

## It was a Beautiful Mistake

David Rothfeder

*“Half of all new teachers quit teaching within their first five years.”*

*“On the bad days you just need to think about those few good moments.”*

-Common things said to new teachers that nobody admits are related

*It was a Beautiful Mistake* is a larp for four to twenty players (ideally at least 8) and one facilitator (who may also be a player if they think they can manage both) about a burnt out teacher trying to reconcile their career. On the last day of Alex Park's career, they reflect on their time in and out of the classroom trying to decide if the years were worth it. This manifests as imagined conversation between different representations of Alex as they aged and progressed through their career. Each player will play Alex at different points of their life. Before playing decide on a time limit for the discussion (60, 90, or 120 minutes) and chose a play space with a chalk, white, or cork board large enough for all players to easily view available. You will also need name tags and any other materials to display information on the boards.

To begin, each player will decide an age that they will represent for Alex's life. Most players should choose to be 23 or older, but it is ok for a few players to play a younger Alex as they progress through their education and how they decided to become a teacher. Players will then line up by age and the facilitator will list each of the ages on the board with a gap in-between. The oldest Alex will be Alex as they are today; tired, disgruntled, and frustrated. The larp facilitator will then ask all Alex's over the age of 23 to raise their hand if they are teaching. The youngest Alex with their hand raised will represent Alex's first year teaching; idealistic, well meaning, but overwhelmed. Players older than this Alex without their hand raised represent a year where Alex took a break and need to decide why they didn't teach that year. Anybody younger than first year Alex will represent them before they started teaching; who they were before, what jobs they once had, what they did to get their teacher's license.

Starting from the youngest Alex, each player will give one detail about them that will be consistent through their life. This could be a band they like, a detail about their family, a mannerism, or a character trait or flaw. The facilitator will keep an easy to see list of all these traits on the board so players can easily remind themselves.

Next, each player will work with their neighboring Alex's to determine what defining event in their personal life occurred between their two periods in life. For example, falling in love, going to Rome, getting married, picking up a new hobby, having a child, fighting with a friend, having an affair, being mugged, getting a divorce, buying a puppy, or losing a family member are all acceptable. The only rule of thumb is that the event must represent a change or memory for Alex. The younger Alex should treat

this event as being hinted at; meeting a new person, feeling the need to see the world, their parents worrying that they live in a dangerous neighborhood, while the older Alex should treat this event as a fresh memory. When the event is decided, write it on the board in between the ages of the two Alex's so that other pairs of Alex's know that it has occurred (and can avoid inconsistencies).

Finally, each player will be given a card with questions to answer. If a player is playing an Alex before they started teacher, they will get the Pre-teaching Card which are all identical. An Alex who is taking a break from teaching will get a Break Card which are also identical. The first year Alex will get the First Year Card and the oldest Alex will get the Last Year Card. All other Alex's will get a random Teaching Card. These cards will prompt the player with an aspect of their year as a teacher and ask them a question about what is currently going on within the school.

Once all of the players have answered their questions and have thought about their current outlook, they will write what they are currently called (Alexandra, Mrs. Park, Mr. Alexander, Ms. P, P-Funk, Park, Lex, ect.) and what their age is on a name tag and wear it so it's easily visible.

Play takes place with all of the Alex's coming together with the goal to try to understand each other. Some Alex's may feel angry, sad, or relieved that they will leave the profession, but others will have mixed feelings. Older Alex's may try to warn the younger ones about what will happen while young Alex's may want try to remind their older selves of fresh emotions. The young Alex's want to know what their futures hold, while the old want to reminisce on memories half forgotten. Do not be concerned when an older Alex is unaware with what is on a younger one's card, the feelings are just forgotten for the moment. Maybe the student who was the focus of one year faded as a flood of new faces came in the next. The frustration plaguing the past became normal as new ones come into place.

After the predetermined amount of time (60, 90 or 120 minutes, whatever you decided upon) or the Alex's feel like they've decided, a vote is had. If anybody has any last things to say, they may do so in a sentence or two, but then each Alex must decide how they view their teaching career. All Alex's who look at their time with pride, that teaching was good for them, or decide that the good they've done was ultimately worth it will move to the left side of the room. All Alex's who feel their life was destroyed, that their efforts were futile, or that none of it was worth their sacrifices will move to the right side of the room. The only Alex who doesn't vote is the oldest Alex, who must look over their younger selves and choose how they themselves feels. That Alex may choose if they tell the rest of their Alex's, but will then close their eyes and narrate their final actions in the real world before leaving their classroom for the last time.

"I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized."

— **Haim Ginott**

"Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition."

— **Jacques Barzun**

Note: Thank you to my reader Tayler Stokes for his insights and support.

**Pre-teaching Card**

What are you doing right now instead of teaching?

What do you admire about teachers?

When do you think you'll be a teacher?

**Taking A Break Card**

Why did you leave the classroom?

How is your life easier now that you're not teaching?

What do you miss about teaching?

**Pre-teaching Card**

What are you excited for?

What is overwhelming?

What were you never taught that you now realized you desperately needed to know?

**Teaching Card (1 of 18)**

What aren't you able to accomplish even after putting in 50+ hour weeks?

What is the major drama in the school right now?

Which student is inspiring you and why?

**Teaching Card (2 of 18)**

What did you need to do which caused you to spend 12 hours in the school today?

What did you learn about your students today?

Why couldn't you reach that one student?

**Teaching Card (3 of 18)**

What have you given up in your personal life because you need to grade papers?

What are the administrators pressuring you for and why can't you easily give it to them?

What have you accomplished so far?

**Teaching Card (4 of 18)**

What has been preventing you from getting enough sleep?

What change has been forced upon you?

What are students saying about you?

**Teaching Card (5 of 18)**

What aren't you able to accomplish even after putting in 50+ hour weeks?

What did you learn about your students today?

What have you accomplished so far?

**Teaching Card (6 of 18)**

What aren't you able to accomplish even after putting in 50+ hour weeks?

What is the major drama in the school right now?

What are students saying about you?

**Teaching Card (7 of 18)**

What aren't you able to accomplish even after putting in 50+ hour weeks?

What are the administrators pressuring you for and why can't you easily give it to them?

Why couldn't you reach that one student?

**Teaching Card (8 of 18)**

What aren't you able to accomplish even after putting in 50+ hour weeks?

What change has been forced upon you?

Which student is inspiring you and why?

**Teaching Card (9 of 18)**

What did you need to do which caused you to spend 12 hours in the school today?

What is the major drama in the school right now?

What have you accomplished so far?

**Teaching Card (10 of 18)**

What did you need to do which caused you to spend 12 hours in the school today?

What are the administrators pressuring you for and why can't you easily give it to them?

Why couldn't you reach that one student?

**Teaching Card (11 of 18)**

What did you need to do which caused you to spend 12 hours in the school today?

What did you learn about your students today?

Which student is inspiring you and why?

**Teaching Card (12 of 18)**

What have you given up in your personal life because you need to grade papers?

What is the major drama in the school right now?

What are students saying about you?

**Teaching Card (13 of 18)**

What have you given up in your personal life because you need to grade papers?

What change has been forced upon you?

Which student is inspiring you and why?

**Teaching Card** (14 of 18)

What have you given up in your personal life because you need to grade papers?

What did you learn about your students today?

Why couldn't you reach that one student?

**Teaching Card** (15 of 18)

What have you given up in your personal life because you need to grade papers?

What are the administrators pressuring you for and why can't you easily give it to them?

What are students saying about you?

**Teaching Card** (16 of 18)

What has been preventing you from getting enough sleep?

What is the major drama in the school right now?

Why couldn't you reach that one student?

**Teaching Card** (17 of 18)

What has been preventing you from getting enough sleep?

What did you learn about your students today?

Which student is inspiring you and why?

**Teaching Card** (18 of 18)

What has been preventing you from getting enough sleep?

What change has been forced upon you?

What are students saying about you?

**Last Year Card**

What is pushing you out of the profession?

How long can you go without new income?

Who tried to stop you from going?