was funded by the Australian Research Council (DE1210569).

Contents

'Working the Iceberg: A staffroom morality play' - some background	1
Characters	2
Stage suggestions.....	2
Doubling suggestions for a cast of five	3
Scene 1: Prologue	4
Scene 2: Teacher Manual 1/Scooter	5
Scene 3: Staffroom Introductions	5
Scene 4: Tim briefs Mel for Lesson 1	6
Scene 5: Hansard 1.....	7
Scene 6: Casey Explodes	7
Scene 7: Teacher Manual 2	8
Scene 8: Debriefing Lesson 1	9
Scene 9: Chorus, 'these students'	10
Scene 10: Allison Briefs Mel for Lesson 2	11
Scene 11: Hansard 2.....	11
Scene 12: Debriefing Lesson 2	12
Scene 13: Morning Tea, Family Stories.....	13
Scene 14: Staff Meeting	14
Scene 15: Ten Tips for the Iceberg.....	16
Scene 16: Josie briefs Mel for Lesson 3	17
Scene 17: Zac's Monologue	17
Scene 18: Hansard 3.....	18
Scene 19: Debriefing Lesson 3	20
Scene 20: Hansard 4.....	20
Scene 21: Epilogue – Biographic Intercuts.....	21
Sources quoted	24
Originating cast and credits	25

'Working the Iceberg: A staffroom morality play' - some background

This play comes from a research project about how teachers understand and sustain their work in challenging secondary school classrooms. The research asked "How DO teachers work in these classrooms?" not "How SHOULD they?" In the play you meet three teachers who speak candidly about their principles, priorities and vulnerabilities to a pre-service teacher as they move between classes and staffroom. These are real people, real quotes and real feelings taken from real interview data, not idealised guidelines for 'best practice'. Rather than templates for practice, the play offers a variety of models, issues and food for thought to discuss in teacher education programs.

The project was interested in the moral dynamics of classrooms created under the Council of Australian Governments' 2009 Compact with Young Australians, a policy move that required students to be 'earning or learning till 17' across all Australian states. By removing the unemployment benefit for this age group, and tying school attendance to family welfare entitlements, these policies effectively raised the minimum school-leaving age. The risk in this well-intended policy move is that a lack of suitable job opportunities will keep young people at school longer than they want to be there. The effects of this 'earning or learning' policy will impact some communities, schools and classrooms much harder than others.

The title uses the metaphor of an iceberg to refer to the complex community-school relations that lie below classroom interactions. The idea of a morality play in the play's title refers back to a medieval form of popular play that used characters to instruct the audience in virtues and values. In the same way, this play seeks to bring to the surface and embody the different moral principles that can inform teacher's work.

The research involved classroom ethnographies of classes for 16 to 17 years olds in non-academic pathways. Eight different teacher/ class combinations were sampled across 2 high schools, 2 TAFE colleges and 1 hybrid TAFE/school program in three towns experiencing chronic youth unemployment. Their timetabled lessons were observed across 3 to 4 weeks and the teachers and some students were interviewed in each site.

The project was funded by an ARC Discovery Early Career Award, 2012-2014.

Characters

CATHIE	researcher and teacher educator
MEL	a pre-service teacher, ponytail, big shoulder bag, pen and pad at the ready, nervous, keen to please
ZAC	a male student with hoody, rides a scooter, battle-worn back pack
TEACHER MANUAL VOICES	Authoritative male and female
DEREK	the deputy principal – tie and rolled up shirt sleeves, brisk, assertive, good humoured
TIM	a teacher, casual shirt, ipad whiz, on top of things
ALLISON	a teacher, flamboyant, colourful glasses, bright folders and cup
JOSIE	a teacher, conscientious, reserved, a bit overstretched
CASEY	a female student, piercings, coloured hair, short skirt, tacky jewellery
SENATOR EDGAR PROWSE	Western Australia Senator, Australian Country Party (1965)
SENATOR DON GRIMES	Tasmania Senator, ALP (1975)
PROFESSOR JUDITH SLOAN	from the National Institute of Labour Studies (1996)
MS JENNIFER MACKLIN	Federal Member for Jagajaga, ALP (1997)
COMMITTEE MEMBER	Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, (Queensland Parliament) (2003)

Stage suggestions

At centre stage, well-worn mixed chairs around a table with old magazines etc. form a common space with enough room for four people to sit down. Behind is (a suggestion of) a cluttered cramped staff room with 3 or more desks, a communal phone, a messy sink area, small fridge. There is a door to left (to classrooms) and a door to right (to the school office and way home) with space on either side. On the far left there is a bench suggesting the outside of a classroom. On the far right there is a formal lectern, with a screen for occasional projections above/behind. Bolded words throughout the script could appear and fade when spoken.

Recorded sound: Electronic bell, crows, playground noise with lots of swearing in it, parliamentary rumble.

Offstage microphone for teacher manual voiceovers, or pre-record.

Doubling suggestions for a cast of five

Scene	1 Female 1	2 Male 1	3 Female 2	4 Male 2	5 Female 3
1 Prologue	Cathie to Mel				
2 Teacher manual 1/scooter		Zac	Voice		
3 Staffroom introductions	Mel	Tim	Allison	Derek	Josie
4 Tim briefs Mel for lesson 1	Mel	Tim			
5 Hansard 1				Prowse	
6 Casey explodes		Tim			Casey
7 Teacher manual 2				Voice	
8 Debriefing lesson 1	Mel	Tim			
9 Chorus, 'these students'	Mel	Tim	Allison	Derek	Josie
10 Allison briefs Mel for lesson 2	Mel		Allison		
11 Hansard 2		Grimes			Sloan
12 Debriefing lesson 2	Mel		Allison		
13 Morning tea, family stories	Mel	Tim	Allison		Josie
14 Staff meeting	Mel	Tim	Allison	Derek	Josie
15 Ten tips for the iceberg	Voice 1	Voice 2	Voice 3	Voice 4	Voice 5
16 Josie briefs Mel for Lesson 3	Mel				Josie
17 Zac's monologue		Zac			
18 Hansard 3			Macklin		
19 Debriefing lesson 3	Mel				Josie
20 Hansard 4	Member				
21 Epilogue - biographic intercuts	Mel	Tim	Allison	Derek	Josie

Scene 1: Prologue

[Crows cawing, playground noise swells]

[CATHIE enters, smiling, faces audience]

CATHIE: “You smile too much ... don’t smile so much.”

It was a one year crash course on becoming a teacher, and I was crashing in slow motion.

There’s nothing quite like the private horror of failing. There is no rewind button ... each day’s mistakes would accumulate in my wavering, desperate smile.

Everyone could tell me what I was doing wrong in retrospect – ‘Should have redirected these kids earlier’, ‘Shouldn’t have come in so hard there’, ‘Could have deflected, defused, challenged, anticipated, overlooked ...’ – their ‘ten essential tips’. But even then I knew that those tips wouldn’t address the iceberg below – that great ominous bulk of unresolved tension between some communities and formal schooling that lurks beneath the everyday relations between teachers and students ... so many shipwrecks, so much resentment, so much wastage ...

Thirty years later, I find myself a teacher educator visiting student teachers on the brink of failing in their prac placements, watching their terrified efforts at teacherly bravura. I feel like a fake, but maybe having failed equips me better than others. I know that any advice comes too late, but I also know that failing gives them more time to learn.

Thirty years later, I also find that schools are not the same. Across Australia, we have effectively raised the school-leaving age and students have to be ‘earning or learning’ till 17 years old. The only hitch is that there aren’t always jobs for those that want them. School systems were once expert in ushering certain students out the door, where labour markets could absorb their energy. Now these students and their teachers are asked to work together for longer. This is not business as usual.

So welcome to my classroom management project – my effort to understand how classrooms work when students don’t particularly want to be there. I went looking for trouble and found it in classes for sixteen year old students in non-academic pathways, in towns with chronic youth unemployment. I walked around their schools and towns; I spent time in their classes and staff rooms; I interviewed teachers and students. How **do** teachers work in these classrooms? What sustains them? What lessons might they teach us?

[Crows cawing, playground noise swells... Bell rings.]

Come with me to a staffroom at Wannabe High – school’s about to start *[puts hair up into pony tail to start transforming into Me]*. You’ll meet a bunch of real characters, each with a different frame on how to work with these students, in these schools, in these communities. These are spaces created by economic forces, not educational design. These teachers work the iceberg every day. Each one brings a biography, strengths, limitations, vulnerabilities and emotions to the job, just like the rest of us. They have their good moments and bad

moments, just like the rest of us. You might get your next placement here or your first job, so take a moment to put yourself in these frames. Each one has something to teach us, so don't be quick to judge.

[CATHIE now as MEL exits right]

Scene 2: Teacher Manual 1/Scooter

Project: 101 Essential lists for secondary teachers, Susan Elkin 2006, p. 33-34. Or image of book.

[Bell rings. Zac with unkempt uniform and limp backpack languidly scoots across stage on mini-scooter, headphones in, smoking a cigarette, while voiceover speaks.]

MANUAL VOICEOVER (Chirpy Female): Adolescents can be ... enthusiastic ... willing ... supportive ... kind ... but they can also be surly ... moody ... capricious ... hostile... The funny thing is that, quite often, they're almost all these at the same time. Put it down to hormones. Actually it's that very volatility which makes secondary school pupils such a challenge, but **so delightful and satisfying** to work with.

Scene 3: Staffroom Introductions

[Teachers wander in and busy themselves unpacking and repacking at desks, swilling cups at sink, sharing greetings. JOSIE with sense of annoyed weariness, ALLISON in a grandiose rush, TIM calm, streamlined and cruisy, making a coffee to take with him.]

[Deputy DEREK pokes head around right door into staff room, ushers MEL in beside him. As he is talking the teachers keep doing what they're doing, but look around.]

DEREK: Hi team. Can I introduce Mel. She's with us for a couple of weeks from uni – I'll put her in here so she can come along to your Year 11 classes. Is there an empty desk? So Mel, this is Allison Summers – she's on English Comm ...

ALLISON: Mrs Summers to you - nah just joking, the kids call me Mrs Winter! Welcome to paradise!

DEREK: And this here's Tim O'Brien – he's on social science, life skills whatever ...

TIM: Hi! You're in luck – we've got 11F first up today! And its uniform check day! Should be fun.

DEREK: And this is Josie May – she does Prevoc Maths ...

JOSIE: *[shakes Mel's hand politely]* We're in the computer lab today after break, but I don't expect many will still be here.

[MEL smiles, looks awkward, smiles, unsure of where to sit, smiles, gets in the way... etc..]

DEPUTY: Allison, any progress on **that report** on Zac?

[ALLISON (her back to DEREK) rolls her eyes and ignores the question ... others watch with ill-masked interest and knowing looks to each other ... DEREK shakes his head knowingly, withdraws and exits right.]

[Bell rings – everyone gathers up stuff and heads off to class. Tim gestures to Mel to follow him.]

Scene 4: Tim briefs Mel for Lesson 1

[MEL and TIM talking/walking¹ to first lesson – TIM is briefing MEL]

MEL: So what's this group like?

TIM: This is the class that keeps me on my toes the most. ... the people in this class make it quite special. In general they are all very large personalities and often compete for attention. They are certainly not the most academically inclined group I have ever seen, but again, that's a generalisation ... It's more the fact that they aren't always here ... I don't think I have ever had everyone on the roll in the room at the one time which makes it difficult.

MEL: ... how do you manage them?

TIM: The majority of them are learning that I have a rather dark sense of humour. I'm quite sarcastic, but they know that I will take it as well as give it. It's one of those things you learn by doing.

MEL: ... so any tips?

[pauses – turns to MEL outside the classroom]

You should know that one of my classroom expectations - set up right at the start of the year - was that you can't just walk in the door if the lesson is already going. You've got to stand there, you have got to be respectful, and you have got to wait. I'm trying to get that little **common courtesy and respect** because a lot of them don't have it. I'm not sure I'm succeeding with any of them *[laughs]* but I'm going to keep trying.

Chances are it's because they have been held up in the toilet having a smoke and just wandering around not wanting to get to class. Some of them just say "I don't have a reason", but they reek of cigarettes. You can kind of work that one out for yourself more often than not.

[MEL and TIM exit into class side]

¹ Teachers often 'talk and walk' using the time moving between classes to get things done. This could be done as a mime, walking on the spot, or moving across the stage as if traversing school grounds

Scene 5: Hansard 1

[rumble of parliamentary sittings]

Project:

4 May 1965,

Tertiary Education in Australia, Ministerial Statement,

Senator Edgar Prowse (Western Australia), Australian Country Party.

				Per cent.
New South Wales	..	..		18.41
Victoria	..	..		9.68
Queensland	..	..		11.8
South Australia	..	..		17.77
Western Australia	..	..		13.4
Tasmania	..	..		4.92

SENATOR EDGAR PROWSE: [approaches podium for formal speech] The statistics in the Martin Committee's report show that only 4.92 per cent of Tasmanian children are still at school at the age of 17 whereas in New South Wales the figure is 18.41 per cent. To my mind, this denotes the success or failure of an educational system. If young people have not derived from their acquaintance with an educational system a desire to stay at school, that is evidence that the educational system is not a success. If a love of learning is created, something positive is being done with the character of a child. But in this case, a State educational system which compels children to stay at school until they are 16 has failed to attract any degree of affection for learning or any desire to continue at school.

[CASEY starts to cross stage right to left wandering to class, dragging bag, non-uniform jumper, with her phone out. She sits on the bench outside to send a text on her phone.]

I do not believe that compulsion to attend school after the age of 14 achieves very much with a scholar. **You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink.** You can keep a child at school and give him all sorts of educational facilities, but you cannot make him learn.

[SENATOR PROWSE exits right]

Scene 6: Casey Explodes

[TIM emerges on classroom side of staff room, watches CASEY]

TIM: *[in a studiously reasonable tone]* Have you got a book? A pen? Is that uniform? No? Then jumper off please – you know the rules. Phone away please Casey, or I will take it off you.

CASEY: Oh Man! *[sighs loudly]*

TIM: *[in a studiously reasonable tone]* Phone please, Casey.

CASEY: Just making sure it's off! You're always picking on me! I didn't even touch a button or anything! Do you want me to leave?

TIM: Yeah. To the office to hand in your phone please.

CASEY: No, I need my phone! Okay, see ya!

[CASEY storms from stage left across stage, gathering bag books and jumper ... defiant, sulky mood evident. TIM throws hands up nonchalantly and returns to exit left into class.]

[CASEY hunkers down to stuff things into bag. She takes some time to visibly calm down.]

CASEY *[monologue to audience]*: I want to drop out of school and go to TAFE, but I don't know what for yet.

All the drama and that, I'm just over it

Yeah. I'm just having a bad day because there was heaps of stuff going on at home, especially with my mum so I dunno... I was just in a really bad mood. I was talking to my sister just checking up and seeing what's going on ... I wanted to have my phone on me if she needed to call me or something.

If Sir had have been like "Casey, can you please put the phone away?" ... Me and him have never got along. He knew how to **push my buttons** and he did it. I know how to push his buttons too, *[laughs]* I do now. I have learnt how. I had to learn. *[laughs]*

I would have got a B+ but because they don't do plus and minus in overall results I just got a B. Yeah, I can do it when I try, but I just have no energy most of the time. School work just frustrates me.

I probably won't stay long at school. Probably be gone by the end of this year. I was going to go to TAFE for community services but I don't know if I want to anymore.

[CASEY gathers up her belongings and wanders off while voiceover runs]

Scene 7: Teacher Manual 2

Project: Bill Rogers (2006) 'Cracking the hard class: Strategies for managing the harder than average class', 2nd edition, p.12. or book cover image

MANUAL VOICEOVER (authoritative voice): Classes can be considered 'hard' when the **frequency and intensity** of the disruptive behaviour of a number of its members are significantly affecting the welfare of one or more of their teachers. Such behaviour is also significantly affecting any sense of productive teaching and learning. The other factor is **duration....**

sometimes it's as amazingly basic as the organisation and timetabling of the classes. Having a school policy of deliberately streaming classes can often create groups of students who believe and act out their label – 'the veggie class', or 'the stupid class'. There is often a correlation between deliberately skewed groups of *learning-problem students* and problems in behaviour. *[Fades out]*

Scene 8: Debriefing Lesson 1

[Bell rings – TIM and MEL enter from class side, walking/talking back to staff room...]

MEL: Oh my god ... was that normal? With that girl storming off like that?

TIM: How they choose to walk through the door will usually decide what colour the lesson will take in terms of the relationship with me. They come in, in a bad mood like Casey did and it was just going to go off. No matter what I did, Casey was always going to be difficult and that's just the way it is. Casey and I will blow up once every fortnight. But there is usually very little grudge holding from her. In my position you can't afford to hold a grudge. Life's too short. She'll walk in as brand new next lesson.

Every time they walk in the door, for me it's a clean slate. I'm quite willing to make Casey a cup of coffee tomorrow if it means I don't have an argument, a battle and a fight and she's actually doing her work. Sometimes it's **the path of least resistance**.

With the personalities it's a really fine line to walk. If you don't need to have the argument, it's always better if you can get away without one.

MEL: Pick your battles, hey? So where do you draw the line?

TIM: I think it depends on how long it has gone on for and whether I perceive any sort of malice or mischief in it.

MEL: Yeah? Then what about those two girls who kept asking you "Do you like dogs?" and "Are you into men or women?" Oh my god! They were so rude! I was horrified! How did you feel about that?

TIM: I was not at all happy with that and have actually reported that to the administration. I don't know what will happen in regards to that but that was not relevant, not on topic, not nice and not necessary.

[MEL and TIM enter staffroom, other teachers and DEREK emerge – flurry of reorganising books etc before next lesson. Mel sits at common table with back to audience. Playground noise swells then cuts. Freeze frame. Teachers look out to audience when it's their turn to speak]

Scene 9: Chorus, 'these students'

[FREEZE FRAME / intercut]

JOSIE: I honestly believe to the bottom of my heart, that every single student in every single one of my classes can get a minimum of a C for every single one of their assignments. But they get the feeling that the teachers sort of give up on them, you know what I mean?

TIM: These students are very street smart. None of them are dumb or stupid by any stretch of the imagination. What I think they lack is focus and determination and application. If they got their head around that I think they would be capable of doing just about anything they wanted to.

ALLISON: Money is a big issue, because a lot of these kids don't eat. They might get one meal a day and that's tragic to me you know. We've got break and enters all the time now because there's no money, there's no job, so what do they do? They're bored.

TIM: No bag, no books, no pen, almost every lesson there will be at least one. In practice it's often easier to say "Here's a piece of paper, here is a pen. There is no excuse for not doing your work. Let's move on."

ALLISON: ... and these kids are all sickly type kids. They're always off sick. I think we've got ten away again today. You know, we never have a full class.

DEREK: They turn up because they have to turn up and it's a place that you've got to go to, to get your Centrelink payments.

JOSIE: These kids you know, they're so impulsive. They sit there and they're like "I'm in a bad mood" and I'm like, "Well, I get in bad moods too but that doesn't mean that you have the right to treat me like that."

DEREK: Our community, we're very low socioeconomically, and then we're extremely transient, like 10% of your school population in and out you know. It's just a constant.

ALLISON: Uh, Donny is just a little boy that's never grown up. He thumped the teacher at his last school. I guarantee he'll be gone very shortly. In eleven days he turns seventeen but he wants to stay. He wants the mates ...

TIM: All I can really do is teach whoever turns up and do my best to cope with what they know from the last time they were here.

JOSIE: They haven't been taught to push themselves. These kids have been so successfully told that they're no good at it that they translate that into "I can't".

DEREK: If I had a magic wand, I would wish for them to value their education and their families to value education because that's one of our biggest issues.

ALLISON: I've always had this kind of kid because no one else will take them. So, I think that it's sad, it's really sad. I feel sorry for them.

[Playground sound swells. Bell breaks the freeze frame. MEL approaches ALLISON at the table and chairs. ALLISON is organising papers and folders. Others exit to class.]

Scene 10: Allison Briefs Mel for Lesson 2

MEL: So what was that report Derek was asking about?

ALLISON: Oh I just don't have the time to do that. It would have come from other classes I would say, from other teachers where Zac hasn't handed in assignments or high absenteeism or something like that. I don't make the first move. It has to be very bad for me to report them.

(confidentially) Some of the teachers don't like the way I'm so soft on them. I sort of sit on the fence, you know ... half this side, half that side.

There is no use them getting reported and then having a day off or a three day suspension. It doesn't achieve anything. It sort of **solves the school problem** not the kid's problem. ... they're out of our hair but they're not learning anything when they're on suspension.

[MEL and ALLISON wander off together to next class, exit to left class side]

Scene 11: Hansard 2

[rumble of parliamentary sittings]

Project:

22 May 1975

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE BILL 1975, Second Reading

Senator Don Grimes (Tasmania) ALP

[SENATOR DON GRIMES approaches the lectern.]

SENATOR DON GRIMES *[Declamatory style]*: There are many children - I think it applies to most children - who for reasons of intellect, environment and psychological and other reasons do not proceed to matriculation, colleges of advanced education or to university level, and are left doing courses which in some States and in some schools are merely watered down versions of the academic level courses. I think this has in some ways been aggravated, certainly in my own State, by the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years. These courses seem to the pupils, to the teachers and to others to bear no relation to the outside world, to the realities of the world in which they live or into which they are going to graduate. I

believe that teachers recognise this; children certainly recognise it; parents recognise it, but to me authorities do not recognise it. I hope that this Curriculum Centre would give full support to the development of new concepts in the training of these pupils and in the development of curricula for these pupils, so they will see **some relation between the school and the world at large** and they will be better equipped, I hope, to cope with the world at large when they leave; better equipped to cope with everything they come up against, from the blandishments of advertisers, I suppose, to the importuning of finance companies, to the duplicities of politicians and everyone else and even the perfidiousness of nature itself.

[SENATOR DON GRIMES exits right, parliamentary rumble swells up then down]

Project:

26 September 1996

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION AND TRAINING: Inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people

Professor Judith Sloan from the National Institute of Labour Studies

[PROFESSOR JUDITH SLOAN approaches the lectern, more conversational style]

PROFESSOR JUDITH SLOAN: Your final point was about raising the school leaving age, which was quite controversial. I am not sure that I fully agree with it, because it is **a sort of regulatory thing to do** and I am not sure I am into that. But there were two real reasons for it. First of all, the aim is to tell young people that they really have no hope in the labour market if they leave school at 15. It is true that if young people try to leave school at the age of 15, virtually without exception, they will do badly in the labour market. So why would you have a legally mandated age which somehow says it is okay to go then?

The second point was that the principals of some of the schools in the most disadvantaged areas needed some leverage to work things out in those schools. The rates of truancy in some of those disadvantaged high schools are unbelievable. The kids have to go to get the Austudy - in many cases there is no other income support- but they do not actually go to school. They hang around the shopping centre. The principals were very keen on the idea that they could have some leverage to say, 'It is compulsory for you to be at school, and these are the kinds of things we have to offer.'

[Bell rings, PROFESSOR JUDITH SLOAN exits right. Bell rings. ALLISON and MEL emerge from class, playground noise swells then dies]

Scene 12: Debriefing Lesson 2

MEL: What's your take on mobile phones? You don't seem to mind them as much as the other teachers ...

ALLISON: If I see them using their phones I'll take them, but I don't mind them listening to music. I don't want to hear it; if it's too loud I go off my trolley! And if they're working it's not an issue ... but it is an issue between me and admin. There is a big issue between me and admin and it is a big issue between me and the other teachers ... they see me as undermining the school culture ... And oh my goodness, there is animosity between some teachers and myself because I treat the kids a bit nicer. The kids want to know which side you're on. Everything is about sides.

MEL: Was that part of the problem with Louise? She seemed really upset about another teacher ...

ALLISON: So with Louise, there was something wrong there because she's not normally like that ... but she'd also just been to a meeting before. This teacher, the teacher of 'the missing assignment' as I call it, practically called her a liar and then Louise came running down to me crying. I knew she'd done the assignment, you know? Why don't you give the kid some credit? They don't all lie!

MEL: So how do they all go with the assessment tasks? I don't see them get much done in class ...

ALLISON: What happens is when they are called to a meeting with the Deputy Head I'll bring their folders and their books up. Zac's will have nothing in it. That's when it'll hit the fan because he's done no work. So, that's going to be a problem there ... but I won't push buttons so hard that they won't keep coming to school.

[MEL and ALLISON make their way into the staff room]

Scene 13: Morning Tea, Family Stories

[MEL, ALLISON and JOSIE congregate around the table in the staff room making coffee, having a snack. There is a break in the pace. TIM eats at his desk – not in the conversation]

MEL: So do you have much to do with the parents?

ALLISON: I do have meetings with parents ... if we report them, or they're put on a watch or whatever, if they're still not improving then the parents are called in and the teachers involved have a meeting with the parent and the head of department, depending on how serious the issue is, but yeah ... unless the kid is very bad, I don't normally report them.

JOSIE: there's part of me that's been a little bit slack with the parent contact ... but the thing is that, with the behaviour management plan for instance, you're facing twelve parent phone calls, then meetings, then letters that have to be sent out!

ALLISON: If I had to report everything in my class we wouldn't have any of the lower end of the kids left.

JOSIE: It's just really daunting on top of having to do all your marking, all your preparation and all this other stuff... it's just really tiring.

ALLISON: You ring their mother and they just go "Oh, yeah" or if I ring a mother about behaviour it'll be, "You deal with it!" ... **I think that it's sad, it's really sad.**

JOSIE: There's part of me that says "Ok, Yeah it is important" but the other part of me is going "If all the students wants to hand in for a draft is one paragraph then that's the student's choice," you know? They are sixteen and seventeen years old. They have to learn what the repercussions of their choices are.

ALLISON: ... and then I had a parent complain because the NAPLAN results his kid got were really bad, and he said to me "What are you doing as a teacher to improve?" and he went on about pay rises and stuff like this and I said "Hey, it's not me. If you want to take it up, you take it up with the principal." *[group laughs]*

JOSIE: I'm a bit of a conundrum in the way I feel because there are times for me where I go "Ok, yep you can make some sort of lee way when it comes to family issues", but then there's also the flip side where I have had students who have come from really difficult backgrounds you know, and yet they actually learnt how to cope with it, and learnt how to work with it, you know? They've gone, "I'm choosing not to have the same life as what's going on here", you know, "I want to make my life better!"

ALLISON: To me, all behaviour stems from what goes on in your home you know? ... you can see which kids have got parents and whose parents care what they do and what they don't do. It's just the environment that we live in. We live in a transient area for one. Number two, the prison is up the road. One parent's in, one comes out; the other parent goes in you know...it's that sort of environment.

JOSIE: **I think that my empathy reaches a certain point.** .. They have a way of trying to make excuses for everything you know. I get a bit sick of it. I just think, "Come on!" As harsh as this may seem, I just go "You need to suck it up because there are always going to be things that you're not going to like doing," you know?

ALLISON: I think that it's sad, it's really sad.

[DEREK arrives from right and teachers clean up and congregate around the table for staff meeting.]

Scene 14: Staff Meeting

DEREK: So guys, let me explain the behaviour report system for you again, and for Mel. Students are being more compliant than you teachers are! You know **it needs to be a pretty hard and fast thing**: if you don't hand in a draft, or you don't hand in an assessment piece, or you don't do work in the lesson, then a report should be made. This is just for year 11 & 12, Mel. You teachers are probably a little bit more lenient when you shouldn't be. They're in that compulsory participation phase ... compulsory attendance phase or whatever it's called

these days. So it's a bit of a double edge sword sort of thing where it gives the good kids an opportunity, and for these others, it's a bit of an extra sword I suppose for us to, you know, to cut them loose.

So the tool is there, but it's whether you choose to use the tool or not. **You lot probably tolerate too much.** If a kid sits there and does nothing, if they don't bring equipment, if they don't hand in stuff by a due date, and whatever else, then it should be applied to them, sorry.

Any parent contact should all be logged too. So then I've got all the kids in Year Eleven on record, you know, whether they've been reported in any particular subject ... so I can start truancy processing and whatever else against kids. 85% is the magic number for attendance. Centrelink's magic number is also 85% attendance, so if you're under 85% you can lose your Centrelink payments. So there is a whole range of magic that comes with that number.

MEL: So can I ask what kind of stuff gets kids suspended?

DEREK: Suspension stuff is disruption of learning, refusal to follow directions, verbal abuse, physical abuse, all of that sort of gambit ... possession of cigarettes, smoking. We'll suspend kids for smoking if they're in school uniform, even if it's occurred outside: bringing the school into disrepute, that sort of thing. Our suspension policy pretty much is three days, then five, then ten, fifteen, then twenty and we apply for exclusion. So, you've had all your chances by then.

JOSIE: Derek, what's going on with Zac? I think he's pretty much lost the plot. I have seen him in school but he hasn't come to my class! Surely his attendance is so low that he can no longer graduate. I'm not even going to bother calling his mum considering the response that I got last time. I said to her that he was being rude towards me. And the mum said, "Why are you picking on my son?" So there is part of me that just goes "What's the point in ringing a parent like that?"

DEREK: Those kids, they're the kids that should be getting reported for their level of compliance and work ethic and whatever else, but they don't in your subjects because, you know, you're trying to work with them etcetera. Sometimes it's building a rod for your own back by doing that, because all of a sudden, it does become too much. It's like the teacher who lets the kid get away with this 100 times and the 101st time you come down on them like a tonne of bricks. And the kid says, 'It's not fair!' Yeah, exactly, and then all of a sudden it's a big deal. So, all of that, you know, Good Samaritan sort of stuff gets thrown out the window straight away and the kid hates you.

[Teachers are reacting to his laying down the law – ALLISON rolling her eyes, JOSIE looking exasperated. TIM is unconcerned because he already plays by the rules.]

Scene 15: Ten Tips for the Iceberg

[Staff meeting breaks. The three teachers, DEREK and MEL line up in front of table. Teacher manual quotes are shared across five smooth, authoritative voices – these voices can be pre-recorded]

Project: Hickey, L. (2007). *Hot tips for classroom management* [DVD]. Bendigo, Victoria: Video Education Australasia.

[Key phrases in bold emerge and accumulate on screen]

MANUAL VOICEOVER 1: Many headaches can be saved by **pre planning**.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Pre planning.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 2: Students can help to devise the rules to ensure everyone's **right to learn** is respected.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Right to learn.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 3: Observe the attitude, **tone of voice and body language** of other teachers who have successful classroom management.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Tone of voice and body language.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 4: Remember that a **cool, calm and directed** teacher makes for a cool, calm and directed environment.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Cool, calm, directed.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 5: Consider the seven Rs steps to behaviour management. This involves a **graduated sequence** of reminding, reinforcing, relocating, repatriating, reporting, reuniting, and renegotiating.

CHORUS *[echo]*: A graduated sequence.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 1: Successful teachers base their interactions with students on **respect and self esteem**.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Respect and self esteem.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 2: Establish a positive classroom environment by taking a warm personal interest in each of the students and always use a **warm, reasonable tone**.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Warm, reasonable tone.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 3: They are **careful** about the behaviours they model.

CHORUS *[echo]*: Careful.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 4: Avoid aggressive body language but also avoid **submissive** body language such as **pleading**.

CHORUS [*echo*]: Submissive, pleading.

MANUAL VOICEOVER 5: Being **angry, aggressive or upset** gives the students implicit permission to behave that way too.

CHORUS [*echo*]: Angry, aggressive, upset.

[Bell sounds. Everyone scatters to gather books.]

Scene 16: Josie briefs Mel for Lesson 3

[TIM, DEREK and ALLISON exit to class. JOSIE gestures to MEL that it's time to leave. JOSIE is carrying lots of books, laptop etc. MEL offers to take some. They start to walk/talk to class, occasionally stopping to reorganise load, going up stairs, dodging students etc]

MEL: How do you find this group?

JOSIE: First lessons with this group were terrible because they were testing the waters. It's **always a given**. It's interesting because like, with Zac - you'll see, the bloke with the hoody - he was quite fractious towards me for quite a while you know, and it wasn't until second term that things sort of seemed to switch for some reason. I don't know exactly what happened.

A lot of teachers their first impulse is to say "No, don't even bother" you know? "Don't bother talking to me, blah blah blah, you're in trouble. Get out of here!" whatever, you know? Whereas I tend to actually say to them "Look, you do have a voice in my classroom but you have to realise there is an appropriate time and an inappropriate time. Come up to me at the end of the class and we'll have a chat about what's happened and have a chat about how we can approach it next time."

MEL: So what's your advice? Any tips?

JOSIE: Students know how to push teachers' buttons. It's the easy way out, the easy way to be able to get out of class if they want to. I tend to pull students away from their peers and I just say to them quietly "Do you think that was **appropriate?**" and I don't raise my voice. I like to pick my battles you know. The last thing you want to do is exhaust yourself going in there and battling with them over something that you know in the long run isn't such a big thing

... but at the same time I do insist upon hats off in classroom because that's about etiquette.

[MEL and JOSIE exit left into class]

Scene 17: Zac's Monologue

[ZAC rides scooter across to bench, sits down, and lights up a cigarette]

ZAC: Yeah, school's alright. It's pretty fun. It keeps my mind off other things instead of being bored at home. It's good to catch up with mates 'n' all that, yeah.

I'm usually pretty average. Not the highest of marks. Oh, I didn't fail and stuff. I just didn't do as good as I could have coz of like, you know, girls and stuff like that.

In class it's like, I don't really like answering much because then people always try and correct me and that's when I just get frustrated. But after class I like talking to Miss because she's interested in what I do.

If I pass this year yeah, I'll go on to year 12 while looking for work. If I don't pass this year I'll probably go straight out and look for work because I don't want to have to repeat Year 11 again.

It's good with Mrs Winter. She treats us as equals. She gets along with us. She helps us out.

Mr O'B, he's alright. I do give him a lot of crap sometimes. We get along, but we have our arguments and stuff every now and again.

I just concentrate on having fun, make the best of everything, might as well. Yeah. I know when I'm going too far, take it overboard, but it's funny so it's hard to stop.

Teachers shouldn't take everything so serious, we're mostly just joking around and we're not actually being serious, we're just having a joke, **trying to make it funner**.

Sometimes they pick on other students and stuff. You shouldn't do that. You should treat everyone equal. We get along with people that treat us with respect. Like a lot of them just come in and expect us to listen to them and respect them and treat us like crap. If you treat us with respect we'll treat you with respect most of the time.

Yesterday *[laughs to self]*... yesterday we got caught having a smoke at lunch – some teacher bails us up, and takes our names down for detention *[laughs to self again]*, so we all made up false names! I was "Robert Baratheon" - you know, from Game of Thrones? ... it was so funny. I reckon if you're 16 and have parent consent you should be allowed to smoke. It's not affecting your schooling or anything if you're having one on your lunch break.

School's school you know. It's not really exciting or anything.

[ZAC stubs out cigarette and mooches left into class]

Scene 18: Hansard 3

[rumble of parliamentary sittings]

Project:

17 November 1997

Social Security Legislation Amendment (Youth Allowance) Bill, Second Reading

Ms Jennifer Macklin (Member for Jagajaga) ALP

[MS JENNIFER MACKLIN approaches the lectern]

MS JENNIFER MACKLIN: Overall, the common youth allowance is an example of a policy that will further disadvantage young adults from low income families in a labour market environment that is already working against them.

Let us look at 16- and 17-year-olds firstly. Young people do not finish school for a variety of reasons. They leave school early because of family or emotional difficulties, because their home life does not support their studying or because they have no home. They leave school early because of peer group pressure, because of alcohol and because of drugs. They leave school because they consider that the curriculum or the way they are taught or the school environment they find themselves in is just not relevant to their needs or aspirations....

Let us make it quite clear: Labor does agree with the government that it is important for our young people to finish year 12. It is important because finishing year 12 does give young people the best chance in life and the best chance of taking up further education and getting into jobs that provide rewarding careers and decent wages. But from here of course we part company with the government. We are talking about **taking income support payments away from low income families**—not middle income families, not wealthy families, but low income families. From 1 July next year they will receive no support unless they stay at or go back to school.

Schools, of course, will receive no extra support to teach them—not one cent. Schools will not receive one cent from this government to help them deal with all the problems that young people leaving school before they finish year 12 find themselves with.

These young people are concentrated in particular areas in Australia. They are concentrated in areas of extreme disadvantage. These young people are not evenly spread amongst the better off suburbs where the schools might be able to cope with an influx of one or two. That is not going to be the situation.

... I certainly know what it is like to be in **a place where young people do not want to be** in a classroom. I can tell you, from very bitter personal experience, that forcing a young person to endure up to two years of doing something that they are neither willing nor suited for will not improve their prospects.

We have to work with these young people and not threaten them.... those at risk of leaving school early need our greatest, not our least, support. ... The government does nothing on the employment side, nothing to get them into a job. The government uses the one measure that it knows something about: the big stick. That is not the definition of mutual obligation or reciprocal obligation. That term needs two sides, one for the individual and the other for the government.

[MS JENNIFER MACKLIN exits right]

[Bell rings. Playground noise erupts then fades]

Scene 19: Debriefing Lesson 3

[MEL and JOSIE enter stage from class, organising load of papers, equipment and books and start walking/talking back – down stairs, stopping occasionally to adjust the load of books, equipment.]

MEL: So how normal was all that mucking about and swearing ?

JOSIE: They get used to not doing work. They get used to not writing and whatever else. I do think it's a shame. They get to the point where they just think "I can't be bothered" or they get told that they can't do it ... I just constantly reinforce in my students "I think you can do it but you have to put the effort into it" you know? I tell them at the beginning of the year "It's not going to happen like that *[finger click]*. You're going to pass over a period of two years. By the time you end Year Twelve hopefully you will be on an average of C." But again that has to come with them learning how to work again and that's what they actually miss out **they forget how to work.**

MEL: So tell me about Mick and business with the mobile phone under the desk?

JOSIE: I know he has had an issue in his family so I didn't go crazy about that. I chose not to send him to the office and instead took him outside because, I've had this before with him to the point where, at one stage, he took his shirt off last term and asked if I want to have a go at him! There is no point poking the bear.

JOSIE *[in a more confidential tone]*: To be honest with you I would probably change the curriculum. We do dumb down the curriculum. I think that one of the reasons that the students do actually tend to muck up is because we're not challenging them. You should have seen the first assessment piece. This unit went for about nine weeks, and so I just sat there going "How the hell am I going to stretch this out for nine weeks?"

[MEL and JOSIE arrive back in staff room. All teachers and deputy emerge, pack their bags, collect belongings etc., then take a seat to sit in a straight line facing the audience. MEL approaches the lectern, adjusting persona to become COMMITTEE MEMBER]

Scene 20: Hansard 4

[rumble of parliamentary sittings]

[COMMITTEE MEMBER approaches lectern]

Project:

19 August 2003

Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, Queensland Parliament (2003)

re YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL 2003, Queensland Parliament

COMMITTEE MEMBER: Whilst Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that “everyone has the right to education”, questions might be raised about the appropriateness of imposing upon young persons (especially young persons nearing adulthood) an obligation to participate in additional school or post-school education. There is a consequential issue of whether it is reasonable to subject their parents to statutory obligations to ensure such participation by their children. The Explanatory Notes state: *[she reads]*

*It is arguable that increasing the school leaving age and imposing the additional participation requirement on parents is a restriction on their liberties, and the liberties of the young people who will have to continue to stay at school until 16, and participate for a further period. However, it is considered that the aim of maximising young people’s opportunities for learning in this period is beneficial not only to the young person, **but also to society as a whole**. This is so because young people who have achieved better learning outcomes are likely to have better chances for future success and better social outcomes generally. These outcomes justify the restriction on people’s liberties.*

[While committee member talks actors arrange chairs in a line facing audience, but Mel’s at one end faces the teachers not the audience. Teachers, Mel and Derek collect and pack their various belongings on their chair and stand behind it.]

Scene 21: Epilogue – Biographic Intercuts

TIM: I was originally working in computing and found that I missed interacting with people and so, I decided I would become a teacher.

ALLISON: I did relief for a teacher that left and that’s when I took over the pre-vocational section... that’s when it all sort of fell into place. How there was a stigma attached, they couldn’t have cared less about the kids that were in the pre-voc section.

JOSIE: I was teased as a young child you know. I think the other thing with my resilience is that, you know, I look around and go - excuse my language for a second - but I just go “I’m not going to let you bastards break me.”

DEREK: When I first came here, after probably six months, my sister is also a teacher and I said to her, “I’m getting nowhere here. All I’m doing is suspending the kids. I’m not making any difference!” and her response was “Well, how about the good kids in the class? What difference is it making to them?”

ALLISON: If they don’t get something behind them they won’t get a job and all through their life they’re going to be like my brother. A kid with a ticket is going to get a job over a kid that doesn’t have a ticket. So that has always stuck in my mind.

JOSIE: At the end of the day I can walk away from the lesson knowing that I have done my very best for all the students.

TIM: How do I feel when stuff happens? Umm...Disappointed, angry I guess to a certain degree. Sometimes I'm disappointed that I let myself get caught up in it. Sometimes that can escalate a situation.

DEREK: it's not fair on those kids who are there to get an education.

ALLISON: Ahh, but it does get you down.

JOSIE: And for me, **I feel very frustrated.**

TIM: It always does get to you, but you try not to let them know that, because the second you let the students know they have got to you, they will aim for that nerve and hit it just about every time after that... The longer you can hold off on that, the better.

ALLISON: Derek the Deputy tells me "Toughen up, toughen up Allie!" he tells me. But I can't because I'm trying to keep these kids at school.

DEREK: I spent the first eighteen months suspending kids.

JOSIE: I come away satisfied if students are actually learning that if they put the hard work in, they will actually get the grades they desire.

TIM: The more time I spend with them the less I dislike them, if that makes sense. Because I really didn't like them at all at the start when I first met them as a group. As a group they wound me up something shocking and I did not enjoy coming to class at all.

ALLISON: The kids help keep me here too... I've got a year twelve boy, the first one in his family to ever complete year twelve and that's such a wonderful achievement ...

JOSIE: They know that they can always email me; they know the work is available online. I'm here for maths tutoring on Tuesday afternoons, I will work any lunch time and I'm available before and after school so that's about the best I can do. *[laughs]*

DEREK: ... My suspension data would have dropped 50%.

ALLISON: I've worked in other countries and I think that was a big eye opener.... you see kids sitting outside the fence waiting to learn and then these kids here just don't try.

JOSIE: That's one of my biggest frustrations at school... I just think you've got all these opportunities to do your very best and you're not using them.

DEREK: You know it needs to be a pretty hard and fast thing *[takes off his tie ... Exits right.]*

TIM: Sometimes it's the path of least resistance. *[puts down his ipad Exits right.]*

JOSIE: I get so frustrated! *[leaves her messy pile of folders. Exits right.]*

ALLISON: I think that it's sad, it's really sad *[takes off her glasses ... Exits right.]*

[MEL packs her stuff up, thoughtfully explores the various things left behind by others, then packs them up too.] Superimpose image of an iceberg – she smiles in a wavering way at the audience then exits.

[Crows cawing.]

THE END

Sources quoted

- Elkin, S. (2006). *101 Essential lists for secondary teachers*, London, UK: Continuum.
- Hickey, L. (2007). *Hot tips for classroom management* [DVD]. Bendigo, Victoria: Video Education Australasia.
- Rogers, B. (2006). *Cracking the hard class: Strategies for managing the harder than average class* (2nd Ed.). London, UK: Paul Chapman
- Senate Hansard. (1965). Ministerial Statement: Tertiary education in Australia. [Prowse]. Retrieved http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hanssen261110
- Senate Hansard. (1975). Curriculum Centre Development Bill. [Grimes]. Retrieved http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hanssen261110
- House of Representatives Hansard. (1996). House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training: Inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people, Professor Judith Sloan from the National Institute of Labour Studies. Retrieved from http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansreps_2011
- Senate Hansard (1997). Social Security Legislation Amendment (Youth Allowance) Bill, Second Reading, Ms Jennifer Macklin (Member for Jagajaga) ALP Retrieved from http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hanssen261110
- Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, Queensland Parliament (2003). *Re Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill 2003*. Alert Digest (4).

Originating cast and credits

A production of this play was staged on Tuesday, 2 December 2014, as part of the Joint Conference between the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) and New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE), at Queensland University of Technology's Kelvin Grove Campus.

Director	Tricia Clark-Fookes
Stage manager	Liesel Koerbin
Sound designer	Matthew Strachan
Playwright	Catherine Doherty
Cathie	Catherine Doherty
Mel	Chelsea Hood Withey
Zac / Tim O'Brien	Jeremiah Wray
Derek, the deputy	Shane McLennan
Casey / Josie May	Kate Ryan
Allison Summers	Charlotte Grimmer
Voiceovers	Tricia Clark-Fookes

The production acknowledged:

- the Australian Research Council, for funding this project (DECRA DE1210569);
- the schools, TAFE colleges, teachers and students that kindly participated in the research;
- Dominique Fitzgerald and Rowena McGregor, the research assistants who helped immeasurably;
- QUT's School of Media, Entertainment, Creative Arts, Performance Studies, for their support and use of facilities;
- Professor Tara Goldstein, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and her performed ethnography colleagues for inspiration, guidance and encouragement;
- May Reyes, in QUT's School of Cultural and Professional Learning, for managing the production finances.

A video recording of this production can be viewed via QUT's Media Warehouse:

https://mediawarehouse.qut.edu.au/QMW/player/?dID=25479&dDocName=QMW_023881



Queensland University of Technology