Giving Voice and Being Heard

Searching for a new understanding of rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes in community theatre.

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes in community theatre practice. It is a qualitative study, focusing on a community theatre project in a small outer suburban primary school near Melbourne, Australia. The researcher is a highly involved reflective practitioner, taking on the multiple roles of researcher, community artist and community member.

At the heart of the thesis is a novella embodying a range of perspectives and experiences from the case study.

The study began with the questions: how is it possible for a community theatre project to satisfy the participants’ artistic and community needs and what are the factors which contribute to the achievement of these ends? The tension between the contrasting needs and experiences of different participants, ranging from theatrically trained artistic facilitators to the children who struggle to be heard, to the parents looking to connect with the school community, informed the study. The inevitable challenges and difficulties of the fieldwork propelled the study into a wider exploration of questions of community participation in the arts as a means of individual and collective expression and as an experience of cultural democracy.

Drawing on an extensive review of theoretical foundations underpinning the practice of community theatre, and a review of practice itself (both the researcher’s own and a range of exemplars), the study proposes an analysis of the key stages of development of community theatre practice.

This analysis has been synthesised into a Community Theatre Matrix. At the core of the matrix is the notion that collective community art-making takes place within an Engaged Space, where key elements of Artistry, Agency, Pedagogy, Pragmatics and Critical Reflection shape and inform the practice. Those who choose to participate in the collective art-making process become a temporary community of art-makers.

This Engaged Space is based on the conceptualisation of a ‘community aesthetic’ - participants engage in collective art-making processes predicated on an invitation to aesthetic and social engagement. Such a space is charged with the potential for a politicising experience as well as a community one. This new understanding is framed by an appreciation of the interplay between artistic invention (and intervention) and pedagogy. In order to give voice to the silent community, the artist employs the tools of emancipatory pedagogy along with modernist and post-modernist theatre understandings.

The thesis concludes with the proposition that community theatre offers individuals and communities the possibility of a shared experience of art-making and the social and artistic possibilities associated with ‘giving voice and being heard’.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

_______________________________
Christine Sinclair
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At the heart of this thesis is a small community, the Belbrook Primary School. I would like to thank the staff, the students, and the parents of the school for taking part in the Belbrook Stories project and for giving me such a powerful story to tell.

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1.1. On the Margins

Why are the arts not an experience shared by all people, every day of their lives, in the places that they are - be it in the work place, the school, the home, the shopping centre?¹

On the margins of Melbourne, out in the Dandenong Ranges a small school community hosts an arts event at the local Community Hall. The Hall is packed. Mums and Dads, Grandmas and neighbours, big brothers and sisters squash into the tightly arranged plastic chairs to watch the children do their concert. At the beginning of the night, the Principal welcomes everyone, at the end he draws the raffle and requests help in putting away the chairs. The evening ends in a flurry of coffee drinking, chocolate crackles and chair stacking, while the children, still intoxicated by their time in the spotlight (a fluorescent one in this case) engage in the age old sport of skidding on the worn polished boards of the Hall.

I’m sitting at the back of the hall, straining to hear small voices unused to the unfriendly acoustics of this multi-purpose building. I’m willing the children to speak up and their parents to stay silent. In the lull between the Grade Five/Sixes taking their smattering of applause and shuffling off, and the Principal making his end-of-concert- now-let’s-draw the-raffle speech, my mind turns to another part of Melbourne. In the heart of Melbourne, by the banks of the Yarra River, there is an arts precinct, the focus of which is an Arts Centre adorned with a commanding Eiffel Tower-like spire, illuminated at night for all to see. No doubt the acoustics are good at the Arts Centre. The Melbourne Festival is in full swing and I’ve been reading about the lavish array of arts events on offer this year. I wonder if anyone in the Community Hall will be going to the Festival this year. I’m not sure that they will. There is something unsettling here. It’s not that going to the theatre in the city is a luxury (which it most certainly is), it’s that it’s an irrelevance, or at the

very least, an inconvenience. There’s the drive down the mountain for a start, and the
cost and hassle of baby-sitters and parking, and to what end? To see something that bears
no relation to their daily lives or concerns in the unfamiliar territory of the Arts Centre. I
don’t sense any animosity to this distant world. It simply doesn’t come up in
conversation. I haven’t won the raffle, so all that remains is to help with the ‘clean-up’.

The contrast between the two venues and their accompanying events is compelling for
me. As a community theatre artist I am drawn to the event in the Hall, although I would
certainly thrill to be in the audience for some cutting edge piece exploring the boundaries
of theatre meanings, imported from overseas for the purposes of the Festival and staged
in the Arts Centre. Especially if I could find parking nearby, and a baby-sitter.

These two expressions of the arts exist alongside of each other. My central purpose here
is to look more closely at the world that contains the concert in the Hall, and to
understand the place and purpose of the arts that might be generated in this world. This is
a world in which ‘arts’ is more likely to be defined (even by those who don’t go to the
city) as that which takes place in the Arts Centre.

Is it possible in this setting to introduce another way of looking at the arts? How would
one go about doing this? Is it possible to open a new door to community-based arts where
participants engage in collective art-making as a means of asserting themselves, their
individuality and the identity of their community? In this environment, what is the role
of the artist facilitator, who mediates art form with content, and with the community’s
needs and skills? How is such mediation possible? What then, is the role of the artistic
facilitator who is part of the community? What do I need to know if I happen to be an
‘artistic facilitator’ determined to work within my own community?

This thesis personalises these questions. I am the community artist wanting to gain a
better understanding of the skills and processes I could use to facilitate an arts event in a
particular community. I also seek to understand what the arts might mean to that
community. At a fundamental level, I also need to have an understanding of what a community is, and what ‘my’ art form is. The questions cascade. In this thesis, several narratives unfold. There is the story of the community artist (and researcher) attempting to create a performing arts event in her own geographic community. There are also the stories of the community and the arts event itself as it takes on a life of its own.

The story begins with my desire to find out if there are processes for working with inexperienced performers in a community-based performance project that are effective for the participants but also achieve a performance outcome that is ‘satisfactory’ for participants, audience and the community artist. and achieving a ‘satisfactory’ outcome? Was it possible I wondered at the outset, to achieve an outcome that satisfied the aesthetic sensibilities of all concerned and the needs of the community at the same time? The perspective in this story shifts many times, as I move through the many roles I have taken on: the artistic facilitator; member of the community; a parent in the local school; and the researcher.

1.2. Choosing This Project

Belbrook is the town in which I live, and the school at the centre of my research project is the primary school at which my two children have been educated. I’ve lived in this community for more than ten years now, and as it is with many such communities, this makes me a relative newcomer.

Standing at my front door, or my back door, or looking out of any window, I am thrilled by the vista. The towering gums, the rolling hills, the mist in winter, the birdsong. If I walk for four hundred metres up the suburban street I live in, I find myself in National Park, able to survey the Melbourne skyline and Port Phillip Bay from Docklands to the Peninsula. I breathe the clear mountain air and wonder what the rich people are doing.

Like many of the families who have chosen to live in Belbrook, we came for the affordable housing rather than the panoramas. Belbrook is just on the edge of the Dandenong Ranges. It qualifies as a ‘hills community’, but it lacks the lustre of the
popular tourist towns, Sassafras, Kallista, Olinda. It has few remnants of the late 19th century settlements, when the ‘hills’ was a holiday retreat for the Melbourne bourgeoisie.

Belbrook is the town where people settle when they can’t afford to go further into the ‘hills’, or don’t want to commit fully to a ‘hills life’. (If you really commit to a ‘hills’ life, you must accept appalling public transport and television reception, treacherous roads in the winter, no reticulated water, and a pervading damp. The package also includes the breathtaking views; log fires in winter; autumn leaves and membership of the ‘club’ – you live ‘on the mountain’.) Belbrook has good roads and good access to public transport, good TV reception and Melbourne water. It is for many a dormitory suburb. For others, it is an affordable place to raise a family.

I have an ambivalent attitude to my community. I love the sense of belonging that living in the hills implies, and yet, I still feel somewhat outside it. I’m a Queenslander. There is an openness and social ease in Queensland that I don’t find elsewhere. However, I don’t think it is simply my sense of ‘otherness’ that gives me a degree of disquiet about the community I have chosen to live in. There does seem to be a lack of cohesiveness here. Individuals initiate exciting projects in the town, start new businesses, call meetings, and more often than not, abandon their aspirations within the year. The town lacks a central focus, and enterprises that are new or require sustained commitment frequently founder. The primary school mirrors this ennui. The school community is fractured and rarely comes together in any collective endeavour. Working Bees and Open Days are not well attended. And yet, amongst individuals in the community, there is a great richness of experience, diversity, and energy. I often wonder why these qualities can’t be harnessed for some kind of shared purpose. It is from this fundamental question that my research found its focus.
1.3. The Research Question

*Giving Voice and Being Heard: Searching for a new understanding of rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes in community theatre*, is an investigation of the personnel, form and processes involved in community theatre. The aim of the study is to consider the question: how is it possible for a community theatre project to satisfy the participants’ artistic and community needs and what are the factors which contribute to the achievement of these two ends?

The study interrogates the relationships between the performance-making processes (writing, rehearsal and production tasks), the content of the theatrical product, and the achievement of a ‘community aesthetic’ (a form which satisfies the artistic and community needs of the participants).

Within the framework of the study, specific attention is given to the development of the following:
- an appropriate skill set for community participants
- an understanding of theatrical form and the use of theatrical techniques by community participants
- a means by which community needs and aesthetic outcomes can be acknowledged and evaluated.

The research is underpinned by a set of key questions:
What is an appropriate aesthetic for this community theatre context and how can it be determined?
Is there a set of skills that individuals who are not trained in theatre can develop, utilise and pass on to others, in the community theatre context?
What are the roles of the key participants in a community theatre project?
What is the relationship between the artistic facilitator and the community?
What is the role of the artistic facilitator in the defining of the ‘community aesthetic’?
1.4. A Description Of The Project

In order to investigate these questions and issues of significance, I formulated a community theatre project. As a highly involved reflective practitioner, I hoped to better understand the nature and processes associated with community theatre practice.

I devised a project that centred on my own community of residence and identified the local Primary School as a ‘hub’ of the community and a suitable site to concentrate my fieldwork. I formulated a plan to introduce performing arts into the school curriculum by running a weekly drama workshop for each class. I wanted to explore whether this introduction to performing arts for the children and teachers would generate some interest in drama as a useful expressive tool in the wider community. Initially, I designed weekly workshops to introduce children (and teachers) to some basic expressive skills, some collaborative problem-solving processes, and to a basic drama vocabulary. In the second phase of the project I intended to develop a series of short scripts based on stories of the local town and its people, with the children and any interested adults within the school community. I would work as playwright and dramaturg, filtering and shaping the ideas and stories from the participants into plays that they would then rehearse and perform. Finally, we would present the plays as a performance component of the school fete. It was anticipated that all grades would participate in the creating and performing of the plays, and that as many individual children as possible be encouraged to attend on fete day.

I chose the school as the site of this community theatre project for a number of reasons related to my perception of the school and particular needs it might be experiencing at this time:
-There was an absence of performing arts in the school, and by implication, a need to provide a program of some kind.²

-The students’ sense of identity and pride in their school and their community was rarely expressed, and indeed opportunities for such expression were rare. This was not a school or community noted for community action or involvement. The profile of the school within the community was quite low and could be heightened by a public performing arts event.

-The school had a declining population. Teacher morale at the school, according to the 2000 Triennial Review was alarmingly low. Given the small size of the school (approx. 195 students), classroom teachers were responsible for all of the so-called ‘specialist’ programs at the school, regardless of specialist expertise and in addition to their classroom duties. It was generally difficult to generate parent or community involvement in school activities. The previous school fete failed to attract substantial community involvement or attendance. It had been a discouraging failure as a fundraiser and school event.

I undertook the project wearing a number of ‘hats’. The first of these was as community artist. Although I situated the project in a school I planned to operate from the perspective of community artist rather than teacher/ facilitator. I ensured that the classroom teacher was present at all workshop sessions as a way of clarifying that my role was that of artist not teacher. It should be said, however, that my background in teaching was extremely useful: in establishing communication with staff of the school; in developing a management plan for the project which accommodated the school’s priorities; and, as it emerged, in the refinement of my skills as a community artist.

² Board of Studies, Victoria, 2000, Curriculum and Standards Framework II, The Arts, Carlton: Board of Studies. Schools are required to include the teaching of The Arts as one of eight key learning areas in the curriculum.
I also wore the associated hat of ‘playwright’. Right from my preliminary planning stages, I had decided that a component of my role as community artist would be as playwright to the community. I anticipated generating ideas and stories from community participants through drama workshops and then translating them into theatrical form for performance.

The other essential ‘hat’ I wore was the researcher’s hat. The project was conducted using methodological tools drawn from qualitative research with a particular emphasis on ‘participatory action research’ and the techniques of reflective practice and ethnographic methods of data collection. This remains an appropriate description of my approach to the research and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

1.5. Background to the Research

Any community theatre project is capable of provoking a series of challenging and uncomfortable questions about the nature of community theatre, the role of the artistic facilitator, and the relationship between community and artist. I formulated the Belbrook Stories Project in response to a series of provocations that arose in my work as a community theatre practitioner and teacher.

1.5.i. Creativity and reflection

In the past twenty years I have worked as an educator and an arts practitioner. At times, I have been primarily an educator: drama teacher, teacher-trainer, actor trainer, facilitator of trainee animateurs, lecturer, post-graduate supervisor. In other contexts and at other times, I have concentrated on the practice of the arts working as director, writer, facilitator, producer on a variety of theatre projects: community theatre in the streets; halls and beaches of St. Kilda; children’s theatre travelling from school to school; school aged children commemorating the Federation of Australia…
Chapter One: In Search of Community

From these experiences I have come to understand the role of the artist/facilitator as both creative instrument and an instrument of reflection. This discovery provided the first provocation for the study. Having reached this understanding I recognized the need to further investigate the actual work of the artist/facilitator and the processes underpinning the production of arts work in community settings.

1.5.ii. Facilitation and the reflective lens

In 1996 I spent one month in Rockhampton, Central Queensland, gathering stories and staging a play about the main industry of the town, the meatworks. This project formed the fieldwork for my M. Ed. thesis, an investigation of community storytelling through theatre. In the design of the project, NO BULL: Stories of the Meatworks, I gave myself a great deal of artistic control over processes and outcome.\(^3\) This was easy to justify, given an unusually short time frame for the project. Here also, I was the writer, director, and the researcher. In this instance the play provided the vehicle through which the community’s stories were ‘played back’ to them. However, there was little room for mediation and construction of new meanings through the art form, given the degree of control I chose to take over this.

NO BULL provided a further provocation to pursue two of my now ongoing interests: the dynamics of the relationship between artistic facilitator and community; and the potential for reflective practitioner research to inform the artistic process.

1.5.iii. Social capital

In 1998, I took on a directing role in a theatre project generated by a group of women in an outer suburban community. We performed the play for two weeks to packed houses. There was not a strong tradition of theatre-going in the area, so this was remarkable in itself. The content of the play, personal stories of women, their mothers and their daughters, seemed to strike a nerve with audiences. Each night people stayed on for

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hours after the play to share their stories and to talk about the ways in which the play had reflected and clarified experiences from their own lives. As the director, I was pleased and excited. I had worked hard to create a strong ensemble. I tried to blend the honesty, authenticity and focus generated in performance by the inexperienced but engaged participants, with some carefully managed stagecraft, and effective juxtapositions of humour and drama, to create an uninterrupted, flowing and powerful event. I felt I had contributed to the success of the play through the crafting of a satisfying theatre aesthetic.

However, during the season it emerged that the performers were unhappy. They were not supportive of each other. They did not feel ‘safe’ during the run, fearing that they would be criticised by others in the cast. It became apparent that the divisions amongst the cast had been present throughout the rehearsal period. It seemed that this had been an unhappy experience for many of the participants and I had been oblivious to it.

I had focused on achieving what I considered to be a ‘good play’. In order to do this I had deliberately blocked out any disquiet during the preparations for the play. I side-stepped any responsibility for the social health of the group. Frequently, I would remind the group, which aspired to work in a democratic way, that I would take on the leadership of the ‘play’ but not the leadership of the ‘group’. This crucial decision on my part had dire consequences. The group had no decision-making infrastructure, and therefore no mechanisms for taking care of the social health of the participants. Despite the highly successful season of the play, the group has not performed since.

This experience undermined my confidence as a community theatre worker. I took one powerful resolution with me from this experience. The human dimension of the community theatre experience could not be pushed aside, overlooked or understated. The ‘social capital’ to be gained from bringing people of a community together to create an arts event must not be sacrificed for the sake of so-called aesthetic considerations. This prompted a significant provocation. How could I achieve this balance in my own work?
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1.5.iv. An arts partnership
During the first part of 2001, I worked in a part-time capacity as a researcher and writer for a community theatre project in regional Queensland. I had been commissioned to create the text for a musical based on historical experiences of the region’s residents. The play, an usual interpretation of the ‘school musical’, by High School and University students in a major collaborative performance event.

In this project, I worked as a member of a team of theatre and educational professionals. I found the partnership between artist, school and community to be rewarding and rich. The production also gratified participants in terms of personal and collective benefits: the students gained a greater appreciation of their own community; they were proud of their role in sharing what they had learned with the broader community; and they engaged in a series of satisfying aesthetic experiences, including the performance of the final product.

There was a critical insight for me here. The project occurred within a framework of shared understanding: of the content (local stories); of the nature of theatrical productions (the school musical); of participants as stakeholders (reflecting the partnership between school, university and practitioners). This shared understanding enabled all members of the creative team to contribute to the endeavour from the position of their own expertise. The framework and the terms of reference were clear and a collective articulation of purpose gave individual participants the freedom to both contribute to the whole event and experience the process in an individual way. Through the clarity of the infrastructure, boundaries of community participation and pedagogy were blurred, redefined and extended.
1.6. Intentions and Outcomes

1.6.i. In search of a Belbrook story

On The Day
It’s eleven thirty on the morning of the Country Fair. The Brinkley Hall is bustling with prams and toddlers, parents and grandparents with video cameras. Katriona, one of the parents, is playing rollicking tunes on the banjo to set the mood. No one is listening, but it does add to the festive chaos. The children of Grades Prep, One and Two file in with their teachers and their parent helpers. They sit, in class groups, on either side of the ‘stage’, an area of the Hall that has been designated ‘stage’, and delineated with home made black curtains, and a wonderful hand painted back drop of a forest setting. (The backdrop, with tall gums, tree ferns and rustic paths, resembles the view outside the window) The Principal climbs over costumed kids and takes the microphone. He welcomes everyone, as Principals do, and reminds them to keep their young ‘uns under control. Frequently, events in this hall are characterised by chortling and careering toddlers, running riot in the acoustically challenging space, ignored by parents, grimaced at by teachers, and indulged by the school children who remember themselves doing the same thing some years earlier. I am introduced. I hobble over the same costumed kids and speak unmemorable words into the microphone. Each of the grades has a short play to perform. They have been woven together to make one single event. The Grade Two Play, The First Day bookends the other two stories. It’s very crowded on and off the stage. I make my first mental note of the day. Should have made more room for the kids performing. The event flies past in a blur. I breathe only once during the whole thing. My teeth are clenched into an anxious smile. I know that the people at the back will be straining to hear and see. I watch my shoes and let my antenna feel the response of parents and children. At one awful moment many of the parents of Grade One children leave as the Grade One contribution, Jack and the Giants concludes. ‘But wait, there’s more’, I shout in my head, my teeth still clenched into the anxious smile. I make the second mental note Should have thought about the ‘false ending’. Actually I made two mental notes at this point, but one I won’t record here, as it’s a rather uncharitable aside, about members of the community and their inability to recognise WHEN A PLAY IS STILL GOING ON!

The thirty minutes creep by. From the view I’m getting when I glance up from my shoes the children are all doing well. They are remembering when it’s their turn and where to go; they are remembering to roar when they are monsters and laugh when they are children from 1934; they are watching quietly when it’s not their turn, and encouraging each other. I see them willing their classmates to tell the story well, not just for the story’s sake, but for their own sakes. Finally it’s over, and the parents applaud. Costumed children break ranks and run to be congratulated. One parent comes to me. She loves what we have done. She appreciates the weaving together of the fantastical Jack and the Giants and the Belbrook Monster, with the historical tale of the first day of the first school in Belbrook. She remarks on the uniqueness of attempting such a play with children so young. Briefly, I smile on the inside as well as the outside.

1.6.ii. Intentions and outcomes: The challenge of a Belbrook story

The performance event that I created formed a central component in the school’s annual fete, entitled The Country Fair. For all concerned, the day was a great success. Everyone agreed that there was an air of congeniality and a sense of real excitement at times during
the day, despite the unseasonable weather. The performance program, it was also agreed, was integral to the achievement of this success. The community’s support for the Fair was unprecedented. All but about eight children in the school’s population of 195 attended and participated in performances. Parents, grandparents, family friends and interested neighbours squashed into the school hall, and braved inclement weather to watch plays performed by the children (and a smattering of adults).

However, in many ways the event was far removed from my expectations, especially in terms of content, and aesthetic and community outcomes. I had promoted the performing arts program as a way of telling the stories of our town. Indeed in all the promotional literature I produced the project was called ‘Belbrook Stories’. However, just a few of the short plays that made up the ‘festival’ were based on the stories of the town and its people. Mostly, the pieces were light-hearted vignettes that reflected the children’s current interests and pre-occupations. There was a ‘murder mystery’, a story of time travel, a retelling of Jack and the beanstalk, a melodrama, and the tantalizing tale of a monster terrorising a small village in the Dandenongs. What had happened, in the three months of this project, to lead me so far away from my intention to tell the stories of the town, to this motley collection of plays that could perhaps have been told anywhere? And despite genuine and widespread audience approval for the performances, admittedly from appreciative parents and relatives, they hadn’t measured up to my own expectation of a ‘satisfying aesthetic’. In many cases, it was simply impossible for the performers to be heard.

What had happened to lead me so far from my stated intentions? There is both a simple and a complex answer to this question. The simple answer is that this was a research project, in which I as a participatory researcher had responded to the setting and circumstances, and the outcomes we ultimately achieved reflected the community and its response to the project.
Chapter One: In Search of Community

The complex answer is the substance of this study of community theatre processes. The contrast between my initial aims and the outcomes leads me to formulate new questions. What are the stories of a community? What does it really mean to ‘give voice’ to community participants? Is there such a thing as a ‘community aesthetic’, specific to and relevant to only one time and place? Is it possible to identify and articulate the processes that the artist goes through in facilitating a project with a community, and what is the significance of their relationship to the community and the project? If I had my time over, what would I have done differently?

My understanding of the nature of community and community theatre has been transformed through this research experience. I have also revisited the role of the community artist and her relationship to the aesthetics of performance and performance making. The Belbrook Stories Project eventually took me beyond my local community, to scrutinise the nature of the community artist’s work and to consider the nature of community participation. It has led me to conceptualise the notion of a community aesthetic which encompasses a space in which participants engage in collective art-making processes predicated on an invitation to aesthetic and social engagement. Such a space is charged with the potential for a politicising experience as well as a community one. This new understanding is framed by an appreciation of the interplay between artistic invention (and intervention) and pedagogy. In order to give voice to the silent community, the artist employs the tools of emancipatory pedagogy along with a raft of modernist and post-modernist theatre understandings.4

We need space...for expression, for freedom...a public space...where living persons can come together in speech and action, each one free to articulate a distinctive perspective, all of them granted equal worth. It must be a space of dialogue, a space where a web of relationships can be woven, and where a common world can be brought into being and continually renewed... There must be a teachable capacity to bring into being a public composed of persons with many voices and many perspectives, out of whose multiple intelligences emerge a durable and worthwhile common world.5

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1.7. The Structure Of The Thesis

1.7.i. Defining terms and reviewing the literature of the field

Giving Voice and Being Heard: Searching for a new understanding of rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes in community theatre.

The title of this thesis provides the guide to the key terms that require further investigation. A deeper understanding of these terms and how they might apply in a community and arts context will provide the lens through which the fieldwork of this study will be viewed. It is hoped that this process will serve two purposes: it will provide a clarification of what took place in the field, and it will locate the practice within a community and arts context.

The terms in question are: Community, Community Theatre, Aesthetic (outcomes) and Rehearsal processes. A chapter is devoted to each of the terms:  Chapter Two –‘The Problem of Community’ canvasses a range of possible definitions and applications of a slippery and problematic term across a number of disciplines. Chapter Three – ‘Enacting Community’ tackles the task of definition through an examination of practice. Acknowledging the plethora of labels attached to community theatre practice and the confusion over the application of the same term to many different practices, this chapter outlines the dominant concerns of those involved in the practice of theatre in communities, within the paradigm of community arts and regardless of the labels they use to describe themselves. In place of a single definition, the chapter concludes with a summary of principles drawn from a detailed examination of practices across continents. Chapter Four – ‘It’s Pretty but is it Art?’ – Aesthetics for community theatre making’ does not attempt to offer a contemporary definition of the ‘aesthetic.’ Rather the chapter focuses on the problems of definition that confront contemporary community theatre
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makers when attempting to formulate an aesthetic understanding of their practice. Critical to this discussion is an overview of the work of useful and influential theoreticians and practitioners. These are commentators whose work embodies the notion articulated by John Dewey that ‘art is experience.’

These three chapters provide a substantial review of relevant literature across a range of fields of theory and practice. This review provides two other important and related functions in this thesis. The first is the foregrounding of praxis. The critical literature is mined not only to explore the ways in which theoretical understandings of key terms are central to the study, but also to place these theoretical underpinnings firmly in the context of practice. Examples of community theatre practice from across the world are incorporated to illuminate and inform the discussion. The extensive consideration of the principles and practices of community theatre form a significant component of this thesis.

The case study at the heart of the research focuses on a single small community theatre project. In order for this project to be viewed in the context of world practice and for the findings of the single case to have resonance with the wider community of practitioners and theorists, I have chosen to balance this exploration of my own practice with the close although not comprehensive examination of the theory and practice of the community theatre field that precedes it.

1.7.ii. Bridging the gap

Chapter Five establishes a link between the examination of principles and practice in a global context, and the study of a small community in the Dandenongs. This short chapter provides the second of the two critical functions of the literature review referred to earlier. It offers a synthesis of this discussion of critical literature and practice in the form of the Community Theatre Matrix. This diagrammatic representation of my understanding of the central elements of community theatre practice is placed at the centre of the thesis and subsequently serves as a lens through which to view my research. It is also intended as a key analytical tool in the formulation of research findings.
1.7.iii. Fieldwork: Researching and reporting

When I turn my attention to the fieldwork at the heart of this study, the story of the Belbrook performing arts project, the thesis takes a distinctly new direction. This is not only a shift in content, but also style, most notably in Chapter Seven. This chapter takes the form of a novella, offering a narrativised third person account of the practice I undertook in Belbrook. My reasons for adopting this form of reporting are articulated in detail in Chapter Six, the chapter devoted to matters of the methodology of the study.

1.7.iv. Looking back and looking forward

I return to a more conventional academic style in the chapters that follow the novella. In seeking to tease out the issues that are embedded in the novella, I use the Community Theatre Matrix as an analytical lens and apply it to the specific, local community context of the Belbrook performing arts project. I then take the opportunity to review the efficacy of the Matrix as a tool for understanding and analysing practice by considering how it has served the analysis of the Belbrook setting. In response to this review, I propose a modification to the Matrix, a matrix ‘reloaded’.

The thesis concludes by revisiting the questions identified in this introductory chapter. Some are addressed in detail in this thesis, and some are not. It is those questions that remain unresolved that conclude the thesis and provide a final provocation. The encounter with questions yet to be answered serves as a reminder that there are more projects to mount and many more challenges ahead for the artist/educator as reflective practitioner.
Chapter Two: The Problem of Community

2.1. The Problem Of ‘Community’

…for culture is ordinary, you should not have to go to London to get it.  

As I set about formulating a working definition of the key term ‘community’ I have chosen to go back several decades to begin my quest for an understanding of the notion of community. Raymond Williams is my starting point with his discussion of ‘culture’, and more particularly his premise that “culture is ordinary”.  

While it is not my intention here to explore the complex discourse associated with the nature and definition of culture, it is pertinent to consider a number of salient points that Williams makes in his discussion of the role of culture in the construction of society. The first is that “culture is ordinary”. The second is that “every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning”. These two propositions provide a critical platform for the coming examination of community arts practice for the following reasons.

Firstly, in a clear-sighted and direct way Williams articulates his view of a culture’s primary function: to express the known meanings and the new meanings of the members of a given society. In addition, the expression of these new and existing meanings are part of the “ordinary processes of human societies and human minds”, and they are both “traditional and creative”. It is in this context that Williams suggests that “culture is ordinary”, and therefore, available to all.

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7 Williams, 1989, p.4.
8 Williams, 1989, p.4.
Chapter Two: The Problem of Community

A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings.\(^9\)

The sweep of Williams’ discussion of culture extends far beyond the arts and the production of arts works. However, Williams does suggest that one of the ways in which a human society expresses its known and new meanings is through the arts. Through the arts, as through culture more generally, a society explores, expresses and constructs “common meanings and directions”.

It is possible to locate two fundamentals from William’s proposition: that societies are given to constructing meanings about themselves, through culture, and that expressions of culture are both everyday and extraordinary. If one accepts that the arts operate as one critical element of culture, then it is possible to extrapolate from Williams work in the following manner: meaning-making through the arts can be a primary societal function, and has the potential to belong in any given society or community, and to be available to all members. This is a central proposition in this thesis: that art and its production as an expression of society can be in the hands of the many, not the few. As Raymond Williams says, “culture is ordinary” and “an interest in …the arts is simple, pleasant and natural”.\(^{10}\)

Williams also takes on the notion of community in his extensive body of work. Once again, his work provides a useful starting point for considering the problematic nature of a commonly used, commonly misunderstood term. There is general agreement across disciplines, theorists, and the passage of time that community is a term that is difficult to define. It is also a term that generally carries positive connotations with it. In other words, although there is little agreement about what community actually is, it is generally considered to be desirable to be part of a community, or at least to aspire to being part of one. However, Raymond Williams noted in 1976, “it never seems to be used

\(^9\) Williams, 1989, p.4.
\(^{10}\) Williams, 1989, p.7.
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unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing terms.”

According to Williams, this lack of a critical context for usage renders the term highly problematic and ultimately, not very useful, especially when seeking a clear definition of the term.

….. it is unusable as a term that enables one to make distinctions: one is never certain exactly to which formation the notion is referring. It was when I suddenly realized that no one ever used ‘community’ in a hostile sense that I saw how dangerous it was.

2.2. Defining Community: Definitions In Practice

Wildcat: I’ve been thinking a lot about this word community. Common unity. I’ve been really thinking hard about those two words. Common. Unity. I’ve been thinking on the Indian reserve – are they ‘community’. And I really wonder. I’m not sure they are yet.

In seeking to define the term ‘community’ I think it is important to acknowledge two things. Firstly, community is a term that belongs in the popular vocabulary. Secondly, as it is a term that individuals use with ease, confident of its meaning, there is not widespread acknowledgement that community is a contested concept. Sociologist Anthony Cohen makes the observation:

‘Community’ is one of those words – like ‘culture’, ‘myth’, ‘ritual’, ‘symbol’ – bandied around in ordinary, everyday speech, apparently readily intelligible to speaker and listener, which, when imported into the discourse of social science, however, causes immense difficulty.

This confident use of the terminology may stem from a self-defining characteristic associated with community. One claims to be a member of a community, and this proclamation qualifies that individual to membership. Also, the act of claiming membership could also be seen to reaffirm the existence of that community. Community theatre practitioners draw on their own experiences to arrive at definitions that serve their

11 Raymond Williams, 1976, Keywords, Fontana, London. p.76.
own practice. The following definitions and descriptions each offer some insight into the ways in which community as a concept can begin to be understood in the specific context of community theatre practice.

Community theatre worker Neil Cameron notes that community may be a factor of geography, ethnicity, living conditions, or shared beliefs, to name a few, although the most significant factor in defining community is the individual’s sense of belonging to it.\(^{15}\) Anthony Cohen describes the characteristics of this sense of belonging:

> The individual members feel a common identity and see themselves as part of a defined group. They know its language, its habits, its beliefs and its relationship to themselves; in other words they know its culture and feel part of it.\(^{16}\)

Cameron also suggests that a community has its own ‘culture’ (eg. shared language, habits and beliefs).\(^{17}\) It follows then, if one accepts Cameron’s assumption, that when a community acts to define itself, through manifestations of community (celebrations, rituals, public events, performances, publications even) there is a confirmation of their culture. There is also a reaffirmation of the community for those who belong—those familiar with the shared language, habits, or beliefs.

Gay Hawkins, in her overview of community arts in Australia, casts her definition of community in political terms, suggesting that ‘community’ can be seen as a force in opposition to the state, or to mass culture, and by community, she means either a community of interest or locality.\(^{18}\)

Neelands and Goode’s reference to children as a ‘community within a community’ is particularly pertinent to this study:

\(^{16}\) Anthony Cohen, p. 4.  
\(^{17}\) Neil Cameron, p.45.  
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...a group of children is a community within a community and...access to forms of communal, creative expression enables them to recognise, strengthen and develop their place within that shared community.  

Owen Kelly too discusses the role played by “forms of communal, creative expression” in the development of a “dynamic community”. He identifies the “sharing of common meanings, and common activities and purposes” as the focus of community and as the means by which growth and change can occur. For Kelly, the engagement in meaning-making in the community and the process of communication entailed in this “is in fact the process of community”.

The perception of community as a dynamic force (rather than an objectified entity) presents a challenge to practitioners and academics also. As David Watt, an Australian community artist and academic observes in his discussion of the work of Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson and the British context:

The interactions within a group of people who choose to see themselves as a community continually alter the nature of that community, so that it is always in a state of ‘becoming’.

2.3. Moving Beyond The Markers: Claiming Community

The literature about community crosses many disciplines. In itself this may provide a clue to the difficulty in arriving at a definition. There is a tendency for each discipline that claims a connection to community to territorialise the domain, and to view community within the lens of its own discipline. It is only when one moves beyond a single lens that it is possible to find some broader definitional markers that serve this particular attempt to define community.

Sonja Kuftinec, a community theatre practitioner and academic draws attention to the work of sociologist Anthony Cohen in her writing. Cohen explores the different meanings that the term community carries for different people and groups. He describes community as a “God” word. As Kuftinec explains:

In *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, …Cohen suggests that ‘community’ operates as a ‘God word’, used symbolically to avoid the confrontation of its connotative differences. Community, like ‘God’ symbolically unites those who believe in and employ the concept, even though these individuals may have vastly varying ideas as to its connotations.

Cohen elaborates on his position with two propositions that are useful for this discussion. The first is that in addition to the differentiation in meanings that community has for the individual, there is a distinctive pattern of usage of the term. According to Cohen, it is a term that is employed when there is a need or desire to establish not commonality but difference.

Cohen’s second important contribution to the understanding of community is in his identification of the role of symbolic understandings. Individuals draw on the symbols of community to assist in their identity formulation as individuals who hold membership of a community. This is not to say that the symbols have shared meanings. Indeed, according to Cohen, it is the very ambiguity of the symbols that make them so useful in the construction of community. It is the presence of the symbols that is critical rather than their meaning. When describing members of a community participating in a large community event, a carnival, Cohen observes: “Each is able to define the community for himself using the shared symbolic forms proffered by the carnival”. Given the widespread use of symbol in ritual and performance, this is a useful guide for understanding the relationship between community and collective performance.

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24 Cohen, p.12.
Political scientist Adrian Little in The Politics of Community also acknowledges that community is a “slippery concept” and resists the temptation to clarify and reduce definitions to a single simple description. Rather, Little embraces the multiplicities of meaning in the practice of community, and focuses on two key principles. The first is the now familiar proposition that community is an aspirational concept. Community is ascribed with a set of virtues or principles to which people might aspire. At its most fundamental level, Little says, the idea of community has been a touchstone for those concerned with “rootedness, cohesion and belonging”.

Little’s second key principle is that community refers to some kind of association. This may be an association determined by choice or a specific purpose or a ‘non-instrumental’ association for which there is a clear connectedness, but not a stated purpose. (Geographic communities, for example, might frequently fall into this category)

Little also places an emphasis on reciprocity and the transactional nature of community: that certain attributes or behaviours are expected in return for acceptance and belonging. However, the critical clarification that Little makes in his description of community is that his is not a ‘totalising’ definition. As Little explains:

Clearly this is a non-perfectionist view of community. It does not set out their size, the closeness or otherwise of relationships therein, or the specifics of behaviour in community. All it suggests is that certain types of virtues will be present at one time or another….There is no veneration of a particular version of association that happened in the past but rather an attempt to legitimise the wide variety of associations that exist today in different groups.

When community is viewed in this constant process of “becoming” or as a “mobile collectivity” it is more difficult to create structures to contain or define it. This has a number of important implications for contemporary understandings of community and indeed for this investigation of community theatre practice.

27 Adrian Little, p. 2.
28 Little, p.4.
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The first is that communities are not fixed entities and are therefore capable of transformation through enactment. The second is that communities are defined, through practice, by the borders that members of the community set up to differentiate themselves from those who do not belong. The third, by logical extension of the first two points is that communities can be temporary and transitory and the boundaries are fluid as meanings are renegotiated within the process of community enactment.

2.4. The Process of Community

Little, Cohen and Williams have all underlined the aspiration for community. This quest for “rootedness, cohesion and belonging” carries with it expectations. Those who aspire ascribe to certain behaviours and values in return for membership. Anthony Cohen proposes that the construction of the borders around a community is a central act of community. This process of creating community while frequently seen as an inclusive act, is inevitably exclusive. Cohen states:

Community....seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference. The word thus expresses a ‘relational’ idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities.

There is an apparent paradox here: while communities are identified by their commonalities, the borders of the community are delineated by community members through their recognition of difference and those characteristics that set them apart from other communities and individuals. Community Theatre practitioner Sonja Kuftinec endorses the work of Cohen in suggesting that members of a community seek to distinguish themselves from others and do so through the definition of boundaries. These boundaries may be of “land, behaviour or background”. Kuftinec is also quick to remind us that these boundaries may not necessarily be stable. The boundaries are formed

29 Little, p.2.
30 Cohen, p.12.
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through the perceptions of community members and they may just as easily shift as individual perceptions or understandings are altered. Kuftinec tested this theoretical articulation of community in her community theatre work in the former Yugoslavia.  

In her work the notion of boundaries as a means of defining community was borne out in her practice. However, the principle proved to be a complex one. For example, she brought with her into the work some preconceptions about communities defined by geography or ethnicity, only to find that within these communities there existed both commonalities and differences. A group defined by its geographic location encompassed many groups defined by association, of age, or educational experience, for example. While the geographic group may have constituted a community with a shared purpose, in the context of the refugee camp the boundaries of community were fluid, with borders shifting to include or exclude on the basis of past experience or age. New meanings were negotiated with different ‘micro’ communities asserting their identity within the broader community context.

David Watt reports a similar initial mis-reading of community in a youth theatre project he facilitated. In the case he cites, the assumption of commonality within the geographic community of his project doomed it to failure. The geographic community comprising young people in the industrial city of Newcastle was a contested one, fraught with divisions and diverse purposes. It was not possible to bring this particular loose affiliation of people together to enact community as a result of the “clashing perspectives and interests”. In this instance:

The word ‘community ‘ is used like Polyfilla, patching the cracks of contradiction to create the impression of monolithic social groupings.  

33 Watt, in Binns,1991, p. 59
34 Watt, p.58
Watt makes the important point that his project was doomed not so much because the geographic community could not be brought together as a ‘real’ community of shared purpose and action, but because of the constraints caused by an imposed assumption of community affiliation.

While Kuftinec records that her work in the Balkans was founded on a similar flawed assumption of shared purpose within the community, she noted a different outcome, made possible by the process of theatre making. This activity, brought into the ‘community’ by outsiders, enabled the reformulation of boundaries through the renegotiation of community meanings and the recognition and acceptance of community symbols. Temporarily, borders shifted, and the excluded became included. The making of art opened up the possibility for new understandings and new articulations of community meaning, and with this set of transactions, borders were crossed and purposes were shared.

Kuftinec makes it clear that this is not a singular process. Like community, theatre-making embodies many shades of interpretation, and the moments in which people came together were mitigated by moments of resistance.

The performance process did…function as a site of differentiation as well as a site of boundary crossing. Populations marked by divisions in class, ethnicity, language, and location could enact these differences by refusing to cross physical boundaries or to translate English instructions. Yet, the process also enabled a temporary negotiation of boundaries.35

There are several useful principles to draw from this section of the discussion. The first is that community is a contested unexpectedly complex term. Not only can it be most clearly delineated by the process of differentiation from those who do not belong, but communities are not singular and complete entities, but can embody difference and commonality within them. As a result, the borders that define communities are not fixed but fluid and can contain other borders and other communities within them.

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This view of community is consistent with a post-modern context. Hebdige describes the post-modern landscape as one possessing “a proliferation of surfaces…a process of cultural, political or existential fragmentation…the replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/discourse formations, the collapse of cultural hierarchies…” The certainties of the past are replaced with the pluralities of the present.

There appears to be a great deal of synchronicity between the post-modernism paradigm, characterised by “the replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/discourse formations” and community, where definitions can be achieved by the delineation and subsequent further delineations of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. While community still carries with it the notion of unity, it is perhaps, as Henry Giroux suggests, more appropriate to describe a “unity-in difference” accommodating both diversity and common ground.

2.5. Borders and Margins: Contested communities

In order to state or to seek a collective identity the cultural, meaning-making tools of the community are employed. The making of community performance sits in a very interesting place in this discussion. Stories, rituals, and performance all can become critical implements of community identity. At the margins of the community many negotiations over the processes of enactment that will best serve the community take place between performance facilitators and participants. The process of art-making brings together a temporary community and collective meanings can be negotiated through this process: through the form that the artistic product takes and through the content and context chosen. While such art-making communities are temporary, they are potentially

very important for the ways in which they clarify and crystallise community needs and problems. The anthropologist Victor Turner describes the rare and particular moment in time when external status structures momentarily dissipate as ‘communitas’: “an essential though temporary enactment of community”.\(^{39}\) Through ‘communitas’, which can be described as the “ephemeral sense of connectedness and bonding experienced by a group through the common experience of a unifying ritual”, participants in a performance event can be united with the audience and with the community theatre workers facilitating the event.\(^{40}\) Such an experience of ‘communitas’ can be a catalyst for healing or the remaking of community boundaries to include rather than exclude.

The theatrical event functions as a unifying ritual in Turner’s terms, momentarily manifesting and underscoring a feeling of community or identity.\(^{41}\)

However, Kuftinec warns that ‘communitas’ can also veil difference, “concealing its dissonances and limitations in the momentary unity of performance”.\(^{42}\) Kuftinec does not reject the significance of ‘communitas’ or the potential benefits of a performance events for a community, but recommends caution when analysing the impact of such events and by implication, the efficacy of community-based theatre making.

Many theatre practitioners document the significance of an experience of ‘communitas’ for a community. Despite her reservations, Kuftinec attests to the salvific effects of the art-making process and performance, made especially significant in the context of the war-torn Balkans where her work took place.

As a site of re-presentation, performance becomes a medium through which this redrawing [of boundaries] can occur. The performance process reinforces commonalities, illuminates

\(^{39}\) Kuftinec provides a detailed discussion of ‘communitas’ in ‘Odakle Ste?(Where are you from?) Active Learning and Community Based Theatre in Former Yugoslavia and the U.S’,1997, p.180.
Also Victor Turner:
\(^{40}\) Kuftinec, 1996, p.94.
\(^{41}\) Kuftinec, 1996, p.94.
\(^{42}\) Kuftinec, 1997, p.181.
difference, and alters boundaries of identity, bringing together for a time, those who perceive themselves as belonging to different communities. 43

The community artist, who enters a community with a view to creating or facilitating the creation of an art event brings experiences, skills and cultural understanding from another context and in doing so, inevitably shifts the boundaries of the community they have entered. Whether these boundaries are shifted to include or exclude that community artist depends largely on the nature of the transactions between the interested parties. It is also possible that the quality of the transactions is intensified because of the artist’s role in mediating the community input through the chosen art-form.

Ann Elizabeth Armstrong notes the rich and complex community-building interaction between her students as artists, and community participants:

… the emotional connection between the students and the community members allowed the students to enter into this imagined community, assuming weighty responsibilities as both artists and citizens…..

And

The student facilitators ..were outsiders entering into a community to create theatre with and for that community. They were transformed even as they strove to transform the community…the students crossed several borders as they expanded and remapped the community’s identity, their own identities and their perceptions of the world. 44

Shelton and Fisher, working in a vastly different setting in suburban Melbourne report on the interplay between artist and community, when they describe the successful and ongoing community arts program they have fostered.

In our experience, when a partnership is formed between the community, the artists, and the organisation/s, a ‘container’, or defined space, is created for the creative process. People come into this safe space; engage deeply with their own experience, emotions and memories; and create artistic form. As a result, personal meaning, personal identity and purpose are built. 45

44 Armstrong, 2000, p.113
Prentki and Selman identify similar patterns in their report of indigenous theatre-making in Canada. The emphasis in their research is on how performance-making provides not only the vessel for community meanings but the vehicle by which community, or possibly ‘communitas’ is achieved.

I think that the theatre in many places actually creates community. …… Common unity. It may not be very long lasting, it may not have a community that goes on … but for a period of time, what happens is people see one another. And the act of seeing one another and one another’s lives is… I don’t know how you make anything change until that happens.”

Sonja Kuftinec draws on her experience in the Balkans and in regional United States when she suggests that the process and performance of community-based theatre have the potential to be both artistic and pedagogical in the broadest sense of the word. Kuftinec also suggests that when the form taken by community-based theatre falls outside the familiar and conventional forms of theatre practice, this provides an opening to a rich process and outcome “providing a potential learning experience for audiences as well as participants.”

2.6. Community and Cultural Democracy: Politicised Community

The challenge of understanding community intensifies when one considers the politicised nature of communities in practice. The interface between conflicting notions of cultural production and community suggest a highly politicised field. Similarly, when one considers the vexed issues of access, value and cultural democracy as they relate to artistic production in community contexts, it is clear that community is politicised concept.

Raymond Williams notes, “a culture…has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.”

David Watt, in his article ‘Interrogating
‘Community’: Social Welfare versus Cultural Democracy’, provides a very useful view of Williams’ analysis of cultural dynamics, built upon Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony:

The dominant, or hegemonic element of a culture is a continual flux, sifting out elements which no longer serve its basic purpose of legitimating and perpetuating the socioeconomic structure of the society. …the emergent elements of a culture, those which point forward to new possibilities of social organisation, are continually subject to the assimilative pressures of the dominant.\(^{49}\)

The proposition that culture is both contested and processual rather than objective is foreshadowed here by Williams. This description of cultural dynamics provides several critical precepts for defining and contextualising community within the broader view of community arts, aesthetics and pedagogy.

2.6.1. Precepts of the politicised community

These precepts are predicated on one simple principle: community is a politicised concept.

- The concept of community can be appropriated to serve broader political ends.

David Watt proposes that the term ‘community’ is employed to suggest a unity or agreement that does not exist. “The arena of ‘consensus politics’ is full of references to ‘Australian community’ or just the community, as if it means something more than mere geographical co-presence”.\(^{50}\) Masking schisms within a population has many political advantages, from assuming a mandate and ignoring hidden problems to creating policy in a ‘one-size-fits all’ approach. Doctor H.C. Coombs, the first Chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts, in 1972, observed that the vicarious achievement derived when witnessing supreme virtuosity in the arts, as in football, contributed to a sense of “community identity”.\(^{51}\) At the time, such an observation provided a useful rationale for funding the opera and other elitist art forms with the football-going public’s taxes. With

\(^{49}\) Watt, 1991, pp.57-58

\(^{50}\) Watt, 1991, p.58.

\(^{51}\) Watt, 1991, p.56.
similar intention, John Sumner, Artistic Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company in the early 1970s posited that it was the “largest community theatre company in Australia”.52

In contrast to the appropriation of ‘community’ to rationalise a certain approach to public policy or funding, Gay Hawkins notes that ‘community’ was adopted by the welfare and non-mainstream ‘hippie’ lobby as a way of colonising particular practices that may have been seen as inclusive or democratic or non-bureaucratic.53 Such an appropriation, as has been noted above, was as exclusive as it was inclusive.

- **When a community seeks to express or explore its identity through processes of enactment (eg performance, ritual etc) there are issues of power and cultural dominance to negotiate.**

One of the difficulties that practitioners face when making community theatre is the intricate web of power relations that frames the production of art in a community setting. At the macro-level, there are issues of class, dominance and subordination. Some groups or communities are marginalised and have little access to opportunities to express and explore their needs or identity either through the arts or other means.

For these groups, the opportunity to engage in an act of community such as a collective art-making event, can be powerful and affirming, but can also bring with it other issues of power and cultural dominance. The community artists who facilitate the work may come from outside the community, and therefore, represent the cultural hegemony that silences the marginal group. There are often unacknowledged power relations between various participants in the group, who may be located at the borders of the community, and the artistic facilitator/s, who may come from outside the community, but bring with them the authority of art-form expertise.

Chapter Two : The Problem of Community

Hoffie has suggested that one of the ways in which the cultural hegemony is maintained is through the appropriation of the forms of work created by the marginal group.

The centre reappropriates the style of the marginal critiques in order to recreate its own hegemony. Centrist practice remains the same.³⁴

- **Access to the means of cultural production and audience for marginalised communities becomes a matter of cultural democracy.**

David Watt offers a definition of community that was first articulated by the Shelton Trust, a British organisation who produced a discussion paper on culture and democracy:

The ideas that constitute cultural democracy both enable and depend upon direct participation, and take as their aim the building and sustenance of a society in which people are free to come together to produce, distribute and receive the cultures they choose.⁵⁵

The concept of cultural democracy is a recurring theme in discussions on both community and community theatre. Expressions of community need and identity are manifestations of the existence of community. They are the “proclamations of being” that Barbara Myerhoff so eloquently described. Myerhoff was also mindful that “arenas for appearing” were not optional but essential.⁵⁶ Cultural democracy embodies these notions of community expression and the articulation of collective need and identity through cultural forms.

- **Community expressions of purpose or identity can serve as critique of the cultural (and political) hegemony. As such, community action, through participation in the arts, for example, can be both radical and radicalising, and can foreshadow cultural and political change.**

Chapter Two: The Problem of Community

David Trend sees this as the responsibility of the educator, the community activist, the artist, and the community itself. His analysis is that critique of the political or cultural hegemony is an essential component of social and political change, and that one of the mechanisms that will facilitate this is the public manifestations of art. According to Trend, communities can claim the public arena not simply to critique the status quo but to set the agenda.

...it is incumbent upon radical educators and artists to assist in reconstituting an arena for civic dialogue by validating the significance of a people’s culture and recovering the public function of art. In doing so, cultural workers must recognize their roles in the development of civic consciousness. This means promoting notions of shared responsibility for community life, along with the belief that change is indeed possible.57

2.6.ii. Communities of Art-makers

It is evident from this development of the discussion that there are profound political implications when one considers the conception and practice of community. As a term that has such power to include and exclude it is logical that politicians and makers of social policy might appropriate it in order to consolidate whichever position they had taken on. The impact on community artists cannot be overlooked here. The artist is at the fulcrum of the cultural process, in terms of mediating art forms, in the crossing of borders, and in the evolution of an art-making process that acknowledges aesthetic forces, pedagogy and cultural democracy. The making of art can be the first step to maintaining the cultural hegemony of the time. Issues of high art and popular art lurk beneath the surface of this discussion.

The next step from here is to consider the ways in which community theatre, in its multiplicity of incarnations can be used to support or critique the status quo; to maintain or challenge the dominance of cultural, social and political elites or power bases; to provide the vehicle and the voice for the disempowered or the silent. Vivienne Binns offers a powerful note of caution prior to this examination of community theatre practice:

Some voices are never heard outside their personal local or marginal networks, and incidentally, may choose to have it that way.\(^{58}\)

2.7. Describing Community : A summary

Community is a term with no single fixed meaning. Rather it is a description of a set of transactions, both symbolic and actual, between people who share a common purpose, either by association or agreement.

Community is dynamic. The enactment of community suggests a possibility for both critique and change.

The boundaries that determine communities are fluid and are in an ongoing state of negotiation by those within the community and those standing on the margins. The shifting of these boundaries and the re-negotiations of meaning that take place on the boundaries can be facilitated by the practice of collective art making. In such exchanges, new yet temporary communities can be formed, promising the rare but potent experience of ‘communitas’.

The agency of the community artist is at the centre of these reformulations of community. Through an aesthetic, political and pedagogical frame, the artist and community come together to consider ways to reflect on their lives, and to construct culture. Together, they navigate the “traditional and creative”, and find the “most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings”.\(^{59}\)


\(^{59}\) Williams, 1989, p.16.
A Discourse for Community Theatre

….if we wish to see how contemporary drama and theatre might engage with the ‘great liberal motives’ underlying most conceptions of democracy, then we should be looking to resistant and transcendent practices which valorise the autonomous subject while reinforcing collective (or community) identities.60

As with the other problematic terms dealt with so far in this thesis, it is neither possible nor helpful to provide a single totalising definition of community theatre. The practice is too diverse and the philosophies and artistry that drive the practice represent not a single force but many forces.

One of the early attempts at theorising community theatre practice was made by Steve Gooch, a British community theatre artist of the 1970’s and 1980’s. Gooch made his analysis of the problems and practice of community theatre in Britain at a critical time in British history: (It was the recession of the early 1980’s and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had declared that there was “no such thing as society”).61 Gooch’s contribution to building an informed discourse on community theatre was to draw extensively on the particularities of his own experience as a practicing artist in the field, while also making reference to theoretical underpinnings of practice, with regard to aesthetics, community cultural development, and political theory. While it may now appear somewhat limited in scope, Gooch’s book, All Together Now: An Alternative View of Theatre and the Community takes some important preliminary steps towards the construction of an informed discourse on community theatre.

Gooch identifies some of the critical concerns for practitioners and theorists when he observes:

Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice

…the term ‘community theatre’ itself has been subject to considerable abuse….sometimes it’s assumed that anything so close to home cannot be professional – a misunderstanding experienced and struggled against by many theatre companies….Sometimes its experimental quality is used as an apology for sloppy thinking or poor production standards. Occasionally its name is taken in vain to extract more subsidy from local authorities. The very totality of its ideological opposition to established theatre – whether in regard to audience, work methods, organization or product- makes it an unfamiliar and controversial concept.62

Other commentators of this period examine community theatre practice through a particular interpretive lens. Owen Kelly, for example offers a highly politicised view of the community arts as a site of critique of the dominant cultural and political hegemonies of the day. Kelly provides some useful fundamentals upon which a critical discourse can be built. He also argues strongly for the construction of a coherent theoretical framework for a deeper and more contextualized understanding of the practice of the arts in the community. While Kelly addresses issues related to the arts generally, it is possible to extrapolate from his more general position to consider the relevance of his comments to the community theatre context:

The community arts movement has refused to construct any theoretical framework for its work, and has ignored any attempts that have been made to do so… Without a theoretical framework, it is impossible to judge success or failure, and impossible to set goals. Instead everybody ‘knows what they mean’ although nobody has the vocabulary to express it, and being unable to express it they have no way of finding out if it does, in fact make sense. In refusing to analyse our work, and place that analysis into a political context, the community arts movement has placed itself in a position of absurd, and unnecessary, weakness.63

Kelly is not alone in identifying the resistance that community arts/theatre practitioners have to formulating theoretical underpinnings for their practice. One argument proposed by Pat Hoffie is that the theory itself “has appeared to exist as privileged knowledge”.64 Hoffie cautions marginalized groups (artists and community members alike) against this resistance to theorising:

By doing so they naively accept their own habituation in a ghetto from which the process of self-critique, reinvention and regeneration through an active theory have been banned.65

The last decade has seen a significant growth in informed discourse on community theatre practice. Since Richard Fotheringham’s anthology of practice, Community Theatre in Australia, in 1987, there has been a diverse set of publications on theory, practice and praxis.66 The importance of maintaining a critical discourse in the field in order to embrace the “process of self-critique, reinvention, and regeneration” continues to be a theme in much of the writing.

About this chapter
The purpose of this section of the Literature Review is to consider the diversity of practice that appears under the umbrella of community theatre practice: to examine some of the difficulties and issues associated with that practice and in so doing, to arrive at a synthesis of key principles of community theatre. I have made a conscious choice here to resist the temptation to offer a single totalising definition of practice and to offer instead a recognition of the diversity and plurality of practices that can be called community theatre. I intend to approach this representation of a panoply of practices in the following way.

The chapter is presented in two parts. Part A has a theoretical orientation. It begins with a consideration of community arts, a broader, and I would suggest, more rigorously theorized paradigm within which community theatre practice can be placed. The review of relevant literature from the field of community arts creates a platform from which to launch a more detailed investigation of current literature and practice in community theatre. Questions of definition, positioning and artistic form are canvassed in the discussion.

65 Hoffie, p.41.
Part B extends this discussion through a detailed and deliberate examination of practice. Three exemplars have been chosen for consideration. While this selection is not designed to be representative or exhaustive, the exemplars have been chosen because they represent three distinctly different manifestations of practice, in terms of how the work is defined and conducted, relationships to the community and to the art-form, attitudes to cultural and political hegemony, and the role of facilitators and artists within the work.

The decision to juxtapose theoretical discussion with these exemplars is a critical one within the structure and the developing argument of this thesis. Having recognized that there is no single definition of community theatre that will usefully inform the study, I have set out to identify a set of principles that might consistently inhere in the practice labelled here for convenience as community theatre. The theoretical discussion frames this investigation of principles, and the exemplars through their similarities and differences provide a mechanism by which those principles can be extrapolated and tested. The chapter concludes with an articulation of the principles that emerge from this process.

**Anticipating the Matrix**

The two-part structure of this chapter, with its juxtaposition of theory and practice, is mirrored in the discussion of aesthetic processes to follow in Chapter Four. The identification of underlying principles of community theatre practice, informed by the emergent and then recurrent themes of artistry, pedagogy and agency foreshadows and also drives the development of the Community Theatre Matrix, to be elaborated in Chapter Five.
Chapter Three A: Enacting Community – A Discourse for Community Theatre

3A.1. The Community Arts Context

Community arts provide an umbrella under which community-based theatre practice can be housed. There are resonances in the discourse of practice, philosophy and theory across art-forms associated with the arts in community settings. Given the somewhat limited range of theorised discussion relating specifically to community theatre, it is useful to tap into a wider discourse on the arts, especially those considerations of the issues and challenges associated with the arts in community contexts. In addition, community theatre practice is frequently funded or administered within the broad sweep of community arts, under the auspices of a community arts policy. Before looking at the specifics of community theatre practice, it is useful to examine three aspects of community arts for the ways in which they might inform an understanding of community theatre.

• defining community arts
• the community arts worker
• reclaiming public space – for public art

3A.1.i. Defining community arts

Firstly, while questions of definition are no less problematic in this area than those previously discussed. Owen Kelly makes the connection between public policy and community arts practice when he uses a definition taken from a draft policy document of the Greater London Arts Association as his starting point. Kelly quotes:

‘the term community arts does not refer to any specific activity or group of activities; rather it defines an approach to creative activity, embracing many kinds of events and a wide range of media. The approach used in community arts enjoins both artists and local people within their various art forms as a means of communication and expression, in a way that uses and
critically develops traditional arts forms, adapting them to present day needs and developing new forms'.

The Greater London Arts Association document identifies certain characteristics that recur through this and other discussions of community arts and indeed community-based theatre. Firstly, function and process can be seen as key identifiers. Secondly, there is the conceptualisation of community arts as a site for individuals and groups to have a voice, to have access to a vehicle though which to express individual and collective identity. Thirdly, the reference here to the development and adaptation of traditional forms to create new forms implies a creative engagement with an aesthetic dimension. It is suggested that the artistic form chosen for expression is negotiated to suit individual and/or group needs. It may be that selection is made from an eclectic mix of artistic practices and media, or that new forms are created to reflect the particularities of the group or community involved in the art making.

The document to which Kelly refers also highlights the role of community arts in social change, as a vehicle for critique and potentially, political action. The community artist as activist for social change appears frequently in the literature and the practice of the community arts. David Trend moves the discussion further into the realm of the political in his analysis of public/community arts practice. His proposes that active and public participation in community activities is an essential component of a genuinely democratic society. He couples this with a call to action for community artists. According to Trend, there is an imperative for the community artist to take on the activist role and to restore “the public function of art”.

Trend’s position underlines the politicised nature of this field. Trend shares the view with practitioners and writers such as Baz Kershaw, bell hooks, and David Watt, among

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68 O. Kelly, p.2.  
others, that community artists are in fact activists with a responsibility to promote
democratic processes in community settings, in a politicised public space. This is not to
say that those who don’t foreground the political nature of their work are not engaged in a
politicised activity. It is possible that some practitioners and commentators take the
political subtext underlying community arts practice as a given. The commitment to
critique and change, to the giving of voice to the voiceless and marginalised, could be
seen as one of the most pervasive identifying characteristics of community theatre. The
positioning of the political function within community theatre practice will be examined
more fully in the coming discussion of practice and principles.

Trend’s proposition also reinforces the placement of the community artist at the centre of
community arts practice. In many accounts of practice, practitioners and commentators
focus on the community and arts events, rather than on the facilitators and the skilled
teams of artists who work with community members to bring about various expressions
of community.70 This is consistent with a commitment to the empowerment of the
marginalised groups and individuals who are frequently the participants in community
arts. Indeed Trend’s call to action evokes Raymond Williams’ “culture is ordinary”
claim, when he suggests that artists involved in making art with communities must be
open to the artistic possibilities of the non-artist participants, in order to avoid the
dominance of elitist art forms which have the potential to silence those without access to
those forms.

All of us have an interest in promoting practices that give voice to the broadest number of
people. This means making direct effort to eliminate exclusionary tendencies that devalue
the voices of nonartists…. Rather than perpetuating forms of expression that tell people that
everyday forms of culture lack value, we should try to find ways to develop these forms.
When we become willing to recognise that art is made by people everywhere rather than

70 For examples, see Fotheringham,1992; Fisher & Shelton, 2002;
Drama for Life: Stories of Adult Learning and Empowerment, eds. J. O'Toole & M. Lepp, Playlab.
Brisbane, pp. 119-128.
Community Play’ in Research in Drama Education, Vol. 6, No.1, pp. 69-84.
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three A: A Discourse for Community Theatre Practice)

handed to them by us, our work will begin to achieve the popular relevance it has been lacking.71

The capacity for key Australian community arts commentators such as Binns, Hoffie, Watt and Hawkins to draw on the practical experience of artists in the formulation of theoretical insights is critical here.72 In doing so, they provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of the artist’s role and the artist’s relationship to community.

Binns directly addresses the complexities of being the ‘trained’ artist working with community participants without art training. This provides a counterpoint to Trend’s request for arts workers to not devalue the voice of the ‘nonartist’:

The tension produced by minimising some traditional interpretations of the artist and my desire to be an art worker amongst other art workers was a very significant element which could work against the grain in either direction, i.e. those who made art but hesitate to accept their processes as those that artists also use and for trained artists who were loath to recognise that ‘ordinary’ people could also experience these processes. 73

The interrogation of her relationship as artist to art-making prompts Binns to seek out new ways of working as an artist. She notes changes in her attitudes to her modernist formal art training in the context of community art-making, and notes ways in which both form and process are modified in the creation of a different aesthetic.

My art practice has been the nexus between community and art contexts, between art and art’s others. It has meant constantly defining, redefining and risking the uncertainties that that process implies. It has proved to be a particularly challenging method to develop and recreate ideas and realities, alone and with others.74

71 D. Trend, 1992, pp.142-143.
72 Vivienne Binns, Pat Hoffie, David Watt, Gay Hawkins are all included in the seminal collection of essays on of this topic: Community and the Arts: History, Theory, and Practice, 1991, ed. V. Binns, Pluto Press, Leichhardt.
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three A: A Discourse for Community Theatre Practice)

The capacity for practitioners and participants in community arts to develop a cogent theory of practice is central to the ongoing vitality and evolution of that practice, as Kelly suggested as far back as 1984. There is further scope to examine the capacity for the practitioner artist to develop a reflective methodology in order to theorise their own practice. This will emerge as a central theme in the examination of my own practice to follow later in the thesis.

3A.1.ii. Community arts policy and practice

Looking closely at the Australian context, Gay Hawkins examines the ways in which attitudes to community arts have been reflected both in government policy and funding initiatives and in the understanding of the role of the artist. The two issues are clearly linked: the funding of projects having moved from the funding of artists in communities to the funding of communities who seek to engage artists to work with them.

Hawkins too problematises the role of the artist. She identifies the power relations at play when an artist is brought in to a community to provide a “cultural remediation” function, and the difficulties of ascribing value to art informed by an aesthetic other than a high art aesthetic. This resonates with Binns’ highly personal account of having to redefine her artistic practice within the context of her community. Hawkins notes a number of the most challenging difficulties. She draws attention to questions that arise about the nature of collaboration, which she suggests, “reveal the difficulties in establishing creative equality between artists and communities”. Another key point of discussion identified by Hawkins is the recognition that “that processes of cultural production were far more important than products”. This key factor gives rise to a far more complex discussion about the need for establishing “non-aesthetic measures of value”. The objectives for community arts practice might range from therapy, to affirmation of identity, to opposition, Hawkins maintains. In such cases, she suggests,

Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three A: A Discourse for Community Theatre Practice)

the pursuit of an ‘excellent’ finished product was far less important than the pursuit of the community’s stated objectives.  

In both Community and the Arts, and Hawkins’s book, From Nimbin to Mardi Gras, the ongoing evolution of community arts practice is recorded. While there is a strong inference that political and social context is a key influence on practice, what emerges in the overviews provided is that the territory shifts, and with it, articulations of purpose and participation and definitions of art-making, aesthetics and the artist, are reformulated over time.

3A.1.iii. Public space – arenas for civic dialogue

Many cultural theorists and community arts practitioners draw attention to the importance of a public space in which performance or exhibition of art is possible. I take this to be a figurative ‘space’ that encompasses the facilitating or enabling of expressions of community, as well as a physical space. Trend refers to this as “…an arena for civic dialogue” and “a new discursive space”. Such spaces validate “the significance of a people’s culture.” Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff uses a similar phrase when she describes the need for individuals to come together to celebrate collective rituals, calling them “arenas for appearing”. These arenas for appearing are, according to Myerhoff, essential and offer “opportunities for self and collective proclamations of being”.

Trend reiterates another key notion for this discussion of the “new discursive space” when he invokes radical educator bell hooks. He suggests that part of the power of this space is that it exists on the margins and therefore becomes a space of radical possibility. Trend draws on hooks who proposes that the margins are not a place to desire to leave, “but rather a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to

77 D. Trend, p.105, p.142.
resist”. Furthermore, and most importantly here, it “offers the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds”.79 As Augusto Boal states, such a space, his so-called “aesthetic space”, is a place where we can be “in rehearsal for the real world”.80 It is a place where we can say, according to Boal, “‘OK, that’s the way things are but not the way things should be, and now I’m going to create an image of how I want the world to be.’”81

The ways in which this space is enacted in a community theatre context will be explored more fully in the following section. The function of ‘marginality’ and the nexus between aesthetic processes and the constitution of such ‘arenas for appearing’ is pivotal to the understanding of community theatre practice and theory that I wish to canvass here.

The community artist, it has been said, works in a world of competing discourses – one discourse about the nature of art and representation; the other about political process, social change and community development.82

Many of the themes identified in this discussion of community arts can relate specifically to community theatre practice. Community theatre practitioners share many of the same challenges as visual artists, musicians and craft makers working in the field of community arts. There are many examples of community theatre practice in which practitioners and community members grapple with the very challenges that have been discussed here.

3A.2. Contemporary Community Theatre

3A.2.i. Expressions of community: telling local and personal stories

Community theatre is an important device for communities to collectively share stories, to participate in political dialogue, and to break down the increasing exclusion of marginalized groups. It is practised all over the world by growing numbers of people…

79 D. Trend, p.108
81 Augusto Boal, 1996, p. 49
82 P. Hoffie, 1991, p.43.
It is united, I think, by its emphasis on local and/or personal stories… that are first processed through improvisation and then collectively shaped into theatre under the guidance either of outside professional artists…or of local amateur artists.\footnote{Eugene van Erven, 2001, \textit{Community Theatre: Global Perspectives}, Routledge, London & New York, frontispiece.}

As Eugene van Erven discovered in his epic ‘field trip’ across six countries, community theatre is practised by skilled and committed professionals in collaboration with members of communities. They work in a variety of ways and employ a diverse range of strategies. This results in many different theatre forms created for many different purposes. There are some commonalities in the practice however, as van Erven and other researchers have discovered. Community theatre, van Erven suggests, is as much for the benefit of the participants as for any audience. He repeatedly documents the accounts of participants who report improved confidence and self-esteem and a greater understanding of themselves or others.

...all the groups would agree that the most important benefits for the participants in community theatre are improved self-esteem and cross-cultural understanding through collective art processes.\footnote{van Erven, p.244.}

Van Erven suggests that community theatre is both an artistic medium and a process. Community theatre, he observes, is a medium by which the collective stories of the community can be shared.\footnote{van Erven, p.1.} Prentki and Selman echo this emphasis on the centrality of a community’s stories in community theatre in their work on ‘popular’ theatre\footnote{Prentki & Selman, 2000.} and by Horitz,\footnote{Tony Horitz, 2001.} a practitioner/researcher whose work is grounded in the building of community plays. These theorists and practitioners suggest that control over the content of the theatre to be produced critical. This ‘giving of voice’ to community participants can lead to the production of a powerful art.
Community theatre thus is a potent art form that allows once largely silent (or silenced) groups of people to add their voices to increasingly diverse and intricately inter-related local, regional, national and international cultures.\(^{88}\)

3A.2.ii. Finding a label to fit the form

Prentki and Selman attempt to reflect the multivocality of community theatre in their book on popular theatre.\(^{89}\) They choose to use the term ‘popular theatre’ in preference to ‘community theatre’, a term they regard as more problematic. The choice of ‘popular’ is intended to highlight the importance of the social context in which theatre is made.

‘Popular’ refers to the attempt to work with the forms and contents of the specific cultural context in which the process is situated. It is theatre created with, by and for the communities most involved in the issues it seeks to address.\(^{90}\)

Many commentators have wrestled with the terminology employed in community theatre. Prentki and Selman identify a selection of key terms used globally to describe some of the variations in community theatre practice. They provide a hierarchy of terms that I have summarized here:

- ‘Community-based Theatre’ – the broadest spectrum of theatre which embraces community, education and social concerns.

- ‘Popular Theatre’ - implies community involvement and ownership of the process and content of the theatre.

- ‘Theatre for Development ‘ - is used as a tool in processes of community and social development –the overt use of theatre processes to achieve non-theatrical ends.

- ‘Social theatre’ – used to describe a wide variety of theatre and drama that addresses the social or educational concerns of society.\(^{91}\)

\(^{88}\) van Erven, p.3.
\(^{89}\) Prentki & Selman, 2000.
\(^{90}\) Prentki & Selman, 2000, p.8.
\(^{91}\) Prentki & Selman, pp.13-14.
In the United States, the term ‘community theatre’ is most often used to describe what would be labelled ‘amateur theatre’ in Australia and elsewhere. Practitioners and commentators in the U.S. have appropriated the term ‘community-based theatre’ or ‘grassroots theatre’[^2] to describe “theatre which embraces community, education and social concerns”.[^3] The nuance of these two terms implies a “theatre of place”[^4], and is suggestive of an orientation towards the stories of individuals and communities as a means of valuing or restoring the collective voice of the community.

A symposium of American grassroots theatre practitioners at Cornell University in 1992 produced a seminal document for the American community theatre movement. The document, *From the Ground Up: Grassroots Theatre in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* attempted to acknowledge the breadth and depth of practice across the country without arriving at a single reductionist definition. It set out to articulate the “patchwork quilt of sources, goals and structures” upon which the work was based.[^5] The resonance with similar attempts made in other parts of the world is striking:

> Grassroots theatre grows out of a commitment to place. It is grounded in the local and specific….Grassroots theatre strives to be inclusive in its producing practices. Presentation of the work is made in partnership with community organisations… Grassroots theatre is linked to the struggles for cultural, social, economic, and political equity for all people. …Grassroots theatre is given its voice by the community from which it arises. The makers of grassroots theatre are part of the culture from which the work is drawn. The people who are the subjects of the work are part of its development from inception through presentation.[^6]

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[^4]: Todd London uses this particular term when he is describing theatre generated in a specific location, with reference to that location, and for the residents of that location. [‘Your Place or Ours?’ *American Theatre*, May/June 1995, New York, pp52-55]  
[^6]: D. Cocke et al. p.81.
It is interesting to note here that there is quite a contrast between this description of ‘community theatre’ and one proposed by British community theatre practitioner Tony Horitz. The contrast is not in philosophy or process but in the focus of his description, which is on the community play rather than the group or auspicing body. Underlying such an orientation is the assumption that the form (a community play) is predetermined and resources are marshalled around that point of focus.

There are five main criteria identifying a community play: a festive quality, a local focus in terms of theme, a sense of common purpose, a long gestation period and professional co-ordination of a large amateur cast and backstage crew.97

Horitz’ descriptor embodies aspects of process and forms of participation. By contrast, in their writing Prentki and Selman draw attention to the importance of the participatory nature of the theatre-making, the processes of theatre-making, and the role of theatre-making and performance as an agent of ‘empowerment’ and change.98

With the benefit of an international overview, Van Erven takes the analysis of common elements in community theatre even further. He observes that theatre artists who practise in this field often share methodological approaches, organisational strategies, and concerns for such aspects of the work as ethics (“of middle class artists working with peripheral groups”), aesthetics, and the “status of community theatre as a distinct art form”.99 Van Erven notes in his study of six companies across several continents that “all groups would agree that the most important benefits for the participants…are improved self-esteem and cross cultural understanding through collective art processes”.100

Regardless of which of the possible terms is employed, a closer examination of a range of community theatre practices reveals commonalities in the practice. Interestingly, these

97 T. Horitz, 2001, p.70.
98 Prentki & Selman, p.9.
99 van Erven, p.244.
100 van Erven p.244
commonalities are characterised more by philosophy and a commitment to the tenets of cultural democracy than by a particular working process.
Chapter Three B: Enacting Community – Community Theatre in Practice

3B.1. Examples of Practice: Some Global Perspectives

In exploring the philosophies, processes and outcomes of a range of community theatre practitioners, I have deliberately chosen exemplars from a variety of contexts and continents. Also, I have elected to structure my examination through the use of a set of broad guidelines, representing common areas of concern and focus for community theatre practitioners. These are as follows:

• **Purpose**: Community and Ideology
• **Art**: Form and Process
• **Stakeholders**: Community arts (policy, infrastructure and participation).
• **Pedagogy** and Practice

3B.2. Example One: PETA

The Philippines Educational Theatre Association is a useful exemplar for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is strongly connected in ideology and practice to Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, and the theatre for community development movement inspired initially by Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and subsequently informed by Boal’s methodology.\(^{101}\) The PETA heritage is deeply rooted in political struggle in the time of Marcos, and in more recent years in community and cultural outreach to a diverse range of marginalised and disempowered groups.

Secondly, as van Erven established when he chose to include them in his book on Community Theatre worldwide, “PETA’s use of the Basic Integrated Theatre Arts

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(BITAW) is arguably one of the clearest methods of community theatre to come out of Asia”\(^\text{102}\). This examination of PETA’s work draws extensively on van Erven’s research, published in 2001 in *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives*.

PETA is a complex organization. It incorporates a number of branches fulfilling contrasting functions, from a ‘semi-professional performance ensemble’ to specialised theatre units for women, children and youth, and a dedicated training arm, the ‘School for People’s Theatre’\(^\text{103}\).

- **Purpose: Community and Ideology**

When it was first formed in the late 1960’s PETA’s philosophy was a liberationist one, designed to engender opposition to the Marcos regime. This continued under the oppressive military rule of subsequent leaders but has been defused in recent times, as oppressions have shifted from the military to the economic and social oppressions of a highly divided society; and to the problems of poverty and the sexual and economic exploitation of children. PETA’s present focus is to “combat continuing social problems by transferring its creativity and its theatre skills to a broad range of communities in and around the country’s main island, Luzon”\(^\text{104}\).

‘Professional’ (as in paid) teacher/artists and actors run PETA’s various programs in collaboration with community participants. The work includes highly ‘professional’ scripted plays performed in Manila by experienced actors. These plays have proved to be very successful with audiences, and play to packed houses in an open air theatre in downtown Manila for several months each year. There are also productions for children and young people that tour regional areas.

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\(^{102}\) van Erven, p.6. (B.I.T.A.W. is an acronym for Basic Integrated Theatre Arts Workshop)

\(^{103}\) van Erven, p.6.

\(^{104}\) van Erven, p.30.
In addition to this more conventional approach to theatre, PETA has developed outreach programs where trained facilitators, teacher/artists go into community settings and run workshops, and assist in the creation of community performance. All aspects of PETA’s work have a strongly pedagogical orientation, whether it is in the overt pedagogy of a training workshop or the structural pedagogy of skills exchange through performance-making. The commitment to community building through skills acquisition, and personal and community expression through theatre remains unwavering. Beng Santos Cabangon, the PETA executive director at the time of Eugene van Erven’s visit to the Philippines, sees the ‘grassroots’ work in the regions surrounding Manila as PETA’s essential task. She states:

It provides people with a non-threatening space to tell what happened to them, so they feel a bit better about themselves. In addition, I would say theatre is still one of the better alternatives, specially for our children and youth….Theatre is an effective way to positively redirect their energies, so they can contribute something good to their community and their families.\(^\text{105}\)

PETA’s School for People’s Theatre runs workshops in these outlying areas. The nature and focus of the workshop depends on the brief that comes from the community. The community is expected to cover the expenses of the PETA team, where possible, and all projects are conducted in collaboration with key community members.

- **Art: Form and Process**

There is a very specific structure to a PETA community theatre workshop. Eugene van Erven observed the critical stages of the working process:

- PETA facilitators design their syllabi according to a specific social theme provided by their hosts. After
  1) building trust and releasing inhibitions through theatre games, the essential ingredient in PETA’s community theatre method is
  2) the so-called ‘exposure’, a field trip to an area where life is strongly affected by the issues at hand. The stories gathered in the exposure then becomes the basis for
  3) a collectively created performance.\(^\text{106}\)

\(^{105}\) Beng Santos Cabangon, PETA Executive Director, quoted in van Erven, p.25.  
\(^{106}\) van Erven, p.21.
This process takes place within a theatre training context, reinforcing PETA’s fundamental drive towards artistic pedagogy. PETA’s history reveals an ideological divide between two distinctly different approaches to the training/theatre-making nexus. The key to the conflict within PETA was aesthetic. According to van Erven,

> While both camps agreed that the social, political, economic and cultural conditions should always be the starting point for PETA’s theatre processes and that participants should be empowered by writing their own scripts and directing themselves, they differed on the question of whether facilitators should be allowed to present their own aesthetics and perspectives.107

The crux of the issue, it would appear, is the ‘ownership’ of the aesthetic. One school of thought within PETA felt that the role of the teacher/artists was to nurture the participants’ creativity without any imposition of the aesthetics of the facilitators. The contrasting view was that when the artist/teacher brought their own aesthetic understanding to the work as a means of modelling appropriate artistic practice, such nurturing was more effectively enabled, in order to “raise the aesthetics of the participants”.108 As leading artist/teacher Ernie Cloma states, “Growing one’s own aesthetics is also okay, but to nurture it they have to see other forms”.109

While the tension was ultimately resolved within PETA through an organizational restructure, the question of aesthetics continues to be one of the critical issues for all community theatre practitioners. It may manifest itself as a matter of ‘quality’ of performance, artistic control or intervention, or competing purposes.

- **Stakeholders: Community arts (policy, infrastructure and participation).**

PETA is primarily funded by NGO’s from a number of countries. Different agencies fund specific programs. For example, the Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development

107 van Erven, p.20.
108 Ernie Cloma, Head of the School for People’s Theatre, quoted in van Erven, p.20.
109 Ernie Cloma quoted in van Erven, p.20.
and Peace funds PETA’s work in schools. In recent years, this external support has been supplemented by subsidies and grants from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. There has also been a commitment more recently to self-fund the performance season in Manila.

While the funding is barely adequate, it does ensure that PETA is now able to pay an administrative staff, actors, and teacher artists. Their wages, however, are below the minimum wage. Commitment to the ideals of PETA and to the role of artist as activist comes under attack when actors find they can make more money in one day performing in a television show than in an entire season with a PETA production. 110

The relationship between PETA and the Non Government Organisations that sustain much of their work is not an unproblematic one. While the external funding certainly enables the association to continue to be a voice of challenge and empowerment amongst marginalised groups, PETA has been required to be more financially accountable. A review of funding in the late 1980’s prompted a major restructure of PETA’s organisation, and a refocussing of attention on a smaller and more specific ‘client-base’ (five regions in proximity of Manila). The focus of the work undertaken has also experienced a shift to work that is more “narrowly issue-based than the general anti-imperialist stance that characterised [PETA’S] work before 1990”.111 On the other hand, the partnership between PETA and the NGO’s has consolidated the centrality of community needs to their work. Since 1990, PETA has worked with NGOs to “explore how cultural work can be integrated in community development processes”.112

There is a long history of PETA conducting workshops in regional and urban Philippines, and a great diversity of project aims and outcomes. In terms of examining PETA’s relationship with specific stakeholders, there are two critical factors that are useful to

111 van Erven, p.21.
112 van Erven, p25
consider in this particular context. The first is the concept of facilitation. The artist/teachers travel to the community where a workshop is to take place, take time to understand the issues in question, and then use their skills and training to enable not only participation, but to maximise the transmission of skills to local people. The PETA team may be in the community for two days or two weeks. The intention is to enable local stories and issues to be explored and for key local people to receive training in the PETA methods, so that work can continue independent of the PETA staff.

The second critical factor comes into play at that point. Initiatives must come from the community in order for the workshops to proceed and succeed. Many types of training, from writing to directing to basic theatre skills are offered to communities. It is not within the PETA brief to impose these programs on individuals or groups. The work within the communities is filtered through key people, often self-selected as project leaders, so that community ownership is maintained and the voices that are ultimately heard are those of the participants not those of the artist teachers. Without individual or collective initiatives from the community, the BITAW method cannot be successfully implemented.

It is also important to note at this point that the role of the teacher/artist is clearly articulated through the structure and processes of PETA’s work. However, careful planning and excellent training do not necessarily account for the ‘human factor’. One of the essential ingredients in the building of successful working relationships between artists and the community is the artist himself or herself. Briefings and orientations cannot replace local knowledge. Training is essential, but cannot teach charisma or that indefinable entity, talent. Polemic cannot replace a deeply held belief in the ideals of community theatre practice. When Eugene van Erven completed his case study of a PETA project in Marinduque, his final observation was not on the efficacy of the BITAW process, but on the vagaries of personality and creativity.

…the BITAW is not some magic formula that will automatically yield positive results wherever it is implemented. Its success relies heavily on the personalities of the artist-teachers guiding the creative process. Their interventions are more likely to be effective
when they possess extensive prior knowledge of the circumstances they are going to work in, when they have sufficient pedagogical expertise to design workshop syllabi and the didactic skill to implement them. But most helpful of all are flexibility, charm, and energy, qualities that are well-nigh impossible to learn.  

• **Pedagogy and Practice**

Much of PETA’s work is couched in a workshop structure emphasising process and skills exchange, rather than performance outcome. PETA practitioners are called artist/teachers and they take on the task of educating through an artistic process, necessitating proficiency in both areas.

PETA remains committed to its work in schools and with young people. Teachers are invited to participate in workshops in which they are introduced to ‘creative pedagogy’. There is a belief that the artistic processes that participants encounter in the workshops free them to engage more fully with the issues and problems of their community, while also providing a vehicle for the expression of those problems.

Pedagogy is both overt, through the implementation of training programs for both PETA workers and community members, and implied, through the reflective structures embedded in the organisation.

• **PETA at work**

A closer look of the management of the workshop process demonstrates PETA’s approach to the integration of artistry and pedagogy, predicated on cultural democratic principles and a commitment to the agency of individuals and communities.

Usually, two people lead the workshops, with a third person responsible for documenting the process. Dessa Quesada, a workshop facilitator, observes that this

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113 van Erven, p.50.
114 van Erven, p.28.
arrangement breaks down the structure of teacher authority, based on the image of
the “all-knowing teacher”.\textsuperscript{115} Also collaboration in teaching provides a model that
the facilitators hope to engender in the community participants’ own work.

At the commencement of a workshop process, the teacher/artists divide the
participants into a number of small groups. These groups will have specific practical
responsibilities such as time keeping, cleaning the space, communication with the
teacher-artists each day, ensuring that the smooth running of the workshops is a
shared undertaking. A process of reflection for the participants is implemented at
this time also, and is managed through the small groups. Van Erven describes the
arrangement:

These so-called ‘O-A-O’ teams are also supposed to report back at the end of each afternoon,
assessing how that day’s activities have enhanced the group’s thematic orientation (O), their
artistry (A), and their organisational skills (O). By forcing small teams to thus reflect on
different aspects of the process right after they have undergone it, the participant gains deeper
insight into the workshop dynamics and starts to feel ownership, rather than only passively
consuming whatever the PETA facilitators dish up.\textsuperscript{116}

PETA is a leading exponent of community theatre practice in Asia and worldwide.
Members of PETA travel extensively, teaching and demonstrating the group’s
approaches to practice, and seeking new ideas for their own work. PETA has links
with community theatre practitioners and educators throughout Europe, the
Americas, Australia and New Zealand. The dissemination of their particular
interpretation of community theatre practice has influenced other groups, particularly
in Asia. For the purposes of this study, their ideologically driven, well theorised
artistic pedagogy is an especially useful model of praxis.

\textsuperscript{115} van Erven, p.35.
\textsuperscript{116} van Erven, p.38.
3B.2. Example Two: The Preston Creative Living Centre

In striking contrast to the international profile of PETA, the Preston Creative Living Centre clearly defines its orbit as the City of Darebin, located in suburban Melbourne. The Centre is responsible for the creation, management and staging of a major arts event (either drama/dance or multiform) each year. The community participants, the artists and administrators engaged to work on the project, and the audience members, are all from the surrounding area. The PCLC is committed to community performance at a grassroots level. The 2002 publication *Face to Face: Making Dance and Theatre in Community*, written by two program leaders from PCLC, is the primary source of information about this exemplar.

The relevance of this community arts site to this thesis lies in the model of practice designed by the PCLC administrators and artists. The model brings the principles of community development into partnership with artistic processes and forms. Fisher and Shelton identify a number of key concerns articulated in the initial stages of developing the program:

- In developing the project concept, we found that we needed to engage in two related streams of thinking:
  - community development aims
  - artistic aims

And

- Early in the process the most formative question is probably:
  - Who is the community in this project? \(^{115}\)

- **Purpose: Community and Ideology**

The Preston Creative Living Centre was founded in the early 1990’s to address the needs of the “diverse and often disadvantaged” Preston-Reservoir community. \(^{118}\)

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\(^{118}\) Fisher & Shelton, p.5.
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three B: Community Theatre in Practice)

The PCLC was created both for providing community service and exploring the way people express their discoveries and life experiences through art, symbols and rituals. ¹¹⁹

From the outset, the founders of the Centre were equally committed to matters of ‘social justice’ as a manifestation of community development as they were to other expressions of creativity. In order to formalise their obligation to community participation in the arts, a Community Performance Making Program was established. Broadly, the PCLC resolved to create an open and safe environment in order to provide a “process in which community members proactively explore and express their identities and determine their priorities for the future”.¹²⁰ They were also determined that through the process local artists could participate in community-based work to both develop and disseminate their skills.

The form chosen by the PCLC to best accommodate these aims was an annual performance project guided by an artist from the community working with an administrative team and members of the Preston-Reservoir community interested in the chosen focus of the work.

One of the key ideological factors driving the PCLC is a commitment to access and participation in artistic processes for all members of a community. They have clearly identified the principle of engagement in artistic processes as a mechanism through which communities and individuals can confirm or challenge cultural identities and can prompt social change.

The type of participation in artistic processes we’ve described… should be part of the ‘bread and butter’ of living in a community – not an unusual delicacy. Through engaging in artistic processes, we can enliven and enrich almost every public context of human life, if we can find the structures and forms for the engagement.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Fisher & Shelton, p.6.
¹²⁰ Fisher & Shelton, p 73
¹²¹ Fisher & Shelton, p151
When documenting the work of the Community Performance Making Program, Shelton and Fisher identify a critical relationship between ideology and structure. The PCLC responded to the perceived community arts and social needs of the Darebin City area with the creation of a structure within which individuals could work. The structure reflected the organisation’s commitment to art-making for all: to shared outcomes; to reflective practice; to mentoring and skill development; and to consultative processes compatible with the principles of cultural democracy.

- **Art: Form and Process**
Two critical elements of the PCLC approach to community performance are the emphasis on story and the primacy of process. Story is useful as a means of providing individuals entrée to a given project, and to the process of universalising and meaning-making that the sharing of stories promotes.

Each project dipped into the sea of people’s stories. Each time, everyone involved was taken aback by the abundance, the detail and the poetry of the stories and by their power to communicate with audiences. The themes were big, rich and inclusive.¹²²

A stated emphasis on process is a common feature of community theatre practice. Fisher and Shelton’s account of the work of the Community Performance Making Process highlights both the need and the impossibility of planning for an effective process and outcome.

…much of the process of working on a community – performance project is about discovering a creative path through chaos.¹²³

Despite their stated reservations, they do however identify three broad phases in the community performance-making process, regardless of form chosen or the artists

¹²² Fisher & Shelton, p71
¹²³ Fisher & Shelton, p79
involved. They describe these phases as “gathering, deepening, and entering into new territory”.

In the ‘gathering’ phase the context for the particular project is fully explored by the artist and the management team, and by the participants as they prepare for the art-making. In this phase, as participants are invited, cajoled and adopted into the project, community building takes place. Friendships are forged and the first evidence of the permeability of community borders becomes apparent. Stories are told, purposes clarified.

The ‘deepening’ phase represents opportunities for engagement with an aesthetic process. The performance-making place becomes an ‘aesthetic space’ as Boal describes it. For Shelton & Fisher, the focus of this experience is more human than political:

> During the creative process, there’ve been inner journeys; sudden realisations of meaning; release of feeling; new connectedness with poetry, dance or story; and a deeper sense of shared humanity. All these experiences were life enriching and life changing.

The final phase, “entering new territory” suggests collective and individual journeys beyond the familiar. The process of “using arts processes to engender connection and creativity in places not traditionally viewed as being places for innovation” places the emphasis clearly on the potential for growth in social capital through artistic means.

In the process, we as members of a community began to articulate social meanings, social values and different points of view that exist in that community. This process entails a rare quality of relationship, listening and collaboration. In clearly expressing what matters to us, we can influence social action, community decision making, and social policy making.

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124 Fisher & Shelton, p150
125 Boal,1996, p.49.
126 Fisher & Shelton, p150
127 Fisher & Shelton, p.150.
• **Stakeholders:** Community arts (policy, infrastructure and participation).

The Preston Creative Living Centre has been embedded in local community since its inception. It was created by members of the Preston Uniting Church Parish as a direct response to needs expressed by the church and the wider community. The church community expressed a desire to construct a new relationship with the geographic community. Two sets of community needs emerged from research conducted by the Parish prior to setting up specific programs. These were: human relationships and creativity-celebration.\(^{129}\)

The PCLC embraced the principles of community cultural development\(^ {130}\), and then identified a set of potential stakeholders within the geographic community of Preston-Reservoir. They established a series of administrative and artistic structures to support the programs they planned to implement.

There are some useful observations to be drawn from the PCLC experience. The first is that the ‘community’ of involvement differed with each project undertaken. Reminiscent of Giroux’s concept of border pedagogy, the Creative Living Centre provided a space on the margins of community where borders could be negotiated, crossed and redefined through the art making process.\(^ {131}\) It offered “…a safe space where people could struggle with the ultimate questions of life.”\(^ {132}\)

The second observation is that the thoughtful construction of partnerships, between administrative team, artists and community participants was a central component in the success of individual projects and the ongoing sustainability of the centre. The structure incorporated sufficient flexibility to accommodate shifts in leadership between these

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\(^{129}\) Fisher & Shelton, p.6.

\(^{130}\) The working definition of Community Cultural Development adopted by the PCLC, taken from a document produced by the Community Arts Network, South Australia was as follows: *an ongoing process in which a community creatively determines and expresses who it is, what it is and where it wants to go*


\(^{132}\) Fisher & Shelton, p.6.
three groups of stakeholders, from project to project, and within a single project. Considerable effort is invested in the initial clarification of needs and aims of the stakeholders. This effort, plus time spent exploring the themes and possible forms a project might take, are central to mounting a successful project within the PCLC framework.

Shelton and Fisher offer a third observation that is pertinent here. From their perspective, the impetus for a project could be generated with either an artistic or a community development orientation. As the project proceeds, it is imperative that the needs of the other possible orientation, either artistic or community development, are considered and kept in balance with the project’s initial driving force.

Finally, collaborative project planning is a creative exercise. Shelton and Fisher provide a concise overview of the preliminary planning process undertaken at the PCLC. They suggest that each project “involves a judicious and creative combination of the current interests, needs and skills of the community participants, the PCLC staff members and the artists”. Once the various interests have been identified, the greatest challenge is to develop a project concept in which all of the interests are “honoured, integrated and balanced”. This requires a particular kind of creativity that Shelton and Fisher propose is “unique to community-arts processes as opposed to individual –arts processes”.

The work of the Preston Creative Living Centre is framed by the local government context in which it finds itself. Local Government policy influences issues of funding and support. The PCLC finds itself with in a supportive local government environment, where the aims of community cultural development expressed by the Creative Living Centre are mirrored by those of the City of Darebin.

133 Fisher & Shelton, p.77.
134 Fisher & Shelton, p.77.
135 Fisher & Shelton, p.77.
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three B: Community Theatre in Practice)

…the City of Darebin is keen to foster projects that give voice to people from our diverse community, and we believe that community arts projects, and performance projects in particular, are an essential ingredient in developing better communities.136

• Pedagogy and Practice

The pedagogy at work in any Community Performance Making Project is couched in terms of the PCLC’s commitment to community cultural development.137 This manifests itself through the presence of mentorships in each project. Each project incorporates the mentoring of new artists by experienced community artists. As the artists gain more experience they are given more leadership responsibility in subsequent projects.

Principles of community cultural development also inform the artistic facilitation that artists engage in when working with community participants. To support artists in their pedagogy, the PCLC provides a Community Development Worksheet. Any one of the guidelines on the Checklist has pedagogical implications for the management of performance-making with community participants. The following are a selection of the more critical points made on the worksheet:

• Involve the relevant community members in assessing the needs: Plan, develop, set goals, implement and evaluate.
• Share skills and provide opportunities for people to learn.
• Facilitate storytelling, discussion and debate.
• Draw attention to what’s happening in terms of process.
• Know and share, and learn from history, acknowledge that there are many histories.
• Reflect, both as an individual worker and in a group
• Acknowledge that you have power as a worker.138

As with PETA the process of reflection as an element of artistic pedagogy is important. It is present in the performance-making processes and in the post-project evaluations that shape new understandings for participants and project planners alike.

136 Mark Wilkinson, City of Darebin Arts Policy Devt. Officer, quoted in Fisher and Shelton, p.152.
137 Fisher & Shelton p.85.
138 Fisher & Shelton, p.86
Transmission of artistic skills is project-specific. While the community artists may be responsible for facilitating the artistic processes, the teaching of new skills is not limited to a one-way exchange between artist and community participant. Each project represents a pooling of community resources. Skills are exchanged in the same way that stories are, as reflections of community experience.

- **PCLC at work**

*Spinning, Weaving: Trees and Songs* was a performance project built around family trees and stories. The project incorporated a diverse range of performers from the community. Each one brought personal stories of key relationships and key moments in their family trees.

Performance workshops ran along side spinning and weaving workshops, in which community members worked to create a colourful, woven wool backdrop for use in the production. Traditional songs from many parts of the world were incorporated into the final production. The combination of performance and visual elements suggested a commitment to a highly evolved aesthetic. It is not clear in the account of this practice whether this focus on the aesthetic outcomes of the production compromised the PCLC’s stated commitment to principles of cultural democracy.

What is reported is that the dynamic between artist and community performers shifted in the last weeks before performance, as increased rehearsal time was required. According to reports, the production was very well received by audiences and was remounted some months later in a professional theatre venue. Community artist, Bagryana Popov notes the challenge of working with community performers in *Spinning, Weaving: Trees and Songs*:

> There’s something about working with community that engages a kind of ‘ego-lessness’ in me because it is so much about them and doing everything to bring them forward – all your

139 Fisher and Shelton, pp.34-47.
energy and ego go into that….You’re working towards another person’s working or flourishing , and that’s the focus."140

Bagryana Popov’s reflection does not really address the issue of the negotiated aesthetic. Aesthetic considerations become subsumed in the working process. The form chosen for performance reflects a range of considerations. It reflects the artists’ central vision for the project, the ideas and capacities of the performers, and the theatrical symbols and conventions accessible to the community performers and audience.

The complexity of community-based theatre is revealed in any close examination of practice. Issues of cultural development balanced against artistic considerations. At a given time there are competing concerns and agendas from any one of the many stakeholders. Community theatre practice is not only politicised artistic practice, but it is shaped by an overt or implicit commitment to pedagogy. Reflection is a central pedagogical tool for community artists but its value is not always recognized by the artists themselves.

This discussion of practice reveals a recurrent theme: that community theatre practice is based on celebrations of the ordinary. Such a focus begs further investigation of assumptions and fundamentals of art-making. In particular, it prompts a consideration and review of the question of aesthetics, with a view to articulating a paradigm that can accommodate the celebration of the ordinary in preference to apologizing for it.

It’s clear that this type of work can engender personal and social transformation. Within the bigger scheme of things, though, our annual projects are tiny…. And they’re not extraordinary projects – they’re quality examples of work that’s going on, in little pockets all over the country! 141

3B.3. Example 3: Neil Cameron, artist for hire

The work of Neil Cameron provides a striking contrast to both PETA and the Preston Creative Living Centre. Cameron works as a professional community theatre artist,
facilitating community projects on request and for a fee. It is useful to examine his practice as it brings into relief the critical and central role of the facilitating community artist.

Neil Cameron has recorded his experiences and insights in a book that is part-memoir, part-manual, part-advocacy document. The book, *Fire on the Water*, which is the key source of information for this section, reveals Cameron as an articulate and experienced practitioner. He emphasises the pragmatics of artistic practice in *Fire on the Water*. This provides an interesting counterpoint to many other accounts of community theatre practice. While one could suggest that Cameron’s practice is under-theorised, and even lacking in a reflective process, he reveals sound and very clear understandings of the dynamics and logistics of practice in this particular field.

I work from a plan that is almost like a mathematical puzzle. The community and the theatre team have decided the way the show will be performed, the research has been done, the resources have been investigated and the aim of the project carefully worked out. I lay out all these facts and then construct the show.  

This approach may at first appear to be somewhat clinical, especially as the community-based work is often viewed as highly charged emotionally or politically. However, there is another perspective to consider. The facilitative role that Cameron assumes is an enabling one. He analyses the key components of the task he is given, identifies the competing needs and the available resources, and constructs an ‘aesthetic space’ in which individuals and communities can achieve their goals through an arts experience.

- **Purpose: Community and Ideology**

Neil Cameron, as artist for hire, does not appear to work in an overtly political way. No particular ideological line is apparent within his community theatre projects.

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However, his commitment to community arts practice is driven by a fundamental belief in the transformative capability of the arts experience.

There was no doubt in my mind … that the arts and theatre in particular could bring about change in the individual and society itself and how exciting it was to be an artist who helped to enable the release of that power.\footnote{Cameron, 1993, p.12.}

From Cameron’s perspective, the essential ingredient in effecting change through the arts resides in engagement with the arts process: the discovery, unleashing or harnessing of individual creativity. According to Cameron, this “release of creative energy” has the potential to “change people’s lives and give them a new direction”.\footnote{Cameron, p.77.}

Building from this position, Cameron proposes, it is necessary for the key stakeholders to clearly articulate their purpose. In order for Cameron to enable some kind of community expression through a theatre event, he must have an understanding of community needs and purpose. Rather than the political agenda of the community artist driving the process, in this context the community’s agenda must be clarified and overt if effective community theatre making is to occur.

Cameron makes a clear distinction between his motivations for undertaking community arts practice and the motivations of a community commissioning his services. Cameron defers to community development activist, Saul Alinsky when he considers what drives his work. According to Alinsky, “understanding ..one’s own motives were the most important thing to know about working in the community. No one is purely altruistic in their work with people”.\footnote{Cameron, p.49.}
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three B: Community Theatre in Practice)

Cameron applies a similar test to communities about to embark on a theatre project. What is the motivation or need in the community and how will this be addressed by mounting an arts event? In considering this question, Cameron suggests that two factors must be examined. The first relates to community context. How will an arts event be situated within the community? What has gone on before and what is anticipated for the future? The second factor is critical. How will a community arts event advance the community’s need?

As outsiders to the area one must see all projects in terms of the value that the piece of theatre can give. If there is an existing network of community activists, how can theatre further their work and if there is not, how can a cultural event help focus one?146

Cameron’s approach prompts a review of the question of aesthetics in community theatre practice. There is an implication in Cameron’s description of practice that the artistic facilitator is the ‘keeper’ of the aesthetic, responsible for determining which aesthetic framework will be used, the skills necessary to satisfy perceived ‘standards’, and the visionary who controls form and content.

Further examination of Cameron’s work will provide a clearer picture of the dynamics of the process and may shed some light on who in fact is the ‘keeper’ of the aesthetic.

• Art: Form and Process

In Neil Cameron’s work, the first element of the theatre process that is decided upon is the form. According to Cameron, it is from the decision about form that all elements in the making of a community theatre event follow. Naturally, decisions about form will be informed by the community context. In determining the form of the event, Cameron considers his resources with regard to space, available performers, budget, and audience. If he chooses to create an outdoor performance,

146 Cameron, p.52.
then the work is likely to be more visual and symbolic, using music rather than
dialogue. Such decisions are also designed to accommodate limitations in the skill or
experience of ‘nonartist’ performers.

A common strategy that Cameron uses in the preliminary stages of his work in a
community is the drama workshop. He uses the workshop structure to introduce
skills, to galvanise interest, and to precipitate that process of ‘unleashing creativity’
in individuals. The drama workshop also provides the community artists with an
opportunity for consultation with community members. In addition, it is a
mechanism for building a shared vocabulary for the performance event and a means
of identifying particular aptitudes and skills brought to the project by community
members.

Much of Cameron’s work is characterised by highly stylised performance elements:
use of ritual; puppetry and sculpture; circus and clowning skills. He works across
many forms, harvesting useful components for use in his collective performance
making. On many occasions he has incorporated processions or parades using
lanterns. These processions, in which individuals may be involved for weeks or
months in making lanterns, giant sized puppets or sculptures, can provide thousands
of people with the experience of participation in a highly ritualised performance
event.

As the architect of such events, Cameron maintains control of the aesthetic and the
literal space. He determines how the event will proceed, what elements will be
included (for example, light, live music, projected images etc), and will take
responsibility for ensuring a suitable ‘standard’ for each of the elements.

Music is often the central artistic glue and like the technical side of theatre must be very well
produced to provide a proper infrastructure for the community to express itself.…
There is no part of a community show that forbids involvement, but be warned that badly played music will not be tolerated by any audience. 147

- **Stakeholders: Community arts (policy, infrastructure and participation).**

In this area Cameron uses his logistical expertise. Relationships with stakeholders are clarified through careful planning. In Cameron’s model, the various stakeholders maintain their roles and responsibilities throughout.

A professional arts team is brought in from outside the community to facilitate a community commissioned project. They participate in garnering funding for the project, through grant applications and requests for sponsorship. Practical and financial planning skills are essential to the community artist, suggests Cameron.

Within the community itself, there are different stakeholders. There is the group or individuals who have made the decision to commission a community theatre project. These people may be community development workers, civic leaders, municipal officers, or those involved in grassroots activism. Their relationship to the rest of the community will be pivotal in determining the successful entry of the ‘professional arts team’ into the environment, and in ensuring the smooth passage of the project through the myriad of challenges that disparate community elements might generate.

It is also important in this context to consider the role that funding bodies and policy might have on community arts practice. Cameron’s strategy for the inevitably delicate relationships with funding bodies is to develop very effective budgeting procedures, transparent accounting, and rigorous evaluation processes at the conclusion of a community project.

Finally, Cameron proposes a simple mechanism for ensuring a clear understanding of relationships between the various stakeholders – put it in writing.

147 Cameron, p.72.
...the outside art workers and the community must come to agreement about what decisions are to be made by whom and who carries what responsibility before the project starts. Then it is written down…it becomes a sort of artistic agreement.148

- **Pedagogy and Practice**

Like other community theatre practitioners, Cameron incorporates the teaching of specific skills into his performance-making workshops. It is his usual practice to assemble a large team of highly skilled artists to work with community members on specific projects. Once the trained artists have transmitted specific skills to community members, layers of incremental learning are fostered. Critical understandings are shaped through selective consultation and reflection by facilitators at all levels of production. The structure is quite hierarchical in terms of management, but as has been noted earlier, community consultation and responsibility is carefully ‘folded in’ to the structure to ensure shared ownership of the process and outcome.

The division between community participants and facilitating artists that Cameron deliberately maintains, has implications for the practice of artistic pedagogy. Cameron’s position on the pedagogical relationship between artist and community members is well defined and consistent with his practice.

Some have said that it is the theatre workers’ job to teach the community to take over their function and for that community to have the ability to create theatre unaided. This point of view demeans both the artist and the community. The theatre maker has spent years learning the trade and a community can no more learn those skills in the length of a project than the artist can learn how to be an electrician, a carpenter or a doctor in a few weeks. The artist has specialist skills that can be used by a community to great effect and it is a question of educating both sides to the ways in which this is to be done.149

Cameron’s statement provokes yet another series of questions relating to aesthetics. These questions are: What theatre aesthetic is essential or fundamental for community

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148 Cameron, pp.52-53.
149 Cameron, p.53.
theatre practice? How can it be defined, and does it require a different set of skills to conventional theatre practice even when that is in place in community settings?

The next chapter considers the question of aesthetic definitions, processes and outcomes more closely. Cameron’s statement represents a challenge to many of the assumptions that underscore practice. What is ‘good’ community theatre? How do the implicit power relations between different stakeholders influence the processes and outcomes of community theatre practice? Is cultural democracy a fundamental of community theatre practice, whether acknowledged or not?

- **The Artist at Work: Ascotvale and the Artist for Hire**

One particular example of Cameron’s community theatre practice brings the questions of aesthetic and community value into stark relief. As members of West Theatre Company, Cameron and his team were invited by a newly formed tenants’ organization to facilitate a theatre project in a Melbourne Housing Estate. The community was ethnically diverse, and there was a notable problem with disaffected teenagers with nowhere to go on the estate. The tenants group provided a brief to “stage a piece of theatre that would consolidate the local action group and renew confidence in the residents that they could achieve change”.

From the outset, the project was fraught with problems. There was no suitable infrastructure to support rehearsals and no suitable venue for performance. Any attempt by the theatre company to establish a ‘site’ on the estate was greeted with hostility, vandalism and theft by a gang of young people. Plans for the performance event were thwarted at every turn. Initially the team proposed a theatre event in the form of a Parade that moved through the streets and paused for small performances at various locations along the way. The Parade was abandoned when the company

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150 Cameron, p.88.
realised that they would not be able to ensure the security of the equipment necessary to the performance.

Cameron and the company shifted focus and began providing circus workshops for an enthusiastic group of children. The circus work evolved into an outdoor, single site performance by the children, to be staged in conjunction with an afternoon fair. Many community groups who had not supported the performance event contributed to the fair, and it proved to be a successful event both in its own right and as a way of drawing an audience to see the circus show.

The company’s challenges continued right through to the day of performance and beyond. They were compelled to do the complete setting up for the show on performance day, for fear of vandalism and theft. They felt unprepared, and struggled with the technical requirements of staging the play. Cameron felt frustrated and disappointed while watching his young circus performers present their show, up to a certain point. He recounts the moment when his perspective on what was happening on stage was changed irrevocably:

> Halfway through the show one of the team .. said to me how well it was going. I was amazed that he could say that. But I saw his point. Every seat was filled and the audience was obviously enjoying it tremendously. The local people had no preconceptions about the way a show should be performed and were not judging it on the same criteria that I used as my guideline. This was their show and it was working, on their terms. There was a communication of emotion and understanding. I consciously relaxed and began to enjoy it too.\(^{151}\)

Despite this moment of epiphany, Cameron goes on to comment that the work had been hard and that he felt that “it had not been what outsiders would call theatre at all”.\(^{152}\) The experience in Ascot Vale prompted him to question the ways in which success is measured in community theatre.

\(^{151}\) Cameron, p.92.
\(^{152}\) Cameron, p.93.
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three B: Community Theatre in Practice)

Conventional theatre has evolved a gauge for quality and a way in which it judges theatrical product. This is, of course, only relevant when the criteria are the same. If the cultural base is changed the criteria for judgment must also change.\textsuperscript{153}

In then re-evaluating the ‘success’ of the Ascot Vale project, Cameron began to look beyond his own preconceptions of what constituted good theatre. He recognized that the “cultural base” from which he worked was different and that it was this that informally influenced the way that community audiences ‘measured’ their experience. Cameron’s final assessment of the project’s efficacy is the most telling of all. Notably Cameron moves away from his previously held measures of value.

Three things occur to me in retrospect.
The first was the very fact that something was achieved by the people to express their community. I believe that theatre had galvanised this feeling in a way that nothing else could.
Secondly it had brought out hidden problems and now the community could at least face them rather than allow them to remain under the surface.
The third was the effect it had on certain individuals in the area and the way in which theatre can build personal confidence that was to lead to the emergence of local leaders at a later time.\textsuperscript{154}

There are some useful conclusions to be drawn from Cameron’s reflection. The first is that the challenging and uncomfortable nature of the project prompted in him a deeper reflection and a palpable shift in understanding. The second is that the measures of success that Cameron ultimately drew on could provide a useful foundation for some important revisions in understanding and evaluating a ‘community aesthetic’. Finally, implicit in Cameron’s review is the significance of community engagement in an ongoing process, not just a concluding event.

The significance of the examination of Cameron’s work to this discussion rests with his problematising of the aesthetic and with his artist-centred focus. The perspective of the artist is often side-stepped in the desire to situate the community at the centre of

\textsuperscript{153} Cameron, p.93.
\textsuperscript{154} Cameron, p.94.
community arts practice. However, the person responsible for facilitating a community theatre event is a key participant and their perspective on the processes and outcome is critical to a full appreciation of the practice.

3B.4. Community theatre is….

The community artist, it has been said, works in a world of competing discourses – one discourse about the nature of art and representation; the other about political process, social change and community development.\textsuperscript{155}

3B.4.i. Defining Community Theatre

The term ‘community theatre’ does not represent one single form of artistic practice or arts event. It also does not reflect a single philosophical approach to theatrical performance or art-making. Neither is there a single dominant process or form that ‘belongs’ to community theatre. To compound the challenges to definition that these factors create, many practitioners would shrink from the term ‘community theatre’ although their practice might suggest otherwise.

The set of key principles outlined below is extrapolated from definitions and descriptions of practice offered by the diverse range of community theatre commentators considered in this chapter. It is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. It has been assembled for the purposes of this study as a means of identifying recurrent themes in the practice and theory of community theatre.

\textsuperscript{155} Pat Hoffie, 1991, p43
Chapter Three: Enacting Community – Contemporary Community Theatre Practice (Three B: Community Theatre in Practice)

3B.4.ii. Six Principles of Community Theatre

Community theatre is:

1. Contextual
   - determined by who constitutes the community
   - the articulation of the community’s need (in relation to that which can be expressed through a theatre event)

2. A Politicised Art Form
   - combining ideology with artistic process, each informing the other in symbiotic relationship
   - recognising that this is a participatory art-form
   - acknowledging that relationships (between various participants in the art-making process; and between participants and audience) are not fixed but are negotiated as part of the art-making process. These relationships are clarified through the use of theatre form and space

3. An enactment of community
   - promoting a redefinition of the community, for participant or audience, through engagement with collective art-making.

4. A Theatre Form where process is privileged

5. A Theatre Form that reflects the cultural heritage, experience and the capacities of participants, the artistic facilitators and the audience.

6. A Theatre Form that challenges the dominance of high art/elitist art forms and practices.

   … each new community theatre project, no matter where it takes place, has to make its own unique journey that can never be fully predicted or simply duplicated elsewhere.\(^{156}\)

\(^{156}\) van Erven, 2001, p.244.
Chapter Four: “It’s Pretty but is it Art?” – Aesthetics for Community Theatre Making

When the flush of a new-born sun fell first on Eden’s green and gold,  
Our father Adam sat under the Tree and scratched with a stick in the mould;  
And the first rude sketch that the world had seen was joy to his mighty heart,  
Till the Devil whispered behind the leaves, “It’s pretty, but is it Art?”  

The purpose of this chapter is to more closely examine the nature of the aesthetic; to consider the problems that are associated with the aesthetic when it is located in a contemporary community art making context; and to determine if it is indeed possible to find or formulate a definition for the aesthetic that serves such a community setting. Through this chapter the following questions are explored: is there an aesthetic imperative that draws individuals to participate though art in expressions of their lives and identity? And, how can the aesthetic serve the community in the production and presentation of community theatre?

As in the previous chapter, the concept of praxis is engaged in the examination of these questions. This chapter also is presented in two parts. Part A of the chapter concentrates on the theoretical implications and ramifications of the questions articulated above. This section concludes with explorations into the possibilities for a ‘community aesthetic’ relevant to this particular area of artistic and community practice. This discussion foreshadows the examination of practice that is the focus of Part B. In Part B the work of several community theatre practitioners who have tackled critical aesthetic challenges in their practice is described and theorised.

Chapters Two, Three and Four of the thesis provide the context, in theory and practice, for this study. All three chapters were propelled by a central drive to create working

definitions of the key terms of my study. I set out to identify areas of paradox and contradiction within the various fields of investigation. Also, I wished to generate a set of understandings for myself through which I could examine my own practice in order to ultimately contextualise it within the field of community theatre. It is my intention with Chapter Five to provide a conclusion of sorts, to this sustained investigation of literature and practice. I conclude this component of the thesis with a coda: a slim Chapter Five in which a synthesis of the elements pertinent to the making of a community theatre event is considered. I propose the formulation of a matrix within which community theatre can be framed. Added to this conception is the possibility that the matrix is both a formula for understanding the dynamics of community theatre practice: “that which gives form to a thing”, and the mechanism itself: “that which serves to enclose it”. This second dictionary definition of the matrix suggests the notion of a charged and enabling space that in itself makes community theatre practice possible. Through the Matrix I propose a view of community theatre taking place in a dedicated, although not literal space. Such a space engenders learning, aesthetic engagement, practical commitment, and countless enactments of community. This is also a liminoid space where a temporary community of art-makers is convened. Such a site might be designated an ‘Engaged Space’. In order to create and inhabit an engaged space there is a need to understand the nature and purpose of the aesthetic dimension in a community theatre setting and to understand the relationship between rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes. The Community Theatre Matrix is the key to developing this understanding.

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Chapter Four A: The Community Aesthetic, Theorised

4A.1. Defining The Aesthetic

...aesthetic refers to a particular form of sensuous understanding, a mode of apprehending through the senses the patterned import of human experience.\(^{159}\)

The notion of the aesthetic is applied freely across disciplines and, like ‘community’ carries with it the assumption that those who use it share an understanding of its meaning. The difficulty however, is that the aesthetic is a critical element in formalist traditions in art, but can also be used in much broader contexts to suggest heightened experience in everyday life (the experience of a sunset for example).

4A.1.i. Art practice in everyday life.

Attempts to place the ‘aesthetic’ within the reach of ordinary people and everyday life are particularly pertinent to this discussion, echoing as they do with Raymond William’s invocation: “culture is ordinary”. This orientation to the aesthetic can be traced back to, among others, John Dewey in the 1930’s. Dewey’s work challenged the primacy of ‘museum’ arts, and thus provides the foundation for a long line of theorists who have devoted their attention to various ways of reframing the aesthetic to accommodate more dynamic interactions between art, art-makers and percipients of art.

It is useful at this point to review the statement made by Raymond Williams quoted in an earlier section of this study:

A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{160}\) Raymond Williams, 1989, p.4.
Williams couples this set of observations with another critical one, which is that human societies express their purposes and meanings through their institutions and through arts and learning. Williams thus provides a pertinent reminder: that the arts provide societies with the mechanisms for expressing collective meanings and purposes and that rather than viewing the processes of art-making, a subset of the society-wide process of meaning-making known as culture, as extraordinary and exclusive, we should consider them the domain of the everyday and therefore accessible to all. The community theatre context is framed by a commitment to two key principles. These are: the accessibility of the processes and products of art-making, and conversely, the processes and products of collective art-making providing a voice for individuals and groups, particularly those who may otherwise be disenfranchised.

In 1934, Dewey writes of a separation between the idea of aesthetic experiences as they applied to art, and the idea that art could be part of everyday life experienced by any individual. And, according to Dewey, this separation had occurred through political and economic forces. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey draws a distinction between so called ‘museum’ art and the practice of art as a normal functioning of individuals in a society. Indeed, the stated aim of his reflection on the philosophy and practice of art is, “…that of recovering the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living”. Dewey’s analysis is that the rise of capitalism had seen the appropriation and separation of art for the purposes of ownership and as a measurement of wealth. Such a process, Dewey believes, denies many people access to aesthetic experiences and a desire to engage with art and art experiences, which appears to them to be remote and irrelevant to their daily lives.

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161 Williams, 1989, p.4.
Chapter Four: “It’s Pretty but is it Art?” - Aesthetics for Community Theatre

Making (Four A: The community aesthetic, theorized)

So extensive and subtly pervasive are the ideas that set Art upon a remote pedestal, that many a person would be repelled rather than pleased if told that he enjoyed his casual recreations, in part at least, because of their aesthetic quality. The arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts.163

In forming his argument that aesthetic experience should be restored to its rightful place, integral to daily life, Dewey offers an analysis of the process of nature: This process of nature carries with it an artistic and aesthetic quality and is implicit in human behaviour. Dewey’s investigation into the experience of art is propelled by his need to understand why something that is implicit in human behaviour can fail to become explicit. “Why is it”, Dewey asks, “that to multitudes, art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country and the aesthetic to be a synonym for something artificial?”164

The aesthetic experience is at the core of Dewey’s philosophy of art. The key descriptors of an experience that is aesthetic are: the sense of “heightened vitality and a complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events.”165

While Dewey suggests that the aesthetic experience is primarily a matter for the consumer, his attention to the process of art-making would suggest that the artist, in shaping the artistic product with purpose, is also privy to an aesthetic experience. This experience is manifest through the act of making and through the imaginative projection of an audience response. As Dewey says:

The sensory satisfaction of eye and ear, when aesthetic, is so because it does not stand by itself but is linked to the activity of which it is the consequence.166

Dewey’s emphasis on the aesthetic qualities inherent in both the production and reception of art paves the way for a dissolution of the boundaries between the two when one addresses the specific context of community theatre. By adapting Dewey’s description of

163 Dewey, 1934, p. 5.
166 Dewey, p.49.
the aesthetic dimension of art to the community theatre context, it is possible to propose a preliminary ‘definition’ of the aesthetic that privileges a collective participation in the making, performing and reception of the art event. Also, perhaps the aesthetic experience is more resonant because of the collective nature of the ‘experience’. And, the collective nature of the experience is fostered though the aesthetic engagement in the art-making process.

Without external embodiment, an experience remains incomplete; physiologically and functionally, sense organs are motor organs and are connected, by means of distribution of energies in the human body and not mere anatomically, with other motor organs. It is no linguistic accident that “building”, “construction”, “work” designate both a process and its finished product. Without the meaning of the verb that of the noun remains blank.167

With an emphasis on the achievement of unity, of a purposeful pursuit of completion in order to restore equilibrium, Dewey defers to modernist traditions in the philosophy of art.168 Significantly however, Dewey laments the marginalisation and isolation of the artist participating in the culture of ‘museum’ art, and argues for conditions that bring producers and consumers closer together in a celebration of art in everyday life. There is no overt challenge in Dewey’s philosophy to the possibility that the aesthetic may be achieved other than through the restoration of unity. Such a position would be challenged later, by those who ascribe to a post-modernist paradigm of artistic production and reception.169 Within his analysis however, Dewey provides an invaluable framework for subsequent theorists to examine the arts practice of their own time.

4A.1.ii. The Aesthetic Field

One of the successors to Dewey is Peter Abbs. In contrast to Dewey, Abbs approaches the aesthetic from the perspective of the educator, and his context for theorising is arts

168 Dewey, p.15.
education. Abbs’ orientation towards pedagogy and his commitment to developing a theorised model of arts education is useful here. One of the central tenets of Abbs’s work on the aesthetics and arts education is his belief that learning about the aesthetic dimension of art should be learned through an aesthetic process.\textsuperscript{170} Fundamental to this process is an appreciation of the aesthetic heritage that informs artistic practice in a given context.

For Abbs, this “aesthetic heritage” is more than a set of historical artistic references, but “refers to that complex interactive system of allusion, reference and structure in which individual expressions of art are necessarily constituted”.\textsuperscript{171} This is what Abbs refers to as the “aesthetic field” and is the cornerstone of his “conservation aesthetic”.\textsuperscript{172} Judith McLean suggests that Abbs’ work belongs at the more traditional end of the spectrum of contemporary aesthetic theory with his claim for “recognition of the historical culture”.\textsuperscript{173} It is also interesting to note, however, that Abbs links the individual’s experience of the “great dramatic and artistic works of past generations”\textsuperscript{174} with the possibility of forging an identity within the larger community through an aesthetic experience. Consequently, “the individual is seen as part of the communal culture”.\textsuperscript{175}

The modernist tendencies which Abbs lays claim to here need not be seen as oppositional to more contemporary and post-modern understandings of the aesthetic, which suggest that the singular ‘seminal narratives’ of the past have given way to a shifting plurality of reference points.\textsuperscript{176} Rather, I would suggest that Abbs’ adherence to the centrality of the

\textsuperscript{170} In his Ten Propositions of Arts Education Abbs writes: Proposition Nine… the arts must be taught through the aesthetic mode. 
\textsuperscript{171} Peter Abbs, 1994, p64.
\textsuperscript{173} McLean, 1996, p.19.
\textsuperscript{174} McLean, 1996, p.19.
\textsuperscript{175} Abbs cited in McLean, p.19.
\textsuperscript{176} Abbs, 1994, p.47.
“aesthetic field” indicates a practitioner’s appreciation of the need for a set of exemplars from the past to facilitate the development of skills and insight critical to the making of new work. It is possible to view Abbs’ invocation of the pivotal role of a canon of great works as the first step to building a performance vocabulary that will then enable the artist to create work. In the context of collective art-making, the development of a common performance vocabulary of shared symbols, references and allusions is essential.

This performance vocabulary is constructed through the bringing together of several components: the set of tools, knowledges and skills that are needed in order to make and perform theatre. This is particularly evident when a theatrically trained artist/facilitator works with a community on a collective art-making process. Training by its very nature draws on the past traditions of the form in question, influencing the way in which artist/facilitators approach the making of theatre, the language they use, and the ways in which they value the result. Similarly, the untrained participant and audience member bring with them their own understanding of the aesthetic, based on whatever experience they have had. As long ago as 1984, community theatre practitioner and commentator, Steve Gooch observed,

Aesthetic sense and taste are developed attributes. The moment we approach the stage, whether as audience and critics or as producers, we bring a little of the past with us. However strong our desire as artists towards innovation and experiment, the materials we build with are old ones, and the responses of past audiences remain with us.  

4a.1.iii. The quest for the emancipatory project

There is a palpable tension between the need for what Bruner called the ‘cultural tool kit’ that individuals bring to a collective art making experience and the post-modern paradigm. Many commentators have remarked upon it. Henry Giroux suggests that

177 Steve Gooch, 1984, p17
while the certainties of modernism can no longer be relied upon, the optimism which underscores much thinking from the Enlightenment and beyond can play a vital role in movements committed to effecting change (for example, many community theatre projects). Giroux sees the juxtaposition of post-modern pluralism with a modernist belief in emancipatory practices as pro-active, driving an imperative for change, and with the potential to dismantle existing monolithic power structures.

Postmodernism frays the boundaries of that world and makes visible what has often been seen as unrepresentable. The task of modernity with its faith in reason and emancipation can perhaps renew its urgency in a postmodern world, a world where difference, contingency, and power can reassert, redefine, and in some instances collapse the monolithic boundaries of nationalism, sexism, racism, and class oppression.\(^\text{180}\)

In further developing the notion of the aesthetic as an “emancipatory project”, there are a number of key factors to consider.\(^\text{181}\) Once again, Abbs’ writing is useful. He reinforces Dewey’s argument that the aesthetic experience is accessible to everybody in the first of his Ten Propositions of Arts Education:

Contrary to the exclusive claims of various cultural coteries, we are all by immediate biological disposition active aesthetes.\(^\text{182}\)

Many writers allude to the aesthetic experience as an essentially sensory and sensuous experience. For Abbs, this also constitutes a form of cognition of equal importance to other forms of knowing. As noted earlier Abbs suggests that learning about the aesthetic should be undertaken through an aesthetic mode. While Abbs’ orientation is towards arts education, the significance of this process of apprehending the arts through an “aesthetic mode” cannot be understated when considering collective art-making processes with so-called ‘untrained’ participants. Abbs describes this process as “the apprehension of meaning through sensuous engagement”.\(^\text{183}\)

\(^\text{180}\) Henry Giroux, 1997, p160  
\(^\text{181}\) Helen Nicholson, 1999, p.86.  
\(^\text{182}\) Peter Abbs, 1994, p.45.  
\(^\text{183}\) Abbs, 1994, p.45.
Abbs’ work intimates a link to a postmodern understanding of the aesthetic. There are a range of theorists who have taken on the challenges presented by the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism. The consequences of such a shift, Baz Kershaw proposes, are in part embodied in a set of new found freedoms: “a celebration of human difference; the reconstitution of the individual as a series of subject positions all of which are equally valid; and the expansive embrace of pluralism”.  

In her article ‘Aesthetic Values, Drama Education and the Politics of Difference’, Helen Nicholson attempts to deal with the contradictions and complexities of the aesthetic within a contemporary drama classroom. What might drama look like in a classroom committed to the privileging of multiple voices, cultural diversity, and a recognition of the politics of difference, she asks? While providing an astute and expansive overview of this difficult terrain, Nicholson offers two clear and precise observations about the aesthetic in such a context. The first is a reminder of the purposes that underlie education in aesthetics:

…aesthetics is ….an attempt to explain how and why art matters, to find words to describe the special powers with which the arts can illuminate, move and excite. 

The second concentrates on the notion of context:

the values of freedom and equality, which have been traditionally associated with aesthetic education, might extend to a more pluralistic politics by recognising the local knowledge that informs the range and diversity of personal and cultural narratives symbolised in artistic form.

The recognition of local knowledge, of a specific, regionalised context to serve as a buffer against the relativism of a post-modernism recurs in contemporary commentaries across a number of disciplines. Educationalist and critical theorist Henry Giroux invokes Michel Foucault, whose position on the aesthetic pivoted on the ultimate democratisation of art. He famously poses the question, “‘couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of

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185 Nicholson, p.82.
186 Nicholson, p.83.
When Giroux draws on Foucault he is deliberating on the difficulties of privileged knowledge. If one accepts Abbs’ claim that aesthetics is knowledge in a sensuous form, then Foucault’s description of a set of subjugated knowledges is pertinent. Foucault argues for a new appreciation of “disqualified knowledges” drawing attention to a “popular knowledge...a particular local, regional knowledge”. Access to such knowledges opens the way to genuine critique, suggests Foucault.

Foucault’s elevation of “particular, local, regional knowledge” to a central position resonates with the work of Dewey, Williams and more latterly, Nicholson. She argues for an aesthetic that recognises local knowledge as a means of adapting to shifting artistic paradigms and accommodating diversity in the contemporary community. Implicit in Foucault’s discussion is the essentially political nature of the relationship between particular practices and the theories that authenticate them. These political issues, articulated by Helen Nicholson as a set of questions about the aesthetic and arts education, rise repeatedly as one attempts to find a workable understanding of the aesthetic in a contemporary, collective art-making setting.

…the political questions that continually arise in aesthetic education are concerned with who defines beauty, where the boundaries between art and ‘non-art’ are drawn, and whose interests the arts are primarily intended to serve.

4A.1.iv. In Summary: Characterising the aesthetic in community contexts

While this discussion has not yielded a singular definition of the aesthetic for use in community art making contexts, it is possible to note the following emergent characteristics from this exploration of relevant literature.

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For the purposes of this study, the aesthetic

- suggests a heightened state of being
- can be seen as a form of sensuous knowing
- is purposeful
- is available to all, as it is essential to the nature of the human being
- is informed by ‘particular, local regional knowledges’ rather than universals

This discussion of the aesthetic in contemporary community art-making contexts is underscored by a recognition of the politicised nature of that aesthetic. As Nicholson’s comment above reveals, the political nature of the aesthetic prompts difficult questions about definitions of beauty, boundaries of art and non-art, and the purposes which art-making is intended to serve. In addition to this, there are questions about access and participation, about ascribing value, and fundamentally about the relationship between the aesthetic and notions of cultural democracy. Given the range and complexity of questions generated by a review of the aesthetic in these circumstances, it is useful to problematise the aesthetic in relation to the political subtext that challenges such attempts at definition.

4A.2. Problems For A New Century: The Politicised Aesthetic In Pluralist Settings

They builded a tower to shiver the sky and wrench the stars apart,
Till the Devil grunted behind the bricks: “It’s striking, but is it Art?”
The stone was dropped at the quarry-side and the idle derrick swung,
While each man talked of the aims of Art, and each in an alien tongue.¹⁹¹

4A.2.i. The appropriation of the aesthetic

As Nicholson notes, the politicisation of the aesthetic calls into question how art is defined. Dewey powerfully articulates this issue of a politicised aesthetic in his analysis

of the separation of ‘museum’ art from everyday life through the forces of capitalisation and the commodification of culture.\textsuperscript{192} Indeed, \textit{Art as Experience} is a manifesto for the return of art to its ‘rightful’ place as a part of daily life for the ordinary person.

Helen Nicholson’s overview of the aesthetic as it relates to arts education provides a useful insight into the ways in which the politicisation of the aesthetic is both inevitable and pivotal in the practice of the arts and arts education. Nicholson also suggests that aesthetic theory has been remarkably pliable as a political force. She notes:

\begin{quote}
Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged that the aesthetic, as the quest for a unified beautiful and good, has contributed to both political stability and social change; the paradox of post-Enlightenment aesthetics is that it has served the political aspirations of both the Right and Left.\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

One of the ways in which the aesthetic is appropriated for political ends, according to Nicholson, is when it is used “to authenticate a range of values”.\textsuperscript{194} When the aesthetic is invoked as a means of valuing so-called ‘high art’ products, it sets up a universalising or normalising process where certain products or art forms represent not only standards, but art itself. As a consequence, the aesthetic is not only invoked to identify what art might be but also to exclude practices that don’t fit into this framework.

As Nicholson suggests, such a process not only excludes certain practices but those who participate in such practices:

\begin{quote}
…the idea that there might be universal agreement over what constitutes the beautiful and true has come to act as a powerful means of social exclusion.\textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{192} Dewey, 1934, p.8.
\textsuperscript{193} Nicholson, 1999, p.83.
\textsuperscript{194} Nicholson, 1999, p.82.
\textsuperscript{195} Nicholson, 1999, p.83.
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4A.2.ii. Exclusion and access

The implications for this normalising of certain practices as ‘art’ at the expense of other forms are far-reaching for those involved in all forms of community art. At the very least, it sets up a dichotomy between legitimised art forms, ‘high art’, and those that are not recognised as art, the popular forms. Often craft practices and the cultural practices associated with ethnicity (traditional dance for example) are relegated to a position of non-art due to the binary and excluding nature of an ‘authenticating’ aesthetic.

This issue is explored from many different perspectives in *Community and the Arts*, and in considerable depth by Gay Hawkins in *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras*. Hawkins tests Australian attitudes to and experiences of community arts through the lens of a history of the Australia Council’s Community Development programs, examining the ways in which such attitudes are reflected and shaped through public policy. She identifies a number of key ways in which this question of exclusion manifests itself in the Australian context. The first of these is the notion of excellence and its association with ‘high art’. Hawkins sets up access and excellence as a central dualism of governmental arts policies in Australia. The suggestion historically was that excellence, authenticated by aesthetic theory, was the domain of elitist art production, created by the few, for the few, in the maintenance of a ‘high art’ tradition.

The corollary of this is that standards of excellence in the arts are the province of trained professionals. The more sinister implication, implied by Hawkins dualism, is that wider access to the arts dilutes excellence. Therefore, for policy makers, a choice must be made between providing wide access to the arts or providing a high standard in arts production.

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More recently, Hawkins reports, there has been a move towards more culturally
democratic arts practice in the community. A brief look at the elements that characterised
this evolution from democratisation to cultural democracy reveals a great deal about the
place of the aesthetic in the practice and theory of community arts.

4A.2.iii. Democratisation or cultural democracy

The process of democratising the arts relies on a commitment to providing access to the
‘high arts’ for those for whom access is usually limited. As Kirby observes:

The democratisation of culture centres on the idea of making high culture more readily
available, regardless of the audiences’ cultural backgrounds and interests. 198

On the other hand, the emergence of cultural democracy as a principle in community arts
practice is a dominant theme of more recent years. 199 As Sandy Kirby notes, cultural
democracy is concerned with the expression, production and distribution of cultural
forms themselves. 200 It should be noted that processes associated with establishing
culturally democratic practices in the arts continue to be problematic. Helen Nicholson
identifies a central difficulty as it applies to the drama classroom. Her observation could
apply equally to the practice of community theatre.

The challenge that faces contemporary aesthetic education is how to maintain a commitment
to social democracy and to an emancipatory political imagination, but without the
discriminatory practices that have been associated with a single aesthetic register or to one
unifying aesthetic theory. 201

4A.3. Rethinking the Aesthetic

In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it
in the raw ….

198 Sandy Kirby, 1991, ‘An Historical Perspective on the Community Arts Movement’ in Community and
201 Nicholson, pp. 84-85.
The man who poked the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colourful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it. 202

4A.3.i. Recasting for plurality and diversity

Contemporary commentators have sought to re-examine and redefine the aesthetic in a way that better reflects specific contemporary purposes and contexts. After all, the aesthetic continues to be a pliable concept, and as Helen Nicholson reminds us, has contributed not only to political stability but also to social change.203 Even the more conservative Peter Abbs offers that the role of the dominant canon in the arts serves not only as a model but also as a challenge “to a deep, historic and parodic imagination”, to be subverted and recast.204 Through his Ten Propositions of Arts Education, Abbs proposes a rethinking of the aesthetic in order to develop a more adequate “public conception of the true significance of the arts”.205

In Nicholson’s reworking of aesthetic theory within an arts education context, the values of freedom and democracy that have long since been associated with aesthetic education are placed alongside a “postmodern commitment to the politics of difference”. 206 The plurality of voices that signifies a postmodern paradigm can then be acknowledged and embraced rather than rejected on the grounds that such diversity defies the possibility of universal values. There are a number of ways in which pluralism can be accommodated through a re-envisioned aesthetic. Firstly, Nicholson suggests, when one accepts that pluralism is not an example of naïve political relativism but a political stance in itself, then this becomes a position from which “established values might be challenged”.207 Secondly, the importance of specific and local contexts as a buffer to the potential relativism of a post-modern aesthetic is re-iterated. There are two key contributors to the
individual’s capacity to engage with the aesthetic: the role of identity (in relation to self and other), and the capacity of the individual to locate and contextualise themselves through the aesthetic experience. Nicholson summarises:

The strength of this version of the aesthetic, for those who wish to find a more radical, pluralistic aesthetic theory, lies in its emphasis on how the relationship between self and other, identity and difference, emotion and intellect are completely but indistinguishably engaged.208

**4A.3.ii. The aesthetic as a whole art experience**

One of the common understandings of the aesthetic is that an aesthetic experience occurs through an interaction between audience or percipient, and an object of art. Dewey’s *Experience of Art* focussed on this relationship and for many commentators, this is the key element in theorising the aesthetic.

There is another perspective, however, which accommodates a more fluid view. Building on the notion of the aesthetic as a mode of sensuous engagement, the potential for an aesthetic experience is not limited to the observer/audience/reader/percipient but is also available to those who participate in art-making, either individually, or collectively. In collective art-making in community settings the notion of audience is overturned. Individuals generate work for each other as audience, and also serve as representatives of the audience of community members for whom they are making the performance.

John O’Toole examines the experience of the participant in process drama, where children are engaged in a fictive process and are both audience and ‘performer’ within this fictive frame.209 Interestingly, O’Toole describes these participants as the ‘percipients’, even though they are not only perceiving the events of the drama but also generating and shaping them in the first place. According to O’Toole, there

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208 Nicholson, p.86.
is the potential for powerful learning through such a process. As O’Toole says, when the “sensuous internalisation of meaning is…externalised and made cognitively explicit, knowledge is generated. The knowledge that emerges as dramatic meaning is neither just propositional comprehension nor sensuous apprehension, it is a fusion of both”\textsuperscript{210}

This discussion of the aesthetic in the context of the drama classroom broadens the potential for insights into the aesthetic in the community theatre context. As O’Toole describes, the aesthetic is present throughout the drama process, rather than purely in the moments of perception of a completed art product by an observer or audience member. The place of the aesthetic at the heart of the drama process could easily be transferred to the community theatre workshop or rehearsal setting. Therefore, when one considers the ‘aesthetic outcomes’ of a community theatre project, it is useful to examine the ‘whole art event’ from first meetings, to the ‘after party’.

From the perspective of the community theatre maker, both Baz Kershaw and Richard Schechner have broadened the view of the theatre event to take in the “constellation of events” that surround the making and performing of a piece of theatre\textsuperscript{211} Kershaw expands on Schechner’s work. He proposes that “everything else which is done in preparation for, and in the aftermath of, the production is part of the performance and may affect its socio-political influence”.\textsuperscript{212} John McGrath, like Kershaw, writes out of the English political/ community theatre tradition. He adds to the discussion of the aesthetic when he refers to the elements of theatre language involved in the theatre event. According to McGrath:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} O’Toole, p.98.
\end{itemize}
There are elements in the language of the theatre beyond the text, even beyond the production, which are often more decisive, more central to one’s experience of the event than the text or the production.\(^{213}\)

### 4A.3.iii. Acquiring dramatic languages

Nicholson also considers the way in which the symbolic languages of drama practice inform the development of a more inclusive aesthetic. She refers to Judith McLean’s work on devising an aesthetic framework in drama education,\(^{214}\) and emphasises the importance of the acquisition of dramatic languages to enable participants in the drama class or workshop to explore individual and cultural identities. For both McLean and Nicholson, such an acquisition of the languages of drama does not represent the acceptance of a single set of values. Rather, it offers individuals the opportunity to critique and challenge values, through the medium of drama. Diversity and a divergence of values can be accommodated within the same aesthetic space. Nicholson concludes:

> Because the aesthetic encompasses a range of artistic and dramatic narratives, it offers both a safe place from which to explore values, emotions and experiences, and invites a more dangerous, and unsettling, challenge to familiar beliefs.\(^{215}\)

### 4A.4. An Aesthetic For The Community

A number of theorists and practitioners have addressed the need for a definition of the aesthetic that more accurately reflects the nature of community and the distinctive qualities of art-making and appreciation in community settings. There are three ‘versions’ of a community aesthetic that are useful to consider here. The first was coined as a response to the difficulties Australian community theatre practitioners experienced when they found that existing measures of value did not adequately reflect what they felt had been achieved through their community theatre practice. Tom Burvill proposed the

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\(^{214}\) Judith McLean, 1996.

\(^{215}\) Nicholson, p.87
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notion of a “social aesthetic”.216 Burvill’s concept requires an acknowledgement of the whole art event, including rehearsal and other preparation and the social, community and conventionally ‘aesthetic’ achievements that are accrued during the production and performance of this “whole art event”. Gay Hawkins describes Burvill’s concept in the following way:

a ‘social aesthetic’ juxtaposes the methods of production with the formal organisation of the play/performance piece, and measure of value and success are determined by the close interaction of performers and audience.217

A second notion of a community aesthetic was framed by Jonathan Neelands and Anthony Goode as a response to their own dissatisfaction with earlier definitions of the aesthetic when applied to community contexts. Neelands and Goode formulated a “ritual aesthetic”.218 As practitioners, they sought to draw on an aesthetic which recognised the role of individual creativity and ritual in the construction of performance outside of the reference points provided by intellectual ‘high art’ experience. Neelands and Goode explain:

We start from the premise that the mass of people are vigorously creative in their own lives in ways which have become invisible... we put forward a view that aesthetic in its original sense refers to sensory, visceral, physical experiencing. The trigger for aesthetic response is in the body, not in the mind.219

Neelands and Goode’s work begins to direct attention towards ways of working which might contrast with the conventional theatre making processes with aspirations to a modernist or ‘high art’ theatre aesthetic. The implication here is that a different aesthetic requires a different approach to theatre making, predicated possibly on the acquisition of a different cultural ‘tool kit’ than that required by the professional theatre maker performing in a conventional theatre space. By implication, different ‘tools’ for the

216 Burvill cited in Hawkins, 1993, pp.131-132
217 Hawkins, 1993, pp.131-132
219 Neelands & Goode, p.44.
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audience’s perception and participation are then required in order to guide appreciation and involvement, and the ascription of value.

A third proposed definition of a community aesthetic was formulated by a social theorist rather than a theatre practitioner or commentator. It has been labelled a community-based aesthetic. According to the social theorist, Lucy Lippard the principles of community-based aesthetics can be framed as a set of seeming contradictions which enable a purposeful engagement in community meaning making through artistic practice. These principles are as follows.

The community-based aesthetic practice is:

• SIMPLE and FAMILIAR enough, at least on the surface, not to confuse or repel potential viewer-participants.
• LAYERED, COMPLEX and UNFAMILIAR enough to hold people’s attention once they’ve been attracted, to make them wonder, and to offer ever deeper experiences and references to those who hang in.
• EVOCATIVE enough to make people recall related moments, places, and emotions in their own lives.
• PROVOCATIVE and CRITICAL enough to make people think about issues beyond the scope of the work, to call into question superficial assumptions about the place, its history and its use.  

4A.5. The Aesthetic Imperative

One of the central tensions of this chapter has been the putative disconnection between ordinary people and their access to aesthetic experiences. Both theorists and practitioners have attempted to restore the aesthetic dimension to its place at the heart of everyday life. Perhaps missing from this account is an articulation of the reasons for attempting such a

restoration. What can the individual or the group of individuals who constitute a community of location or interest, possibly gain from an engagement with the aesthetic as a part of daily life? While this question could arguably be a Pandora’s box, at this point, I will consider just a few of the vast possibilities for response.

• **An aesthetic experience, for participant or percipient, can be transcendent.**

An aesthetic experience is a heightened experience of the senses, as Nicholson reminds us. It is about feeling “fully alive”, about being “fully present in the moment while being conscious of its past and future significance”.\(^{221}\) Such an experience also invites the individual into an act of imagination that is potentially liberating and dangerous. Theatre-maker John McGrath calls it a “vertiginous adventure along the tightrope of invention.”\(^{222}\) The theatre is an avenue for this adventure, McGrath suggests, and is unique in the opportunity it offers those willing to submit. He continues:

> This role of theatre, this temporary imaginative release from the chains of alienation and predictability, is perhaps one of the most important things that it is ‘about’, and can rarely be matched in intensity or presence by any other experience of art.\(^{223}\)

• **The aesthetic experience can be transformative**

McGrath develops his argument further. His position aligns with Nicholson’s proposition that the aesthetic can either support or challenge the status quo. McGrath describes the “intoxication” of the transcendent experience, the release from the chains of alienation, as potentially subversive, “because it can create the appetite for throwing off those chains more frequently, for coming out of retreat and onto the offensive”.\(^{224}\)

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\(^{221}\) Nicholson, p.81.


\(^{223}\) John M McGrath, p.91

\(^{224}\) John M McGrath, p.91
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Augusto Boal suggests that the experience of inhabiting an aesthetic space can promote “knowledge and discovery, cognition and recognition”. It liberates memory and imagination. Through the properties of the aesthetic space, art and pedagogy meet. The aesthetic space, says Boal, “promotes learning by experience”.

- A space for giving voice and being heard.

Boal identifies some of the concrete ways in which theatre, when informed by an emancipatory pedagogy, can service both artistic and political ends. The key, he says, rests with the application of a language that is instinctive to individuals, but is made explicit through its heightened use in the theatre.

There is nothing on the stage that is basically different from what we do in our daily life. The essential difference is that in our daily lives we don’t pay attention to the fact that we are using this language.

It is through this language that people, regardless of their skills or experience in theatre, can express their own ideas. Boal insists that theatre is the form, not the subject, and that it is possible to teach about this form, to develop the language, without imposing the discourse. At the centre of Boal’s theatre process is the notion of theatre as an aesthetic space. The concept that it is necessary to construct or locate some kind of performative or aesthetic ‘space’ as a precondition for critique, opposition or even celebration of a given society is a recurrent theme in the writing of commentators, theoreticians and practitioners across many disciplines. This is a space in which many voices can be heard; or a space in which dissent can be tested; or a space where difference and diversity can be expressed and celebrated; or a space for silence in which the unnameable or the difficult story can be

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226 Boal, 1995, p.21
228 Boal, 1996, p.50
signified, or a space where oppression can be identified and addressed, in rehearsal for the real world. And it is a public space. Different commentators identify a range of qualities that they see as necessary for such a space to exist. Many focus on the role that creativity or an imaginative engagement with possibility might play. Others focus on the significance of finding a language, a voice, or an environment that facilitates not just speaking but active listening. Many suggest that there is a role for pedagogy in the construction and management of such ‘spaces.’

Theatre is powerful because we create an aesthetic space where everything is both magnified and dichotomous…Theatre is telescopic because it brings close what is far away and makes bigger what is small. These characteristics of the aesthetic space make it extremely powerful in analysing our situation…..the aesthetic space allows democratic interchange, allows us to say, ‘OK, that’s the way things are but not the way things should be, and now I’m going to create an image of how I want the world to be’.

* The aesthetic space as pedagogical enterprise

It is interesting to note the way that Boal draws on the oppositional and purposeful qualities of the aesthetic. Also, the pedagogical dimension is present in Boal’s writing and in his approaches to practice. In his theorising, Boal builds on the fundamentals of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. When Boal discusses the concept of a theatre language as a means of gaining entry to the aesthetic space, his understanding is both pedagogical and artistic. The language he refers to is everyday language, rather than

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229 Julie Salverson develops the idea that this ‘aesthetic space’ may be a site for privileging silence over speech in her article ‘Performing Emergency: Witnessing, Popular Theatre, and the lie of the Literal’, *Theatre Topics*, 6.2, 1996, pp181-191, to be discussed later in this chapter.


David Trend, 1992: calls for ‘reconstituting arenas for civic dialogue’ (p.105) and ‘cultural spaces unfettered by the debilitating separation of theory from practice.’ (p.107)

Maxine Greene, 1995, *Releasing the imagination: essays on education, the arts, and social change*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco : describes a ‘space of dialogue’, where ‘a web of relationships can be woven’; and where there is a ‘teachable capacity’.

231 Boal, 1996, p.49.

an elite vocabulary accessible only to those with a formal education. The implication is that when everyday language is used for theatrical purposes, to reflect and explore issues of everyday life within a heightened frame, the possibility for a democratic, pedagogical and transcendent experience is created.

4A.6. The Aesthetic in Community Art Making

4A.6.i. The aesthetic space

One constructs, finds or shapes an aesthetic space in order to provide a vehicle for the ordinary to become extraordinary. The heightened experience and ‘sensuous knowing’ afforded by an engagement with others in an aesthetic space can provide individuals with a greater understanding of their own lives; can generate a clearer articulation of community identity; can politicise those who engage as participants or as percipients; and can provide opportunities for creative and imaginative acts which may serve to emancipate individuals from difficult daily lives. It can also inspire individuals to engage with and in their daily lives to a greater degree, to be “fully ‘present’ in the moment and also conscious of its past and future significance”. 233

The presence of this aesthetic space is fundamental to community art making, and by implication to the achievement of a ‘community aesthetic’.

• The aesthetic space and cultural democracy

If one accepts that the aesthetic can be invoked to provide a means of articulation, clarification or challenge, then it is conceivable that an aesthetic space could be constructed to provoke social, political or personal change. Educator and cultural theorist Henry Giroux has developed a theory of ‘border pedagogies’. Learning for change or for emancipation, Giroux contends, takes place where borders are firstly contested and then reformulated. This theory has particular resonance for community theatre, a practice that is located on the margins of both community and theatre, and therefore ideally positioned

233 Nicholson, p.81.
to challenge both. Giroux invokes Maxine Greene in his recognition that at the heart of these challenges there is a space that is performative (and by implication aesthetically framed), public and democratic.

We need spaces… for expression, for freedom… a public space… where living persons can come together in speech and action, each one free to articulate a distinctive perspective, all of them granted equal worth. It must be a space to dialogue, a space where a web of relationships can be woven, and where a common world can be brought into being and continually renewed….There must be a teachable capacity to bring into being a public composed of persons with many voices and many perspectives out of whose multiple intelligences may still emerge a durable and worthwhile common world.234

**The aesthetic space and the imagination**

One of the issues that is repeatedly present in discussions of collective art-making and the aesthetic is the role of the imagination, another of the dense and slippery terms that arise from a discussion of community theatre practice. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to ‘unpack’ this term, its relevance to the process of individual and collective art making is noted here. It would seem that the structures or rules that contribute to the construction of an aesthetic space carry with them the invitation to engage in an exercise of imagination. This particular form of heightened experience performs a number of functions within the community art-making context. The reframing of experience in symbolic languages; the possibility for empathy; the shifting of perspectives; the escape from daily life, are all ways in which the imagination may factor into a collective art-making process. Some commentators would suggest that this is not peripheral but central to the developing notion of the aesthetic under discussion here. Steve Ball (following R.K Elliot), for example, maintains that all imaginative acts are “a means of freeing ourselves from our circumscribed view of the world”. 235 Maxine Greene is unequivocal:

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Without imagination - the ability to enter alternative realities, to bring an ‘as if’ into being, to look at things as if they could be otherwise - we would be sentenced to perpetual literalness. 236

**The aesthetic space and multiple pedagogies**

The role of pedagogy in the aesthetic dimension of community theatre should also be acknowledged at this point. The framing of the art-making processes requires an understanding of pedagogy, and the engagement in the aesthetic experience of collective art-making affords all participants the opportunity for new understandings.

Here are two examples of a pedagogical process in collective art-making. The first is the conscious transference of particular knowledge or experience enabling participants to become involved in the purposeful shaping of theatrical form. This relates closely to the notion of the ‘cultural tool kit’ that Jerome Bruner proposes. While Nicholson refers to this concept in the context is the drama classroom, it is useful to apply this perspective to a community theatre context:

As teachers, therefore, one of our responsibilities is to provide students with what Jerome Bruner has called a ‘cultural tool kit’. A tool kit that includes a diverse range of aesthetic languages of drama might enable students to recognize and explore a range of values that inhere within different dramatic practices. 237

A second manifestation of pedagogy rests with the theatrical form itself. Sonja Kuftinec looks specifically at the community theatre context. She identifies a particular way in which both the understanding of theatre form and the capacity to manipulate it can promote new knowledge for participants as theatre makers and participants as audience.

Operating outside the realm of "conventional" theatre practice, community-based work operates as a learning tool by violating expectations of participants and facilitators. These initial violations can lead to further disruptions of form, providing a potential learning experience for audiences as well as participants. 238

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The role of the community artist is pivotal to the achievement of the aesthetic dimensions of community art-making. However, it would be simplistic to assume that responses to the aesthetic imperative rest solely with the so-called trained artists. Indeed, in striving for an inclusive and democratic ‘community aesthetic’ both artists and community participants seek to build spaces in which responsibility is shared and all inputs are valued.

4A.7. Cultural democracy and a pliable aesthetic

When one brings together all of these elements: a commitment to cultural democracy, a pliable and contextualised aesthetic; a recognition of the whole art event from first rehearsal to ‘bump out’; and the significant contribution of pedagogical practices to the process and outcome; it is possible to see ways in which the aesthetic has moved beyond its conventional authenticating functions. It is also possible to see cultural richness and complexity at work when a community engages in collective art-making and when those participating encounter a ‘community aesthetic.’ The prescient Steve Gooch encapsulated much of this in his 1984 account of community theatre practice in Britain.

…while art is certainly somewhat more ethereal than a nine-to-five existence, its source is inside people rather than halfway to heaven…. the purpose of a genuinely popular art must surely be to draw out those qualities which exist in everyone, to ‘educate’ in the sense of the original Latin ‘educare’ (to lead out) while remembering that the successful learning is usually that which is enjoyed. 239

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Chapter Four B: The Aesthetic at Work – Accounts of Practice

This section of the discussion of aesthetics and community theatre focuses on practice. Three exemplars are considered. Each is an account of community theatre practice in which aesthetic considerations are both visible and potent. The purpose of including these studies of practice is to further explore some of the challenges and problems presented by the aesthetic dimension in community theatre practice. These accounts should therefore not be seen as representative or even indicative of broader practices in community theatre, although this may indeed prove to be the case. Rather, they are offered as an alternative lens for viewing the issues at hand. This is particularly pertinent in anticipation of the Community Theatre Matrix, which is presented in Chapter Five, and in preparation for the examination of my own practice through multiple lenses, which is to follow in subsequent chapters.

4B.1. A Celebration Of Localised Unified Difference: The Children’s Procession (Baz Kershaw)

This first account is drawn from two documentations by Baz Kershaw of a community theatre event staged in Glasgow in 1990. British political and community theatre company, Welfare State International were commissioned to mount an event to celebrate the culmination of Glasgow’s time as European City of Culture. The event, Glasgow All Lit Up! involved over ten thousand people carrying lanterns in a two mile long procession through Glasgow streets. Kershaw describes and critiques the work firstly in an article for the journal, Research in Drama Education, in 1998. His analysis of the event is developed further in a chapter of his book, The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard, published in 1999. My discussion draws on these two sources.240

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4B.1.i. Context

Welfare State International was a leading professional theatre company working in Britain in the last decades of the 20th century. Their work was politically and community oriented. It was characterised by large scale ritualistic performance events, and by professional theatre workers facilitating the participation of community members in these events. The work was often staged outdoors or in non-conventional performance spaces. In Glasgow All Lit Up! artists from Welfare State International spent eighteen months working with local artists and community groups to prepare for a procession of lanterns that was to end at the Glasgow Green with a spectacular finale involving a two hundred member choir and a stunning light show. The professional theatre artists trained local artists in lantern-making skills brought from Japan. These local artists in turn worked with two hundred and fifty community groups to make an extraordinary variety of lanterns, from tiny paper ones which could be carried by small children, to elaborate constructions to be transported on trucks. Baz Kershaw quotes the Guardian newspaper’s account of the procession, as one means of conveying an outsider’s view of the procession.

‘There were big floats, of course; a gorgeous white reindeer, a huge unflattering image of the Prime Minister (Thatcher) shoving a gunboat out to sea...a beautiful white Swan Lake float...But in a sense, the big set pieces were beside the point; what reduced one or two of us cynical old observers to tears, was the children, thousands and thousands of them...every one of them clutching a little lantern...There were boats and space ships and churches and mutant hero turtles, and lots of simple triangular lanterns with nothing but gorgeous, blobby abstract patterns on....’

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4B.1.ii. The Aesthetic Space at work

This outsider’s view of the event draws attention to the multifaceted nature of Glasgow All Lit Up! It wasn’t a single performance for an audience, but a framework for different participants to experience a ritualised theatre event in their own way. Rather than an act of community, the two mile long procession was an

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aggregation of communities brought together in time and space. For each group, the enactment of community was initiated in the lantern making classes and brought to conclusion on the night of the parade. Decisions about what would be made; who would contribute and how; what role the artists would play in the making; how they would process as a group, were the key decisions in the construction of this particular community aesthetic.

For each group, practical issues of management and logistics were juxtaposed with artistic and social issues. The task of making the lanterns and preparing for the involvement of the group in the parade provided entry into an aesthetic space. Bringing all the groups together into a single event had a number of ramifications. It was both an opportunity for and a challenge to enacting community. The ripples of the challenge radiated throughout the event. The audience members, for example, were as much participants as they were observers. The framework of the parade and the finale, carefully shaped by the artistic director of Welfare State International, John Fox and his team of professionals, provided the opportunity for a heightened aesthetic experience for all.

For Kershaw, the event represented a complex interweaving of official and unofficial power structures, moments of resistance and challenge counterbalanced with “‘a permissible rupture of hegemony’ that ultimately reinforced the dominant values of its socio-political environment”.

In order to better analyse the ways in which individual groups might have intersected with the overarching framework, Kershaw gave his attention to a small group of participants whose involvement challenged his initial understanding of what had taken place. Kershaw described what he saw at the finale on Glasgow Green:

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When the big procession finally reached Glasgow Green the orderly ranks fractured into a confusion of mini-processions, bands playing at the centre of small crowds (the punk Scottish pipers were a hoot), small groups eating or playing games or just wandering around enjoying the spectacle .... In the middle of the up-beat hubbub my attention was drawn by a most extraordinary sight. This was a procession of about forty children aged from around six to nine years old, each of them carrying a self-made lantern based on the images of the Glasgow crest. The first notable aspect of this group was that they had a few adults with them, but the adults were not leading. The second was that they were moving in complete silence, with none of the usual chatter of excited children. And the third remarkable quality was that they were still clearly processing, but not in a straight line towards one of the lantern-pyramids on which their lanterns would be hung…they appeared to be happy and self-possessed enough to be enjoying their procession for its own sake. Apparently, they were processing for the enjoyment of the fact that it was their procession – not because they were part of some mega-celebration stage by Welfare State, not because this was a major civic happening that justified Glasgow as the European City of Culture. This was their event, they were staking a claim to their own creativity and, I think, through their procession they may have been empowered.243

Kershaw’s interest in this particular ‘community’ of participants was largely due to their capacity to challenge the dominant power structures. He believed that the framework of the lantern parade afforded this group a rare opportunity to participate in a culturally democratic process through the expression of their own voices, and in asserting their own interpretation of the parade, they enacted their own community while resisting the implicit controls of the dominant groups. My focus however is somewhat more contained. I am interested in two critical aspects of the Glasgow All Lit Up! as experienced by this group of children. How does one locate the aesthetic space that the children encountered? And what was the pedagogy at work in the shaping of this experience?

4B.1.iii. Locating the aesthetic space

In attempting to analyse the aesthetic dimensions of what he witnessed in the children’s procession, Baz Kershaw turns to Victor Turner and the complementary notions of “communitas” and the “liminoid”244. Many practitioners concentrate on the unifying nature of “communitas”, described by Sonja Kuftinec as, “the ephemeral sense of connectedness and bonding experienced by a group through the

244 Kershaw, 1999, pp.77-78.
common experience of a unifying ritual”. Kershaw, however, is also mindful of the way in which “communitas” is enabled through an “abrogation, negation or inversion of the normative structure”. In terms of the children’s procession, the experience of connectedness and bonding was possible for the children not only because of their participation in the ritual of the lantern parade, but because their own particular version of participation inverted the expected structures for the behaviour of children in this community. Within the bigger event, the children had the opportunity to represent themselves individually and collectively through the lanterns they had made. The principle of lantern making unified them, while each individual lantern signified choice and the possibility of representing their own individuality. Kershaw draws on Bakhtin to explain this multi-vocality. He describes it as “heteroglossia”. When referring to the entire event, which Kershaw believes is a manifestation of heteroglossia, he identifies the radical juxtapositions of this approach:

They were heteroglossic in that they did not subscribe to a single set of explicit enunciations, there was no dominant language of imagery or form...While many images were totally engaging, none of the voices represented was predominant; all were expressive of a plurality rooted in many local, distinctive communities.

The significance of this principle for the children’s parade is that this was an event in which their ‘voices’, depicted through the lanterns they had made, and through the manner of their processing, were not only accommodated, but ‘heard’ alongside the many thousands of other expressions of community at play during Glasgow All Lit Up!

As an expression of cultural democracy, the children’s parade is particularly interesting. In his description of the whole event, Kershaw notes the many ways in which an artistic and logistical imprint is imposed on the lantern parade and the finale. It seemed that the

245 Kuftinec, 1996, p. 94.
management of ten thousand people and the profile of the event required strong artistic control. It also limited opportunities for input. However, as Kershaw discovered in his observation of the children’s parade, within these constraints the children were able to find their own opportunity for a culturally democratic response. They found it in an aesthetic engagement with the event. At the same time they were redefining the meaning of the event for themselves through their particular interpretation of participation.

4B.1.iv. Critical pedagogies and the role of the facilitator

Clearly, in a project of the dimensions of *Glasgow All Lit Up!* the facilitative roles are distributed both through the group of artists leading the project, and through the structure of community networks enlisted to participate. What is notable in such a project is the need to find a balance between the facilitation of artistic practice and the facilitation of the event itself. The logistics and pragmatics of galvanising the involvement of two hundred and fifty different groups in preparation, and the ‘performance’ of all ten thousand people in the procession and finale both challenge and shape the artistic processes and the possibility for cultural democracy. Decisions relating to the achievement of aesthetic outcomes are informed by the need to ‘deliver the event’. The management of mass involvement transforms the art event into a military style exercise complete with schedules, permits and contingency plans. Artists are transformed into generals and community participants into compliant soldiers. Against such a backdrop, where pragmatic considerations dominate, the achievement of small and large aesthetic moments, and manifestations of cultural democracy are triumphs of artistry and pedagogy.

The significance of the pedagogical dimension to a performance event such as this one cannot be understated. For Kershaw, at the heart of making of such an event is the making of meanings. This is represented by an accumulation of transactions between the different kinds of participants. The most critical of these transactions, according to Kershaw, are those between performers and audiences. Kershaw proposes this analysis:
...performance can be most usefully described as an ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience. Ideology is the source of the collective ability of performers and audiences to make more or less common sense of the signs used in performance, the means by which the aims and intentions of theatre companies connect with the responses and interpretations of their audiences….The spectator is engaged fundamentally in the active construction of meaning as a performance event proceeds. 249

Clearly, the balance between artistry, pedagogy and management processes was problematic in this event, and needed to be renegotiated repeatedly for different groups in different settings. Different groups and individuals, participating as art-makers, performers or audience had vastly different encounters with the event and took very different insights and understandings of the experience away with them. There is not a single artistic or pedagogic function at work in a community theatre event such as Glasgow All Lit Up! there are many. And as the children’s ‘mini-procession’ reminds us artistry and pedagogy are not the exclusive domains of the professional facilitators. All participants are potentially artists and potentially teachers.

4B. 2. Defining the Aesthetic, Redefining Community (Sonja Kuftinec)

Sonja Kuftinec is an academic and theatre practitioner whose focus is on theatre in community settings. In 1995 and 1996, Kuftinec took part in a series of community theatre projects in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In each project, she was a member of a team comprising American community theatre artists, volunteer aid workers from the sponsoring NGO250, and local community workers. She details this work in an article for the American Theatre journal, Theatre Topics.251 Significantly, Kuftinec’s analysis is made some time later, after her return to work as a University lecturer in California.


250 Key sponsoring organisations were : Suncokret, a Croatia based humanitarian organisation, sponsor of volunteer projects in refugee camps; and IRSA (Immigrant and Refugee Services of America), sponsor of the community centre for teens and youth which served as a base for a number of community theatre projects.

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As a practitioner, she offers an overview of the processes and outcomes of the theatre-making and performances that occurred in the former Yugoslavia. As an academic and an educator, she shapes her reflection through a pedagogical lens and makes invaluable observations about the nature of learning in community-based theatre and indeed, on the nature of community. It is also significant that Sonja Kuftinec has a Bosnian heritage, and some ‘conversational’ language skills. Consequently, while she positions herself as ‘outsider’ her access to some language and understanding of culture gives her an advantage not available to other ‘outsiders’.

This section examines one of the performance projects, *Odakle Ste? Gdje Ste? Gdje Idete? (Where are you from? Where are now? Where are you going?)* that Kuftinec has documented. This piece involved young people from the refugee camps and from the refugee population living in the town of Varazdin. The three week project culminated in a performance at one of the refugee camps. The performance concluded with a participatory music festival that in turn evolved into a late night party.

4B.2.i. Context

For three weeks in the summer of 1995, Kuftinec, choreographer Sabrina Peck, and photographer Jessie Chornesky collaborated with volunteers and young refugees from Varazdin, Croatia to create two performance pieces that were then performed in one of the refugee camps. *Odakle Ste? Gdje Ste? Gdje Idete?* was the larger of these two pieces and was designed to give participants the opportunity to reflect on questions of identity. The facilitating team resisted ‘trauma drama’, by deliberately avoiding a focus on war experience. Instead, the piece was divided into three parts, with each part inviting participants to reflect on a particular set of questions: “Where are you from? Where are you now? And, where are you going?” Although the work built on the personal narratives of the refugee participants, the performance was stylised. It incorporated movement, music and text, all generated by participants.
Kuftinec explains the progression from artistic shaping by the community artists to the eventual claiming of the piece by participants:

We shaped the material through movement exercises, narrative layering, sound and music, and structural changes. But the actual movement, music, and text of the show arose directly from participants.  

The young people invited to participate in the making of a performance piece came from a variety of places. There were two distinct groups of potential participants: the refugee youth who were living in the town with relatives. This group congregated at the IRSA sponsored Community Centre in Varazdin itself. Generally, these were Bosnian refugees who had had the benefit of the Bosnian education system, prior to the war. Many of them spoke English. The other group, living in one of the two refugee camps, was predominantly Romany. Even prior to their forced expulsion from Bosnia this group had been marginalised. Many had either been excluded or had chosen to exclude themselves from the Bosnian education system. As a result, none of this group spoke English. Bringing the two groups together was problematic. To the English-speaking community artists, the young people were all Bosnian refugees. However, there was a great deal of antipathy between the two groups. The facilitating team relied upon the English-speaking young people from town to translate the instructions for exercises so that the Romany youth could understand. Frequently, they gave inadequate explanations or misled the Romany youth, resulting in inappropriate responses to tasks. The group was humiliated and marginalized even further, and ultimately chose to withdraw from the project. Despite this initial failure, the facilitating team was more successful in drawing other groups from the refugee camps into the project. Eventually, they succeeded in creating temporary bridges between different subgroups within the wider refugee population.

The performance event itself was evidence of this temporary dissipation of borders between people in the camps and the town. Kuftinec describes the staging of *Odakle Ste?*

We performed *Odakle Ste?* in the Women’s Centre of Camp Two, bringing together camp and IRSA participants with an audience representative of both populations. The audience physically and actively integrated themselves into the performance. Several of our older friends helped to prepare the stage area, moving weaving looms, sweeping the floor and arranging chairs. The unembellished, level architecture of the room further contributed to the audience’s integration, allowing for little separation from the performers. The audience of camp residents, Suncokret and IRSA workers, and relatives of the IRSA youth who lived in the town of Varazdin filled the space fully ten minutes before the start of the performance. They watched quietly as the cast participated together in a warm up, attended to the performance, and joined in the final song, which led into a more open-ended participatory musical festival, spilling into a late-night party.253

4B.2.ii. The Aesthetic Space at work

One of the most striking characteristics about Kuftinec’s description of her work with the refugee youth of Varazdin is the way in which the multiple agendas which inform community-based theatre work are woven together in process and performance. The theatre-making process as a form of active learning; the agency of facilitators; the community imperatives underscoring process and outcome, are all inextricably bound together. Art and learning are not separate bits to be dealt with in isolation, but symbiotic elements invoked to serve the greater needs of individuals and communities caught in the crisis of war and dispossession. In this work the art-making process is very much the vehicle for “reflection …re-presentation and individual envisioning”.254 An artistic framework served to facilitate this process. For example, when reflecting on the past, participants (always including artistic facilitators) were asked to think of an enjoyable activity that they may have undertaken in the place they were from. The workshop leaders then broke the activity into four distinct movements. The abstraction of the movement provided distance to reflect on the memory, and an opportunity to express that memory in an

254 Kuftinec, p173
artistic form. This in turn, enabled others to recognise the experience of one of the participants, in a way that was not dependent on language, or the individual’s capacity to articulate how they felt about something from their past. Kuftinec notes the critical role that the construction of this space (an aesthetic space and a space for learning), played in the development of this particular enactment of community.

Participants and local leaders helped to define the form of the piece, while we worked to create a space for personal reflection, experiential re-presentation, and individual envisioning. The space we arrived at asked the questions, “Where are you from?”, “Where are you now?” and “Where are you going?”

Kuftinec identifies a number of key elements contributing to the achievement of a ‘community aesthetic’ in the process and in the performance of *Odakle Ste?* The first is linked to the notion of “active learning”. It is clearly demonstrated in the process of performance-making developed through the project. According to Kuftinec, “active learning …is a pedagogical approach that encourages students to engage in reflection, questioning, and commentary, prompting synthesis and analysis of information”.

The second, “memorable learning” is demonstrated in the performance itself. Kuftinec refers to Zimbardo’s definition of memorable learning and describes it as occurring through “vivid, emotionally effective storytelling” and through a “disruption of expectations”. The artistic choices embodied in the theatrical form of *Odakle Ste?* disrupted audience expectations. Rather than working in a conventional linear narrative, the piece was presented through “a layered collage of movement, narrative, music and sound.” This multi-vocal and textured structure enclosed the “vivid, experiential narratives” brought to the performance by the

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255 Kuftinec, p.173
256 Kuftinec, p.172.
257 Kuftinec, 1997, refers to a lecture given by Philip Zimbardo, Psychology professor at Stanford University. ‘Memorable Teaching’, Stanford University Lecture, 27 April, 1995. p172
refugee participants. The performance of these narratives occasioned memorable learning for all participants, including the artistic facilitators, for whom the stories were unfamiliar.

There are some insights to be drawn from Kuftinec’s account of the performance itself. Firstly, Kuftinec describes the performance as an event that achieved “communitas”, the momentary dissipation of the external status structures, resulting in a sense of oneness between audience and performers, and a temporary enactment of community. The key to the achievement of communitas is a ritualised event that enables a shared experience. In this case, the shared experience is the presentation of personal stories, vividly retold within an aesthetic frame and performed in an aesthetic space.

Secondly, Kuftinec’s description of the performance event reveals a contrast to conventional theatre events. Not only are expectations disrupted through a different interpretation of the aesthetic and unexpected manipulations of artistic form, but through the semiotics of the performance event from beginning to end. As Baz Kershaw says albeit in a somewhat different context:

> How the audience gathers for a performance, and disperses when it is over may be as important to its ideological reception of the show as, say, the style of performing itself.


260 Kershaw, 1999, p.24
central concern of the event. The aesthetic space is not one where art is placed on a pedestal, but is integrated into the daily lives of individuals. The vivid narratives are shaped into an artistic form, but access to these stories is interdependent on issues of agency, community, and learning. From the moment when the weaving looms are moved aside to make a space for performing, the performance event connotes the beginnings of an inclusive, yet heightened experience, available to all who enter the space. In this space, a community aesthetic is achieved.

4B.2.iii. Locating the aesthetic space

Often operating as “outsiders” to a local population, community-based theatre facilitators must constantly renegotiate their positions in relation to the community. They must balance their role of soliciting participants’ input with the agency implicit in artistically shaping and editing a performance. The facilitator must remain aware of her power to evoke the emotionally effective material that provides such memorable experiences for performers and audience.

Through her work in the former Yugoslavia, Kuftinec and her collaborators develop a form that accommodates the artistic exigencies of play making. They provide a foundation for a culturally democratic process, and engender an environment of supportive listening. At the heart of establishing this dynamic interaction sits the question: “Odakle Ste?” and then “Gdje Ste?”, followed by “Gdje Idete?” These questions, “Where are you From, Where are you Now?, Where are you Going?” provide the structure for play-building, the title of the play, the space for a variety of responses, the space for listening and responding, and the opportunity for individual and collective reflection. Kuftinec notes the importance of the question format when the facilitator is an outsider.

The “question” format of Odakle Ste? production guided initial workshops, inviting active participation and reflection while acknowledging our agency as questioners and our position as outsiders.

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Once again, Kuftinec reveals how the delicate balance between the artistry, the agency and the pedagogy of her work in a community context operates, with each element supporting the others, and each element interdependent on the others.

Given the interdependence of these elements, it follows that the performance event itself reflects the values embedded in the process. The following elements: the semiotics of the performance, the non-theatre performance space; the shifts in performance styles; the participatory and familiar forms of engagement within the event (i.e. the sing-along at the end), signify an open-ended and inclusive event, where performance is privileged but open to all. The aesthetics of performance is redefined to acknowledge community and individual needs. All are invited into an intense aesthetic experience: a temporary transcendence through the theatre form, and through the re-presenting of and reflection on vivid narratives.

It is important to note that the aesthetic space constructed for this event accommodates more than performance of the art event. By sharing the group warm-up and enlisting aid in setting up chairs, the audience is implicated in the building of the performance ritual. Some participants engage with the event without taking the stage as actors. Kuftinec cites two examples:

Sanimir, one of the more reluctant performers, became invested in the production by arriving an hour before the show and then accompanying songs on the guitar. Armin, who had decided not to perform, was placed in charge of lighting and handing out programs.263

4B.2.iv. Critical pedagogies and the role of the facilitator

According to Sonja Kuftinec, the approach to community theatre making that she outlines in her article Odakle Ste? relates closely to the process of active learning. She notes:

The participatory aspects of creating and performing community-based theatre model active learning techniques.264

She further identifies the specific techniques shared by active learning and community-based theatre as: “reflection, questioning, and commentary”, and suggests that such processes prompt “synthesis and analysis of information”.  

In this particular instance, I would argue that one of the most significant features of this theatre/learning nexus is the developed awareness of the nexus itself. Kuftinec consciously and actively invokes her pedagogical skills in the theatre-making process, and conversely, draws on the theatre-making processes to enhance learning. Many community theatre practitioners intuitively evince a teaching model in their practice, and many teachers apply aesthetic and theatre-making principles to serve their pedagogical aims. However, it is the conscious appreciation and manipulation of these elements in juxtaposition, which sets this example apart and provides such a useful guide for the construction of a working definition of the ‘community aesthetic’.

There are a number of other ways in which Kuftinec’s understanding of the pedagogical subtext in her community-based theatre practice is demonstrated in her account. One of the most striking of these is in the cautionary note she strikes when discussing the complex relationship set up between facilitators and community participants through the eliciting of sensitive stories that are then shaped into a theatrical form. Kuftinec suggests that facilitators need to be aware of the power they hold when eliciting “emotionally effective material”, and the subsequent responsibility inherent in “artistically shaping and editing a performance”.

Specific strategies employed through the building of the community aesthetic also reflect this understanding of the role of pedagogy. The power and authority that comes with the role of director is balanced by the open-ended structure of the workshops. While the facilitators still maintain control over the artistic shape of the work, the participants have

control over the content itself. The facilitating team make a critical decision to always include their own stories in storytelling sessions, and to always participate as they invite others to. These strategies, pedagogical in nature, contribute to the achievement of a culturally democratic process.

4B.3. The Aesthetics of Telling and Hearing the Difficult Story (Julie Salverson)

Julie Salverson is a Canadian community theatre practitioner. She describes herself as a playwright, theatre animator, and arts educator, with the majority of her work falling under the umbrella of popular theatre, the term most often used to describe community-based theatre practice in Canada.

Much of Salverson’s work involves “creating theatrical events through acts of storytelling in which some or all of the performers are members of the target communities”. In the journal article that informs this section, Salverson describes a particular theatre project, Are the Birds in Canada the Same? on which she worked as resident writer. In contrast to the two previous examples, the focus of her discussion is on the nature of the relationship between community participant, facilitator, and theatrical form. Rather than tracing the evolution of the project, Salverson teases out some of the discomforts she identifies as characteristic of community-based theatre work. She draws on the experiences of one particular project to illuminate her evolving understanding. To a far greater degree than in the two previous exemplars provided here, Salverson places herself and the role of the trained facilitator as the central object of her reflective gaze.

4B.3.i. Context

In 1993, Salverson was commissioned by The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice in Toronto to work on a play about refugees in Canada. Salverson was to be the producer

and playwright. She was to team with a director, Aida Jordao, and a refugee advocate. The production team met with a group of actors who were also refugees and actors or artists over a five week period. During this time, the refugees told stories of their experiences which the group then workshopped, exploring various representations of the stories and communicating through the use of use of physical image. At the conclusion of this storytelling/workshop phase, Salverson withdrew from the group and wrote a script. She describes the choices she made as playwright in the following way:

The play I wrote took elements of what had happened to the participants and re-presented them, reshaped them, and put them into a form that they could first read, then re-enter as performers, and finally experience an audience receiving.\footnote{Salverson, 1996, p.185.}

The principal audience was to be refugees and refugee advocates. This was a critical factor for Salverson in her writing process. When she completed the script, Salverson represented it to the production team and the group of actors. The actors performed the stories that they had originally told. In 1994, the play, *Are the Birds in Canada the Same?* was performed a number of times for refugees and refugee advocates. Salverson observed that responses to the play were very positive, particularly amongst audiences of refugees.\footnote{Salverson, 1996, p.185.} In 1995, a video adaptation of the play was produced.

**4B.3.ii. The Aesthetic Space at work**

Salverson’s work on *Are the Birds in Canada the Same?* is informed by her philosophical understanding of popular theatre in Canada, and her practical experience in the field. Like Kuftinec, Salverson sees the community-based work she does “as a public and distinctly pedagogical enterprise”.\footnote{Salverson, 1996, p.183.} The aesthetic space is constructed to consciously accommodate pedagogical and community needs. Salverson’s community-based theatre work centres on the telling of stories and the translation of these stories into theatrical forms for presentation to an audience. The

\footnote{Salverson, 1996, p.185.}
\footnote{Salverson, 1996, p.185.}
\footnote{Salverson, 1996, p.183.}
act of telling a story, and the act of listening to it are the fundamental dynamics in Salverson’s process. According to Salverson, the first task of the facilitating artist is to create a space in which stories can be told safely. This space, she says, must provide an environment for agency where conditions of reception support the teller and the listener first, and an aesthetic space after that.

For Salverson, the response to the story is an act of witnessing. This witnessing takes place from the first act of storytelling through the workshop, scriptwriting and on to the performance itself.

The final and critical element in Salverson’s community-based theatre is that these stories can serve as agents for change. Not only are the tellers and listeners changed by entering this facilitative and aesthetic space, but so too, potentially, is the audience. By finding the way to tell the story through theatre, the conditions of reception that are set up exist within an aesthetic and politicised frame. Salverson makes the point in the following way:

> When popular theatre artists and members of a community negotiate how the telling of their stories will occur, both parties are attempting to set up conditions of reception that will urge and allow the participants and the eventual audience to be affected and changed by what they hear.\(^{271}\)

In the light of the overt political agenda of Salverson’s approach, there are two issues worthy of note when considering *Are the Birds in Canada the Same?* The first might simplistically be seen as the influence of Brecht’s theory of ‘alienation’ on the working process.\(^{272}\) In developing the stories for the audience the aesthetic choices are informed by a desire to create a distance, both from the tellers and the audience, in order for those stories to be seen in a new light as a ‘call to action’. As many

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\(^{271}\) Salverson, 1996, p.183.

other practitioners, including Brecht, have done before her, Salverson addresses this need for critical distance through artistic form. This is discussed at length in the next section.

The second issue that arises in this consideration of performance as an act of witnessing relates to Salverson’s choice of performers. When asked to produce a play about refugees in Canada, Salverson sought out refugees who were also actors or artists to join the play-making team. One possible explanation for Salverson’s choice relates to the question of vocabulary. Perhaps the vocabulary an artist brings to the process of abstraction and physicalisation of story taps more directly into the style of performance-making Salverson finds most effective with an audience. Perhaps it is also a decision influenced by pragmatism. With a fixed period of time and money, there is an efficacy in working with a smaller group who also happen to have a theatre language.

In the examples cited, Salverson does not write about the decisions relating to who will constitute her community of play-makers. However, she does give particular and painful attention to the difficult transactions which take place in formulating a project, and in developing conditions in which ‘witnessing’ as listening, translating and playing back, are possible, within a space where agency and artistry can co-exist.

4B.3.iii. Locating the aesthetic space: problems, solutions and strategies

Ideally, popular theatre can act as an object of symbolic exchange; histories and memories can be translated, heard, and, if not made sense of, at least taken into a narrative shared within some kind of community.273

At the heart of Salverson’s work lies the ‘difficult story’. When a community seeks to tell the stories of marginalised groups the stories to be told are often complex and difficult. The relationships between the participants, as tellers of stories and listeners, are

273 Saladon, 1996, p.188.
also potentially complex and difficult. Salverson recognises the multiplicity of intentions brought into any project: the political, the personal, the need for a collective healing and reconciliation, the artistic and the social needs. Closer analysis of the processes Salverson describes when detailing her work in popular theatre in general and specifically in *Are the Birds in Canada the Same?* suggests four critical stages in achieving a ‘community aesthetic’ through the making of a community-based play.

These are:

- naming assumptions and setting goals.
- setting up the conditions of reception.
- translation of story to form.
- playing back (distancing for audience and self).

An examination of the issues associated with each of these stages reveals some of the key strategies available to the facilitators and the group for successful passage through that stage.

**Naming assumptions and setting goals**

Salverson suggests that the process of naming the assumptions and setting goals can assist a production team in orienting their work prior to commencing a project. The set of questions that Salverson has formulated as a means of naming the assumptions and setting goals direct the facilitators towards the central concerns of the work, the participants and the audience. In addition they require reflection on their own processes and needs before entering into the contract of making the work. These are the questions:
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- What are the primary narratives understood by our intended audience as their histories, and in what way is our project an attempt to insert counter-narratives into those histories?
- What do we expect from ourselves and our audiences in the way of initial resistant responses, and how can we prepare to engage them in what will perhaps be a conflicted listening?
- How might the existence of trauma in the listener relate to and affect the reception of traumatic narratives?
- How can we provide an environment within which the stories told can be heard by the listeners so as to reconfigure their sense of who they are in relation to the speaker and the event – a reconfiguration that causes them to take up a stance of obligation in relation to this event as they recognise and meet it in the world?  

Setting up the conditions of reception

According to Salverson, when the act of listening requires the listener to take personally the events that are told to them, a transformation of the listener’s understanding of her or himself occurs, not just as an individual but as a member of a community. Therefore, this process of framing and responding to those key questions collectively and preparing an environment conducive to active listening impacts directly on the listener. This becomes the first act of community in the theatre-making process.

Salverson maintains that a literal retelling of story may not provide the best means to convey the authenticity of an experience. Also, a single fixed, finite story may not offer points of entry for an audience. Salverson proposes a re-thinking of play-making built on personal narratives. Central to this reconfiguration is a new understanding of the relationship between story and form. If story is not fixed, but is open, layered, and accommodates both contradiction and silence it may provide a powerful new starting point for theatre-making. In this instance, theatre makers and community participants

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alike need to see the theatre form as the vehicle through which difficult stories can be
told, can be transformed, and can be heard and re-heard. The question remains what kind
of theatre form is available for this three-fold task? The notion of form that Salverson
suggests here embraces the processes of the aesthetic space, and aesthetic outcome,
shaped by community and political aims, and a highly developed sense of agency.
Salverson argues for a form that embodies a ‘container’ and a ‘gap’.

I consider form as the structure of both a) the practice of speaking / listening / translating
stories in popular theatre workshops and b) the created play or event through which an
audience engages those stories. Within this form, which can be usefully conceptualised as a
‘container’, a space or ‘gap’ must exist. It is this gap that holds the circle of knowing open.276

• *Translation of story to form*

Salverson talks of “the building of an environment” within which stories may be
witnessed.277 The parallels to the concept of the aesthetic space discussed earlier are
clear. Salverson takes the principles of the environment for witnessing further as she
elaborates on her idea of the working space as a ‘container’. Salverson’s conception of
the container pertains less to the notion of a receptacle for containment and more to the
notion of an agreed site that allows for the possibilities of gathering together, of
witnessing, and of connection. She explains:

> The word for container comes from the Greek *temenos*, meaning a sacred space and time
> specially prepared and set apart in order to reconnect with ancient energies.278

For Salverson, this container carries connotations of the sacred, and of a time and place
set apart for reconnections between people. The other key characteristic of the ‘container’
is that it embodies a ritualised and public space. In Salverson’s work, the significance of
the ritualised space lies in the sharing of a common history, the collectivising of

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278 Salverson, 1996, p.185.
narratives, and the recognition of collective images. In other words, at the heart of this ‘container’ is an enactment of community.

While the establishment of the ‘container’ is critical, the construction of a gap within the container is even more crucial. Without the creation of a space in which the silences, dissent or ambiguity that accompany many difficult stories, can be accommodated Salverson suggests, the container can become just another “totalising structure” designed to shape difficult stories into forms which meet “social norms.”  

Salverson describes the construction and the function of the gap in the following ways:

My concept of the gap as a structured space for calling up what is unmarked, or for holding in mind “ the lie of the literal”…

It is this gap that holds the circle of knowing open and invites a current that prevents steering a straight line through the story, or arriving at a predetermined destination.

If the container provides a framework through which participants can involve themselves in an aesthetic act, then the gap allows for possibilities that cannot be anticipated. The key to the metaphor is to imagine that the ‘gap’ is not a literal gap, but a functional one, providing for a reconstructed container that serves its primary function of bringing individuals together for a common purpose but is not structurally complete and therefore closed. It is malleable and accommodating. The gap also allows for some things not to be said. This framework accommodates shared responsibility between the artistic facilitators and the community participants. The structure for participation, the container, may represent the expertise of the facilitators in art form and agency, but the gap ensures that there is an unmediated access for all participants. Achieving a balance between the container and the gap is the means by which cultural democracy in the art making process is approached.

Chapter Four: “It’s Pretty but is it Art?” - Aesthetics for Community Theatre

Making (Four B: The Aesthetic at Work - Accounts of Practice)

The gap is for me the pivotal element of the container. If it is too large it will destroy the structure, and there will be no connection between the storytellers and their own stories. If the gap is too small or nonexistent, there is no room for the Other, no space across which the familiar and the strange can gaze upon each other.  

For Salverson, the container represents the synthesis of aesthetic processes, political purposes and agency. Essentially, this process is one in which the experience of metaxis is possible. This “double seeing” where the image of the real is as real as the image can operate in two settings. It can arise in the rehearsal room when participants rediscover their stories through the theatre form created by the playwright, and in the theatre for the audience, when their own realities may be mirrored by the realities of refugees performing difficult stories from their lives. As Boal reminds us, this metaxis is possible because of its location within an aesthetic space.

- Playing back (distancing for audience and self)

One of the key strategies of Salverson’s project is the employment of the writer to interpret and translate stories into a scripted form. In this instance, this is done after the stories have been told, and workshopped with all the participants. The first audience for the script are the storytellers, who are also the performers. In the Salverson model, the actors are cast to perform their own stories, or, rather, those characters upon which their stories have been based. For one actor in Are the Birds in Canada the Same? this proved to be a decision Salverson ultimately regretted. The actor, Tom, found the process of participating in the play-making and performance deeply troubling initially as a result of re-living some of the difficult stories he had told in the early stages of workshopping. In her analysis, Salverson probes deeply into possible reasons for his difficulties. She questions the roles actors are given:

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Chapter Four: “It’s Pretty but is it Art?” - Aesthetics for Community Theatre

Making (Four B: The Aesthetic at Work- Accounts of Practice)

Tom, who was not an actor, spoke lines he had created and told stories he had lived. My mistake as a playwright was not writing for Tom a character sufficiently new and different from “Tom” – one that would allow him to step into a character who was not himself. By acting his own story, the theatre project prevented him from taking the step psychoanalyst Dori Laub describes as the re-externalization of the event.285

4B.3. iv. Critical Pedagogies and the Role of the Facilitator

Julie Salverson’s analysis of her working process, framed by this notion of the container and its gap, is illuminated by an account of practice in which this very structure failed. As is often the case, greater understanding of the way in which structures scaffold a working process is achieved when the weaknesses are revealed. While the project facilitators successfully created a container that prompted the participant Tom to tell difficult stories of torture from his past, the container could not hold the stories. The experience became traumatic rather than liberating, and those in the facilitative roles were unable to adapt their framework to accommodate the challenges of this particular individual.

The analysis of this failure of the structure underscores the delicacy of the process and the magnitude of the stakes that can be involved. It also highlights the pedagogical nature of the work of the facilitators. Salverson’s capacity to recognise the shortcomings of the process reveals an appreciation of the pedagogical nature of the process. The analysis is conducted with a set of critical, reflective questions in mind. Salverson asks:

As artists and educators, we must continually ask ourselves: in what context are risky stories being told? Within what frameworks did they originate. And what is the cost to the speaker.

She then observes,

Taking responsibility should extend beyond an ongoing inventory of who we are as individuals to an understanding that there are stakes for those with whom we work – stakes that exist, but are never more than partially knowable.286

Some time after this project, and shortly after having completed a project about Land Mines, Salverson reflects on the complex role of the facilitator whose obligations are pedagogical, political and personal. She notes the potential that each project might have

286 Salverson, 1996, pp.181-182
to not succeed, and then powerfully, strips away all the aspirations of community theatre making, reducing it to one single fundamental. This, she calls resonance.

Resonance

I would like to propose the concept of resonance as a space within which I as playwright/teacher and the students involved in the play might meet the reality of land mines and stay in contact. Resonance does not answer questions, it holds them open, and holds all participants within the structure of the question, the structure of the engagement, the structure of the class. ...The concept of resonance...offers connection and detachment, a way to hold feeling and thought together. It is the generosity of approach that does not recycle in melancholic repetition, does ask for returns....

What is the point of a play about land mines if there is no guarantee it will teach me something, change the students' behaviour in the world or give them enough information? But perhaps friendship, and popular theatre, are not about outcomes. What if the passing on of stories, the translation process itself, is not to produce meaning or truth but simply, but not at all easily, to attend. To engage in a relationship of attention. 287

Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

The term ‘matrix’ has multiple meanings. It can be used to mean “a substance, environment within which something else originates or develops”. A matrix is also, according to Penguin Macquarie Dictionary, “the rock in which a crystallised mineral is embedded”. These days, it can also refer to a film about a quest for ‘reality’ in a fictionalised world. Like Keanu Reeves in the film that came before the sequel, this thesis seeks to identify and understand a matrix. What is it that encloses and enables community theatre practice and its possible outcomes? In the previous chapters, I have attempted to extrapolate the key elements of community theatre practice, through an examination of the nature and multiple meanings of community, community theatre and the aesthetic in the community theatre context.

The Community Theatre Matrix is offered as a synthesis of the disparate elements drawn from this extensive consideration of theory and practice. The matrix is formulated in response to the question: what are the forces at work when a community engages in a collective art-making experience? The matrix proposes a series of steps and a set of interrelated and overlapping relationships enacted through the art-making process, and as a result of the art-making process. At the core of the matrix is the Engaged Space, which both encloses the art making and enables it.

The diagram below represents the matrix. This is followed by an explanation of the progression of the matrix through its four steps. A detailed explanation of the Engaged Space and the key elements that appear within it, forms the central discussion of this chapter.

Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

A COMMUNITY THEATRE MATRIX

Step One: Community

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Step Two: A Call for Community Theatre

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Step Three: The Engaged Space

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Artistry       Agency       Pedagogy       Pragmatics

↓

Community enactment
Inhabiting the Border Territory

The Engaged Space

↓

Step Four: An act of community:
Community (re)defined
Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

5.1. Step One: Community

Identification of community is the key to initiating the process of community theatre making. Community is dynamic rather than static. The fundamental acknowledgement that a community exists is a preliminary act of community. The agreement to belong brings with it a recognition of those factors that include and exclude.

5.2 Step Two: A Call for Community Theatre

This process of determining ‘belonging’ is potentially the most powerful motivating force propelling a community towards enactment. The community with problems of exclusion, marginality, or identity, paradoxically, is a still a community, and one that frequently attracts outside forces inclined to articulate community needs through initiating an art-making project.

When community need translates itself or is translated into a call for cultural expressions of community (in this instance a call for community theatre) the process is underscored by the principles of cultural democracy. Community theatre as an entity is informed by these principles. Those artists, teachers and community workers who work in this field are guided by a fundamental commitment to some manifestation of cultural democracy. This of course will not be the only factor motivating their investment in this work. The principles of cultural democracy will have influence over key decisions such as: acquisition and allocation of resources, personnel, place, participation, desired outcomes, and purpose.

5.3 Step Three: The Engaged Space

5.3.i. Many steps

Step Three is not one, but many steps. When participants come together, the following factors require primary consideration for the construction of community theatre as a collective art-making process:
Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

- **Artistry** and the place of the aesthetic;
- **Agency** and the facilitation of individual and collective voices within a performance-making and rehearsal (aesthetic) process;
- **Pedagogy** and the intersections of skills and community and aesthetic knowledge amongst participants;
- the community context and the implications for the **practicalities** of performance making, rehearsal and performance.

**Artistry**

Artistry in a community theatre project relates to the shaping of the aesthetic elements. The development of a shared vocabulary for play-building, rehearsal and performance may be initiated by a community theatre artist. In many contexts, there is an assumption that this role will be fulfilled by trained professionals. Aesthetic outcomes cannot be achieved without artistry. If all elements are in balance, and there is a stated commitment to shared responsibility for process and outcome, artistry too will move beyond the domain of the trained artist. Many community theatre practitioners believe that their primary task is to skill community members sufficiently in theatre making and performance in order to make their own input redundant.

Regardless of how the various manifestations of artistry are managed within a project, it is the coupling of this element with pedagogy and agency that ensures that more than aesthetic outcomes are nurtured in the community theatre-making event.

**Agency**

Agency is about the support of the individual and the collective within the shared endeavour. It may be revealed in a facilitator’s capacity to engender trust, or in a teaching artist’s ability to draw out the performer in a community participant, or in a community participant’s willingness to reveal the layers of meaning in community stories to an artist-outsider.
Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

Julie Salverson’s notion of the container and the gap provides a model for the achievement of agency with artistry.\(^{289}\) The container allows for structure and safety in transforming community input from the raw to the performed. The gap, carefully placed, allows for supported listening from all participants, and for silence when that is more appropriate. A gap, carefully situated, is a step towards a “relationship of attention”.\(^{290}\) A commitment to agency ensures that there is a balance between the artistic health and the social health of the community-in-formation. It is as critical for community participants as for artists and facilitators to understand the importance of agency in the process, and to commit to its primacy.

• **Pedagogy**

The teaching function of facilitators and artists is often implicit in community theatre. However, pedagogy provides a central structural element to the collective art-making process, through which artistry and agency are enabled. Effective pedagogy in itself is a tool through which experiences can be scaffolded and shaped. The value of this tool is that while it can be transparent, it can also be referential, directing attention away from itself and towards matters of substance for the community. Like the wires that fly Spiderman in the movie, or the puppeteers of Philippe Genty, attention is given to the action, not to the mechanism.

Of all the key elements, pedagogy has the most potential to diffuse responsibility and engender commitment. The ways in which the community participants undertake their own pedagogical roles, towards each other and any outsider-artists/facilitators may provide the best measure of the ultimate efficacy of a community theatre project in achieving goals of cultural democracy and the redefinition of community.

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\(^{290}\) Julie Salverson, 2000, p.29
Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

• Pragmatics

The management of any community-based project carries with it an intricate web of practical tasks. Beyond the ways in which performers may need to be assembled and processed, in *Glasgow All Lit Up!* for example, there are the infinite details relating to funding, budgeting, building, meeting, decision-making, providing information, publicity, documenting, dispute resolution and then rehearsal and performance, inevitable in any event involving the community. The ways in which the pragmatics is dealt with may be the very best indicator of the social health of the group. Effectively managing the pragmatics in a manner sensitive to goals of cultural democracy may be the single most significant component in the overall ‘success’ of a project. Pragmatics is the most fundamental scaffold of all. It is also a very important means of entry into the community of theatre-makers. Taking on a practical role or task is a mechanism for commitment and engagement and provides access to members of the community who may be reluctant to enter the aesthetic space.

• Summary

Each of these elements is at play throughout the art-making process. None of them is the sole domain of any single participant or facilitator. While an artistic facilitator may take primary responsibility for developing a performance-making vocabulary and for shaping the performance aesthetic, transmission of skills, story and knowledge ensures that responsibility for the artistry is shared.

However, it is important to note that none of the elements need be diluted or compromised in a mis-guided democratisation of process. Rather, participation in and responsibility for each of the elements can be accommodated to support critical expertise, desired outcomes, multiple voices, multiple needs and agendas. The intersections and juxtapositions of these key elements ensure that the multiplicity of voices and agendas that are foregrounded work in counterpoint to each other. The framework, the engaged space, defines and enables the collective endeavours and collective purpose of this form of community enactment.
Chapter Five: The Engaged Space

5.3.ii. The engaged space, elaborated

The space in which this community enactment takes place extends beyond the aesthetic space. The aesthetic space is critical in allowing for the transformations of story and experience, and ‘rehearsals for life’ that are an essential process in the making of community theatre. However, the range of interactions and the diversity of inputs that evolve in a community theatre project encompass the artistic and the social, the pedagogic and the therapeutic, and most importantly, the practical. A community participant may not choose to participate in the theatre processes, but they may gain entry to the art-making community through an equally powerful investment in community such as the building of sets, the setting up of a phone chain, or the making of the lunches. All contributions can be accommodated within the engaged space. The nature of this space ensures that a commitment to the enactment of community, and a shared responsibility for the collective processes are validated as forms of participation.

The key characteristics of the engaged space are commitment and responsibility.

5.4. Step Four: Community enactment/ Community redefined

The engaged space embodies both process and outcome. Audience is integrated as a form of participation. Performance frequently signifies the culmination of process, but is by no means the only time in which community is enacted. Through enactment the borders of inclusion and exclusion are challenged. This may be the purpose of the community theatre event, or it may simply be a consequence of it. Due to the nature of engagement in collective art making the potential exists to challenge political and cultural hegemonies, if only temporarily. Such engagement places participants on the margins of existing communities and at the threshold of new ones. Old assumptions are challenged and new understandings are formulated, informed by principles of cultural democracy. Shifting borders of understanding and belonging allows for the possibility of change and the constitution of a new community. Depending upon the efficacy and purpose of the project, this change may be temporary. It may only exist in the moments of performance or enactment. Regardless of the durability of the reconstituted community, such shifts in experience and relationships must inevitably bring about a community redefined.
Chapter Six: 'Thinking with my viscera, feeling with my brain'- Methodology for the artist researcher.

So it's important to get exposed to local stories that bring us into the worlds of experience that are unknown to us, show us the concrete daily details of people whose lives have been under-represented and not represented at all, help us reduce their marginalisation, show us how particular and situated our understanding of the world is. Maybe that's depressing to some of you, but I think it's enlightening and possibly transforming. 291

The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate the dynamic and evolving role that methodology has played in this study. In the chapter I explore the many ways that methodological considerations have been instrumental in the shaping of the study, both in the execution of the fieldwork, and in the processes of reporting, interpretation and analysis.

6.1. Decisions and Definitions

6.1.i. Introducing the field

…good research is a matter not of finding the one best method but of carefully framing that question most important to the investigation and the field, and then identifying a disciplined way in which to inquire into it that will enlighten both the scholar and his or her community. 292

At the heart of this study is a small, outer-suburban community, a community arts event and the work of a community arts practitioner in that setting.

I wanted to examine rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes in community theatre. As my interest was in both artistic and personal processes, I also wanted my study to provide an understanding of the experience of participation for the community members.

Chapter Six: 'Thinking with my viscera, feeling with my brain' - Methodology for the artist researcher.

and for myself as the community artist. And I hoped to find and honour the voices of all the participants without necessarily presuming to speak for them.

From these preliminary deliberations, the following decisions emerged. My fieldwork would focus on a single location, and the lived experiences of those associated with that site. Therefore I would undertake a case study. Clearly, this would fall under the umbrella of qualitative research. I hoped to closely examine artistic processes - the decisions, challenges and dilemmas facing the community artist, in situ - and I would be both artist and researcher. As a result, the methodology I adopted would need to draw strongly on reflective practitioner research. Having conducted highly involved participant observation in previous research projects, I was aware of the critical role that the reflective process would play within the research framework. Reflective practitioner research would be coupled with critical elements of participatory action research. I felt that the juxtapositioning of these two approaches to qualitative methodology, with their emphases on reflexivity and process, would help serve two purposes: the management of the research and the investigation of my multiple agendas of artistic practice, pedagogy and community engagement. This process was compounded by my other two roles within the project, community member and parent. It was therefore, also important that the methodology accommodate these roles, the frequent shifting between roles that I experienced, and the challenges to data collection and analysis created by not one but multiple highly involved perspectives generated by my experiences in the field.

The questions associated with community engagement led me to further extend the scope of my study design to encompass ethnographic research practices. To fully understand the impact and implications of community arts practice it was important to me that my

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294 Hitchcock and Hughes cited in Taylor, 1996, Researching Arts Education: Paradigms and Possibilities, Falmer, London, p36 offer a definition of ethnography that highlights the place of the individual at the centre of the action, and focuses on 'context, meaning, culture, history and biography'
methodology shed light on a range of participant experiences, not just my own. It was also important that my methodology provide a framework for the voices of participants in the fieldwork to be heard and acknowledged.

As with much qualitative research, the design of the study allowed for new directions during the course of the research. Consequently, when the needs of the research and the researcher dictated a re-evaluation of methodology, an evolution in methodological practice was possible. Later in this chapter, I will discuss in greater detail the rationale behind my decision to adopt an arts-based research methodology, bearing characteristics of both narrative inquiry and autoethnography, when moving from preliminary data analysis to the writing up of the field work.

6.1.i. The Case Study

The decision to use a case study model in this study was a straightforward one. It stemmed from my desire to investigate rehearsal processes in community theatre at close range, from the perspective of myself as artist/researcher. For detail and the ability to trace a project from inception to aftermath, a single site was sufficient, or rather, desirable. John Carroll ascribes four main criteria to case study methodology. These criteria provide clarification of the significance of the methodology to this study, and an invaluable amplification of the possibilities that case study methodology can offer to the researcher. Carroll draws on the work of Lamnek when he proposes the following criteria:

- Openness (no predetermined goals or paths of action)
- Communicativity (reality emerges in the interaction between 'actors')
- Naturalism (study takes place in its natural state)
- Interpretativity (reality is interpreted, not objective).\(^{295}\)

6.1.iii. Participatory Action Research

Initially principles of Participatory Action Research influenced the research very strongly. Kemmis and McTaggart suggest that there is a relationship between the researcher’s desire to effect change and a process of critical reflection. I commenced my project with the expectation that critical reflection while in the field would prompt change, both in my own work and in the participants’ understanding of the drama work we were engaged in.

Despite this, my observance of participatory action research techniques was somewhat circumscribed, even in preliminary stages. I did not choose to enlist community participants as co-researchers and the characteristic action research cycles were not part of my design. However, there were several ways in which this methodology did inform my study design: the centrality of practice (in a naturalistic setting); the centrality of critical reflection; and the situating of the researcher at the heart of the research. In contrast to the dominant model of participatory action research where the participants become highly engaged in the research as co-researchers, I became immersed in the life of the community of the school, and enmeshed in the school lives of the children and teachers. As Schratz and Walker describe, I became, “part of the situation….not apart from it”.

6.1.iv. Reflective practitioner research

The key to conducting effective and illuminating research from such a highly involved, ‘insider’ position lay for me in the principles of reflective practitioner research. Reflective practitioner research has particular resonance for arts educators and arts practitioners. There is a growing body of work that explores the dimensions and

297 Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.595.
298 Kemmis and McTaggart, p 596
299 Kemmis and McTaggart, pp.597-598. (The Key Features of Participatory Action Research.)
possibilities of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as a methodology in educational research and significantly in drama and arts education research. The central appeal of this methodology is that it inextricably links the process of research to practice. It also highlights the essentially reflexive nature of research that is grounded in practice. As Donald Schön observes,

When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context……He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry.

Drama educator Philip Taylor puts this into the school context. Taylor proposes that because outcomes are “discovered in process” and that the “leader is often the follower”, reflective practitioner research can contest central questions of “schooling, curriculum, the role of teachers and students”. Pivotal to Taylor's description of reflective practitioner research is the sense that reflection is not only interwoven with action but informs action. What follows, Taylor suggests, is that this process of reflecting in action inevitably challenges the frameworks in which the research, and therefore, the action are taking place. My study was founded on a line of inquiry that compelled me to question and probe my own practice and my understandings of institutional and community practices.

Reflective practitioner research is both dynamic and challenging. It is a methodology that requires a flexible and highly engaged relationship between the researcher and the field. These qualities made this an appealing methodology for me when developing my research design.

303 Taylor, 1996, p.35.
Unpredictability and uncertainty removes us from the world of singular truth, and plunges us into multiple realities and multiple visions. It is this multiplicity which is at the heart of reflective practitioner design.\textsuperscript{305}

Three other characteristics of reflective practitioner research informed my approach to this methodology: its emphasis on multiple perspectives; the centrality of the practitioner/researcher as the principal instrument for data collection and the principal instrument of data collection; and the influence of ethnography on reflective practitioner research.

Ethnography informs the study design firstly because it provides a research framework that “allows for the description of the routine, everyday, unquestioned, and taken-for granted aspects of school and classroom life”.\textsuperscript{306} Ethnography also embodies the principle of multiple truths and directs researchers to data collection techniques that honour the many experiences of diverse individuals in the field. Through rigorous data collection processes and techniques (such as field journals and interviews), a “crystallisation” of data enables many voices to be heard through the research.\textsuperscript{307}

Maxine Greene's proposition that artists are “for disclosing the extraordinary in the ordinary” has particular resonance for artist researchers.\textsuperscript{308} Taylor captures the utility of this vision for the reflective practitioner (artist) researcher when he articulates his understanding of this aspect of the methodology:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{305} Taylor, 1996, p.36.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, Research and the Teacher, Routledge, London, p.49.
\item \textsuperscript{307} Laurel Richardson writes extensively of crystallisation as the ‘central imaginary’ in place of triangulation as a key tool in achieving ‘validity’ in qualitative research. Richardson, 1997, Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, p.92.
\item \textsuperscript{308} Maxine Greene cited in Taylor, 1996. p. 39.
\end{itemize}
Chapter Six: 'Thinking with my viscera, feeling with my brain' - Methodology for the artist researcher.

Just as Greene is interested in how artists transfigure the commonplace, I am keen to explore how reflective practitioners are reading their world, what decisions they make about importance and value, how they struggle with ambiguity and contradiction, and how they begin to ascertain the logical procedures through which they will collect, analyse and present that struggle.  

6.1.v. Arts-based research practices – autoethnography and narrative inquiry

In thinking about dance as a metaphor for qualitative research design, I find that the meaning for me lies in the fact that the substance of dance is the familiar; walking, running, and any movement of the body. The qualitative researcher is like the dancer or the choreographer, then in seeking to describe, explain, and make understandable the familiar in a contextual, personal, and passionate way.

When I came to report on my fieldwork I found that I needed to look beyond the methodological framework I had constructed to that point. My experience echoed Janesick’s conceit of dance as a metaphor for qualitative research. Firstly, it was essential for me to find a form through which the overly familiar view of the community artist’s work became new again. Secondly, my work was highly personal and highly contextualised within my community. I needed to find a way of writing about the research that reflected the “personal”, the “contextual”, and the “passionate”, but gave me sufficient distance to enable me to reflect and write for a new understanding of my fieldwork. At this point, I looked to the range of qualitative research methodologies that come under the umbrella of arts-based research practices.

To understand the complexities of a field in which I had been so deeply immersed, an arts-based research model best reflected my needs. This approach also opened doors to new ways of expressing the intricate web of experiences, emotions and insights that represented my time in the field.

Chapter Six: 'Thinking with my viscera, feeling with my brain' - Methodology for the artist researcher.

Arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing.\textsuperscript{311}

Arts-based research can take the form of narratives, poetry, visual art, or performance. It can also take the form of fictionalised accounts that either capture and then mask the identities of key participants or create a synthesis of experience, where individuals are merged into fictional amalgams, and events are invented to reflect essence rather than actual experience. Critical decisions for arts-based researchers revolve around their relationship to raw data and to how it will be transformed through the art-making that is embedded in their research practice.

Barbara Myerhoff was an early exponent of a more literary approach to the writing up of research. She recounts the moment in which she discovered the real significance of including herself as a character in her autoethnographic account, \textit{Remembered Lives:}

\begin{quote}
It felt more honest, deeper, and finally simpler than any anthropological work I had ever done. I felt more of my reactions being used, wholistically, the way we are taught to study societies. I was thinking with my viscera, feeling with my brain, learning from all my history and hunches and senses….I could never imagine trusting my own or anyone else's work as fully again without some signposts as to how the interpretations were arrived at and how the anthropologist felt while doing so.\textsuperscript{312}
\end{quote}

I chose to write about my performing arts project in the third person, through the form of a novella. I became a character in the novella and the participants in my fieldwork became characters also. The novella reflected the chronology of the performing arts project, and encapsulated key events. It was important to me that I honoured both the data as collected and my recollection of events. For me, the engagement with the writing of a narrativised text offered the opportunity to explore

from a distance: the place, the people, the absences, silences and contradictions of the field. The artistic framing of events informed my analysis and was informed by my analysis. By deliberately constructing an identity for the community artist/researcher within the novella, I was better able to see and understand my place within the constellation of events that surrounded the making of the performing arts project.

The process of writing the novella prepared the way for a more detailed interpretation and analysis of the research. On completion I became audience to my own event and reader of my own reconstruction of the event. In so doing, I began to clearly articulate not the answers to my earliest research questions, but a more precise formulation of what those questions should be. The chapter that follows the novella is the continuation of the discussion that the novella initiates. As Tom Barone has so eloquently remarked:

Good stories, as art, do not conclude, but suggest, eschewing direct summary statements for delicate hints about theme and thesis.313

6.2. Into the Field
6.2.i. The Site: Ambiguity in gaining entry

The fieldwork site I chose was the community I had lived in for the previous ten years. The small primary school that my children had attended became the focus of this fieldwork. The school presented itself as a potential focal point for community activity. As I was already known as a parent and School Councillor, I anticipated that gaining entry and earning trust would prove both plausible and possible. To a degree this was the case. In the year prior to the planned study I approached the School Principal with a proposal for a performing arts program that concluded with a performance event, for the following year. The Principal requested that I make a

presentation to a Staff Meeting and to School Council. If these two sets of stakeholders were to agree, and all appropriate approvals were gained from the Education Authorities and the University then the program could proceed. I prepared a written proposal for the staff (all of whom I knew previously), and took the same proposal to the School Council. (Appendix One).

The proposal was received positively at both meetings. The staff agreed that the program could go ahead in the second half of the following year. They did have one significant proviso. They did not want the production to take over their lives. It was not to become 'bigger than Ben Hur', they instructed. The Council Meeting at which the proposal was ratified was a straightforward affair.

Reflecting on this very first approach to the school, two methodological issues clearly emerge. The first is that my reading of those preliminary meetings was heavily influenced by my desire to get the program in place. I needed the site for my fieldwork and I was focused on ensuring a smooth passage into this stage of my research. In doing so, I was already placing myself in a difficult position both as researcher and community artist. It seemed that there was more at stake for me in mounting the project than there was for other participants.

While this was not necessarily a problem in itself, my reluctance to acknowledge this imbalance certainly was. Deb Ceglowski writes of her ambivalence in conducting research in a site where she is torn between the expectations of different stakeholders and her need to complete her research.

I think about McLaren's (1991) study within a school system. There is controversy among the teaching staff about his work, and he ends up leaving the site. I worry that this could happen to me as well. When I am at Wood River, I align myself with the staff. When the
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administrators see me, I feel my stomach churn. My answers to their questions often are evasive.\textsuperscript{314}

6.1.ii. Gatekeepers

The second issue, which begins to be apparent even in the earliest days of the project, is the absence of a clearly identifiable Gatekeeper. Margot Ely defines a gatekeeper as “that essential person who could provide the permission to study in a particular setting”.\textsuperscript{315} Clearly the Principal was the first Gatekeeper. I had anticipated that he would continue to fulfil the functions of Gatekeeper as the program unfolded in his school. The situation proved somewhat more ambiguous, however. The Principal was new to the school, and while prepared to allow me to put my proposal to his school community, he insisted on consulting with staff before fully supporting the program. In this instance I appreciated his reticence, as I shared his belief that it was important that the school community be invited to participate rather than co-opted.

The equivocation in the Principal's execution of his role as Gatekeeper did cause some difficulties for me later in the execution of the project, perhaps due more to my expectations than any formal arrangement between us. I had assumed that his initial support would translate into ongoing visible support. Possible demonstrations of support, such as newsletter articles and photographs, visits to classes, acknowledgements in meetings and assemblies did not continue after the first couple of weeks. Beyond opening these first doors and responding to direct requests, the Principal took no active role in the program. I suspect that my difficulty with the Principal’s response (or lack of it) was governed more by my high expectations than by his positive or negative attitude to the performing arts project.

It was not until the program was well under way that I realised that my position within the school community was somewhat ill-defined. Once admitted into the community of the staff, the staff’s response to me suggested that I had become a 'de facto' staff member. On the other hand I inferred from parents’ comments to me that they saw my role as that of visiting community artist. When specialist teachers or artists were brought in, traditionally, they didn't receive a great deal of parent or teacher support. As a result, it was difficult to build the teacher/parent support base for the project that I had hoped for, and indeed regarded as a key element in the management of the program.

6.1.iii. Recruitment

The next stage of gaining entry to the field came with the recruitment of participants. I was aware that the concept of a performing arts program within the school and myself as a community artist was a new one. I took some steps in the months leading up to the commencement of the program to introduce the idea of performing arts at the school to the school community. I began a segment in the school newsletter called Performing Arts News, complete with its own distinctive logo. (The Principal was helpful here). In these segments, I published stories and anecdotes reflecting on the community's past. This would be the stories for our performing arts program, I’d explain. "They were young once" was an occasional series of vignettes about parents when they were children. Occasionally, I would pop into a staff meeting with a question or a reminder about the coming program, and once or twice, I spoke about the program at school assemblies. These were always well attended by parents. Informally, at school functions, at the school crossing, and at chance meetings in supermarkets, I would mention the program to parents I met and reveal my interest in gathering together a group of adults as performers. Responses varied. I also set up a small 'steering committee' of three volunteer teachers and myself. I anticipated that this group would guide the necessary organisational and creative decision-making. I was unable to generate the necessary focus and energy to sustain this group and so it met only once.
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When it came time to send home the information and permission forms for children to participate, the Principal agreed to write a cover letter endorsing the project. Response rates were on the whole very positive and there was a high level of participation in the research in some classes.

Despite an active recruitment drive, the Adult Drama Group only managed to generate a membership of three, not counting myself. When we performed I became a reluctant participant to bolster number. I recruited my husband, an actor, at the last minute, to shore up confidence and to increase 'bodies on stage'. There is an irony here. We are both members of the parent community, and we were as reluctant as our neighbours to stand up and be counted as performers in this 'community event'. Relationship to community is one of the more complex aspects of the research methodology of this study.


We are our own subjects. How our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others is and has always been our topic.316

As I have suggested at a number of points during this thesis, my relationship to the community at the centre of this research was a complex one. As a resident, I felt a loyalty and a connection to my town, but also experienced some frustration as a surprised and perpetual outsider. Like many small communities, full membership of this community was a birthright. Ten years was a mere apprenticeship. And yet, my experience on the margins mirrored this community's place in the wider world of the city, as a town on the margins. The school also carried a marginal tag. It was an appendage to the high school. It was the small primary school on the 'other' side of the highway. It was the one that didn't figure prominently when people were deciding where to send their children. My understanding and experience of marginality equipped me well to undertake the research in this field. Of course, it also meant that I would have to work harder to earn the trust of

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The participants. My status as researcher and community artist also compounded my difference from other members of the community. In many ways I embraced the separation that these differences created. It enabled me to propose to community participants new activities and new ways of working, and it gave me the distance I needed to be able to construct a safe space for collective art-making. Also, for some of the time at least, it gave me the perspective essential for my role as researcher.

Amanda Coffey considers the interconnectedness between the roles of researcher and self as participant in the field, and offers a perspective on the web of relationships that inform the research and the research design.

Ethnographic fieldwork cannot be accomplished without attention to the roles of the researcher. Fieldwork involves the enactment of social roles and relationships, which places the self at the heart of the enterprise. A field, a people and a self are crafted through personal engagements and interactions among and between researcher and researched. 317

In order to conduct my research, it was necessary to build relationships with a number of sub-strata communities within the school. Building trust with each of these micro-communities was a delicate exercise, particularly given my early difficulties with finding 'enabling' Gatekeepers. It was also an exacting task as new relationships could be perceived as a threat to existing alliances and the comfortable status quo.

6.1.v. Multiple selves: the wearing of many hats

I have already discussed the multiple roles I undertook through this research, and these were most evident during the fieldwork. I entered the field as the community artist, but due to the site I chose, carried with it elements of a teaching role, and of course, parent, school councillor and member of the Belbrook community. In this instance, a key component of my role as community artist was to act as playwright in the project. This too impacted on the nature of my relationships with participants, on the way I conducted the research, and on the performance outcomes. The nexus between the various functions

and skills of the community artist emerged as a key theme through the data, as indeed it has through the discussion of the work of community artists in the literature review.

The other essential ‘hat’ I wore was the researcher’s hat. As I have already indicated, the research design was modified, both during the field work and beyond, to reflect the changing dimensions and needs of my researcher 'self', in negotiation with the needs of the community artist, teacher, writer and community member. Coffey suggests that this process of negotiating meanings and relationships in the field is physically and emotionally demanding, and that such demands are potentially a strength of ethnographic field work, implying an honest and well-executed research process.318

6.3. The Performing Arts Project in practice

6.3.i. Overview

The performing arts program took place over fifteen weeks, straddling two school terms. I worked with each of the eight class groupings in the school, for one drama session each week. Class sizes ranged from fifteen Preps to thirty Grade Fives. In addition to this, I ran an Adult Drama Group, and in the second half of the program, an extension performance group open to Grade Sixes, which rehearsed in lunchtimes. From these activities, eight different performances eventuated. With the exception of the Grade Six performances, each group produced a scripted play that was ultimately performed in the School Hall. The two Grade Six classes produced a collection of short 'street theatre' style pieces that were performed outdoors. A Grade Six extension group performed in the Hall. They presented two short plays for young children, written by myself and one of the teachers. All eight classroom teachers and 196 children enrolled in the school participated in the performing arts program, although not all children performed on the day (about ten did not perform). Of course, data was collected only in relation to those children whose parents agreed to their participation in the research. Children were also asked to sign Consent Forms.

318 Coffey, pp.158-159.
Consultation with the Principal and teachers took place in the term prior to the commencement of the program and matters such as content, scheduling and desired outcomes were considered. The management of the program was left entirely in my hands. After consultation, I developed a weekly schedule and then designed a program for each grade. The initial workshop program concentrated on the development of drama skills, progressed to a play making process, in which I negotiated with the children on the writing of a play for their grade to perform. The final stage of the program focussed on refining the scripts and rehearsing the plays. In the younger grades, parent helpers became involved in the rehearsals, attending during class-time rehearsals, and working with children on the day of the performance. All grades devoted additional time to rehearsals led by the classroom teacher in the final weeks.

The Adult Drama group was open to all members of the school community, although it was difficult for some people to attend due to the scheduling of workshops and rehearsals during school time. The intended target for this activity was the group of parents who were very involved in the day-to-day activities of the school. However, numbers remained small. The Adult Drama group went through a similar developmental program to the children's groups, although I found that the group preferred to work from scripted material from the very earliest stages. The participants had considerable input into the evolution of the scripts and eventually, the group performed their collection of short plays loosely based on the history of the town, in the Hall.

For all participants, there was at least one de-briefing/feedback session in the week after the performance. I conducted a wrap-up session with each group, and depending on the ability levels of students asked them to complete a questionnaire or a visual and/or verbal response to their experience in the performing arts program (Appendix Two). With the exception of the Street Theatre pieces, I produced a final draft of each of the scripts for use in later rehearsals. (Appendix Three). After the performance day I elected to produce a ‘published’ version of each of the scripts. For the junior grades it took shape
as an oversized, handmade book. In addition to the scripts, the book included the children’s illustrations of the plays and responses to the experience of making the plays. The 'published' versions of the plays were presented to the grades that were responsible for them and these publications were placed in the School Library.

6.3.ii. Data collection

During the project, my principal data collection tools were:

- a field journal, supported by audio tapes of selected workshop sessions.
- a 'management' journal, consisting of all formal communications generated through the project (memos and schedules to principal, teachers and parents), newsletter entries, rehearsal schedules, handouts for children); detailed plans for each workshop session; and brainstorming notes related to program planning, promotion, and scripts.
- video tapes of selected workshops and rehearsals.
- questionnaires for teachers at the beginning and conclusion of the project.
- a questionnaire for parents at the conclusion of project.
- interviews with children during the project (small group, semi-structured).
- interviews with children at the conclusion of the project (whole class, semi-structured de-briefing sessions).
- an interview with the Principal at the conclusion of the project.
- children’s responses to project (in age-specific form – artwork, questionnaire, reflective writing).
- video tapes of performances.
- drafts of play texts, from original conception to final draft.

- **The field journal**

The field journal was the single most important data collection tool. Maintaining the journal throughout the project also proved to be the single greatest challenge in data collection. The sheer volume of work involved in establishing and maintaining the program in each grade of the school was daunting. Ensuring that adequate records of each workshop session, meeting and incidental conversation of significance were kept created
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...a central tension in the research in the field. As the workshop leader/community artist, it was not possible for me to record notes in the field. It was also not desirable. While I did not hide my researcher status, I also made a conscious choice to focus on the artistic and collaborative work at hand, while minimising attention on the research component. The participants in this project were not co-researchers in the 'action-research' sense of the word. The world of the university was potentially intimidating and off-putting to some community members and teachers. The research component was in evidence but did not dominate.

In the early weeks of data collection, I developed a number of strategies to support the maintenance of my field journal:

1. Firstly, wherever possible I audio-taped workshop sessions. These audio-tapes provided an aide-memoir as I wrote up each session. They enabled me to capture verbatim material, which was especially valuable as I became increasingly aware of my 'teacher' language, of my 'artist' language, of my introduction to the language of playmaking and the aesthetic space. It was also helpful in identifying times when I did not use specialist language and times when I attempted to track the evolution of the particular performance vocabulary I was developing. There were distinctive differences in activity, language usage and the use of space with each group. This suggested the building of idiosyncratic relationships between myself and each group. The striking contrast between early recordings and the final ones revealed in an immediate and surprising way just how much my approach had changed. By the time I recorded the debriefing sessions, the frenetic energy and the anxious monitoring of behaviour and response characteristic of the early workshops was gone. In its place were quiet and respectful exchanges between myself and students and teachers, and amongst the students. The tape recording of sessions thus provided an invaluable source of data in the way that they were used to support the journal, independent of other data collection.
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2. My second strategy was to formulate a writing routine. Given the frantic pace of the daily program of ‘contact’ time (including workshops and crucial school ground conversations), planning, then scripting, I set aside one complete day each week for journal writing. I began each entry with an overview of the week. This enabled me to articulate those issues that were most pressing at week’s end. This may have been an individual participant or class, a troubling or exciting encounter or conversation, a problem with script or a data collection issue. This weekly overview was a critical tool in my reflective armoury. It became a reflexive agent also, as I ‘wrote myself into understanding and frequently found solutions to dilemmas or problems the week had generated.319 These weekly overviews are reminiscent of the “analytic memo” described by Ely et al. They suggest that the analytic memo “can be thought of as conversations with oneself about what has occurred in the research process, what has been learned, the insights this provides, and the leads these suggest for future action”.320

When writing entries for each particular workshop, in addition to audio-tapes I consulted any materials generated by myself or the participants in the class, the workshop plan I took into the class, and where appropriate, the script developed or modified in that week. Inevitably, as time progressed, the volume of supporting materials increased exponentially, and I was in danger of becoming swamped by the onerous task of journal writing.

3. At this point, I devised my third strategy for supporting a sustainable field journal. This strategy was to construct a pro-forma for individual workshop entries. (Appendix Four). The proforma employed a series of headings designed to guide my recording and reflecting, without inhibiting the descriptive flow. The Weekly

Overview was deliberately unstructured and complemented the proforma model, providing a forum for those things that didn't fit in the prescriptive framework. The headings used were: Field Journal Entry; Workshop Session; Time and Date and Location; Teacher Present; Atmosphere/ ambiance/vibe; What happened – list of activities; Activity outcomes / Performance outcomes to be noted; Aesthetic moments; Important interactions/ Key anecdotes.

4. Finally, I incorporated an adaptation of the process of 'bracketing',\textsuperscript{321} described by Ely et al, and Bogdan and Biklen's Observer's Comments (OC).\textsuperscript{322} These are both mechanisms to further the researcher's dialogue with herself. They also facilitate emergent analysis, the process of clarification, and the formulation of new questions for the research, or new actions in practice. These 'observer's comments' appear in the computer generated journal in bold, and they can best be described as 'light bulb moments'. Subsequent readings of my field journal yielded new insights and observations. These have been handwritten into the margins of journal, and dated.

• The 'management' journal
This journal resembled a folio of work rather than a journal per se. The project generated an enormous amount of material associated with the daily management of the program. These ranged from the purely practical, to the artistic, to entreaties for support or co-operation. The documents in the folio vividly reflect the practical dimensions of the performing arts project, and as such, the management journal provides an invaluable, parallel account of the fieldwork.

The workshop plans reveal the commonalities and differences in approaching different classes. My early, overt intentions to introduce a performance vocabulary are clearly reflected in the activities and the way they are framed, across all levels. My less overt

\textsuperscript{321} Ely, et al, 1991, p.71
\textsuperscript{322} Bogden and Biklen cited in Ely,1991, p.74.
agendas regarding co-operation, collaboration, independence and responsibility, and the giving of voice, begin to emerge as the program unfolds.

These subtle and overt agendas are reflected in the drafts of the scripts that are also contained in this 'journal'. When script, workshop plan and field journal are juxtaposed, many dimensions of the same set of events are revealed. The most significant of these, but perhaps the most difficult to articulate, are those aspects of problem-solving: of meanings negotiated through art form, of difficulties with dramatic language and performance itself, of the needs of individual students and whole groups - that is evidenced in both the choice of workshop activities, and in the drafting and re-drafting of scripts.

The subtextual dimension of documents contained in this journal is significant. It is particularly powerful in the series of communications provided to the teachers. Each communication combines quite prescriptive information about imminent organisational matters of structure and procedure. The balance between prescription and inclusion shifts as the pressure rises for me in my role as community artist. Such is the importance of this dimension of data collection, that I have included a number of these documents in the novella, in the belief that they reveal subtleties in the evolving nature of the program and especially in the relationships between myself and the teachers.

Finally, it should be said that there is an aspirational tone to the language in all of the communications - to teachers, parents, the Principal and the children. The tone is resolutely positive and encouraging regardless of the actual circumstances.

- **Supporting data collection: tapes, interviews, questionnaires**

These supporting tools for data collection each performed useful and sometimes surprising functions in creating the intricate and elaborate “webs of significance”323 of the

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data as a whole. For example, each of these additional forms of data collection contributed to the formulation of the field journals. The use of multiple sources of data in constructing the field journals was essential for the creation of multilayered accounts reflecting a range of voices and experiences of the performing arts project. This impacts directly on the issue of triangulation and crystallisation, which will be discussed in the next section.

On the day of performance a parent volunteered to video the performances in the Hall. This parent had no prior encounters with the plays, apart from hearing stories brought home by his children from Grades Two and Four. The parent thus provided an audience's eye to the performances. The tape of all the indoor performances, collated onto a master tape by the obliging parent was an almost complete record of the day's events in the hall. He expressed great disappointment at omitting the section of the Adult Drama group performance in which the actors tell local stories about bushfires in the area. (He was changing the battery in the camera!)

Consistent with the Ethics Clearance given for the conduct of the fieldwork, parents and teachers were invited to complete questionnaires focusing on attitudes to performing arts and to the school itself, prior to the project and again at the completion of the program. (Appendix Two). A lengthy interview was conducted with the Principal about two weeks after the program concluded. Although I had not initially planned to interview the Principal, I found it necessary to set up a formal interview situation in order to solicit feedback regarding the program as he had not volunteered any formal or informal responses to the program.

Several weeks into the program, I conducted two thirty-minute interviews. One with a group of five Grade Five children, selected by me to represent a range of possible responses to the work so far, and a similar group of five Grade Sixes. The interviews were conducted in the ‘drama room’ during class time and the children were given
permission to leave their classes to participate in the interview. I tape recorded the interviews but ultimately chose not to transcribe them. The interviews were designed to support classroom observation and informal playground discussions with children. I found that group interviews did not prompt deep or considered responses to questions about the drama program, and therefore did not prove as fruitful for data collection as the unsolicited informal, playground encounters.

Similarly, I attempted a formal interview with a small group of teachers mid-way through the program (four teachers during one lunch-time), but found the teachers did not respond well to the more structured nature of this encounter. They appeared inhibited by the presence of the tape recorder, and reluctant to engage in the more considered discussion required by an ‘interview’ during the time of respite from classes that lunchtime provided. Once again, unsolicited informal class-room and photocopying room conversations proved richer and more informative as data. Such conversations were recorded in my field journal as close to the encounter as possible and I attempted to record as much verbatim material as my recall would allow.

6.4. Validating the research: “claims to authorship, authority, truth, validity, and reliability”.

Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied. The entire endeavour must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analysed, how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated. Trustworthiness is thus, more than a set of procedures…it is a personal belief system that shares the procedures in process.324

6.4.i. The crystal as “central imaginary”

My response to the dual challenges of trustworthiness and validity is informed by Laurel Richardson's seminal work on this topic. Richardson proposes that

324 Ely et.al. 1991, p.93.
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Triangulation of data, the accepted procedure of collecting data on the same event from multiple sources or perspectives, be replaced by the notion of crystallisation as a more useful metaphor for the achievement of multiple perspectives on data and on the management of multiple sources of data. Richardson eloquently argues for the many facets and functions of the crystal, in refracting, reflecting and transmuting beyond the two-dimensional limitations suggested by the geometric order of the triangle. For Richardson, the crystal as “central imaginary”, combines “symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach”. Building on this “central imaginary”, Richardson's work provides two key insights for me. Laurel Richardson suggests that “what we see depends on our angle of repose”. For me, the actions of knowing how to approach and subsequently analyse, interpret and write about my experiences in the field, are shaped by that central question - what is the angle of repose? Given the multiplicity of roles I performed within my fieldwork, this was not always a simple question to answer. However, the process of considering the position from which I was viewing the work was invaluable in providing context and depth to my understanding. Philip Taylor draws on Ely et. al. when he elaborates on Richardson's metaphor, suggesting ways in which it can be manifested through specific research techniques:

The metaphor of crystallisation works well in reflective practitioner design. It works well because it beautifully captures how our perspectives are shaped by 'our angle of repose'. The techniques we adopt to investigate our practice will inform our evolving perspectives. In qualitative inquiry, these techniques can include interviews, student journals, audio-visual resources, peer support groups, and negative cases.

I have drawn a second insight from Richardson's work. It is particularly informed by her commitment to a post-structuralist paradigm. She proposes:

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326 Richardson, 1997, p. 92.
327 Ely et al. cited in Taylor, 1996, p.44.

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Crystallisation, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity" (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic.\textsuperscript{328}

This deconstruction of validity as a central feature of sound qualitative research practice is both liberating and challenging. The freedom to embrace the subjectivities of the study and to acknowledge the multiplicity of perspectives and their attendant versions of 'truth' enables the researcher to accommodate all the experiences of the field, including the silences, the absences and the paradoxes, and to name those things which previously may have been unnameable. The challenge is to not become lost in the relativity vortex, and to maintain personal integrity and ethical procedures. In other words, it is important to maintain one's “personal belief system”, and to adhere to a rigorous and transparent implementation of processes, no matter how complicated and intertwined these might appear.

A qualitative researcher pays continuous, recursive, and …excruciating attention to being trustworthy. …The quest is to make the research project credible, produce results that can be trusted, and establish findings that are, to use Lincoln and Guba's phrase, 'worth paying attention to'.\textsuperscript{329}

\textbf{6.4.ii. Keys to a credible research process}

The key to establishing an ethical stance, a credible research process, and trustworthiness in reporting, was focussed for me in three specific sets of actions during and after data collection.

- \textit{The formulation and presentation of an ethical research design.}

Information about the proposed study was carefully disseminated, and by necessity, passed through a number of stages of approval (university, education department, staff, school council, parents and children) before research was undertaken. Not only was this

\textsuperscript{328} Richardson, 1997, p. 92.

\textsuperscript{329} Margot Ely et.al.,1991, p.156.
an important component in ensuring an ethical process, but it was also a critical 'rite of passage' for myself, from nominal outsider to accepted 'member of the school community'.

- **The facilitation and juxtaposition of different kinds of data.**

As principal research instrument, I was responsible for mediating much of the data collected. In many instances I generated these data in the first place. However, by ensuring that there were a number of different forms of data collected, a range of different perspectives (angles of repose) was accommodated. The process of juxtaposing different data, both self generated and from other sources, for the purposes of analysis and interpretation, was part of the reflexivity of the research design. The parallels between the forms of data, the intersections, and most strikingly, the inconsistencies, reflected my drive to interrogate the meanings of experiences for the participants and myself as practitioner/participant observer. It also served in the interrogation of the self as researcher. As Lincoln and Guba observe:

> Reflexivity... demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and stage around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives.\(^{330}\)

- **The significance of representation.**

The third strategy relates to the question of representation. In seeking ways to represent the range of experiences within my fieldwork, I found it necessary to consider the significance of representation.

> Although it may be true that researchers are never absent from our texts, the problem of just how to "write the self [and, we would add, our political reflexivities] into the text" (Billig, 1994, p326) remains...\(^{331}\)

\(^{330}\) Lincoln and Guba, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, p.183.

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I chose the novella to represent the most complex and layered aspect of my research, my experience in the field. In this part of my research report I hoped to represent the many voices of the field including the various persona I inhabited myself. The novella falls easily into the recently articulated category of Creative Analytic Practices, framed by Laurel Richardson, in her ongoing quest to acknowledge and define the many ways in which so called 'evocative representations' can contribute to the burgeoning field of qualitative research practices. According to Richardson, these “evocative representations” allow us to “relate differently to our material…[to] know it differently”. When the researcher employs an “evocative representation”, Richardson suggests, they find themselves “attending to feelings, ambiguities, blurred experiences”.  

In my approach to the novella, I was interested in locating a 'storied narrative' for my data and situating it in a literary form. Polkinghorne, drawing extensively on Bruner, describes the 'storied narrative' as the “linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts”. In the evocative representation of the novella, I undertook to structure and order events and 'characters' in a meaningful way.

Polkinghorne makes the following pertinent points:

The analytic development of a story from the gathered data involves recursive movement from the data to an emerging thematic plot….,

and

As the plot begins to take form, the events and happenings that are crucial to the story's denouement become apparent. The emerging plot informs the researcher about which items from the gathered data should be included in the final storied account…

A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts.

332 Richardson, 2000, p.931
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The novella enabled me as the researcher:
-to distance myself from the field. This was very important given my intimate involvement with the community before during and after the fieldwork, and given the difficult nature of some the stories to be told. As Madeleine Grumet says: “It is the function of art to re-organize experience so it is perceived freshly”. 335

-to bring the setting to life using literary and fictive devices. Rishma Dunlop's reports that in her experience, fiction can be a powerful vehicle “for the articulation of lived experiences”. 336

-to honour the voices of the participants. They are quoted verbatim in the context of the story, and their thoughts are speculated upon by the narrator. This is a complex matter and care was taken to delineate participants speaking for themselves, through verbatim accounts, and the writer researcher speaking through them as a means of acknowledgment.

-to present the artistic and community practice in a readable and accessible way, linking the thought processes of the community artist, to the actions taken in the workshop spaces and through the dramatic texts

I was however, mindful of the responsibilities of reconstituting the experience of others through the construction of a 'storied narrative'. My own perspectives dominated and any mechanisms I employed to represent the voices of other participants, while informed by a range of data, were inevitably imaginative reconstructions of my own. I was very aware

334 Polkinghorne, p.7
335 Madeleine Grumet,1988, Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, p.81
Chapter Six: 'Thinking with my viscera, feeling with my brain' - Methodology for the artist researcher.

that. “flooding the text with ruminations on the researcher's subjectivities also has the potential to silence participant/subjects”.

However, my intention was not to silence my participants but to find a way to hear them and ensure that their voices were heard in the report from the field. The act of ‘writing’ them required me to consider their perspectives and to reflect on possible interpretations of their relationships to the experience of the study. At very least, this process informed my capacity to analyse and interpret events within the distanced, fictionalised context as well as within the raw data.

The reflective practitioner stance demands a discovery of self, a recognition of how one interacts with others and how others read and are read by this interaction.

6.5. Writing the research

This thesis unfolds into three distinct parts. The first part has concerned itself with two critical and inter-related functions: to provide a context for the investigation of community theatre, and to provide an interpretive lens through which the fieldwork can be examined and analysed. In the opening chapters I have concentrated on the construction of a context in which key terms can be understood and defined in a way that serves the later investigation into the field. The refinement of this understanding takes the form of the Community Theatre Matrix. This discussion of methodology provides a link between the first and second parts.

The second part of the thesis is the Belbrook case study. I have outlined my rationale for adopting an arts-based approach to the writing of this report from the field. The novella represents a stylistic departure from the earlier chapters of the thesis, but its construction is informed by the theory discussed in the first part.

The third part of the research report is the discussion of the Belbrook study in the context of the literature review and the Community Theatre Matrix. The Matrix provides a useful analytical lens and key discoveries are articulated and recommendations for future research formulated.

In terms of methodology, it is essential here to highlight the role that the novella plays both in reporting the fieldwork and as a function of data analysis. I have outlined my approach to the writing of the novella in detail here. It is my intention to make the links between data collection and the transformation of this data into the literary forms and the ways in which this process reflected, supported and enhanced the analysis of that data.

6.5.i. Reporting from the field: The novella

A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts.  

The processes of selection, refinement and focus that are intrinsic to the construction of a literary form served this component of the research report well. With vast amounts of diverse and divergent data it was necessary for me to privilege some stories over others. A literary approach allows for nuance and the spaces between events to speak. By drawing on my skills as a writer and my obligations as a researcher I was able to provide a picture of the fieldwork which suggested its complexity and diversity, highlighted the key research findings and acknowledged the realms of the unknowable within the field. This work aligns itself with the arts-based research tradition about which Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone have written extensively and modelled so eloquently in their own research writing. They identify seven features of Arts-Based Research, all of which are represented to a greater or lesser degree in the novella:

339 Polkinghorne, p.7.
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Seven Features of Arts-Based Educational Inquiry.
1. The Creation of a Virtual Reality.
2. The Presence of Ambiguity.
3. The Use of Expressive Language.
4. The Use of Contextualised and Vernacular Language.
5. The Promotion of Empathy.
6. Personal Signature of the Researcher/Writer.
7. The Presence of Aesthetic Form.  

While each of the features has a significant role in the search for new understanding that the research report represents, it is the presence of aesthetic form that is the critical factor for me. Decisions about aesthetic form inform and shape the responses to the raw data. The intuitive artistic processes that are brought into play when writing for an aesthetic outcome work alongside the analytical processes of the researcher. The novella provides the intersection for these two processes and creates the possibility for a broader, deeper and multidimensional consideration of the research experience.

By the end of a story…its format and contents will serve to create a new vision of certain educational phenomena. When readers re-create that vision, they may find that new meanings are constructed, and old values and outlooks are challenged, even negated. When that occurs, the purposes of art have been served.  

6.5.ii. The writing process

Before writing the novella, I undertook a comprehensive review of all forms of data. Video and audio-tapes were revisited, and field and management journals were thoroughly re-examined. I prepared for the writing of each section of the novella by re-reading data pertinent to the events and people involved in that section. My intention was to selectively represent people and events; carefully choosing moments in the field which best exemplified the themes of the research. I attempted, through the form of the novella, to bring the place and the people and the events to life, and to locate myself as a character within the field. Identities of people and place were protected by pseudonyms, but the characters depicted in the novella were all based on actual people. Where conversations appear in the novella they are drawn from verbatim accounts within the data.

341 Barone & Eisner, 1997, p.78.
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By using a literary form, I am able to take a very fluid approach to perspective (authorial positioning). I move from the intimate insider's view of the project from the perspective of the community artist, Pip, to an 'almost' omniscient narration of time and place, and to many positions in between. The same events are viewed from a number of perspectives as I (speculatively) enter the thoughts of different participants. Not only does this fluidity of positioning assist in revealing the narratives, but it is also a clear example of the ongoing analytic processes available to the writer/researcher. In the act of writing, I am reconstructing events; I am 'walking in the shoes' of the participants; I am walking around the work; and I am considering the possible angles of repose. My desire to create a compelling and readable narrative complements my researcher's desire to continue to explore the nuance and complexities of my fieldwork. While educationalist and novelist Rishma Dunlop ultimately took a very different approach in her arts-based research, her deliberations on how to manage her data has great resonance for me.

Another challenge was to decide how to delimit the story, the characters and the huge volume of data I had gathered. In the end I took the novelist's approach, choosing to write about the stories that moved me, that enabled me to see things in new ways….By writing about the things that haunt us, saying what must be said, we can speak eloquently as researchers, writing and speaking the voices that are often unheard.

There are many ways in which the aims of the research are supported and enhanced through the artistic construction of the novella: multiple perspectives; selection of events guided by themes of the research; suspense mirroring the emergent nature of the research; multivocality; ambiguity and paradox; silences and gaps in the narrative to represent the inevitable incompleteness of data collection. There are three particular features of this novella that for me are especially important in the exploration and illumination of the research.

342 Dennie Wolf discusses the concept of 'walking around the work' in relation to young visual artists developing their artistic skills through reflective practice in: 1989, Art, Mind and Education: research from Project Zero, eds. H.Gardner & D.N. Perkins, University of Illinois Press Urbana, pp.150-153.
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- The community artist at work

The first is the detailed attention given to the work of the community artist. The novella follows the artist from planning stages, provides detailed descriptions of workshop activities and responses, and then ruminates with the artist as she reflects-in-action and after action. It was always my intention to look closely at the day-to-day work of the artist in the community setting. From the privileged perspective I have as the reflective practitioner involved, I am also able to provide a meta-commentary on the action. What is the artist thinking, how does she respond to this challenge or this surprise or that obstacle? What makes this so valuable, I believe, is that the act of writing such a detailed account of practice extends the notion of reflection-in-action. Even as I write, my understanding of my own actions, of the dynamic between people, place and intention, is revisited. New understandings are formulated.

- 'Reflective summaries'

The 'reflective summary' provides a function in the fiction similar to that of the 'analytic memo' of journal writing in qualitative research. Pip, the community artist takes time out to capture key moments of insight or difficulty in the midst of the project. Although they are consciously constructed to serve the purposes of the researcher, these moments are not overtly sign-posted within the narrative. However, the intention is to reinforce the reflexive processes at play throughout the performing arts project and to demonstrate the ways in which these moments of reflection infuse both the practice of the artist in the field and the theorising that was ongoing and emergent.

- “Mixed genres”

According to Laurel Richardson, “mixed genres” within “Creative Analytic Practices”, such as the novella, allow the researcher to “draw freely in his or her productions from literary, artistic, and scientific genres”\(^\text{344}\). While the use of “mixed genres” is not the dominant mode of this artistic production, the introduction of other forms of writing, (for

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\(^{344}\) Richardson in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.934
example, the memos to teachers, snippets from the play texts, participant responses, forms to be filled out, and letters to parents), all provide different perspectives on the events being described in the central narrative. They offer both confirmation of attitudes encountered in the central narrative and contradictions. They set up a discourse between the different forms of telling and between the teller and the reader. They suggest gaps in understanding, and the gaps they create between the narrative as told and the 'other' text generate a space for the reader, and myself to re-interpret and reconstruct meaning. They are central to the process of “crystallisation” which has been discussed earlier.

6.5.iii. The structure

From a practical and artistic perspective, the structure of the novella enabled me to manage the complexity of the fieldwork and the intricacies of the experiences I wished to represent.

I divided the novella into six sections. Each section represents a different stage of the project. Each section opens with a 'snapshot' from the day of the performance. The cumulative effect of this is that by the time the reader arrives at Part Five, which focuses on the day of performance itself, there is already a picture emerging of what actually happened on the day. From the writer's point of view, Part Five, which is clearly the climax of the story telling, can deal with the overall experience of the day, rather than the detail. This is a decision driven primarily by artistic considerations: a complex, multi-layered interweaving of past and present seen from a number of perspectives, informed by the emergent research. One of the themes of the research that I consider is the relationship between the performance day as an event and the performance day as a series of crafted theatrical statements. The exploration of this theme is embedded in the structure of the novella.

My decision to begin each section of the novella with an account of The Day also frees me from the potential limitations of a chronological linear narrative. It suggests to the
reader I believe, a more fluid interpretation of 'truth', reflection and memory, and represents one way in which the subjectiv(ies) of the writer/researcher are acknowledged and foregrounded. Each 'snapshot' of The Day is selected for what it reveals about the nature of the performance event and also for the thematic links it offers to the developmental phase I am exploring in depth in the given section. In another way, it also invites the reader to consider the 'if I knew then what I know now' dynamic, which I as the writer have the benefit of, but Pip, the character did not. Ideally, this promotes a discourse between reader, writer and participants: about the research questions that prompted the study in the first place; and more importantly, about the question of what the community artist needs to know in order to make choices which facilitate the greatest efficacy when working with a community. This dialectic is revisited in a more formal way in the chapter that follows the novella.

With eight distinctly different play-writing projects incorporated into the performing arts project, it was a challenge to find a way to represent them all. Like Rishma Dunlop I struggled to find ways to "delimit the story". My solution, like hers, was influenced by a fundamental artistic concern - the desire to generate an interesting and engaging story. The research function of the story was present however, in the selection of stories and characters. I sought out key events that were emblematic of the themes I had identified in my data collection. Similarly I focused on participants whose experiences confirmed or challenged the principles I had brought in to the project as artist and/ researcher. (Appendix Five uses the evolution of the Grade Two play discussed below, to illustrate of the way that theme, content and experience are extrapolated from a number of sources of raw data, and transformed into key moments in the novella.)

As I have previously suggested, one of the most valuable and revealing processes to emerge during the play-writing was the negotiation of meanings through drafts of the play-scripts. I wanted to closely examine the way in which this key decision: to serve as playwright to each of the groups, impacted on my work as community artist and on the
project itself. I selected one group (The Grade Twos) and followed their journey from first workshop to performance, giving particular attention to the place of the play-script. It should be said here that I consider this one of the more successful play-scripts from the project, and one of the more successful playwright/participant negotiations through text. I chose not to provide a contrasting example of a less successful attempt at negotiating through text. There are many instances in which my less glorious moments as community artist are showcased. In this instance, I chose not to set up such a binary in the writing of the novella. I include many examples of the playwright/text/ participant negotiation in the novella and address the relative merits of the community artist as playwright in Chapter Eight. (Appendix Five also contains the complete script of the Grade Two play, samples of earlier drafts of the play, and examples of workshop strategies used in scriptwriting)

6.5.iv. Pip
For myself, I constructed the character of Pip. This objectification of self was surprisingly helpful to me in the writing of my report of the fieldwork. I didn't attempt to differentiate the character of Pip from myself, and hopefully, I resisted the temptation to valorise or demonise her/my actions. For the duration of the novella writing process, I was able to stand back and describe, analyse and interpret Pip's experiences. Through the 'storied narrative' of the novella I was able to find the distance necessary to reflect on my own experiences in a complex and highly personalised research study.

6.5.v. The novella and its context
While it is my hope that the novella could be read independently of the thesis, it is presented here as an integral and key component of this thesis. It is contextualised by the review of global community theatre theory and practice as much as by the Belbrook community in which it took place and in which I live. It provides a counterpoint, in practice, to the Community Theatre Matrix.
6.6. **Drawing the Threads Together: Analysis and Interpretation**

While the novella invites many readings, I choose to conclude this thesis by offering my own understanding of meanings evoked through its pages. The chapter that follows the novella offers a re-contextualisation: the global and the local, from the perspective of the practitioner artist. I apply the Community Theatre Matrix articulated in Chapter Five to the Belbrook community experience.

Chapter Eight offers an analysis of the findings to emerge from this consideration of the Matrix. The discussion traces the evolution of a community theatre project from the identification of community need through to community enactment and reviews the practice in the light of the four key principles of the Matrix: Artistry, Agency, Pedagogy and Pragmatics. The study addresses the question framed within the Matrix: what does it mean to create and experience the Engaged Space?

Some of the key themes to emerge are:
- Agendas and preconceptions.
- Giving voice and being heard,
- The development of a vocabulary of experience,
- Reformulating the ‘cultural tool kit.’
- Critical reflection as a critical tool of community theatre practice.
- Discovering artistry.
- Enactment as emancipatory practice.

6.7. **In conclusion: between the global and the local**

The discussion of methodology here addresses more than the consideration of research design and implementation of appropriate methodological tools. It raises questions of identity, subjectivity and situatedness for the researcher. It deconstructs notions of research reporting and writing. And, it seeks to create a space for the fusion of artistic and research practice. In other words, it reflects my approach to the challenge of research for
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The artist/academic/pedagogue and allows for the blurring of boundaries between different aspects of my life as community artist, community member and researcher.

Research', we suggest, is not a technical set of specialist skills but implicit in social action and close to the ways in which we act in everyday life, for we find increasingly that the worlds of academe and social life, theory and practice, work and family are not really different but constantly interrupt one another often in complex ways.345

Finally, this discussion of methodology forges a bridge, between the global concerns that occupied the opening chapters of this thesis, and the local, personal and particular concerns of the Belbrook community. In telling the Belbrook stories a new discussion is initiated. The possibility then exists for new ways of thinking and talking about community theatre practice both here and elsewhere.

…the end of a story is best seen as an invitation to begin a new phase in the conversation.346

Chapter Seven: Belbrook Stories – A Novella

PROLOGUE
The cake auction was interminable. As the grey sky hastened the little school hall into early night, the sounds of bidding echoed. How many cakes were there? Ten? Fifteen? Did every family in the school have to have a cake to take home?

The rain pelted down. The asphalt quadrangle abandoned, damp streamers and a lonely chook wheel only hinting at the frenetic activity of the day just passed.

Another cake sold. Fourteen dollars. Not bad for a craftily disguised Betty Crocker.

The children of Grade Five waited, silently, anxiously behind the makeshift curtains. Some clutched props, others adjusted unfamiliar skirts and awkward hats. Jared made faces at Joseph, provoking him into silent laughter and less silent chinese burns. Gareth checked his script one last time, practised the little smile he planned to use just before his final exit, glanced nervously around to make sure no one was looking at him, took a deep breath, and continued waiting.
Another cake. This one a novelty affair, made by the Principal. The bidding was vigorous and the hall erupted in laughter. Warren the Principal spoke on behalf of his cake. Applause, as the fortunate ex-student claimed his prize and his mother paid.

Fran Hay fidgeted behind the curtains, eyeing off her Grade Fives as they patiently waited for their turn. They were good kids. She could feel her blood pressure rising. Lovely Lucy Loverly, the Grade Five performance was scheduled at 4.30 in the hall. They had been ready, costumes on, props in place, at 4.20. Nancy, the Uni student helper had warmed them up and helped them to focus. They were ready to go at 4.30. It was now almost 5 o’clock. She could feel the adrenaline seeping away. Jared and Joseph were making everyone laugh. They’d lose their concentration and upset everyone else. She gave them one of her unmistakable glares. They got the message.

Now she was just plain annoyed. Warren seemed oblivious to the twenty-eight children waiting for their turn. Well, if they mucked it up he’d only have himself to blame. Fran glanced sideways at Gareth, pale and tense in the corner. She hoped this would be a good day for him.

Nancy slipped silently through the groups of children, reminding them to stay focussed, and to save their energy for the show. Fran knew she was lucky to have her these past few days. What Fran knew about putting on a play would fit on a postage stamp. Nancy had taught them
about projection and vocal warm-ups and helped them stay on track. It was handy just having another adult in the room during the frantic rehearsals of the last couple of days. Fran wondered about Pip. If she was feeling anxious, Pip must have been beside herself. This was the last performance of the day, and Fran was sure that Pip would be aiming for it to go ahead as scheduled.

Pip hunched in the corner behind Warren and Dan praying for the cake auction to be over. She could feel the tension from the kids behind the curtains. She needed the play to start so that it could be over. She needed Warren to sense her thoughts. "Time to finish up, Warren", she telepathed to him. He didn’t seem to be receiving messages. She tried the white hot glare through the back of the shirt. She thought she might just edge forward so that he could see her out of the corner of his eye. She would be the one looking at her watch. Pip took a deep breath. One of many she had taken on this very long day. As she exhaled, she realised that this moment was beyond her control. She would have to wait. By her count there was only one more cake. The people in the hall looked relaxed. They didn’t seem bothered by the delay in the start of the fabulous Lovely Lucy Loverly, an original melodrama to be performed by the Grade Five children of Belbrook Primary School (their contribution to the Country Fair). The children would have to be trusted, Pip decided. If they forgot to speak up, and the set changes didn’t happen smoothly, and the audience couldn’t follow the story, well there was just nothing she could do about it now.
The vibe was good. Everyone was pleased to be in the Hall and not outside in the chilly November drizzle. She was the only one there not having a good time, she thought. Except perhaps Fran, who was looking daggers at Warren from the other side of the hall. The last cake made its way out of the hall.

Pip stood up, and prepared to walk over to the microphone to introduce the play. She had the spiel down pat, after a whole day of introducing the plays performed by different grades. She knew what she would say. The children have helped with the writing of the play. Many of the scenes and characters were their inventions. This grade showed a talent for over-the-top acting, so we thought we’d give you a good old-fashioned melodrama to finish off the day. They’ve worked hard and are excited to be sharing this with you today, and, if you could keep your toddlers from roaming free, that would be good.

She’d almost reached the microphone. Ah, yes, the drawing of the raffle. Lovely Lucy and her family would just have to wait a few more minutes.
**Lovely Lucy Loverly – a melodrama in six scenes, for 5H**

Madame Mysterioso

Good afternoon. It is my proud duty to tell you the story of Lovely Lucy Loverly. You will laugh, you will cry, you will quiver, you will sigh. In other words, it’s a pretty good story.

Our story begins with the young and beautiful Lucy. Her parents, Sir Lyle and Lady Lottie Loverly are having a little soiree for Lucy and her many suitors.

Lucy, famous for her nightingale voice, has been asked to sing…

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**PART ONE: EARLY DAYS**

There’s a little town in the Blue Dandenongs

I like to call my home

You can hear the Puffing Billy blowing soft

As she chugs on up the line

Well the folks are fine and the wildlife sublime…

This city girl’s here to stay

I’m never going back

Wild horses couldn’t drag me

My heart belongs up Belbrook way

Oh de-lay-e-oh, de-o-de lay e-I-de-d-d-lo-hoo

**Belbrook**

Belbrook Primary School sits in amongst the trees and slopes in the foothills of a mountain range, just outside Melbourne. Like the town itself, the school reflects a mix of suburbia and bush. And also like the town it is named for, it finds itself marginalised. In the same way that the town perches on the edge of a city, and finds itself belonging neither to the city nor the hills, the tiny school is adjacent to a high school, five times its size. Tucked in behind back streets of the town, overwhelmed by the high school, some locals wonder if it has any identity
of its own. Many people in the town choose to bypass the little school and send their children to the bigger school on the other side of the highway. Its population grows steadily. Meanwhile the little school clings to its share of the land above the oval, valiantly builds new classrooms and updates computers, appoints a new principal, letterboxes new estates and kinders, and watches its population shrink.

If you want to enter the school, you need to come in through the car park. Countless school council meetings have been devoted to discussing the problems of this access. It is unprepossessing. Occasionally the gateposts and the dumpster parked in the carpark are vandalised. Once the sign over the Admin building lost a smattering of letters. The Belbrook School was Be bro k S hool for months until repairs were authorised. Many proud parents, teachers, and children will tell you however, that what lies beyond the carpark is well is worth exploring.

If the children took you on a tour, they’d take you past the new brick classrooms (more classrooms than classes in fact), past the refurbished Hall, where games are played on wet days, assemblies take place every Monday morning, and the occasional disco is held. A couple of times, there have been plays in the hall. But we don’t have a stage, they’ll tell you. Where might they be taking you, on this tour? Perhaps to the ’Old Adventure playground’, a 1970’s inspired collection of wooden play equipment, nestled in amongst tall gums, just beyond the OOSH building. (OOSH stands for Out of School Hours and this building is dedicated to
the before and after school care of students). The 'Old Adventure' is a wonderful place for climbing and hiding games, and is almost the best place in the school to be at playtime. The 'Old Adventure' is better than the 'New Adventure' that is set in an out of the way corner of the school, just near the boundary with the high school. It is preferred by Preppies and Grade Ones. Occasionally they are joined by their 'buddies' from Grade Five. On the tour the children might point out the only double storey structure in the school, an imposing white brick building facing out over the highway. The 1940's building is heritage listed and is called by all and sundry, 'the Double Storey Building'. This, the children will tell you, is where the Grade Fives and Sixes have classes.

You might think the tour is over at this point, but there is one more important site to be shared. If you're lucky enough to have Grade Ones or Twos as your tour guides they might take your hand at this point. If your tour guides carry with them the gravitas of sixth graders, they may simply lead you and expect that you will follow. Back down through the school, past the library and the admin building where the staff room is and the Principal has his office, back down across the carpark and beyond the building line, you find yourself standing on the high edge of a slope. This is 'The Slope', the children tell you. The very best place to go at playtime. It's steep and quite heavily wooded, but grassy. There are countless tracks through the light undergrowth. At the bottom of the slope is the oval, often muddy, but well utilised, and central in the
lives of the next generation of footy players living out their lunchtime dreams.

So why is the slope the very best place to be at small play and big play, you might wonder? Because this is where you can build bases, the children answer, amazed that an explanation is necessary. Under the towering eucalypts, structures of bark and sticks and branches evolve in the midst of elaborate play. Small teams of children gather to build their special cubby houses. The lore of base-building is elaborate. Only one group of children at a time is permitted to build bases. They have a week in which to build and re-build, improve and renovate their structures. Such efforts are to be respected by other children and no tampering is allowed. At the end of the week, the group often dismantles their base in preference to seeing it destroyed or slowly decay over succeeding weeks. And wrecking can be as much fun as building, they whisper. The Base-Building roster is posted on the door outside the library.

Music blares from the loud-speaker system. The tour is over. Children run from all points of the school, back to their classrooms. That's the end of Big Play for another day.

It is winter, 2001. Term Three is about to begin. It's not been a remarkable year. There are perhaps some murmurs of discontent, often voiced in the car park near the kinder, where parents wait for children
in the afternoons. Enrolments are falling and no-one seems to know what
to do about it. Every time there is a drop in the population, another
compromise is necessary. In 2001 there are no longer any specialists
coming in to the school. One of the classroom teachers is taken out of a
grade for the year to take Library and Art, another takes Phys Ed and
sport, in addition to teaching his grade. There are ten classes in the
school all together. Despite the small number of teachers, there is not a
lot of camaraderie. In the staff room, one might be aware of tensions
reminiscent of couples who’ve lived together too long, know each other’s
habits too well, and are generally tired of the effort involved in getting
along. The Principal is new and finding his way.

Term Three promises some variety. In the second half of the year,
there is to be an ISSE (that’s the International School-to-School
Experience) trip to Peru. Six Grade Six children and two teachers will
travel to Peru for a month. There is much excitement as planning for the
adventure progresses. The school will host an ISSE delegation from
Wales. Several children and two teachers will arrive from Wales and
spend a month at Belbrook Primary. This won’t happen until Term Four
but already arrangements for hosting families and sightseeing trips are
in the pipeline. A group of parents has been working since Term One on
preparations for a fete. This too will happen in Term Four. After a
couple of dismal events in recent years, this year’s fete committee is
determined to have the best fete ever. It’s to be called the Country
Fair. It’s going to have an olde-worlde theme.
And in Term Three, the school will have a performing arts program. Each grade will have drama once a week, and will work towards developing a script to be performed, by their grade, at the Country Fair. One of the parents, Pip, will run the program. For Pip, the program is a community theatre project, and will be research for her PhD.

The teachers express enthusiasm for having the drama classes, although they worry that the plays may come to dominate their teaching in Term Four. *We don’t want to be overwhelmed by the plays they say. We want to have drama, but let’s not make it bigger than Ben Hur, they suggest.*

* 

**Dear…**

Dear Andrea
With reports and Education Week, I’m sure you’re frantically busy at the moment. I thought I’d just catch a moment of your time with this note, to mention a couple of things about next term, and the plans for the performing arts program.

**The Program:** With Preps, I think the drama sessions should run for 30-45 minutes, each week. The program will start in the second week of Term 3 (week commencing 23rd July) and will run for eight weeks. There will be more activity in Term 4, but we have plenty of time to discuss how you would like to proceed with preparations for performance on Fete day.

**The Activities:** Perhaps you know that I am hoping to involve as many children at as many year levels as possible, in a performance day in Term 4 (The Country Fair). As a result, my idea with the preps is to provide a mix of drama activities and games to encourage imagination, creativity and group participation, balanced with some introductory expressive skills work, to guide the children towards performance.

As the performances will focus on Belbrook stories, past, present and future, I thought I could look at gathering some of the children’s family stories as a way of building some sort of play. Perhaps children’s stories and songs from the past and the present might also be useful material to use to generate performance? I would very much like to involve parents of the Preps in the program and would be interested to hear your ideas on how to approach the task of encouraging parents to be involved. There is an enormous amount of flexibility here, and I would like to respond to your requests and suggestions regarding content, approach and outcomes, and to also be sensitive to the needs of your particular group of children.
The Schedule: My preference would be to have the junior school drama sessions on Wednesdays (9.30-10.15; 10.15-10.45; 11.30-12.15; 12.15-1.00). Do you have a preference for one of these times? Please let me know as soon as possible, as I will be juggling all requests from all the teachers in order to arrive at a final schedule. If you have a problem with Wednesday, I’m sure we can arrange a suitable time on another day. If you could give me a couple of preferred times, that would help me.

Your involvement: It’s my understanding that you’ll need to be at the drama sessions, when I’m working with the children. (I think this is necessary legally etc.) You’re very welcome to take an active role in the classes, as team teacher or participant; or, alternatively, you may wish to take the time to catch up on preparation or other bits and pieces. Let me know how you’d like to be involved. I also would like to invite your comments, suggestions or requests at any point during the term.

Finally: Two final points for all teachers. While the drama sessions will be geared towards the performance in Term 4, and I would like to encourage as many children as possible to participate in the performance, those students who won’t be attending the Fete will be able to participate fully in the classes.

With likely disruptions to classes during Literacy Week, I will not run drama sessions during that week. (second last week of term)

It’s my hope that the drama classes provide a constructive addition to your current program. I’m very much looking forward to working with you and your children.

Regards

Pip

Pip

Pip thought the first week would never end. It wasn’t that it was bad, although some of it was, indeed, bad, it was just so… difficult. It felt like she was giving a performance in a play for which there wasn’t a script. Here she was promoting ideas that she wasn’t entirely confident of, and working with primary school children - something she hadn’t ever thought was a good idea for her. She liked primary school children well enough, but didn’t really feel she had their measure. She looked on in awe at the teachers, like Pete and Marina and wondered what their magic was.
Still she knew that she had to have faith. She had to trust that twenty years of drama teaching gave her something on fall back on when the Grade Twos went feral and the Grade 6s resisted with every fibre of their recalcitrant beings. Still, she looked back over the first week and fought a rising urge to retreat. Her research question repeated itself like a mantra. Community theatre sure, but what about the aesthetic? Don't forget to teach them about the 'aesthetic bits', she reminded herself. Don't forget to write a play, don't forget to make it good, and, that's right, make sure the kids feel they own it.

She wondered what she would cook for tea. She made a mental note to check for cat food and white wine. She would have a glass of wine tonight. She was very glad it was Friday.

'We talked our houses'

The Preppies started drama classes this week. Wednesday morning after Show and Tell and a quick game of Buzz, Pip arrives. Mrs Lydon knows her and welcomes her into the class. The class is small, the atmosphere friendly.

Pip wonders aloud if they know what drama is. She wonders if anyone has seen a play.

"What about Charlotte's Web? We saw that last holiday program".
"She dies in the end" says Jakob, "but she doesn't really, because she came out for a bow at the very end."

Pip and the children talk about pretending. It’s even possible to pretend to be a spider.

"Ooh that sounds scary," says William, wide-eyed, thrilled at the prospect of scaring and being scared.

The preppies discover that drama class is not like other classes. Pip suggests games and activities, explains the rules, bangs the tambourine for ‘freeze’. Mrs Lydon joins in when they need pairs for ‘Statues’. She is the tallest tree in the forest. Then they learn to make a ‘Picture Postcard’ of a house. Tali wants to be the wall. Jakob makes the door, and Catherine is the statue in the garden. Tali doesn’t want to be the wall any more. He’ll join with David and together they’ll make the chimney. It’s a fine house they all agree.

Pip invents a story for them all to be involved in. The children will get to make houses. There’s going to be a visitor who wants to talk to them about their houses. Pip is the visitor when she wears a different hat. The children think she talks a bit funny. They want to find out more about this lady. And they all want to show her their houses. They discover she’s a Real Estate Agent looking for a house for some friendly ghosts. Eli thought she might have been "God", and Carey thought perhaps "a fairy". The children liked that the ghosts were friendly.
The children sit on the floor with Pip and Mrs Lydon. Catherine sits on the chair for the Special Person but makes sure that she’s close. They talk about their first drama lesson, and about how they might try to remember what they’ve done today. One of the children says, "We could make a book." Pip loves this idea.

"Oh yes, we're good at books in this class," Mrs Lydon adds. In fact, they’ll make their book right this minute.

Pip picks up her big blue folder, her hat and her tambourine and leaves, promising to return next week. The children begin work on their book. At lunchtime, Mrs Lydon takes the finished book to Pip, to make her day.

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We made a house. I was a mum. Other people were a wall, a chimney, a door and a flower and a bush.

I enjoyed the Homes for Sale. We talked our houses. Pip pretended she was a person selling houses.

We had drama with Pip.

We played - Statues; Shapes; Postcards; Homes for Sale.

We used our bodies to make a forest. I was a squirrel. Some other people were trees.

I liked the shape game. My group made a forest. I was a snake and Jakob was a dead rat.

I enjoyed For Sale. Pip talked funny. We had to guess who were her customers. They were ghosts.

I enjoyed the statues. You could walk around and we had to 'freeze' when she banged the tambourine.

I liked the Postcards game. We made a house and I was the door.

I liked when I made a chimney. We made people, a door, another chimney and a wall.
I liked the Shapes game. I was the tree. Catherine was the flower, Amber was the leopard.
It was night time.
I was a tree in the Shape game. Jakob was a dead rat and lots of people were trees. We had to make a forest.
We played Postcards. We made a garden and a house. I was a statue for birds to drink out of.
This is the forest game. We had to make the shape of a forest. I was a fallen down tree. I lay down on the ground.
I played a picture game. I was a dog. Rosa was the mum, Eli was the dad, Miranda was the statue.
When we made the house it came alive. I was the TV. I was talking and moving when we were alive.

Janet

Janet had a nightmare. In the dream her Grade Six boys were running riot, and there was nothing she could do about it. She was yelling for them to sit down, and they were ignoring her, standing on desks, punching each other, teasing the quiet kids. She felt completely powerless in her dream.

At school the memory of the dream lingered. Perhaps it had something to do with the way her Grade Six boys shouted across the room, terrorised the quiet kids, and insisted on arguing with her over every request she made of them. She wasn’t sure that she would cope for another day. Her own school, forty kilometres across the hills, seemed like a different kind of dream, far beyond her reach. She told herself,
this is an exchange. The stay at Belbrook is finite. Today, however, this was small comfort. Her head ached after such a restless night. The boys were particularly difficult this morning. She wondered if they sensed her vulnerability and capitalised on it. Thanks heavens the class was small.

Janet had another worry today. There was a rebellion brewing. Some of her boys had told her they didn't want to do the drama classes. They would get their parents to write a letter, they said.

She'd argued with them. Telling them that this was a really great opportunity for them. Assuring them that they would come to like it if they gave it a chance. She found herself getting frustrated and angry with them. Why didn't they like it? Why did they have to be so negative? Why couldn't they manage to stay involved in something for more than ten minutes? Why did they expect everything on a platter? Of course they wouldn't budge. They were pissed off, and nothing was going to change their minds.

Her chat with Warren this morning hadn't really helped. He had this idea of her - that she was cheerful and resilient. He refused to believe that the "optimistic, smiling Janet" might be feeling low. She told him how the kids had reacted to the drama class. It was such a good example of how difficult these kids were. They had this terrific opportunity, and Pip had made the class accessible, not threatening at all, and still they
resisted. Warren told her to hang in there. "Good one, Warren" she thought as she left his office.

She knew she had to talk to Pip about the drama situation. Perhaps she should sit the kids down and ask them why they didn't want to do drama. Even as she thought about this, a brief smile flickered across her face. Darren and Joel, two of the most vocal of the critics, yesterday had casually asked her when they were having drama again - not in a hostile way, but out of curiosity. How would she ever figure these kids out? She would go to bed early tonight. She really needed a decent night's sleep.

*

Dear …

30/7/01
Dear Teachers
Thank you so much for making me feel welcome to your classes for the first week of the drama program last week. I had a great week. It was good to get started, and to begin to get a picture of how each class might set about writing a play and performing it.

……
I've taken the liberty of including the first of two questionnaires I plan to use during the project, with this note. It would be a great assistance to me if you had a moment to complete it, if you have decided to participate in the research. You could leave completed questionnaires with Cherie in the office in the envelopes provided.

Many Thanks.
Looking forward to working with you in the coming weeks,

Pip

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Fear and Loathing in Grade Two Or, Grade Two: The First Day
The Grade Twos had a reputation to uphold. After a particularly challenging IT class Warren had called them feral. Lotte Blackwood was equally frank. She found them difficult on a daily basis. So many lovely
children, she’d say, and so bright, but as a whole, they’re a handful, a real handful.

For the Grade Twos, drama would be after Play Lunch on a Wednesday. On the first Wednesday for drama, Lotte suggests to Pip that she come later. "They've been dreadful this morning", she tells Pip. Lotte will do some reading groups with them first to settle them down.

Pip is happy to accommodate and arrives at 12. The children are working quietly in their reading groups. Some are gathered around Mrs Blackwood, others are in clusters in the Withdrawal Room or elsewhere in this cluttered classroom. Not much room for drama after twenty-four children, one teacher, one teacher’s aide, a wheelchair, a drama teacher, lots of desks, and items for show and tell have been crammed in.

The drama class begins.
"Good Morning, Mrs Hughes", the children chant, on instruction from their teacher. Pip asks them to make a circle 'on the rug' at the front of the class. Not really enough room to make a circle, but an egg-shape, perhaps even a rhombus is possible. Jason Gaines doesn’t want to. Mrs Blackwood prompts him.
"Hurry up Jason, you're holding everyone up."
"I don’t care. I don’t want to"
"Sit in that circle, Jason."
"I don’t feel like it."
"I’m counting to five."
Jason joins the rhomboid-inspired gathering on the rug.

Pip does the now familiar talk about drama, what it might involve, who might have seen a play. She follows this with the evolving discussion about "rules" in the drama class - about listening, and respect, and what to do when the tambourine sounds. Simon has been jumping around on the spot during this discussion. It's very difficult to sit in the same spot for such a long time. And Jason Gaines has already stomped on his foot. Simon wants to do something else now.

Rhys shares this opinion. It's very hard to manoeuvre his wheelchair right into the circle, which is definitely not a circle anyway. If he's outside the so-called circle, who's going to pay him any attention. Drama sucks, he thinks to himself.

The teachers start talking about behaviour, and co-operating, and listening, and detentions for those who don't want to 'do the right thing.' Mrs Blackwood takes out a pen and prepares to write down the names of children who will be picking up papers with her at lunchtime.

The drama class begins again. There is a game. 'My name is and I like…'
"My name is Sophie and I like horses."
"My name is Anika and I like the beach"
"My name is John and I like footy."
"My name is Harrison and I like footy."
"My name is Jason and I like killing people."

"Do you mean, you like to pretend to kill people? In drama you can pretend all kinds of things?"

"No I mean really killing. Can I? Can I kill someone now?"

The rhomboid-influenced confluence of individuals on the rug starts to erupt. Rhys has run over someone’s foot with his very heavy electric wheelchair. Anika is crying because it’s her foot, and she knows he’s done it on purpose. Rhys will be picking up papers at lunchtime.

The drama class resumes.

From ‘My Name is...’ to ‘What are you doing...’ to ‘Statues’. The tambourine sounds and everyone freezes. Quickly on to the next activity. From ‘Statues’ to ‘Shapes’. Pip tells them to wait until she calls out the name of the shape, and then see how quickly and well they can make it with their partner. The bell rings. Pip has barely delved into her workshop ‘plan’.

The children listen to the inevitable lecture on behaviour and co-operation, and the importance of obeying the rules. Pip asks the children if they’re willing to co-operate next week. The children nod. To conclude, every one gets to make one comment about the class, about drama.

Drama is fun, they say.
Max’s Mum

For Max, the excitement had been brewing all week. When he heard kids from other classes talking about 'doing drama', and what they’d done 'in drama', he smiled to himself. That was his Mum they were talking about, and on Thursday, finally, she’d be coming in to his class to 'do drama'. He hoped the kids in his class would co-operate. Sometimes they could behave very badly. He wanted them to behave well for his Mum, and he wanted his Mum to do a good job when she came into his class. If the other kids didn’t like the class, he’d be hearing about it.

Thursday, finally, and here she is. His excitement spills out into his smile. He wants to be cool about it, so very nonchalant, but there’s no getting around it. It’s really great to have your Mum as a special guest.

While the class is settling in to a circle (and taking a very long time about it) he looks around to see what his friends are doing. Nicholas knows his Mum well too, and looks jazzed. He’s usually pretty quiet in class, but today his interest is aroused. Max exchanges expectant glances with Andrew. Andrew will have something kind to say even if the class doesn’t go well. Now he’s in trouble with Mrs Mac. She’s telling him not to dawdle. Max springs into action, helping to move the furniture back so that there will be enough space for a circle on the rug. He takes his place amongst the twenty-eight nine and ten year olds, just close
enough to his Mum that she will notice him first, and but not too close.
He’s no Mummy’s boy.

They’re in a circle and the drama class begins. There’s a bit of a lecture on rules. That’s to be expected. The tambourine is loud and annoying.
Max hopes his mother realises that Grade Three/Fours are a bit too old for gimmicks like “freeze when I bang the tambourine.” Even while the last rule is being explained, the one about respecting other people and not criticising, Max begins to suspect that some of the ‘naughty’ kids aren’t listening. Nils is edging closer to Briony so he can stir her one last time today, and Jessie has gone silent. Max knows he’s just waiting to pounce. Kylie can’t seem to stay in the circle and decides she needs to fill her drink bottle from the tap in the room. Now Briony is hitting Nils and Mrs Mac has sent him out of the circle.

Today in drama they get to do games. ‘My Name is and I like...’ Max is a bit embarrassed when Andrew says, “My name’s Andrew and I like Max”, but that’s typical of Andrew. Lots of kids do well with this game. Nicholas comes up with a good action for working on the computer, and the Richards twins are so funny when they do the action for playing footy. Even Nils does a good one, when Mrs Mac lets him back in the circle. Max relaxes into the class, and almost forgets that Pip is his Mum for a moment. He wishes she’d make more of a fuss of him, but she does look pretty busy.
Mrs Mac just gets on with her other work. She watches the games when they start, writes them down, then goes off and does other things. The other kids don’t seem to notice, but Max thinks it’s a bit rude. He wonders what his Mum thinks. She doesn’t seem to mind, but then, she does look pretty busy. The games are easy. They do ‘What are you doing’, and then ‘Shapes’.

Then they do ‘Shapes’ in a group. This doesn’t go so well. No one wants Briony in their group. Kylie keeps changing groups. Mark Radley has gone off into a corner to play with the beetle shells he’s brought to school for Show and Tell. Max thinks that it might be time to get tough. He wishes Mrs Mac would stop what she’s doing and come and help. His Mum doesn’t seem too worried, but she doesn’t really know what to expect from his Grade. He wishes he could take her aside for a quick chat. His group comes up with some really good shapes, and Jessie’s group does the best one of all.

Pip draws an imaginary picture frame at the front of the class, and they begin to fill it with images (made with their bodies) from their school day. Twenty hands up to volunteer. One at a time. A picture about play lunch. A picture on the slope. A picture at lunch time. They look at how the story is told with no words. Pip asks them to look for the clues in the picture that help tell the story. She reminds them to stand very still. More ideas, more hands up.
It’s nearly time for the bell. The drama class is over in a blink. One last picture with everyone in it.

"Can you do this?" Pip asks.

"Yes," they assure her.

The energy is fraying. Jessie and his friends want to put their stamp on the lesson. The 'Picture Postcard' is "Going Home." Things fall apart. It’s an image of chaos. Children fighting. The picture itself collapses as children fall on top of each other, laughing. The bell rings. The drama class is over. Max sighs. Now his Mum will think his class is the worst in the school. He will have to talk to her tonight. Give her some advice on how to manage them. Mrs Mac does it, but this class always tests out new teachers. He’ll just have to explain it to her. He’s sure they can all do a lot better.

* *

From ‘My Name is’ to ‘Picture Postcards’

Pip was aware that she wasn’t breaking any new ground with her drama program at Belbrook Primary School. The drama strategies she was using could easily be considered old hat. She was particularly conscious in these early weeks of her limitations in working with primary aged children. She hadn’t been trained in this field and she hadn’t kept abreast of the latest teaching strategies for younger children. Still, her brief was not that of the primary drama teacher, she reminded herself. She’d cast herself in the role of community artist. She was looking towards collaborative play-building with the children. In these early
classes she just wanted to make contact with the kids, and if possible, to build some common understanding of drama so that they could make plays together. This was her self-assigned brief.

From this perspective, the first weeks of classes held lots of surprises. So many of the children reacted enthusiastically to the simplest of activities. Pip had anticipated that there might be some shyness about getting involved in activities. She’d worried also that the activities might seem too banal to be taken seriously. Finding the balance between the mundane and the non-threatening was always a challenge when introducing a group to drama for the first time. For the most part, the response had been more than she had expected. When she outlined the rules for 'My name is', or 'What are you doing', eyes would light up, and children clamoured for the next turn. The teachers responded well. Fran Hay, dedicated non-drama person that she was, joined in without a second invitation much to the enjoyment of her class. Janet, too, leapt into the activities with her customary energy. Bernie Mac didn't join in, but she carefully noted the details of the activities so that she could use them herself at a later time. Certainly, there were exceptions. On the whole, the Grade Ones struggled. Children clustered together and tentatively tried out their ideas with each other, but resisted sharing with the whole class. Those that did want to jump in were held back when the momentum for the classes didn’t build. If they wanted to lose themselves in any building momentum of the class, they were brought back to self-consciousness by the 'resistors'.
And there was Jemima in Janet’s class. When it came to her turn at ‘My Name is, and I like...’ the tears flowed. She was a shy girl in the midst of loud and confident boys and girls and naming herself and what she liked seemed to be beyond her, in the pressure of the moment. It was Janet, rather than Pip, who insisted that she take her turn. With coaching and encouragement, she managed a fleeting gesture towards the task. Sufficient to let her off the hook with Janet and to enable her to say “I did the exercise”.

For Pip, by far the most significant development in the early weeks of the drama program, beyond building these new relationships, was the intensity of reaction by the children (and teachers) to the simple feats of dramatic enactment that they were invited to engage in. It was early days for her project, Pip knew. She sensed that this first surprise provided an important clue to what she hoped to learn about working with communities making theatre. She wondered what it could mean.

Did a simple task like ‘What are you doing’ affirm the actor in the non-actor? Did the children feel capable of joining in because the subject matter was themselves, and their lives - did the exercises give them a chance to be experts? Were they freed from the prospect of failing because they were the experts? Did they relish the shift in power relations in the classroom? Moving from desks to the circle, from teacher authority, to the more accessible Pip?
Or was it more simple, more fundamental, than all of these things? Had they been waiting to be asked? Did a drama activity give them a chance to speak and to be heard, in relative safety?
Pip put all the questions into the mix and wondered what would come next.

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PART TWO: MONSTERS AND THE STORIES OF OUR TOWN

The day did not start well
Pip walked into the Hall and sighed her first sigh of the day. It was just as she had left it at 5.30 yesterday. The sound system was hooked up. The countless metres of shapeless blue fabric had been fashioned into Stage curtains complete with gaps for entrances and exits. But the seats remained in neat stacks of ten in the corner, and the floor was dotted with the mud and detritus of days of much coming and going, giving it an unkempt look. In two hours, the Country Fair would be underway, and the Preps, Ones and Twos would be due to perform. Their parents would want to have seats to sit on. Clearly, there was no time for reflective sighs.

As she swept the hall and somewhat grimly unstacked the chairs, she mused. The Fete committee had galvanised teams of volunteer workers, who had worked tirelessly to prepare the school for today. There was bunting, canopies for stalls, tables for the Devonshire Teas and
barbecues for the sausage sizzle. The outdoor stage had been assembled for the High School Band, and the chook wheel was in a prominent place.

The tables had been set up in a corner of the Hall where the home made cakes, later to be auctioned, would be on display, but nothing had been done to prepare the spaces where the plays would be performed. This was her job, she realised. Brigitte and Margot, the Fete organisers, had overlooked the plays in these last minute preparations. Not because they didn’t want to help, but because they saw it as Pip’s domain. At least, this was what she speculated. As she swept, it made perfect sense. She had carved out the Performance Program as a niche within the Country Fair and had taken responsibility for it. She had enlisted parents to help with costumes and props and sets and with rehearsing the littlest performers. Of course she would take care of the Hall, and the OOSH Building, too, where her troop of Grade Six children would perform their plays for pre-schoolers.

Reverie interrupted. Had anything been done in the OOSH building for the Pre-School plays? Did they even have a set? Did anyone know they were going to be performing there?

Pip threw the last couple of chairs in the direction of the front row and took off for the OOSH building. Sandra, the OOSH co-ordinator (and sometime performer) was calmly setting up for the Face Painting. Pip tried to form coherent sentences but the panic was definitely setting in. No sign of preparation for the Children’s plays. Pip began pulling the
free-standing screens out in an attempt to make a performance space. What a terrible idea, she thought to herself, as she pointlessly and artlessly covered the screens with some kind of flimsy paper. This was definitely not good.

She checked her watch. An hour till start time. She saw Margot out of the corner of her eye. Could Margot find someone to help her with this? Margot had someone in mind. In fact, Margot had asked a parent helper a couple of days earlier about some fabric that could be used to 'dress up' these very screens. Margot hadn't completely forgotten her, she realized. But Margot's helper was nowhere to be seen and neither was the promised fabric.

Pip had to consider that Margot was marginally more stressed than she herself was. They had a walking conversation as Pip returned to the Hall to put up signs advertising the program of performance for the day. Both with clenched teeth, both thinking much more than they were prepared to say at that moment in time.

The day had not begun well, Pip thought. She really wanted to sigh again, but resisted. Pip found Frank Kennedy, the School Council president, an affable, smiling policeman by day, an affable smiling Council president after hours. She hoped she might enlist his help with last minute preparations for the Hall. Frank smiled, affably, and chatted for a moment, helped for a few moments more, setting up the very last of the
chairs. Then he was off - on his way to set up the PA next to the Chook Raffle Wheel. These things couldn’t wait.

Pip finally took a moment to sigh. How stressed could an individual be before actually exploding? Time stopped momentarily. She paused to gather up the strands of energy she knew she would need to shepherd her performers through their plays. Miranda, garlanded in green for her role as the Beanstalk, came through the door with her mum Dana. Pip knew there really was no more time for sighing. She walked across to welcome them and to admire this most wonderful Beanstalk.
On Stage
Performances Today
11.30 Brinkley Hall Preps, One M, Two L
The First Day.
The Grade Twos tell the story of the first day of school in Belbrook, August, 1934.

Jack and the Giants
On that first day, the children hear an unusual fairy story, which tells what really happened when Jack went up the Beanstalk. Told today by Grade One M.

The Belbrook Monster
If you see unusual footprints down on the slope today, be careful. It might be the Belbrook Monster. If you have never heard the story of the Belbrook Monster, you can hear it told today, by Prep L.

All of these short plays were created during drama classes with the children during Term 3.

12.30 O.O.S.H. Building Grade 6
Two short plays for children

Cinderella No Baloney
A disco version of a traditional tale. Based on an original story by Grade 4 student, Max Hughes, this is an updated version of Cinderella, who dreams of marrying the Disco Prince and becoming the Disco Queen, down at the Lyn Daniels Dance Studio.

Rapunzel
Who would have believed that this story is based on actual events which took place in Belbrook, a long time ago, when it was Bell's Creek? A traditional story told with a local flavour.

A small group of Grade 6’s with an appetite for the stage, volunteered for this extra opportunity…performing these two short plays for the younger visitors to the Country Fair.

12.45 Brinkley Hall Grade 3/4
The Time Machine.
What happens when a group of children with not a lot to do build a ‘Base’ down on the Slope, and find that they have made a Time Machine?

With the help of a couple of mysterious children, this little band travels back to the time of the Dinosaurs and back to when their parents were children at Belbrook Primary School. Then it’s into the future, and who could imagine the perils of that journey?

This play was created in consultation with the children of 3/4M and 3/4B, when they responded to the question, “what would happen if a group of children made a time machine?”
Chapter Seven: Belbrook Stories – A Novella

1.45  O.O.S.H. Building  Grade 6
Repeat Performance  Two short plays for children
Cinderella No Baloney
Rapunzel

2.30  Brinkley Hall  Adult Drama Group
Progress at the ‘Progress’
Beginning back in 1918, the Belbrook Progress Association Hall was a social hub for Belbrook residents, and was especially popular at the time of the Bazaar. We take a look at what might have happened at the Bazaar, back in 1918, and then again, in 1955. The Adult Drama Group presents some snapshots of Belbrook history through a series of short sketches. Come and hear the world premier performance of a new song, Up Belbrook Way, composed by local musician Katriona O’Day

For the past ten weeks a small group of parents of Belbrook P.S. children has been meeting.
This play represents those weeks of conversation, workshop and rehearsal.

3.00-4.00  Outdoors (Basketball Court area)  6A, 6K
Watch this Space
Clowns, comedy, mystery, drama, intrigue, advertisements, dances of the future……The Grade 6 students have put together a series of short performances that might take place next to where you happen to be sitting. You may become a witness to a murder, or a theft! You may help to put out a fire or rescue a cat as the intrepid Belbrook Primary School branch of the C.F.A (Clown Fire Authority) go about their business. You’ll never know what will happen next! So Watch This Space!

The Grade 6 students have taken responsibility for creating their own performances. Based on characters and ideas developed in drama classes, the students have worked in small groups to create this array of entertainments.

4.30  Brinkley Hall  Grade 5H
Lovely Lucy Loverly, a melodrama
Bring your cup of tea, or your drink and come into the Hall at 4.30pm. You’ll be able to Hiss the Villain, and Cheer the Hero, as the Grade 5 students recreate an olde time melodrama. We follow the fortunes of the lovely Lucy Loverly, and Ernest Moneybuckets, the villain who would make her his wife.

During the drama classes in Term 3, the Grade 5 class showed a particular talent for exaggerated comedy. This melodrama was created to show off these talents.
The birth of a monster

In 1991 acclaimed Canadian drama educator Norah Morgan came to Sydney for a drama conference. She brought with her a workshop about a small town that is confronted with the fear of a monster lurking in their gardens and trampling their washing. Pip was trying to recall the details of the workshop as she gathered up her tape recorder, tambourine and winter jacket on her way out of the house on a chilly August morning. She wondered whether such a monster might lurk in the streets and gardens of Belbrook. Shortly she would be going in to her drama session with the Preps and she had woken that morning with only one certainty. The plan she had made to work on a script about the first day of Belbrook Primary School, which she’d written with the Preps and Grade Ones in mind, was not going to work. It had been a bad idea on Monday when she’d had the Grade Ones. Then, she’d abandoned it early in the session. And it would be an even poorer idea to work on such a script with the Preps. Her previous workshop with the preppies had delved into the story of the school and the first day, but she knew in her heart that she had been pushing it. This was not a story coming from the children. There are times when you can just take community theatre a bit too far, she told herself. These might have been stories of the school community, but they certainly didn’t have much currency with the five and six year olds. History for them was last Christmas, not sixty years ago.
Pip formed a mental image of a large and distinctive footprint, left in the mud down near the slope, and wondered if the town's mythology could be helped along just a bit. She remembered Norah's gentle, unhurried and inclusive story building back in Sydney all those years ago and hoped that Norah wouldn't mind what she was just about to do to her lovely workshop.

The day begins with 'Yes Lets'.

*Let's suggest something that we can all pretend to do or be.*

*Let's all be spiders.*

*That's a good one.*

*Let's pretend we're watching the footy.*

*Go Collingwood. Go the Bombers. Yeay!!*

*Let's go on an adventure.*

Yes let's.

Pip tells the children this will be another story of their town. Yes, a bit like last week's but quite different. In this story, the people of Belbrook have discovered a mysterious footprint in their town. Bigger than a bear, and definitely not a dinosaur. Does anyone know anything about it?

Quite a few people of Belbrook town have something to say about the creature. The people of the town call a meeting and invite a scientist to
help them with the mystery. Pip has a clipboard. She is the scientist. Questions are asked. What do you think it looks like?

It’s very big.
Perhaps it’s a dinosaur.
Bigger.
Bigger than a dinosaur? (I’ll just write that down)
It might be a giant.
It could be a dragon.
What else can I hear about this story?
It might be monster.
Would that worry you, you people of Belbrook, if it was a monster?
Yes!
I’ve got something to say. I saw a footprint. And it keeps on standing up and it takes a step and it falls over... and it gets up and falls over again. That’s so interesting. So it falls over?
I think it might have a broken leg.
We might have to catch it.

The story of the Belbrook monster unfolds. The scientist asks the townspeople to draw the monster. They use Tali’s connector pens which are the best tools for such a drawing. Plans are made for traps around the houses. The Scientist wants to study the monster in a laboratory.
It becomes more complicated, this story. What if the monster isn't doing anyone any harm, and has been living quietly in Belbrook for many years, perhaps since the elders of the town were young? Mrs Lydon, sitting on the sidelines, is consulted as a town elder. She remembers stories of a monster when she was a child.

And then there is the matter of the baby.

There's the baby footprints.
I see. Did you say a baby?
Yes, Yes because when it...we'll have to catch two at the same time..

The children puzzle over the problem of a monster with a baby that will need looking after, a scientist who wants the monster for her own purposes, and the possibility of harm if there is a monster out of control. They find safe haven in their houses, created under desks and behind easels. They gather in twos and threes and speak fearfully and bravely about what they would do with the monster with the twenty legs.

A single child comes forward.
I am taking care of the monster and her baby, she says.
I have been feeding them and taking care of them, and I've told them they are safe. I know how to talk to them and I won't let any harm come to them. She is quite certain of her actions and will prevail.
But what about my men? says another child, who is the richest man in the town. The monster has killed his men.

Time is running out for the monster, and for Pip, who has another class. There must be two monsters, a feral one, and a mother, who is protecting her baby. The scientist can trap the feral monster, and the child who knows how to talk to monsters can take care of the mother and her baby.

The story of the Belbrook Monster has been born.

Pip calls the children to sit near her on the mat. She opens a large folder filled with empty pages, but for the first one. On this page it says, “Once upon a time”.
This is the story of the Belbrook Monster, she tells them. But it hasn’t been written yet, because it was told for the very first time today. I didn’t know what the story would be. Now I do.

Briskly, Pip gathers up her things, and promises to return next week. The children gather around their enormous drawing of the monster with the twenty legs, and discuss with Mrs Lydon where in their classroom they might hang it.
Augusto Boal and the children of 6A

Janet tells the kids to put away their books. If they haven't finished all the Maths they can do it later. It's almost time for drama. She casts a sceptical eye over her disparate group and wonders what the day will bring. There have been murmurs and complaints all week about the coming drama class. Threats of non-participation, perhaps even non-violent non-cooperation. She's spent the week letting them know very clearly that this isn't an option, but even so, now that drama time has come around, she's apprehensive. She notes with relief that Jonas and Alexander are both away. And so is Dale. That might help. Cassidy hasn't said a word all morning. Finally, his mum is giving him his medication. Perhaps today would be better. The kids know that she expects more of them this week. She hopes they care.

In the newly appropriated 'Drama Room' Pip hears Six A thundering down the stairs. She wraps up her session with the Grade Fives. They go out smiling, as does their teacher, Fran.

Pip looks around the room, checking for potential sources of distraction or destruction for the Grade Sixes. It's a good room for drama. The best in the school. This is part of the original school building from the 1940's, with high ceilings, deep set windows, and good acoustics. The floor is carpeted and the sound doesn't travel. This could be a safe room, Pip thinks.
Phillip is through the door first, followed by Darren who is chasing him for some reason known only to the two of them. Janet arrives and pulls them back from the brink. Pip performs 'friendly and welcoming', and hopes that they cannot sense her lurking dread.

"Let's sit down in a circle".

The diminished group sits in a haphazard circle. Cassidy sits at the abandoned teacher's desk in the corner and plays with paper clips. He doesn't want to argue, but he really doesn't want to be here today and he definitely doesn't want to be in a circle.

Pip unfolds her plan. She speaks to them as clearly and respectfully as she can without wanting to sound cold. It's a bit of a balancing act but so far so good. She introduces a game designed to challenge and focus them. It's not a great choice. They are quite focussed when they play, but the challenge is too great. The game is too hard and in the end, Pip chooses to let it fade away. There is more at stake today than succeeding at a game.

Janet watches warily. Her kids are going along with everything that's asked of them. They’re good kids really. Phillip has a sweet nature, underneath. And Darren is a born leader. She’s waiting for the signs of resistance they promised her earlier in the week, but nothing so far. She
thinks they might be enjoying themselves. Even when the game isn't working they don't seem to mind.

Pip suggests that they do some work that is only for their class and only about them. This is interesting. She starts to describe a drama activity that she knows about that she thinks the grade could do. The activity, she tells them, is based on a story from their class. It has to be a particular kind of story, in which someone exercises power over someone else. Something that isn't fair. Has anything like this happened in their class, Pip asks? She continues:

*There could be several stories. Different people might have different ideas about what stories should be told. As a group we choose one of the stories, and act it out. But the acting out has certain rules that I'll teach you. The rules make it easier to act out, not harder....*

*Anyone can tell a story, but there are two conditions. It must be true, and names shouldn't be used.*

Pip is introducing them to the work of South American theatre director, Augusto Boal. She wishes she could be more precise. She thinks she's selling Boal really short, but on the other hand, she doesn't want to put the kids off by using language they aren't familiar with. She fears that "oppression" might be a word they haven't heard, and if she uses an unfamiliar term right now, she might lose them completely. She is confident that they all understand what oppression is, however. Charles
puts his hand up. Charles is one of the quiet kids in the class. He is small with a ready smile. He’s adept at sliding below the radar of the loud and boisterous — those kids who might otherwise choose to pick on him.

_We used to have a really nice set of dominoes. We were allowed to play them when we finished our other work. I really loved those dominoes. One day the other Grade 6s were in our room. When we came back, the dominoes were all over the place. The set was totally destroyed. I was distraught._

There is some discussion about the event. Embellishments are added. Janet commiserates with Charles over the loss of the dominoes. "I was devastated", he repeats.

Pip asks if there are any other stories. Phillip has his hand up.

_‘I’ve got a good one. There was this one day Jonas, I mean, someone found these tiles at the back of the class, and he started throwing them at me. One of them came this close to me, and cracked the window right behind me._

"Remember that we’re not using actual names", Pip reminds them. "And how did you feel about this story? How do you think the boy in the story was feeling when the tiles went sailing by?"

"I didn’t mind," Phillip adds. "Jonas is my friend".
The boys are intrigued. They love Phillip’s story so Pip tells them this is the story they will use. Phillip, the oppressed, is thrilled.

She transforms Boal’s Image Theatre into a game of ‘Picture Postcards’ to begin. They build the image of the story, one person at a time. Many people remember the incident, and want to represent themselves in the image. Pip introduces the first new vocabulary ‘silent negotiation’. It’s challenging for the Grade Sixes. Silence and negotiation.

The atmosphere in the room is charged. The energy is feverish and the room is noisy, but everyone is interested. "Let’s add thoughts", Pip suggests.

She explains how those who are not ‘in’ the image can enter it, and speak a thought for one of those who are ‘in’. The protagonists embrace the oppressions of the image.

*It’s fun to throw tiles.*

*It’s fun to have your friend throw them at you.*

"What about these people here?" Pip asks.

Attention turns to a neglected corner of the image, where three children have been placed, frozen in attitudes of attention or despair. In this section of image, the teacher is attempting to help one of the children with her work. Another child is concentrating on his books.
"What thoughts could you give these people?" Pip asks.

I wish they'd stop so I could get on with my work.

I hate my job.

Janet looks closely at the onlookers. She wonders aloud what they might make of these comments. "Yeah course they'd say that," someone mutters.

"Let's try and 'resolve' the oppression here," Pip suggests. "Do you know what 'resolve' means?"

No one asks what oppression means. The image has done its work. Pip guides them through the stages of resolving the oppression. They use silent negotiation, silently, and then 'activate' the image, bringing it to life to move it from oppression to resolution.

Janet looks at her watch. Twenty-five minutes on the same task. She makes a mental note.

For the second time Pip asks the group to form a circle on the floor.

There is no circle. The children of Six A huddle around Pip on the floor. The movement is spontaneous and without rancour. They look expectantly at her waiting to hear what might come next. Pip and Janet exchange glances. Has something just happened here?
The class moves on to the next task. They work in groups, creating new images from their own lives - images of oppression that they are to resolve. They draw on the work they've just done, struggle to work without words, but are clear about the task. Darren and Phillip are leaders and embrace the activity.

Play lunch starts and Pip steals two minutes of their time to finish the work. Janet praises them and sends them off to their break. She is smiling and so is Pip. It has definitely been a better day.

"Just wait till next week," Janet says. "It'll be different when those troublemakers are back."

* 

PERFORMING ARTS AT BELBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ever thought of having a go at acting? Thought it might be interesting to do drama? Not much experience, but thought you might enjoy being involved in a play? Got some free time on a Monday?

THE LATEST THING AT BELBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL: DRAMA FOR GROWN UPS!

THE ADULT DRAMA GROUP MEETS IN BRINKLEY HALL EVERY MONDAY 11.30AM –1.00PM.

ALL PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, INTERESTED FRIENDS, ARE WELCOME.
DROP IN NEXT MONDAY, OR CALL PIP HUGHES (7592 4549) FOR MORE INFO.
SEE YOU ON MONDAY.
Telling tales or not in Brinkley Hall

The Performing Arts Project at Belbrook Primary was to have a spot for adults. There was a small and dedicated group of parents who came to the school almost daily. Monday morning assembly was always well attended. The mums, occasional dads and inevitable toddlers would observe from the chairs placed against the walls of the Hall. Gossip was exchanged. Arrangements for afternoon play and sleepovers were made. Plans for walks through the Nature Reserve were formulated. The latest problem with the Uniform Policy, or the most recent fundraising drive were posted on the unwritten agenda and worked through, without the benefits of a chairperson or minutes. This was the place to find out what was going on at Belbrook Primary.

From time to time, Pip would pop in to Monday Morning Assembly, endure the taped Julie Anthony version of Advance Australia Fair, and make contact with one parent or another. Sometimes it was to arrange play afternoons or sleepovers, or to check when the money from the raffle was due back. Sometimes it was to check on some School Council business. In the weeks leading up to the start of her performing arts project, she started going to Assembly more often, touting business for the Adult Drama Group. Notices for the Group appeared in the newsletter and on the display board down at the local supermarket. Sandra West, the OOSH Co-ordinator and parent of Adele in
Three/Four M, thought she might like to come along. She liked to sing but had never done anything like act in front of people. She thought it might be time to try it out. Maybe she could learn to not be so embarrassed. Evelyn MacKenzie always helped with the school productions. She was a whizz with a sewing machine and could make any kind of costume. Now that Simon was in Grade Two, she thought it might be time to try something new. She thought she might give the Adult Drama Group a try. One or two other parents chatted about the idea that adults could have their own drama group, but it wasn’t for them.

For the first two Mondays, there were just three people. Sandra arrived first.
"Am I the only one here?"
"So far."
"Who else is coming?"
"Well, I’m expecting Margot, and Evelyn MacKenzie, and Katriona, although she mightn’t come today - she’s not well. Do you know how to light the heater?"

The first couple of Adult Drama Group workshops were held in the Brinkley Hall. The winter chill hovered over the hall from late May till September. There were gas wall heaters in each corner of the hall, but not all of them worked, and the working ones were turned on only as needed. Evelyn and Sandra didn’t know each other, so when Evelyn finally arrived at the first session of the Adult Drama Group, Pip did the
introductions. Casual chat ensued. The three adults hovered near to the working heater and talked of many things. No drama to speak of took place in the first session. There was quite a lot of talk about doing drama, about reasons for coming along, about the desire to try something new, about overcoming shyness. Eventually, there was a lot of talk about the play they might perform at the Country Fair. They made a list of ideas.

EXAGGERATED CHARACTERS
SHORT SKETCHES REPEATED DURING THE DAY
MADAME WHO RUNS A B&B AND SERVES DEVONSHIRE TEA
MODERN TIMES/OLDEN TIMES IN CONTRAST
COOKING SHOW (OLDEN TIMES) - PARAKEET PIE
ETIQUETTE - HOW TO.

Pip guided the discussion, carefully recording any suggestions at all. She thought all of the things they wrote down were possible and promised that she would write some scripts for them to work on, based on these ideas. She indicated that this would be a building process.

The tiny group exchanged stories. In the first week they remembered experiences of bushfires. Everyone in Belbrook had a bushfire story. And they had stories of their families and of domestic life. In the second week of the Adult Drama Group, they tried acting some stories out. It wasn’t so easy, huddled in the corner near the heater to come up with ideas for acting, but they gave it a shot. They tried making up lies.
Not very successful. They tried a game that involved mime. This felt awkward but was manageable. In the second week, they worked on their first script. It wasn’t really a script at all, it was a recipe for Parakeet Pie, taken from an old book on Australian Victoriana. Pip had an idea of a cooking show where Evelyn showed a group of people in 1900 how to bake a pie with parakeets. Sandra would be the Hostess of the cooking show. It was a beginning. It was so much easier when the words were written down. Improvising was hard.

At the end of their second week, the Adult Drama Group still consisted of three people, including Pip. She realised she might have to perform in the play at the Country Fair. It also occurred to her that she might cancel the Adult Drama Group. This would be the easiest option by far. Then she started thinking about how the group might incorporate their stories of bushfire, and made a mental note to call Kattriona. Perhaps she was still willing to join in.

_Sandra remembers the fires of '68_

_That night we were able to go back to our house. All the houses around had been burned, except ours. The grass was singed and everything, but not the house. It was eerie going back to the house later that night. I remember lying in bed, listening to the trees make that crackling sound as they still smouldered._
Juanita

After years as a music specialist, Belinda Mason now found herself back in a grade with twenty-two six and seven year olds. Some of the sweetest small people she’d met. She loved it best when they all sang together during music time. But what a motley crew they were. So many different needs. Some of the girls were way ahead work-wise but required real handling. If you pushed them too hard they’d have their noses out of joint for a week. And then there were the kids who were struggling. Darcy needed a lot of help with his reading. He was so young for his age. It was much the same with David and Juanita. But then there was Josh who was just plain naughty some days. Wonder what was going on with him? She did the best she could, but somehow, things didn’t quite click with this group. Maybe it was her. Maybe coming back in to the classroom was a mistake. No. There was nothing like sitting down with the grade and working on a new song.

She wished they were better behaved in drama. Perhaps it was just a bit too difficult for them. Still they could surprise you. Look at Juanita. Who would have thought she’d like drama? Most days you couldn’t get a peep out of her.

Juanita was one of the quiet children in One M. Pip barely noticed her in the first three sessions. This may have been because the first three weeks in One M had been a bit chaotic. For Pip, this was the group that she was least satisfied with. She came to them first, on a Monday and
most weeks left shaking her head. Was it the material, was it her approach, was it the group? After weeks of false starts, she still didn’t know how she was going to find a ‘way in’ with this group. In the third week, Pip walked in to the class with scripts based on the first day of Belbrook Primary. Within moments she realized that this blinkered commitment to 'community' stories was not going to take her anywhere with One M. She desperately needed to break through. She tried teacher-in-role and that gave her some hope. In the fourth week, she tried a new approach, a story drama. While the story of Jack and the Giants didn’t exactly give her the breakthrough she was hoping for, she did find Juanita, and a way forward.

It’s the fourth class. Pip reminds the children of the person they ‘met’ last week. Together they remember her problem. She is the wife of a Giant, the mother of little giants. Someone has been taking food and possessions from the Giant’s family - a hen that lays golden eggs, a magic harp that helps them sleep. This week the children get to be the villagers of the town where Jack lives. They all know that Jack has taken the food and treasures from the Giant at the top of the beanstalk. So far, this hasn’t been a problem. Until the letter arrives. Pip is the Mayor of the town and she reads the letter to all the villagers. Pip chooses the letter as the device to provoke the children to consider this familiar story from another angle. Darcy is jumping around, finding it difficult to concentrate so Pip appoints him bodyguard to the Mayor.
Harry is Jack and he’s happy that he’s stolen from the Giant. Why should he worry if the Giant’s children are hungry?

And then Juanita stands. As this is a town meeting, she speaks very formally, but she is also very decisive. “We must help the Giant’s children,” she tells the townspeople. “We must give them food and I will take it to them”.

Pip watches as other children follow Juanita’s lead into the drama. There are many discussions and many town meetings to decide what to do. Pip resigns as Mayor and Juanita is appointed. She can lead the delegation. Pip prepares to take on the role of the Giant’s wife. Darcy insists on going with the Mayor to see the Giant’s wife. And of course Jack must go. He is reluctant to change his view but the Mayor is insistent that he come. The other children become flies on the wall of the Giant’s house, prompted by a passing remark from Pip.

Juanita holds the drama together. She leads the delegation from the village to meet the Giant’s wife. They bring food. Even Jack agrees to hand over a crumb. With the situation resolved the villagers return to the village. Pip asks for an account of the meeting. They are sitting in a circle. Juanita stands and goes to Pip and asks her for the piece of paper she used earlier as the letter from the Giant’s wife. Pip fishes out the piece of paper from her pocket and hands it over. Juanita, the Mayor of
the village, tells her townspeople that she has received a letter from the Giant's wife and that she will read it.

Dear People of the village

Thank you for the food you have given to me and my children. My children are not starving any longer. Thank you for the crumb from Jack and for promising not to steal any more. I am so happy that I do not have to go away. My children are happy too.

Thank you for helping us,
Mrs Giant.

The drama draws to a close. Pip asks the children to talk about the story. Juanita solemnly reports on the actions of the Mayor, Jack and the Giant's wife. She tells of the letters and the visit from the villagers and of the resolution to the problem. Others join in. Harry tells his version of events, and Darcy explains what happened to the bodyguard. Belinda tells her children it's time to go back to class. Pip walks with them as they weave their way from one side of their small building to the other. The children prepare for Home Time. Belinda and Pip chat.

"They did better today," Belinda offers. Pip agrees.
"I was surprised by Juanita," Belinda comments.
"Really?" Pip is surprised. She assumes that Juanita must take a lead in lots of dramatic activity, given her work in the drama class.
"She’s not a very strong student. Not very confident. And she really struggles with reading."

"Well she must have found her niche today," Pip answers.

Pip takes this small discovery with her as she leaves the school. She knows that Juanita has just done with things with language that far older children couldn’t have managed. Drama rocks, she thinks, somewhat indulgently. Juanita would probably agree, she tells herself.

Mayor
(Juanita)
I am the Mayor of this little town
We’re having a meeting you must sit down
We must not steal from the Giants land
I will go up the beanstalk and give them a hand.

Mayor’s Assistants
(Joanna, Zoe)
We are your assistants, we will go with you
We will speak with the Giants and give them food

Mayor’s Bodyguard
(Darcy)
I’m the Mayor’s bodyguard. I’ll keep her safe!

Mayor
(Juanita)
You should come too Jack, I know what you’ve done
Bring a friend and meet the Giants, give them just a crumb.

Pip
Pip’s head was swimming. Only three weeks in and she was overwhelmed with the enormity of the task she’d taken on. Relations with the school community were oh so delicate. She was having trouble understanding where Warren, the Principal was coming from. At least, he was saying
supportive things – well come to think of it, at least he was getting out of her way and letting her get on with things. She guessed this was his way of supporting her. But he wasn’t exactly vocal about it, and he seemed ready to cave in if he encountered any resistance from parents or teachers. She decided she’d just carry on, assuming his support. Obviously he wasn’t going to hold her hand through this. She thought he might even pop into a class or two to see how things were going, but so far no sign of that. Perhaps he didn’t want to intrude. And the parents were a bit of a worry too. Pip couldn’t understand why parents would say their children couldn’t ‘do drama’. That wasn’t even the question! She wondered if it might be the Belbrook funk at work. Maybe they were sensitive to the idea of telling stories about themselves at their town. Maybe they thought it was nobody’s business but theirs. Pip really didn’t know, and suspected that she would never really unlock the mystery of the negativity that sometimes pervaded the town she lived in. That was someone else’s research project.

The juggling of all the demands of the project was her most pressing concern. How to keep her data collection going? How to make contact with parents and kids for interviews? How to manage the logistics of the drama program fitting in with the rest of the school and with the preparations for the fete? Then there was the small question of how to keep up with her two other part-time jobs and her family. No wonder her head was swimming.
Always last thing at night her mind would come back to the work itself. She could feel a niggling dissatisfaction with how she had managed the first couple of weeks. On the one hand she was pushing her agendas - looking for ways of introducing the concept of an aesthetic into the workshops, looking for ways to move towards telling Belbrook stories, looking for ways to start play-building. And on the other, she felt inadequate to the task of being the primary school drama teacher. She felt she needed to maintain a profile as the community artist, but then she’d find herself enmeshed in the teacher role. This was just not her at her best, she worried.

At such times her mind would wander back to the recent time she’d spent in Queensland working as a writer on the community play, “Yeppoon the Musical”. There her role was so clear, and her task so solidly within her grasp. First researching and writing the play, then working with the young actors on interpreting it. She was drifting off to sleep with a thousand thoughts swirling when she had a moment of blinding clarity. She had to find a way to move the work towards her strengths. She would be the playwright rather than the teacher and respond to the children’s needs and ideas through the plays they would write together. She would negotiate through her art form. She would concentrate on the things she knew well and liked to do. She would stop trying to be a primary school drama teacher. She could sleep now.
Fear and Less Loathing in Grade Two

Pip wondered about imagination and giving over to it, and she wondered about power and trying to find some. The Grade Twos set her on this course. Every class presented its own particular kind of challenge, but the Grade Twos, like Janet’s Grade Sixes, troubled her. She found their resistance disturbing – there was a hostility below the surface of their responses. Was it hostility? That’s why this class troubled her. She couldn’t put her finger on it. Perhaps it was because she sensed that they couldn’t put their finger on it either. There was something unarticulated in their response. It was a blind, blunt instrument, as if they lacked a language to express what they thought. Or perhaps, she wondered, they hadn’t been asked what they thought.

Pip’s response to this was lateral. She thought she’d tempt the Grade Twos with imagination. "Let’s pretend", "what if", "can you imagine..." So far, their responses had been frustrating, but for Pip, tantalising.

*Can you see my giant picture frame? Here I’ll draw it for you. It’s this big.*

*No. I can’t see it.*

*There’s nothing there.*

*Then later...*

*Hey you forgot your magic thing.*
Pip wonders why so many children want to resist the invitation to 'enter' the drama she creates. She watches as they hover on the edge of belief, but in the end choose to subvert the drama rather than engage with it. This is what prompts her to think about power. Do these children feel powerless in their class? How many opportunities do they have to offer their ideas and opinions? How often are they able to create from their own imaginations? Pip doesn't know the answer to these questions. She would need to spend a long time in Two B to understand the dynamic more fully. There is something that she has noticed however, and it disturbs her. She remembers the exchange she's had with the children in making a "magic picture of a nursery rhyme" inside her special picture frame. She tells the children they need to be very still, to take the magic picture.

Lotte contributes, "Gee we don't get through nearly as much as the Grade Ones." The children succeed in making the magic picture, and their teacher talks to them about behaviour. There is a pattern of intervention emerging for Pip. The small glimmers of hope in her work with the Grade receive no comment from Lotte. She too resists engaging in the imaginative world. She comments only on the behaviour, on the bad behaviour. Is this a power issue, Pip speculates? Another question she can't answer.

She decides that her approach with this class will not be to make it easier for them, but to make it harder. She wants to challenge them to
work imaginatively. She wants to show them the respect of expecting more from them. "Let's raise the stakes", she says to herself as she heads up from the staff room towards the Grade Two classroom.

Pip leads the children of Two B into the adjacent spare classroom that has become the defacto drama classroom for the junior school. She's been in earlier and set up one half of the room with chairs in rows. To begin with they all sit in a circle at the front. This is the beginnings of the drama ritual for this class. They wait, not quietly, but expectantly for the games to begin. Pip doesn't disappoint. They play 'Yes let's'. While Pip encourages children in the other classes to 'use the space' when playing this particular game, for Two B, it's a sitting down game. The game is fun, and only a couple of the suggestions make Pip say, very clearly, "'No we won't be doing 'let's pick our noses' or 'let's go to the toilet.'" Mrs Blackwood agrees wholeheartedly from the corner where she is working on her corrections.

Pip changes the tone and the activity. She asks them if they remember their first day of school. Can they remember something about that day? Can they make a sentence about it? There is general assent. Pip transforms the question into a game. _When I say 'on my first day of school I...' and point to you, you finish the sentence. As you say your sentence you stand up and act it out in the circle._
The activity takes a very long time. But she persists. She wants everyone to have a turn. She wants to hear them speak and to invite them in to the performing circle. Jason Gaines makes his contribution. *On the first day of school*...

*I kicked my sister. I hate my sister.*

At least he’s doing the activity and not kicking anyone in class, Pip reminds herself. She lets the activity play out. Cassandra, Anika and Amber even suggest that they do theirs together. Pip thinks this is a great idea, and look how it hurries things along.

Time for the moment of truth. Pip sets up the role-play she has in mind for the class. They will all be involved. They will get to be adults. This will be their town, but many years ago when there was no school in the town. The children decide who they will be. They are to attend a town meeting where they’ll discuss the issues of not having a school in their town.

It’s a strange event, this drama class. Children move in and out of the fictional world of the town meeting at will. Pip moves in and out of role and struggles to maintain any sense of progression towards an outcome or resolution. Lotte sits in the corner and checks homework sheets, occasionally chastising a child for misbehaving. Within the drama, some children challenge the resilience of the framework. Will, as the parent, complains that his children are forever getting drunk because they have
to go to school in the neighbouring town. He thrills at his role of the adult and thrills at his subversion of the drama. Rhys pretends to be an old man and uses a gruff voice. Cassandra immerses herself in the drama and offers many thoughtful solutions to the problem of not having a school. The drama is chaotic and complex and the realities shift from moment to moment. Pip persists but wonders if she should.

And yet, there is something in the subtext of the class that draws her attention. The children are interested. Their subversions are playful rather than hostile and their fascination with this entirely new experience manifests itself in their willingness to stay with the 'story' of the drama, even when they are unable to sustain their commitment to a role in the drama.

Finally, the meeting concludes with a decision to write to the Minister asking for a school for Belbrook. The class wraps up with the customary circle. Pip tells the children the story of how the Belbrook Primary School came to be built. Many of the arguments in their town meeting, she tells them, were the arguments used by the people of Belbrook sixty years ago when they decided they needed a school in their town. She shows them the photo of the first day of the first school, and they look at the adults gathered to witness the event. Who might they be? There’s the bell. And the children return to their own classroom to eat lunch before play.
Pip is exhausted but strangely exhilarated. She's not sure that she has actually taken the children into an imaginative world as she had hoped to, and the exhaustion she feels comes from the sensation of having wrestled twenty three, twenty kilo tarantulas, but she has the strongest feeling that in this class, the terms changed. She and Two B have carved out a little corner in which they now might work together.

What are the stories of our town?

Throughout the early days of the Performing Arts Project, Pip continued to be surprised. Some of the surprises troubled her, but not sufficiently for her to change tack. She trusted her intuition. This was the biggest surprise of all. The faith she had in her own instincts never ceased to amaze her. This of course, only extended to the classroom door. When she was in the classroom she didn't second guess herself. Even when she changed direction in the first few seconds of a class she seldom regretted it. There was an irony in this sense of certainty. On a daily basis she was consumed with doubt about the project itself, about her wisdom in choosing this site, about the community, and her place in it. But while she doubted the project, she didn't doubt her practice. Once at work on a script or with the children her dilemmas were mostly artistic, occasionally pedagogical.
This instinct or intuition was having a big impact on these early days, Pip realised. It was easy for an artist or a teacher to take for granted the thousand decisions made in any day. In a project such as this one, the decision-making processes could be clearly identified, particularly when there were such contrasts between different grades and different kids. Within the first three weeks, each grade was established on its own trajectory. The plan at the outset was common across the whole school: to do some introductory drama work to establish vocabulary and a way of working, and to draw on stories of the local community for the plays. It was logical that there would be a difference in approach and activities between the Preppies and the Grade Sixes, but even at this stage, the contrasts were striking.

With the Preppies, Pip had quickly moved into a 'process drama' mode, drawing on drama techniques while constructing a broad narrative framework. Attention had been paid fleetingly to the stories from the past, based on the events surrounding the first day of Belbrook Primary School. When this failed to galvanise the children, Pip quickly abandoned it and moved into an imaginative frame rather than this historical one. There was a parallel journey with the Grade Ones, although her challenge with this group was not content but process. With this group, Pip found herself digging deeply, into instinct and experience, to find a way of working that really engaged the children. At times she felt that she was playing this elaborate war game with the Grade 1s. Each failed strategy prompted a return to the drawing board. She hadn’t found her
way with this group and felt like an amateur tactician each Monday as she left this class. Still, instinct was at play - telling her to keep trying new things and telling her clearly that she was yet to succeed.

The pathway with the Grade Twos appeared to be opening before her in an unexpected way. She’d used the same material about the first day of Belbrook School with this group, and then found an imaginative frame to place it within. For this group, this was a way in. Pip wondered how she knew she was on the right track with this group. There wasn’t a great deal of tangible evidence to support her confidence. The sessions were still chaotic and fractured, and she struggled to bring all the children together, with her, in any activity. And yet, there was something in the quality of their responses that suggested to her that a door was being held open for her. Perhaps it was the joy which pretending offered them. Perhaps the game of being allowed to be adults, or naughty children, or a teacher, was a liberation for them that they had not previously encountered in a classroom setting. Pip decided that different children probably had different reasons for being excited by the drama classes, and that whatever those reasons, this excitement was one key, and her historical framework was the other.

There were two Grade Three/Four classes and they were as different from each other as they each were from any other Grade. Pip wondered whether her approach to these two grades was informed most by her perception of the classroom teachers. One of the Three/Four teachers,
Pete was the most laid-back teacher she’d had ever encountered. He was probably one of the most innovative too, although it wasn’t a label he would have been comfortable with. He had a very good relationship with his class. He taught many literacy and maths classes through the medium of sport, his passion. Pip had known Pete for many years and knew that he was not a fan of ‘drama’. When she selected activities, and tapped in to her instinct in Pete’s class, she was monitoring his response, as well as the kids. Surprisingly Pete had been interested and involved in the first couple of sessions. Pip felt encouraged to extend his class further as a result. With Pete looking on, they worked well in groups, and they embraced the challenges of drama activities designed to build their drama vocabulary. Pip had not yet decided on how to proceed with the Three/Fours on a play. She’d put a number of story-building activities in motion with both grades (homework activities about family stories, and extended family stories), but they had not ignited any great interest in either grade. Pete seldom followed up with the suggested homework activities anyway, so it seemed to be evolving into a dead end.

The other Three/Four teacher, Bernie Mac was more diligent in following up requested homework tasks. She brought a very different energy to her grade. Bernie was frenetic in her approach to her work, and was a vocal enthusiast of the drama program. When Pip came in to her class, however, she would use this time to do other things. There was always some minor crisis to attend to in Bernie’s class. She was new to the Grade and the school, having taken over the grade after a
disrupted second term due to a number of staff changes. The children were still finding their way with Bernie and she with them. For Pip, this was a critical factor in the way she worked with the group. She took fewer risks here than she did with Pete's group, and found that her expectations were lower. This was frustrating for some of the class, like Max, Pip's son, but fine for others, for whom drama was a new experience. In some ways, this group like the Grade Twos. The simplest opportunities to 'pretend', or 'create a character' offered a liberation that was new to them. She seemed to do less with this class than she did with the other Three/Four class and rarely asked them to work in groups.

Pip planned to do one play combining both groups. She was aware that it would take more time and more intuition to know how she might tap into the possibilities that were starting to appear amongst the obstacles.

The Grade Fives represented the best hint of what might be possible. It was a large grade with twenty-eight children, but the most cohesive of all the grades. Their teacher, Fran Hay, was a firm taskmaster who occasionally revealed great warmth and regard for her students. Her class was co-operative and well behaved. Nothing less would be tolerated. They had taken to the drama program with great enthusiasm. Here Pip could take risks with more challenging content. She was making real in-roads she felt, in building an understanding of the aesthetic. This was a relief for Pip. After all, wasn't that her research question?
The other side of her research, the stories of the community, hadn’t really surfaced with any of the senior grades. Pip was on the look-out for ways to tap into the stories of the town. As yet, beyond some simple storytelling about themselves, Pip hadn’t found an opportunity to segue into the critical research and story-building phase of the work with the Grade Fives, or either of the Grade Sixes. She was aware that her focus was strongly on the children themselves, and on helping them to see themselves as the makers of the drama. Her instinct told her that they would find their way into being play-makers by using their own experiences. Funnily enough, she found that the Grade Fives struggled with making stories. They loved the processes in drama, but were as yet unable to translate their ideas into a dramatic form. This was the most immediate challenge.

With the Grade Sixes, the challenges were more personal. She needed their trust. She wanted them to want to work with her. She felt that she was drawing on any trick or strategy or activity from her repertoire to keep in touch with either of these groups. The Boal work had been a necessary and helpful diversion. No such work had been used with the other Grade Six class. They had embraced the drama experience from the first week. Their teacher, Betty, was a little jaded. She enjoyed the watching the drama classes, and looked forward to someone coming in to work with her kids. The children, Pip sensed, enjoyed the different, and perhaps more positive energy she brought. Things had gone well so far, Pip thought. Her instincts had not failed her, but she needed to proceed.
with caution. This group still had the drama program and Pip on probation.

Pip sensed that she definitely had a conditional relationship with Janet’s class. She felt that she was working week to week with them, hoping in each session to get a glimpse of what might take them to the next session. She had hoped that the Grade Fives and Sixes would create their own characters based on stories from Belbrook history. Pip still liked this idea, but was not at all clear about how she would lead this disparate group of Grade Sixes through a process of research and character building. The instinct speaking to her at this point told her that this approach may not be structured enough, let alone of any interest. She’d keep working on skills until she had passed her probation.

One final surprise for Pip: the resistance to the local stories she encountered with many of the children was in fact the passport to drama in her work with the adults. When Pip introduced her small troupe of adult performers to drama activities, to improvisation, acting exercise and theatre games, they became uncomfortable. Perhaps they felt too visible in such a small group? A story, particularly a script, provided a welcome crutch that they embraced. More quickly than she’d anticipated, Pip had moved with her adult group into writing and rehearsing scenes for their play. The process - skill building and
performance making - become absorbed into what could comfortably be called ‘rehearsal’.

PART THREE : PROGRESS

Progress in the Hall

The noise in the hall was incredible. The air damp, the floor muddy. Everything was starting to look just a little bedraggled. The curtains that defined the stage area were starting to droop; the backstage area was littered with discarded props and small costume items. Even the cakes on display on the other side of the hall were beginning to wilt.

There was nothing in the hall to absorb the sound. Voices bounced off the vaulted ceilings and off each other. The clatter of chairs as one audience moved out and another moved in was cacophony defined. Pip was silent amidst the noise. She tried to find some focus for the task at hand. In a couple of minutes, the Adult Drama Group would be performing their play, Welcome to the Progress, and she would have to perform with them as their Narrator. She couldn't imagine how she could pull this off. She had never intended to be a performer today. Experience had taught her that it was never wise for her to take on important tasks on the actual day of a performance she was directing.
She was always too nervous. As far as nerves went today was off the scale.

Evelyn MacKenzie carefully laid out all her props: Her strips of bacon made out of fabric; her plastic lemons; her mixing bowl and her hand stitched parakeets. She went through her mental checklist of scenes, and ticked off each item of costume she would need. She put the Drizabone and the .22 nearest the curtain. She would need them quickly, as soon as they’d all sung the song. She could hear Charlie and his mates laughing and talking at the back of the hall. She wondered how many stubbies they’d consumed. She was nervous and excited at the same time. She hoped she wouldn’t forget her lines especially in front of Charlie. The kids were all out there as well. If Simon could carry off his part and he was only in Grade Two, then she should be able to manage. Gee it was noisy in the hall.

The Hall slowly filled with the new crowd. Charlie MacKenzie and his mates made themselves at home in the back row. They even brought in an extra stubby or two to tide them over. Some parents wanting a bit of a sit down, others curious to see what the Adult Drama Group had been up to, wandered in. Children with sticky fairy floss faces and sample bags saw empty seats and sat down, wondering what was going to be on next, now that their plays were over. Teachers, also curious, and just a little bit weary of all the outdoor activity followed. Fran and Betty wanted to support the Adult Drama Group and Pip, and were interested
in what this play might be. Derek returned to his spot behind the video camera. He hoped that the adults would speak up. With all this noise in the Hall, the camera mike might have a hard time picking up everything that was said. He hoped that the video from earlier in the day would come out all right.

Katriona grimaced as she tuned her banjo. Those bloody yobbos at the back of the hall were going to be trouble. She could feel it in her bones. Years of pub gigs had taught her how to read a crowd within minutes, and this was going to be a tough crowd. Still, she was determined to enjoy herself today. This was a good bunch to work with, and now that Mitch, Pip’s husband was helping out, they should do well. It was fun to be working with him. His presence had lifted their little play, and he was bloody funny sometimes. And he could sing! Katriona looked over at Gareth. He was excited, she could tell. He loved being the only kid in the adult play. He was nervous, though. She hoped he’d be all right when his turn came. He looked over at her, knowing she was thinking about him. They exchanged smiles.

Pip did a quick circuit backstage. Mitch was asking people for things, half expecting to see a Stage Manager hovering back there. *This isn’t Her Majesty’s now mate*, she thought to herself, as she handed him his Running Sheet and suggested he change sides for the song. Still she was glad to have him. She knew he’d cover for a multitude of minor disasters if they happened, and he could charm an audience.
Pip worried about Sandra who was looking more pale than usual. Sandra was beside herself. Nothing was where it was supposed to be. She couldn’t remember a single word she was supposed to say. There was an incredible racket coming from the Hall. There was no way she was going to be able to talk over that. She wished to be sucked into a big black silent hole and released only after the Country Fair was all over.

*Oh no. Oh no.*

The banjo had started.

*Don’t start yet, I’m not ready. Oh no. I’m going to have to go out there right now. It’s starting right now.*

Sandra took a deep breath and stepped out from behind the curtain. At least it was singing first. She knew she could sing.

Pip took her place behind the second microphone. The Adult Drama Group launched into their unique rendering of stories of their town. Progress, perhaps.

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**NARRATOR**
The year is 1918. The place: the newly completed Belbrook Progress Hall. You know where it is don’t you? It’s been built by the Belbrook Progress Association for ‘entertainments.’ There are two hundred members and they’ve been working tirelessly on their weekends, to build this hall. They say it’s worth over a thousand pounds.

*(Sandra enters)*

Quite an achievement for a little village in the Dandenongs.
Building a Base

“Let me tell you a story”, Pip says. “It’s a what-if kind of story. See what you think.”

A new kid comes to Belbrook Primary School. He doesn’t say much, but he joins in when games are being played. He’s quite mysterious, but no-one can say exactly why....

On one particular day, lots of children are away on camp. The children who are left behind have an emergency teacher who shows them how to make sun dials, out of cardboard....

Four of the children, two boys and two girls (including the new kid) are doing base-building during recess and lunch. They build the best base. The new kid brings his sun dial in to the base with him....

All the children crowd inside the base. There is mysterious thunder and lightning. When they come out, everything is different. Even the clothes are different. It is strangely silent. There are no other children playing. The school has disappeared!

They explore and discover that it is no longer 2001. It is Belbrook of the past! They have an adventure and eventually return to their own time and the school.

Each day in this week they go to their base and travel through time.
Where do they go?
What happens to them and their base?
They come back one day, and there are another group of children inside!
They come back another day, and the base itself has disappeared!
A person from another time follows them one day when they go inside to return home!
REMEMBER IT IS ALWAYS THE SAME PLACE, BUT IT DOESN'T LOOK THE SAME.

As the questions tumble out, Pip stops the story. She asks the children two final questions: “Where do they go, these Belbrook Primary time travellers?” And, then, “how will it end?”

“This is your play”, Pip tells the children. “But did you notice that there are lots of details missing from this story. That’s where you come in. It’s up to you to flesh it out, and to decide how it ends”.

Pip tells the story of the Time Travellers to both groups of Grade Three/Fours. It’s about four weeks into the drama program and she’s anxious to start working on some ideas for a play. It’s tricky with the Three/Fours because there are two groups, and there will only be one play. It’s also tricky because they are who they are. There is such a range in age and interests and malleability within these two groups. Even their teachers are poles apart. The laconic, sceptical Pete and the frenetic fringe-dweller, Bernie.
Pip puzzles over this and finally decides on the story of the time travellers as both starting point and structure. Yet again, the stories of the town have been relegated. For weeks, Pip has tried to interest the Three/Fours, their teachers and parents, in telling stories from the past, and of the local community. She’s infiltrated homework tasks, and has even made a booklet of parents’ stories for the Three/Four Ms: "They were young once". With little response from the children, or their parents, Pip can’t find any leverage for play-building. She decides to take the path of least resistance, and Belbrook becomes the site of imagined stories of the past and the future. The 'true' stories will have to find another forum.

From the moment she tells the story of the Time Travellers and their time machine, Pip knows she has the children’s attention. With this story, there is traction. A play can be built.

Already there is a real divergence in her approach to the two Three/Four classes. Usually, Pete’s group takes more risks and works more independently. Pip has been introducing the classes to quite a few techniques she feels they’ll be able to use in play-building and performance. She asks them often to work in groups. In the last couple of weeks, she’s had them writing scripts and trying them out in to the hall. Pete is astounded at his group on a weekly basis. After one particularly intensive class, when the children have all gone out to Small
Play, Pete helps Pip pack up, and he comments, in his quiet but engaging
drawl,
"You've done it again,"
"What do you mean?" Pip asks, wondering if she's missed something
completely, again.
"You've got them interested. Some of these kids aren't interested in
anything much, and they're pretty keen on this drama stuff. It's
something for them to stay involved for this long."

Pip wonders if Pete will need a cup of tea and a lie down after such a long
speech, but as he walks out of the room, Pip smiles to herself. Of all the
teachers, Pete is the toughest 'nut to crack' when it comes to drama.
He's always been the teacher least involved in school productions in
previous years, and he's been a vocal cynic about doing 'drama stuff' in
his classroom. Pip admires Pete for his easy manner and his creative
approaches to teaching. This is a good moment.

On the day when Pip introduces the story of the Time Travellers, it's a
different matter entirely. First, Pip introduces Three/Four B to some
more performance techniques - ones she thinks might be useful for the
play. In earlier weeks they've done activities about character and story,
even transforming actors into inanimate objects (or was it the other way
around?) Today they play 'Zip Zap Boing' and 'Hunter and the Hunted',
and then do some Soundscapes. All designed, in Pip's mind, to help them
with concentration, focus and the senses. There is an assault to the
senses in the class. It’s loud and Rosco, Ben and Jasper experiment with sensations of touch. Their victims call it ‘pinching and shoving’. Pip wonders what has happened to the co-operative interested children of two weeks earlier. She glances over at Pete, immersed in planning a Sports excursion in the glassed-in withdrawal room and wonders no more. If he’s not interested, why would they be? And if he’s not at her side who will play ‘bad cop’? She doesn’t want to be the teacher, she wants to make magic.

Close your eyes and let’s make all the sounds of a Haunted House at midnight. Who doesn’t have their eyes closed? Close your eyes Ben. You too, Rosco. Come back into the circle, Rosco. Sit down Ben!

Pete emerges from his voluntary withdrawal. He’s not happy. He reads the riot act. Threats are made. The atmosphere is decidedly chilly. Oh well, Pip thinks, there was no magic here anyway. Pete joins the circle. It’s time to tell the story of the Time Travellers. There is silence for the first time. It’s sullen but not very. The children were waiting for the reprimand. Now they can get on with things.

Pip tells the story and poses her question: What did they see when they came out of the Time Machine. (Remember - the place is the same, but the time has changed). Pete acts as scribe. All the ideas are recorded on butcher’s paper, in Pete’s excellent teacher handwriting. Ideas flow. They could go to the land of dinosaurs. What about the future? There
could be aliens. The Mystery Boy could be an alien. Transformation. Eyes glint with curiosity. There is the sound of the sharp intake of breath as someone gets an idea and has to share it immediately. Star Wars and Jurassic Park filter through the talk. For Pip, there are few surprises in the brainstorm, except for one. They’re in. The brainstorm is their time and they are taking over the story of the kids who build the base.

In Bernie’s class where the energy is high but unfocused, the children offer more surprises. They are more open to the ideas and the promise of possibilities unfolding draws the disparate group together into the ritual of the brainstorm. Pip writes in her less teacherly handwriting, as the children speculate about the fate of the time travellers. Dinosaurs and aliens, of course. But what if the travellers go back to the seventies and see their parents when they were at school? And what if the big kids from the High School come over and wreck the base and the travellers get stranded in another time? What about a mixed-up time, where there’s both the future and the past? The butcher’s paper is ceremonially pinned to the wall: to be visited from time to time during the week. Pip is pleased and relieved. This class hadn’t started out well. The exercises for focus and concentration and exploring the senses had confused and bemused the children. Bernie liked the mirroring exercise and thought that this was one they could practice during the week. Max, however, was less sanguine. “What did that class have to do with drama?” he asks his Mum, later that night.
Chapter Seven: Belbrook Stories – A Novella

A sign is displayed: a very special base is built
The Time Travellers (except the Mystery girl) enter

Boris
It all began last Tuesday, at lunch time.

Anastasia
That’s right, last Tuesday. We were the only children in our grade who hadn’t gone to camp. Which wasn’t very fair. I wanted to go to camp.

Boris
Back to the story. We all wandered down to the Slope to play.

Johnny
I decided to build a base. The others wanted to join in. That was a surprise. Usually, other kids didn’t want to play with me.

Charles Smyth
It was my idea to build a base. I had brought some equipment from home.

Boris
I had the idea to build a base. We’d had just made sun dials in class, and I wanted to put the sun dial on the base. I thought it would look cool.

As they have been talking, the ‘Time Machine’ starts to form on stage.

The joy of falling down

The story of the first day of Belbrook Primary School infiltrates its way into the drama classes for the Grade Fives and Sixes, and if there’s such as thing as de-infiltrating, it does that too. The responses vary from polite disinterest to casual contempt for stories from the lives of strangers. Play-building for the Fives and Sixes has stalled, until Pip discovers the joy of falling down. It begins with Janet’s brood of rogues, rapscallions and mischief-makers.

On a day which starts promisingly, Pip decides to throw out her plan, her carefully constructed set of activities building from a simple introduction to skills related to focus, concentration and co-operation,
to more complex performative applications. In their place, she proposes clowning.

"Do you think anyone here could do a stage fall?" She asks. Of course. Falling over on purpose is a class specialty.

Really! She feigns surprise.

Troy volunteers to demonstrate a fall. Pip reminds him that this is a stage fall. The skill is in not hurting yourself or anyone else. Darren tries. Jonas takes himself off into the corner of the room and has a few practice goes. Those who succeed teach those who are more tentative. Phillip applies himself to the task with fierce concentration. Jonas has no concentration at all today, but is unable to divert the usual crowd.

Pip proposes an elevation in the degree of difficulty. Incorporate the fall into a story - the story itself is simple. It's a greeting, a fall, and a farewell. The class works together on their reinvention of a five hundred year old lazzi. They examine their work, and the work of classmates, critiquing it for narrative clarity and the success of the fall. If it's funny, they know they have succeeded. Hints of character appear. The stories are embellished. The empty classroom that has become their drama studio is noisy and chaotic. Both Janet and Pip attend to the task of helping the children of Six A to fall over, on purpose. It's exhausting work. At one point, Pip struggles to be heard. She raises her voice another decibel, wondering aloud just why they have to make her work so hard.
Janet tells Pip, "That's exactly how I feel: 'Why do I have to work so hard?'"

When it's over, Pip knows it's been a good session. There's energy and excitement. It's formidable and highly volatile, but Pip senses that it's worth it, unleashing this maelstrom. Janet is less optimistic. "I don't know what's worse: the hostility they showed at the beginning, or the excitement they're showing now. It's a bit much to handle."

Pip thinks she'll hang in there, and considers ways to adapt 'the joy of falling down' to the other grades. She scans her memory for other Commedia related workshops, for that's what she's been doing, variations on Commedia del'Arte, the 15th century Italian improvised theatre form. With Betty's class she finds a park bench. One of her favourite 'impro' exercises, the Park Bench is a simple improvisational structure. One person is sitting on a park bench. Another person comes along and tries to make them leave so they can claim the bench for themselves.

Grade Six K discovers the fun of the Park Bench. They play wholeheartedly, all volunteering for a crack at the Park Bench. Pip sees something exciting in the way they play. It's performative. There is the hint of aesthetic awareness in their work. And some, Catherine and Freya particularly, take risks in their playing. They allow themselves to
be vulnerable within the framework of the game. And for the first time, the opaque Skye decides to enjoy herself, dropping her defensive demeanour long enough to take on a character. Pip is careful not to comment. This is a fragile détente: Skye might be contemplating joining in.

For the Grade Fives, learning to fall over on purpose begins with a walk. Drawing from some deep recess of recorded drama workshops stored away in her mind’s dusty attic, Pip introduces the Grade Fives to 'the walk'.

*Walk across the room, find which part of the body you’re leading from, exaggerate it, and exaggerate the walk. Let’s copy other people’s walk and exaggerate them.*

Even Mrs Hay joins in.

From walking to greeting, from greeting to farewell.

*Now incorporate the playing of a trick, or a practical joke.*

The Fives embrace the challenge of creating larger than life characters, and inventing new and unusual ways to play practical jokes.

What they can’t do is build a narrative. Their scenes have beginnings, middles or ends, but not all three in the same construction. They reach towards some notions of an aesthetic in their performances, but are blissfully unaware of what 'works' when they perform. The group of clever boys, led by Jared Mackell, performs a scene incomprehensible to Fran and Pip, replete with obscure scatological references and random
falling down, and all the students agree that it is by far the best. All of
the children laugh. Fran and Pip are bemused but not amused. Fran also
wonders aloud to Pip about the inability to construct a story. It seems
that some catalyst is absent from their formula. Pip wonders also. She
attempts to work in a more sustained way with the willing and engaging
Grade Fives but is unable to build a common vocabulary through their
work. They use the language they have been taught but cannot translate
it into action, and Pip is at a loss to guide them.

She thinks they might do a melodrama. It won’t be a Belbrook story, but
perhaps there was a melodrama performed here once, a long time ago?
If you squint and look at it sideways, a melodrama could fit in with the
theme of the Country Fair. Pip returns to that dusty attic to search for
a book that might hold a melodrama suitable for twenty-eight eleven
year olds.

*  

_Pip: Lunchtime_

Lunchtime at Belbrook Primary School. The children run from
classrooms, lunch downed in record time while sitting at their desks with
teachers looking on. Lotte is on playground duty in the quadrangle. She
supervises two of her erstwhile Grade Twos with some yard duty of
their own. Andrea is heading for the slope, a preppie on each hand. In
the new Sandpit, Frank Kennedy, the School Council President collects up
the last of his tools. The shade cloth is secured within an inch of its life. He smiles and pats the heads of the waiting Preps and Grade Ones. There are games to be played, holes to be dug, buckets to be filled, and so little time. He wanders in to the Staff Room for a quick cuppa and a chat before going home. You can do this when you're on Afternoon Shift. Frank works at the local cop shop.

The teachers gather around the recently arrived Chinese Takeaway, their Wednesday lunchtime treat. Marina and Jenny worry that they haven't ordered anything for Pip. She's usually around on Wednesdays. In fact, they'd be hard to put to remember a time when Pip wasn't around. Somewhere along the way, she crossed a line from parent to 'colleague'. No-one talks about the transition. It was a logical and natural evolution…. Pip having coffee in the staffroom..... Pip putting her two cents worth in about some new strategy for managing the irascible Jason Gaines.... Marina and Jenny decide that there'll be enough Chinese food if Pip wants to join them. They make a mental note to ask her next week.

But today, Pip doesn't join them for lunch. Her head is spinning with stories and scripts and problems to be solved, and as soon as she has gathered up all her bits and pieces from the classroom, she'll head home and power up the Mac. She shoves the now neglected tambourine into her back-pack, unplugs the cord and winds it around the tape-recorder.
She slides inside her heavy woollen duffel-jacket. It was cold this morning, hardly any sign of spring up here in the Hills.

Pip savours the moment of stillness and the soothing repetitive nature of her busy-work, packing up. It's been another frantic morning, requiring concentration from every fibre of her being. They're all so needful. Attention must be paid. The teachers need it too, her attention. She doesn't know how to handle this, and thoughts of her relationships with Lotte, and Pete and Andrea and Janet preoccupy her today. What are they thinking? What do they want from her? Perhaps she should be asking herself what she wants from them, but that thought will take her somewhere she doesn't want to go right now. Down amongst the doubts and regrets and uncertainties of her project. No, she definitely doesn't want to go there right now. It doesn't occur to Pip that the teachers might like her to join them for their special mid-week lunch.

Pip wonders how she can make a smooth transition from drama workshops into rehearsing for the plays. The teachers are the key. It has to be guided by them. She needs to find a way to hand over more of the work to them, without them feeling imposed upon. They have to want to do it, Pip thinks wryly. She finds herself thinking a lot of wry thoughts these days. She makes a quick plan. She'll make sure all the teachers have a copy of their grade’s script before the holidays. And she'll go to a staff meeting and lay it all out before them: give them some options and a chance to bail out. Surely this will get them on-side,
and give them a sense of control? That’s what they said they wanted way back at the beginning.

It’s so much easier with the kids, Pip thinks. For all the challenges of kids with ‘issues’, Pip finds it so much easier to build up her relationships with individual kids and with groups of kids. Their acceptance of her is so uncomplicated. She comes into the class, invites them into this mysterious new place called ‘drama’, and in they rush. Well, actually, it probably is more complicated than that, but at least they are able to tell her what they like and what they don’t like, and at least they seem willing to make some room for her in their ‘crowded curriculum’ of daily life.

She glances at her watch. Twenty-past one. Two hours before her own kids come home from school. Time to incorporate today’s work with the Grade Twos into some kind of draft of The First Day, the play she’ll write for them. Tonight after dinner, she’ll have a look at what the Three/Fours have written about characters and settings for their play. How can she possibly put all of those kids and all of those ideas into one play? Pip hopes the Muse will pay a visit later on tonight. She hasn’t been around much in the last few weeks, Pip notes wryly.

Pip’s passage through the playground is noted. The Grade Six boys fly down from the other end of the basketball court to bombard her with questions about their play. Can they use their skateboards and their
bikes? What about a jumping castle? Hey, what about mud-wrestling?
Phillip leaps down from the basketball court to the walkway in a single bound, almost collecting Pip and her bag with him. She laughs and Phillip bounds away with Jonas in pursuit, to correct some perceived slight in the only way he knows how: a very carefully placed thump. As she moves on, Evie, the new girl in Prep rushes over for a hug, followed by Peter, the Grade Two boy who wants to be the Principal in their play. With a quick word to each of them, Pip extricates herself and continues on her way.

Hi Pip. Have we got drama today Pip?
Where are you going Pip?
Look what I’ve got Pip, I’ve got a Fanta.
Pip do you want to buy a soft drink for ISSE? It’s for our trip to Peru.
Look what we found down the slope, Pip. Cicada shells.
Hey Pip, can I have a good part in the play? When is it going to be ready?
Are you Max’s Mum? How come you haven’t got the same name?
Are we going to play that blindfold game again Pip? That was good.
See ya, Pip. See ya tomorrow.

Pip pauses as she passes the Admin building. There are a few things that need sorting out with the Grade Six teachers. They probably won’t want to talk right now. They’ll all be having their lunch. They probably don’t want to talk shop, especially drama, right now. She’ll go home and power up the Mac. She’ll see them all again tomorrow.
The First Day: A Play for Grade Two

Ever since the Grade Twos did their whole group role play the first school in Belbrook, Pip has been working on making a play about it. Actually, Pip has tried to make a play about the first day of Belbrook Primary School with the Preps, the Grade Ones, even the Grade Sixes. Only the Grade Twos have shown any interest in staying with the story. Pip is starting to get to know the Grade Twos better. She sees their troubled relationship with Lotte and realises that this has an impact on her classes. Sometimes, if Lotte is away things progress more smoothly. And yet, she feels a great deal for Lotte who has been unwell all term. And, Lotte supports the drama program and says so at staff meetings. One day, she thanked Pip for all her effort in front of all the teachers. Pip struggles with Jason Gaines, who is openly defiant and works hard on maintaining his ‘naughty boy’ status. Simon and Peter are both a handful in their own way, but both have sweet natures and find staying tuned in for more than a minute or two really tough. Then there’s Coby and Will. Funny, bright, engaged and engaging. Always trying to stir things up, but always first to volunteer, the first to make a suggestion. The girls are a little more reticent, but in Two B there are some dynamos. Cassandra, Stacey and Amber support each other. They work and play together. They are the glue that holds the grade together.
Pip has an idea to continue her play-building with the Grade Twos. She makes a list of character names drawn from lists of families who attended Belbrook's first day. There are parents, children, and teachers. Today, they'll choose who they want to be in the play.

Pip takes them into their 'drama room', and places the names, in family groupings, on the floor. They can choose who they want to be. It takes a long, long time for everyone to find a name and role they are happy with. When they've chosen their name, they are to stand with other members of their 'family'. Cassandra and Joseph are Mr and Mrs Thompson. Two thirds of the class wants to be in the Thompson family. Pip changes surnames to accommodate the growing Thompson clan. Now there are cousins, and big brothers and sisters. Peter wants to be The Principal, Mr Sturtz. Lotte is concerned that this will be too difficult for him. Pip wants to give it a try.

At the end of the class, Pip is exhausted. There has been no 'drama' to speak of: just the choosing of names, and some simple 'introductions' ("I'm Mrs Thompson and these are my children"). When the bell goes for lunch, the children are filled with talk about who they are, and who their parents are, and their cousins, and whether they are to be a five year old or a thirteen year old. Mrs Thompson's boys, played by Coby and Will, are definitely going to be a handful. Cassandra shakes her head and tut-tuts.
(Cassandra and Joseph)

Mrs Thompson
Dear, I can’t handle these children on my own. You have to come home early from work.

Mr Thompson
I definitely think we need a school in our town. Don’t you think, dear?

Mrs Thompson
Where could we put a school anyway?

Mr Thompson
What about the Church Hall?

Mrs Thompson
Oh dear, where are the children now? Michael, put your brother down this instant. His eyes will pop out if he’s upside down for too long.

Help

In each grade a letter went home. It was printed on bright red paper, and it was a call for help.

Parents of Prep L, We need you, one of the letters said.

After several weeks of Drama Classes, the Grade Fives are now preparing to perform a short play at the School Fete (The Country Fair), said another.

We need a dedicated team of parents to help the children present a wonderful play, based on their own ideas and characters, said each of the letters.

The letter named a time and date for interested parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles to gather in the Brinkley Hall for a meeting.
Pip was surprised when she wandered into the Hall for the meeting of volunteers. For weeks and weeks she’d been putting little teasers in the newsletter about the Performing Arts Program. She’d even done a couple of poster displays down at the local supermarket, but she hadn’t had a lot of feedback from parents. She couldn’t be sure if there was much interest in the program, perhaps even less in volunteering to help. About ten people greeted her on this particular Monday afternoon. She was pleased but a little taken aback. As she smiled and greeted people, she could only think, plays, what plays? We barely have scripts for each of the plays. How can I ask for props and costumes when I’m not convinced that we even have a play? She found it especially difficult to look the parents of the Grade Ones in the eye. What if the children had told their parents about what they did and didn’t do in drama? That would be the end of her credibility.

Pip gave a fine performance of confidence. The parents (all Mums) had suggestions about how they could organise themselves, and what they would need from her.

*Could we have an outline of the plays, so we know what they’re about?* They asked.

*No problem.*

*What about rehearsals, another enquired. Perhaps we could come and watch rehearsals, so we can get more involved?*

*Great idea.*
Many of the parents knew each other. Quite a few knew Pip, either by sight, or through the various birthday parties, sleepovers and sporting events that brought the parents of Belbrook Primary in contact with each other.

After the preliminaries, people gathered together in clusters according to grade. Each cluster would be a small working group. There was a very strong showing from Prep parents. In fact the whole Junior school was well represented. There were no parents from the children of Grade Six. Pip wondered if the note about the meeting made it to parent hands. She fleetingly wondered if the notice had made it into student hands, but dismissed the thought before it could take root.

Amidst the sounds of wayward toddlers, and impatient Preppies, the meeting went well. Contact details were gathered, co-ordinators appointed. A leader emerged. Terri, a Prep parent, volunteered to be the liaison person for all the helpers. Pip was overjoyed. An unsolicited offer of help! She wanted to have Terri over to dinner, to babysit her children, to leave her an endowment in her will. She was inordinately grateful. The meeting wound down as toddler patience wore out. Pip promised to send character lists, and drafts of scripts to the parent co-ordinators before the term was over. And parents would be told about the weekly schedule and invited to rehearsals. Pip trembled at the thought of this and continued not to look the Grade One parents in the eye.
Four-thirty and the Hall falls silent. All the parent volunteers have gathered up their children and departed. Pip remembers that she too is a parent, and heads on up the hill to her house, to be with her own children.

* 

Gareth

Usually, school is the very last place that Gareth would choose to be. Some days, it’s just a bit difficult when no-one in his grade will talk to him or partner him for Library or Art. Other days it’s a living hell and he thinks he’d rather have lunch with Harry Potter’s Dementors than spend another day at Belbrook Primary School. But this term, Gareth needs to go to school as he has responsibilities. He is playing the part of Mr Beedyeye, the evil proprietor of the Childcare Factory in Lovely Lucy Loverly. Now that The Country Fair is getting closer, there’s a lot of rehearsing to be done. If he stays at home, he might miss a rehearsal and then the play won’t be as good. And besides, it’s fun to rehearse. He loves making his eyes all squinty as the evil Mr Beedyeye, and sometimes he makes Pip or Mrs Hay laugh when he complains about the children getting their fingers caught in the conveyor belt.

Thursdays are the best. When Pip comes they play drama games and rehearse their play. For some reason, the other kids are okay during drama. They have to let him join in because Pip changes around the
groups every week, and she makes a game out of forming the groups, so it’s happened before anyone can do anything about it. And there’s that rule about no criticism. He thinks also, just maybe, the other kids think he’s good at drama too. He thought he saw Joseph and Jared laughing when he did Mr Beedyeye in front of the class the other day. And Samira and Katrina even clapped at the end of the scene. Now he has to find a costume, and some props for Mr Beedyeye. He’s not really sure what he’ll wear, but he’ll talk it over with his Mum at dinnertime. She’ll have plenty of suggestions. He definitely needs a clipboard to show that he’s important. There’s probably one in his room somewhere. Gareth makes a mental note to have a look under his bed after dinner. He already knows all his lines, so that’s one thing he doesn’t have to worry about.

His Mum’s just told him that Pip would like him to play a cameo role in the Adult Drama Group. How cool is that. He’ll be the only kid in the play with the adults. He hopes he can do a good job. Now he has even more responsibility.

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**Miss Tidyup**

I’m sorry to interrupt Mr Beedyeye

**Mr Beedyeye**

I told you never to use our names in front of the customers. Then it can’t be used in court, Idiot.

**Miss Tidyup**

So sorry, Mr B. Mr…Boss, but there’s a problem with the conveyor belt which leads to the crushing machine. Something seems to be stuck in it, and it’s slowing production down. The children from the Big Room are getting behind quota.

**Mr Beedyeye**
Good work, Miss T. I’ll have to see to this right away. I hope it’s not a finger again. *(to PARENT ONE)* I tell them time and time again not to put their little fingers where they don’t belong, but will they listen, oh no.

**Miss Tidyup**
I think it’s the four year olds. They just don’t seem to be able to move their fingers quickly enough when they’re loading up the packing machine.

**Mr Beedyeye**
Take over here Miss T. It’s a new customer. Make sure you see the colour of her money first.

**Parent**
Are you sure you’ll take good care of my babies? Will they get milk at morning tea, and a nap after lunch?

*(Mr Beedyeye and Miss Tidyup laugh hysterically. Mr Beedyeye leaves.*

*

**Audition**

Some of the Grade Sixes are telling jokes in their Drama Room. Pip is laughing and nodding, sometimes. It’s Thursday and Pip has called an impromptu audition for the Grade Sixes who might want to do some more drama. The image of the quiet kids in the corner wanting to get on with things has stayed with Pip ever since the day she did ‘Image Theatre’ with Janet’s class. Each week she sees Charles and Beth and the excruciatingly shy Jemima waiting patiently to be noticed, to be attended to. Sometimes they work happily on an idea they’ve come up with. Sometimes, Pip can see their patience fraying, as Phillip, Jonas and Darren take centre stage yet again. In Betty’s class, Catherine, Freya and Milly just want to do more acting!

Freya is jumping up and down in anticipation of a really good part. Grade Sixes will be performing children’s plays on Fete day - not everyone, just an invited group. Pip targets those she feels she is missing in her weekly
workshops. Milly invites herself into the group. Pip hopes she can manage to include her. Really, she hopes she can find a way to contain her natural, unfettered, undiscriminating enthusiasm. Milly likes lots of attention. Pip had hoped to challenge this group. She wants to see them take some initiatives, and to succeed beyond the usual boundaries of class-time. Perhaps Freya can take Milly under her wing.

Pip hears the last of the jokes and tells them she’ll give out parts tomorrow (making a mental note that she’ll have to interrupt her Friday writing time to come up to school). The whole group follows Pip out of the room. They are all actively lobbying for the best part. Except for Charles, who knows patience better than most.

Pip makes another mental note. Find the right part for Charles. And Milly. And Freya, of course.

*  

(Pedagogies of) Hope

Hope manifests itself in many ways. It appears in dusty corners and under the eaves of heritage listed buildings. It smiles from the bottom of a coffee cup at recess. It shouts out in a child’s careless farewell. Sometimes, it doesn’t even look like hope at all. Sometimes, it’s just getting up in the morning, and getting to the other end of the day without weeping or turning tail to run. Sometimes, it’s an absence of despair. Hope can sometimes be the hardest thing of all. The difficult
teacher. The uncomfortable lesson. The presence of the unfamiliar force in the landscape.

Pip was right in the thick of things. Just as she had promised herself she had become the playwright and the director, rather than the primary drama teacher or the Casual Relief Teacher. She felt as if she was manoeuvring an enormous container ship into the shipping lane. But if you asked her, neither she nor anyone else could have told you whether the ship was heading towards open sea or the harbour.

However, the energy was palpable. The children were jazzed. They were making up plays and characters, rehearsing and plotting and planning. School had a different dimension. The teachers looked on, perhaps feeling in turn appreciative and apprehensive. What would this all mean for them in the final term of the year. How would they fit all their other work in? Were they expected to run rehearsals and organise costumes?

Then again, it was interesting to watch the various responses to the drama program. Some of the least likely children had emerged from behind their usual personas. Nicholas, quiet and eager-to-please was the one with his hand up first to volunteer for a new scene or activity. Jessie the sullen showing the occasional signs of interest in something other than himself and the wall he was building to keep himself safe.

There was no doubt about it, the drama program had turned a corner. Pip could feel it and could occasionally see tangible signs of its influence.
Mostly, she could see it in her own encounters with the kids in their drama time. She speculated about what the teachers might see. The changes in behaviour were obvious, but she wondered what they might see and think about the drama, about the art-form. Could they see that the children were starting to use the language of the form, comfortably and confidently? Did they notice when a child made a suggestion that demonstrated an understanding of aesthetics or dramatic structure, or character? Or were they, as Pip sometimes feared, thinking nothing about this infiltration of a new way of thinking and doing, but were wondering when they’d have time to do their reports, or even whether they’d be able to burn off this Saturday, what with the hot weather on its way. There was no getting around it, Pip had succeeded in building a bridge to the children of Belbrook and even a small number of parents, but the teachers were still firmly entrenched on the other side of the ravine. And Warren. From where she was looking, Warren wasn’t even in the same country. She knew that something had been missed. There was something she hadn’t done, early on, which may have altered her relationship with the teachers but she couldn’t see it. Not yet. She actively liked the teachers and got on well with them. But perhaps this was a smokescreen beyond which she couldn’t see. It was complex, though, and probably had a lot to do with the teachers’ own relationships to the school, to their children, to each other, and of course, their attitude to drama. So much baggage. Pip had in her mind the day that Pete had told her that he had never recovered from the
compulsory drama class he took at Teacher's College. "I had to be a tree!" he remembered, clearly still traumatised.

Pip wondered whether the carefully organised schedules and lists she distributed in her attempt to make the drama program fit as neatly as possible into the existing school routine served only to heighten the gap between herself and the teachers. Was she too efficient? Or officious! Was she intimidating? Had she succeeded in fitting herself into the school so effectively that they merely saw her as another staff member, and therefore left her to get on with things, as they did with each other?

Sometimes a person can do too much thinking.

Pip turned her attention to her work with the children. She wanted to look closely at the stages of the process - perhaps this would shed light on the subtleties of 'what worked' and 'what didn't work'.

In the Grade Two classroom, Pip had wanted to share the experience of playwriting with the children, and she wanted to give them a sense of control. With the Grade Twos, this drive to be heard and to have some input into their own destiny underscored every drama class. Pip invited the children to choose their own characters. Then, she asked them for dialogue for their characters. Mindful that some of the children were in the very early stages of reading and writing, she tried to find a way to make this task accessible, and meaningful.
So she created a form. The children might have called it a worksheet. Write down your character's name, and tell us something about them. (appearance, age, family, occupation). Here are some things your character might say. Choose one or two of these things and write them down.

And at the bottom of the form, a big space inviting them to write down other things their character might say.

In this way, the children began their playwriting careers. Pip worried that the process might merely be paying lip-service to the writing of the play and that she ultimately had control as playwright. Perhaps. But from Pip's perspective, the playwriting transaction with the class struck her as symbolic rather than token and the distinction was critical.

Instinctively, Pip felt that the Grade Sixes shared with the Grade Twos that desire to be heard and to have some control over their own destiny. So Pip designed a form for them. In their drama classes, the children had brainstormed ideas for performing outdoors at the Country Fair. On the form they could begin to etch the characters that would people their short performances. It was a very manageable form, and both Six A and Six K applied themselves to the task of filling it out.

On one memorable day, Pip sat in the circle on the floor with the Six Ks while they took turns to introduce the class to the characters they had
invented. Some used funny voices or demonstrated actions in the circle. Some spoke tentatively or briefly. Everyone spoke, and everyone listened. There was pride in the inventions contained on the forms. Skye didn’t want to say a lot to the class, but wanted to write scripts for her character, and Freya couldn’t wait to start rehearsing. She could see it all in her head, she said. The bell sounded and the circle continued until it was done. Pip collected the forms with the promise to collate them into a plan for performing, and into groups for rehearsing. There was hope in the Double Storey Building that day.

For other grades, the Three/Fours and the Fives particularly, the dynamic was somewhat different. Pip discovered a new kind of transaction. She thought of it as negotiating through the art-form. She would write a scene or an outline and the children would work on it during their drama classes. Immediately the problems of the scene or the possibilities for the story line would emerge through their work. A new draft of the script would follow. Sometimes there was too much dialogue. Sometimes an idea had been misrepresented, or just wouldn’t work theatrically. Sometimes the children struggled with the theatrical conventions that Pip had aspired to, so she modified her intentions to suit what the children could do. She would bring the new draft of the script to the next class, and the children would gravely review the changes.
For the Grade Fives, Pip had provided a story line and an outline of characters for their melodrama. One scene was to be: Lucy Loverly finds a job. The children decided that she would be a child care worker. In the absurdist style of the emerging melodrama, the Child Care Factory was born. Pip was always excited by this exchange while the children were nonchalant. How else would one do it?

Because she didn't know how else to do it, Pip took every opportunity to translate the children's ideas into another form - thoughts on a Brainstorm page, lines of dialogue or characters in a script, lists of who does what and when. For Pip, the subtext was: your ideas are important; this is your event. She wasn't sure if her gestures at validation were effective or even mattered to the children, but she did it anyway. Pip wanted it to matter to others as much as it mattered to her.

* 

Dear….

20/9/01

Dear Andrea, Rosemary, Jenny, Lotte, Pete, Bernie, Fran, Betty and Janet,

End of Term Three! In anticipation of Term 4, I’ve put together some information for you that might be helpful with preparations for the performances.

Where appropriate there are current drafts of scripts – with some further development and refinement coming up over the next couple of weeks. There are also cast lists, and descriptions of anticipated ‘final product’.

As promised, it will be necessary to do some extra rehearsals to supplement the work I’ll be doing with the children. It’s my hope that each grade now ‘takes possession’ of their performance, and that I become more of a resource than the principal facilitator. Feel free to work on the scripts and make changes with the children, without feeling that you have to consult with me.
In the younger grades, there are quite a lot of parents expressing a willingness to help. For Preps-Twos, and the 3/4 group, there are little committees forming to support the kids’ work. They’re going to take responsibility for co-ordinating costumes and props and miscellaneous jobs. There are parents who’d be willing to help out in class-time, if needed- to assist with any making and doing tasks, and with rehearsals. If it suits you to have parent helpers, let me know, and we can put the wheels in motion. Also, it would be a good idea to let me know if you’d rather not have parent-helpers in the classroom for this project.

Finally, I’ve compiled a rough list of some of the activities we’ve done in the classes this term. Thought you might like to have these as a reference. The list is not complete – stay tuned for more next term!

Thanks for all your help and support this term. It’s been a challenging and exciting project for me, and I’m looking forward to seeing what next term brings.

See you in October.

Pip

PART FOUR : THE POINTY END

It starts to rain

It’s a betrayal of the heart. Pip is beyond wishing she were elsewhere. She is pretending to be anywhere but on the basketball court as the Grade Sixes begin their performances. The clowns enter the makeshift arena defined by the bales of hay (placed much too close together Pip notices). The first drops of rain are falling and the ground is slippery. The carefully rehearsed bike tricks have to be abandoned after the first bike crashes out on the gym mats. The clowns persist with the rest of their routine, adapting as best they can. The performances roll on, the rain continues to fall, the audience shrinks, sheltering under eaves of the covered courtyard, and Pip shrinks, sheltering behind Janet and Betty, praying for a lightening bolt to end the misery. This is not how it should be. The words are swallowed up in the raindrops, and the actions
indecipherable and cramped in the too small arena. The sketches with plots lose them, and those without, lose the audience almost before they begin.

We should stop, Pip whispers to Janet. They’re getting wet. Pip’s heart heavier than the damp canvas overhangs. Her betrayal bearing down on her. She wants them to stop. Not because of the rain, but because they are not equipped. She has not equipped them, and now she wants them to stop. But Janet says no. Look at them, she says. They’re still going. They’re not giving up. They’re helping each other out, and watching each other’s work. They’re having fun. Pip tried to see what Janet saw. Periodically there were smatterings of applause. Betty, too, was smiling broadly at her motley bunch. Still Pip couldn’t see anything but her failure: the confusion on Skye’s face as no-one laughed at her clever, but under-rehearsed Medicine Show sketch reminding Pip of her inability to prepare her company for the demands of the day. Pip was not thinking clearly. She let Janet be in charge and continued to hide behind her. She was appalled at her lack of fortitude. Look at the children and their determination to complete the ‘show’. She hoped they could hear the applause. And she hoped they could all hear the praise of their teachers. But most of all, she hoped they could not see the betrayal in her heart.
Dear...

CAN YOU HELP? All helpers are welcome. We are also on the lookout for people who might have a talent they can share with us. We are in need of helpers who could
- help with choreography
- help with clowning
- have musical talents – guitar, percussion or singing
- help with drawing or painting.

If you can do any of these things and have some time over the next three weeks, please give me a call ……or leave your name and phone number at the office……..

Pip Hughes (Performing Arts Co-ordinator)

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Tom Jones Sends his Love: the delegates from Wales

Pip felt that she was definitely at the 'pointy end' of her project. Pressure was mounting on all sides. The Fete committee allocated responsibilities to each grade for a Stall on the day. The plays needed props, costumes and rehearsal above and beyond the time Pip had to spend with each group. Some of the plays desperately needed script revision. Some of the plays desperately needed scripts. The teachers were receiving polite but purposeful notes from Pip about additional rehearsals and fitting it to a time line. The children themselves wanted to practise their plays, and also prepare their stalls for the Fete. It was last term, so there were Grade Sixes to be prepared for High School, and Kinder children to be inducted into Prep, last-minute testing to be done. In the midst of it all, the delegation from Wales arrived. Eight children and two teachers from a school in Wales appeared, ready for their month in Belbrook. All were staying with families from the school.
Warren thought it would be a good idea for the delegation to use the music room in the Double Storey building as their base of operations. The teachers protested.

"That's Pip's drama room", they reminded Warren. "The kids need it for their rehearsals."

"Oh, yes, that's right, the drama program".

The teachers arranged for the Welsh delegation to use a room in the Library. Interspersed with rehearsals, classes and prop making, there were trips to the Zoo and Wilson's Prom, and Sovereign Hill for the Welsh delegation and their host families.

"Where's Brianna today?" Pip would ask Charles when it came time to rehearse their series of "Waiter there's a fly in my soup" routines.

"She's with the Welsh delegation in the city. They're going to the Arts Centre."

Charles would look disconsolate and then realise he had one more idea they could put in their scene. He'd rush off to write leaving Pip with a gap in her carefully designed rehearsal schedule. Oh well, the clowns could always do with some more attention. None of them belonged to hosting families.

And then of course, there was the 'Cultural Show'. Pip arrived after lunch one Monday hoping to work with the Grade Ones in the Hall. The Grade Ones were already in the hall along with every other grade. It was
the afternoon of the Welsh Delegation’s Cultural Show. Pip wondered how she’d missed out on hearing this information. But then, it was very difficult to keep up with all the many and varied activities of the Welsh Delegation. Fortunately, Warren had been including lots of stories and pictures in the weekly school newsletter to keep the school community up to date on the exploits of the eight Welsh children and the two Welsh teachers and the host families.

The Cultural Show is a required component of the I.S.S.E., the International School to School Experience program. The visiting delegation must prepare a performance for their host school that illuminates and educates their host school about their home country. It often includes songs and dances and cultural artefacts. All the members of the Welsh delegation were accomplished performers. Confident of their material and proud of their heritage, they entertained the Belbrook Primary School community for almost an hour with various glimpses of their lives and the history of their town. Tom Jones even made a guest appearance, as did a leek, and the Welsh Rugby Team. The Principal was enlisted into the performance at one point much to the delight of all. Warren loved the Welsh delegation and he revelled in his brief moment on stage with them. Remarkably all of the Welsh children could be heard and understood - a feat few of the children of Belbrook could achieve without a microphone.
At the end of the performance, Pip went home to her computer, to reschedule the lost rehearsals. The Welsh delegation would be leaving in the morning.

*

**Monster’s Coming!**

The Preppies learned a wonderful new game. When Pip called out, they had to do a particular action, but you didn’t know which word she would call out next, so you had to be ready for any of them. And you had to remember which action matched which word. It was lots of fun, because you could do your own version sometimes. Like when Pip called out *Monster’s Coming!!* you had to become a monster, and you could make noise and try to scare other people. When she called out *Meeting!* everyone had to huddle together and pretend to talk. That could be fun too, because you could pretend to be a grown up who had seen the Monster. They played the game every time they did drama now. Soon they would be making masks of Monsters, so they could wear their masks when Pip called *Monsters Coming!!*

They were doing a play about the Monster. Even Mrs Lydon was going to be in it. She was going to read the words from the Big Book they’d made about their story. Carey would be the fairy who held the book and turned the pages. You couldn’t hear the story unless the Fairy turned the pages. The *Monster’s Coming!* game was in the play. Mrs Lydon would
say "And the people of the town had a Meeting", and they all knew to do their meeting actions.

On Wednesdays they had rehearsals with Pip. Sometimes William's Mum would come and watch. Sometimes Carey, Brittany and Jaimey's Mums came too. They'd watch and help Mrs Lydon out with remembering the game.

William had an idea. They had just started to play the Monster's Coming! game and Pip had suggested that each feral monster could join up with another monster as they moved into the centre of the room. What about if they keep joining up together, until there's one big monster?

They all agreed that this was a good idea. William watched while the children tried his suggestion. Yes, it was a very good idea, but still not quite right. They needed to be scarier. Could they all make a circle around the Scientist, and scare him?

The other children listened carefully, and followed his suggestions. Then it was time to practise it again. Come on, William, join in, they called.

No, I need to watch from here.

"Is it better now, William?" Pip asked. "Are you pleased with the way it looks?"
William was pleased. The Preps were pleased with themselves. They had made excellent *Family Groups!* and very, very scary *Monsters!* and Mrs Lydon had done a good job on the book.

As Pip prepared to leave after this very busy rehearsal, Sarah ran over to her to say goodbye.

*Bye Pip. That was fun. Can we play that again?*

---

**The First Day, every day**

Lotte was very committed to the play her children were performing at the Country Fair. She was proud of her Grade Twos. The play was very challenging for them. It was very long. It seemed to take hours to get through it when they practised in class. Pip assured her that it would be less than half an hour when they performed it. To make sure, she’d even cut some parts of the play. She’d watched them practise and had seen that a couple of those children just couldn’t manage too many words.

Lotte now had the final draft of the script in her pigeon hole, ready for the rehearsal later in the day. She liked to practise every day. This afternoon they might start with the song. She was going to teach the children how to sing "God Save the King" and "Kookaburra sits in an old gum tree". She was pleased that there would be some songs in the play. Songs got everyone in the mood. And she was good at teaching songs.
Some said it was her forte. Fancy the children not knowing “God Save the King”. Times certainly had changed.

Lotte had a very particular technique when she rehearsed the children. When it was their turn to speak, she told them, they were to take one step forwards, towards the audience, and speak out loudly and clearly. When they’d said their line, they were to step back into place. Lotte was worried that they wouldn’t be heard. There were going to be a lot of people in the Hall, and the toddlers would be noisy. These children didn’t have the same voice projection that those Welsh children had. She would just have to make them practise a little bit every day. It occurred to her that she must let Pip know what she was doing. She was sure she’d be pleased.

Will and Coby were having the best time with the play. They were playing the terrible Thompson boys, so they could come up with all kinds of wicked things to show how mischievous these boys were. During lunch times, they’d talk through their ideas and sometimes try them out. They liked to do a lot of chasing. Some of the other kids, who were their cousins in the play joined it. Their best idea so far came one day when they were practising with Pip in the Hall.

Wouldn’t it be great if they ran all the way through the audience to the back of the Hall. Then later on, they could run back again on to the stage?
Pip laughed out loud when they tried their idea. Mrs Blackwood looked a bit worried that they were being silly, but it was such a cool thing for the Thompson boys to do. Then it would be even funnier when Mrs Thompson said for William to put his brother down - he’d get dizzy hanging upside down like that. Cassandra was Mrs Thompson. She liked this bit the best also. Will and Coby thought that their play should have some funny bits in it. They decided it would be a good idea to keep thinking up new things they could do. They were sure Pip would be pleased. She looked pleased, anyway.

* 

**Dear Teachers..**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEDNESDAY 31 OCTOBER</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEAR TEACHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFTER A VERY BUSY WEEK, I'VE PUT TOGETHER A FINAL SCHEDULE FOR NEXT WEEK – BASED ON ALL INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF PRINTING!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'VE TRIED TO KEEP THE ARRANGEMENTS AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO PREVIOUS SCHEDULES, IN AN ATTEMPT TO MINIMISE CONFUSION. PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF ANY OF THESE PROPOSED TIMES DON'T SUIT YOU, OR INTERFERE WITH OTHER ARRANGEMENTS YOU HAVE IN PLACE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHERE POSSIBLE WE'VE ASKED PARENTS TO COME IN AND HELP FOR THE DRESS REHEARSALS. IF THERE ARE NO PARENT HELPERS, THE CHILDREN WILL HAVE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN THINGS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOU MIGHT LIKE TO ARRANGE ANOTHER GRADE TO BE AN AUDIENCE FOR YOUR FINAL DRESS REHEARSALS. IT WILL BE GOOD FOR THE CHILDREN TO PERFORM TO AN AUDIENCE. UNLESS I HEAR FROM YOU, I’LL LEAVE THIS IN YOUR HANDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERE’S WISHING YOU A CALM AND RELAXING WEEKEND.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Pip

*
Would the time machine please stand still

There is a moment for Pip on this Wednesday, just three days before the Country Fair, when impossibility overwhelms possibility. Hope vanishes and all that remains are fifty squirming uncomfortable nine and ten years olds, their irate teachers, a smattering of bemused parents, and a time machine that won’t do as it’s told. Pip stands in the middle of it all, lolly bag in hand, desperate for an idea or any kind of salvation. This is the penultimate rehearsal of The Time Machine. As an experience it is completely without merit. For Pip there is no evidence of a play at all. She thinks that perhaps she has miscalculated badly with this group. The script is unwieldy, the plot indecipherable, and the nine actors who are constrained within the Time Machine costume are destined for sabotage. Who could blame them really, Pip thinks. It’s very cramped within this canvas hold-all type construction, and most of the children being contained resist containment at any time. They challenge each other to be the most distracting person in the time machine. The teachers get annoyed. Even Pip, who rarely raises her voice, expresses annoyance and disappointment at the Time Machine.

Mrs Mac interrupts Pip’s fleeting reverie, "Will the Time Machine come out from behind those curtains and stand still. And those cavemen can stop what they are doing right now!"

Pip gathers the fainthearted fifty together on the floor and tells them that the play is not ready to go on. They have one more chance to prove themselves, tomorrow, or there will be no play from Grade Three/Four.
Pip struggles to find the words to express what she needs to explain to the children, about concentration and aspiration, about focus and commitment, about being part of a team. As she falters, Pete rides in and roundly roasts the children for their 'behaviour'. He is disappointed in them. He wants a better effort tomorrow or no show. Bernie picks up where Pete leaves off and the children receive another tongue-lashing.

What must they be feeling, Pip wonders. This is just what she had been trying to avoid all along, and now she is a party to it. She attempts to finish on a more positive note. She gives out lollies for the Best Projection of the day. She asks them to give each other some feedback and advice, and she implores them to want to succeed.

The fainthearted fifty trail out of the hall, the Time Machine costume abandoned, a pile of limp canvas lying centre stage. Pip stays, as always, to gather up her scripts, her video camera, her tape recorder and her thoughts. Max returns to the hall to catch a ride home with his Mum.

*Hi Mum. What did you think of me today, Mum? Did I do a good impression of Elvis? I thought Nicholas did a good job, didn’t you? Come on Mum. Let's go home. You can give me a ride home in the car, and I'll make you a cup of coffee when we get home.*
Dear Janet and Betty

This is a brief note about the performance program on Saturday. We haven’t had a lot of time to prepare for Saturday. In order to ensure the best possible outcome for your grade in their performance on Saturday, here are some important guidelines.

**Time of performance:** 6A and 6K are performing between 3-4pm
**Location:** Basketball Court area – designated “Watch This Space”

**PLEASE TELL CHILDREN TO MEET WITH YOU AT LEAST HALF AN HOUR (2.30pm) BEFORE THE SCHEDULED PERFORMANCE TIME. Children requiring help with costumes and makeup should arrive one hour prior to performance time.**

**EXCEPTIONS**

*CLOWNS MAY WISH TO BE AVAILABLE FROM 2PM – TO SET UP SPACE, AND PROMOTE THE PERFORMANCES, AND GENERALLY ADD TO THE FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE – NOT ON SCOOTERS OR BIKES*

*THOSE GRADE 6’S WHO WISH TO HELP WITH DEVONSHIRE TEAS SHOULD HELP EARLIER IN THE DAY SO THAT THEY ARE READY TO PERFORM AT 3PM.*
*(could I have a list of your students who want to help with Devonshire Teas, so that a roster can be drawn up)*

*PERFORMERS IN RAPUNZEL AND CINDERELLA NEED TO BE AWARE OF THOSE COMMITMENTS IN ADDITION TO THE 6E/6K PERFORMANCES.*

Good luck
Pip

PLEASE NOTE: *Last Minute rehearsals:* On the previous rehearsal schedule I’ve suggested a dress rehearsal on Thursday, during 6K’s usual drama time, and additional catch up rehearsals on Friday – can I suggest now that we reverse that arrangement? I would like to work with individual groups which need help with their scenes, during Thursday’s time, and then have a fabulous Dress Rehearsal with an audience on Friday – possibly after recess.?????????????

*But what about the aesthetic?*

For Pip, the last week of the Performing Arts Project raised more questions that it answered. It was an exhilarating roller-coaster, as Production Weeks always are. But it just wasn’t as simple as that, and Pip knew it. This had been an experiment in community theatre, and this was the territory Pip understood. But the other question, that question
Chapter Seven: Belbrook Stories – A Novella

of aesthetics (whatever that meant) continued to challenge and provoke. She had wanted to make good theatre with this community, but what on earth was good theatre anyway, and what did she mean by community?

There was little time to think about the bigger picture during these last days and it was certainly too late to change direction, so she continued on with the day-to-day management of her project. In the daily toil, she made a couple of major discoveries. The scripts that she had so resolutely crafted to be the centre-pieces of each grade’s efforts were flawed. By negotiating the group’s ideas through the written word - the script, Pip thought her performers would come to understand the art-form. But mostly, they responded to the words as words. Lotte’s insistence that the children all take one step forward to say their words showed her this. It was easy for Pip, steeped in years of theatre making. She would read the words of a script and imagine the possibilities of the performed event. For the children and their teachers, the words replaced the experience of the workshops. They substituted for the ideas generated in the wonderful brainstorm sessions. And, for all but the truly intuitive actors in the community, the words created a barrier to the dramatic form. In so many ways the scripts were there to honour the children’s voices. In this last week of rehearsals it became clear to Pip that they had denied them their expressive voice. It was more than ironic that most of the children couldn’t be heard in the hall. It was the most potent symbol of Pip’s misreading of her community.
The other costly discovery Pip made in the final days of preparation for the Country Fair was that the children didn’t know how to prepare for performance. She had taken them through some important play-making experiences. Some of them had learned some useful performance skills, but they did not know how to rehearse. How could they? They did not know what was ahead. They had no experience of performance to help guide their rehearsal process. Pip saw this strikingly in two instances. Most painfully with the Grade Sixes. Their final ‘dress rehearsal’ was complete chaos. They worked on the basketball courts with the teachers, and with Pip’s occasional presence. There was no sense of the impending event. There was no understanding of the space that they would be working in, or what the presence of an audience might do to their work. There was no sense of urgency. It was a game of rehearsing, without the rigour that their art-form required. With the Preps and Ones, Pip had developed some games as a form of rehearsing. Because the children understood the nature of the game: that it would have rules and codes of behaviour, their ‘rehearsals’ served as much better preparation for performance than all the admonishments in the world helped the Grade 6s to be ready. Pip recognised the limitations of the vocabulary she was using. She had believed that teaching the children the words used in theatre-making and performance would enable them to achieve the processes implied by those words. These however were just words, without experience to inform them. A vocabulary of experience, that’s what I need, Pip thought, too late.
Pip made one final discovery during these last days. When it came, it was probably the most important lesson of all for her. She came to the realisation that this event would be whatever the community would let it be. It was, after all, their event. She could not make it something that it wasn’t. Whatever happened on The Day would truly be a reflection of the Belbrook community. This would be enough. If they didn’t understand what might be possible, theatrically, then so be it. They would see the event for what it was, not what Pip thought it should be. She thought it was time she followed suit.

PART FIVE : THE DAY

There was a festive atmosphere at Belbrook Primary School on the day of The Country Fair. Even before you walked into the Car Park you could tell that something special was going on. You couldn’t get a park on Macquarie Drive! Even the Car Park at the kinder down the road was full. Small and large family clusters made their way down the street towards the school. Parents, grandparents, younger and older siblings and neighbours, processed. Small splinter groups would form as children hived off from their family groupings and joined up with friends, to plan their assault on The Country Fair. *How much money have you got? Are you going to try the Lucky Straws or the Mystery Jars? Did you know
they have Show Bags this year? Wanna get a sausage from the Sausage Sizzle? And some fairy floss? Where’s your costume for the play?

Some of the younger children arrived fully dressed for performances in The First Day, or Jack and the Giant. Some even planned to wear their costume the whole day. Not the Clowns. It wouldn’t really be cool for Grade Six boys to be dressed as clowns while they went on the Jumping Castle.

The weather was overcast. Rain threatened but held off. Still it was unseasonably cool for November.

The competing sounds of the festivities greeted new arrivals: announcements booming over the P.A.; the Belbrook High School band playing classics of the big band era; a tinny Fur Elise cranked out by the tiny P.A. system attached to the small Merry-Go-Round; and the sounds of children laughing, shouting, running and conducting high-end business deals over the matter of the Lucky Dip or Face Painting or voting on the Best Dressed Bear competition, or can you give me two dollars for a drink, Mum?

The school is transformed. In nooks and crannies everywhere there are stalls and displays and events. The square of asphalt that holds the basketball courts is the hub. For this day, it is the market square of the small village. On the northern flank a stage has been erected for main
attractions like the Belbrook High School band and the Lyn Daniels Dancers. The Chook Wheel and the Public Address system are located right next to it. From this point, Frank, the School Council President, and other co-opted individuals, announce the day’s events and periodically, *SPIN THE WHEEL!*

On the far side of the village square, opposite the stage, the green plastic tables adorned with check tablecloths are set out with matching green chairs for Devonshire Teas. Grade Six boys and girls dressed in black and white with aprons, hover over their customers, giving special favours to friends and relatives. Aromas of coffee, tea and fresh baked scones blend with cooking onion and sausage smells emanating from the Sausage Sizzle located just next door.

Stalls selling home made cakes and handicrafts, lucky dips and Show Bags fill the spaces on the eastern and southern flanks of this transitory village square. Trade is brisk. Commerce democratises parents, teachers and children into one force, the customer. At the centre of the square, hay bales have been scattered for additional seating. There is a sign. *Watch this space*, it says.

*Adjacent to the Square is the Brinkley Hall, also a hive of activity. In the hall there is a display of home-made cakes (some more home-made than others). There is to be an auction of the cakes at the conclusion of*
the day. There is a gardening competition for children; a display of
dioramas and a small exhibition by the local Historical Society.

And for today, the Hall is also a theatre. Rows of seats have been set
out facing a makeshift performance area. No stage, but bounteous dark
blue curtaining hanging from the rafters to suggest a performance area,
and to provide 'wings' behind which actors and prompts and set changers
can hide. There is a backdrop: a lyrical evocation of Belbrook and its
landscape painted in pastels onto calico hanging on rods of doweling, at
the back to define the far perimeter of the stage.

Throughout the day, parents, grandparents, older and younger siblings,
neighbours and friends shuffle into the Hall between bouts of fairy
floss and jumping in the Jumping Castle, to watch the children perform
the plays they have been working on for several months with Pip, visiting
artist and parent helper. The audiences are noisy and the performers
quiet. The plays are colour and movement and moments of confusion and
clarity. Audiences strain to hear, toddlers fidget, and at the conclusion
of each play there is applause and much pride.

First there are the Preps, Ones and Twos. Their plays have been woven
together into a single event. It's a little too long and somewhat
convoluted, but the children are committed to the telling of their
stories. Their teachers and Pip will them to succeed. The children take
their bows and run outside to spend their fifty cent pieces and play with friends.

_The Time Machine_ follows shortly after. In files a new audience of parents, grandparents, older and younger siblings. A different set of cameras and videos rolling. Another play with too many twists and not quite enough clues for the audience regarding plot and character. Against the odds, the Grade Three/Fours do their very best work. It is clear to all, but most especially to Pip and their teachers, that they have told the story of the _Time Machine_ as well as they know how. More appreciative (if somewhat perplexed) applause and acknowledgement for children, before they return to choosing their Mystery Jars, selecting the Lucky Straws and jumping in the Jumping Castle with fairy floss smiles and sticky fingers.

The special group of Grade Sixes who have prepared their very own versions of _Rapunzel_ and _Cinderella_ relocate their performance to the Hall. This is their second performance of the plays after struggling to find an audience in the OOSH Building early on. Their confidence is shaky and the plays are under-rehearsed. There is an enthusiasm in their work and a tangible thrill in performing for an audience. Small children suck large lollipops and watch as their big sisters and brothers perform. The audience applauds and the group gathers for the briefest of debriefs. Pip knows that they have prevailed in difficult circumstances and wishes that there had been more time for rehearsal with these kids,
the extra keen. She lavishes praise and reassurance and thanks, and they too rush off to be with friends and jump in the Jumping Castle.

With the day more than half over, with the clouds beginning to fulfil the promise of rain, the Adult Drama Group performs in the hall. Despite the nervousness of inexperienced performers, there are moments of playfulness and theatricality in the performance. Stories of Belbrook are told through the larger-than-life characters created by a small group of Mums and Dads, parents of Belbrook Primary School. The banjo plays, and the adults sing, almost in tune. Almost loud enough to penetrate the rumble of raucous conversation emanating from the back of the hall.

The play is episodic, so there is no challenge for the audience to follow the plot. The audience applauds, perhaps not realizing the enormity of the challenge just faced by the novice actors of the Adult Drama Group. The actors are relieved and quite pleased with themselves. The mistakes loom large but only to them. They are reassured that no-one noticed the minor glitches with lines and the short delays between scenes. They pack up and choose a coffee or a beer rather than the Jumping Castle.

With the day winding down, the bunting drooping and the streamers starting to bleed colour onto the asphalt, the rain sets it. The Grade Sixes take up the challenge promised earlier: *Watch this Space.* In the Village Square, the clowns and street performers arrive, do their set
pieces, wait for applause that ripples slowly through the thinning crowds, ignore the rain, and, against some odds, enjoy themselves. As their pieces conclude they shake off the drizzle and head inside.

The Hall is full for the final events of the day. The Cake Auction and the performance of the Grade Five Play, *Lovely Lucy Loverly*, a melodrama with only the most tenuous of connections to Belbrook. The Cake Auction takes its own time. Some might say it is interminably long, but most enjoy the festive atmosphere, undeterred by the darkening sky and the plummeting temperature. It has been a great day, a memorable day for Belbrook Primary School. Almost all the children of the school have attended, participated in the Fair and performed in their plays. Almost all have brought parents, grandparents, older and younger siblings and the occasional neighbour and friend. There has been plenty to do and see. The day has united children, their teachers and their parents in a collective effort: to create the Country Fair. The plays, the stalls, the rides and the sundry social encounters of the day all merge in the making of the event. The day is fun, they all agree. Children, parents and teachers, all earn the right to savour the events of the day - they are the protagonists and the recipients, the performers and the audience, the producers and the consumers.

And now the audience is drawn into the world of *Lovely Lucy Loverly*. They hiss the villain and cheer the hero. Parents are amazed at the transformations of Grade Five children into the caricatures of a
Victorian style melodrama. Fran Hay is reduced to tears as the play concludes with the wedding of lovely Lucy and earnest Frank. She is proud of her Grade Fives and thrilled with their success. For some, the clean up starts almost immediately. The Hall buzzes as families reunite, gather up their Show Bags and other loot from the Fair and head off home. Pip stands at the door of the Hall underneath the Exit sign for the leave-taking, a weary hostess farewelling party guests at the end of a very long night.

* 

I was a bossy mother and I was storyteller three.

I got to wear my Mum’s black skirt, I wore my good white shirt. It was nice. Anika wore a black skirt and her Mum’s black skirt.

In the play my name was Mrs Jones #1. I had a child called Jane. She was five years old. I LOVED THE PLAY.

Monster’s coming!

We often underestimate our students’ abilities. The standard was very high.

The play I saw should have been appreciated more by those attending.

My achievement was: Learning all my lines which will help me in the future.

I’m proud of the time machine. We settled down.

Fergus: A highlight for me was finding out the talent that I had hidden inside me.

Katrina: The highlight? Just doing it.
The best thing I liked about the drama classes was working together and having the opportunity to be a part of the class.

Amelia: Something I would have done differently? I would have acted older and sneakier and put on a creaky voice.


* 


The Country Fair

The Performing Arts program came to a close on Saturday with the performances at the Country Fair. The performances were the culmination of many weeks of planning and rehearsal. The children did a wonderful job in presenting their plays, and all of them should feel proud of their achievements.

Thank You

A big thank you to Prep L, One M, Two B, 3/4M and 3/4B, 5H, 6A and 6K, and to their teachers, for inviting me into their classrooms, and sharing their ideas and talents with me for the past two terms.

And to the Admin staff, Marian and Cherie, for their support and patience with my endless photocopying.

And thank you to the parents who gave so much of their time to helping their children prepare the plays. There were lots of parents behind the scenes, especially in the Junior grades, helping with costumes and sets, and rehearsals. A special thank you to the co-ordinators for each grade, who played such an important part in communicating with the parent helpers and enlisting support for the project (Jane Ashton, Dana Westin, Terri Schultz, Clarissa McLeod and Rebecca Nash)

A special thanks to Denise Abbott who shared her expertise with our Grade 6 Clowns.

Thank you to the Fete Committee for encouragement and assistance with organisational matters, and preparations for Saturday.

I'd also like to thank Warren De Franco for supporting the drama program, and allowing me such open access to the school and its resources.

Thanks Belbrook Primary School

Pip Hughes
PART SIX : AFTER THE FAIR IS OVER

The weeks following the Country Fair were really just a blur for Pip. The aftermath of any show is tinged with anticlimax. This one had been so enormous in its scope and aspirations (too many aspirations, too much scope) that it was inevitable that there would be a sense of deflation in succeeding days and weeks.

It was also a confusing time. Pip knew that the Country Fair had been a resounding success and that her performance program had been a critical factor in this success. More people had attended this year’s fete than had for many previous school events. Even the enrolment numbers for next year were up on the previous year’s disappointing figures. And yet....

There were some very confusing signals coming from the school. Well from Warren de Franco at least. Actually there was nothing coming from Warren. No response to the performing arts program, and to the day itself. No public acknowledgment, no private encouragement. A resounding silence.

On the Monday after the Country Fair Pip came to the school to conduct debriefing sessions with the children and the Fete Committee. Warren was the first person she saw. He made no reference to the events of Saturday, or to her efforts leading up to the day. She had thought he
might make some comment at the customary Monday morning assembly. According to Max, Warren had spoken about the Country Fair to the children and the smattering of adults present, but had not commented at all about the performances. Max was a bit shocked on his Mum’s behalf. So was his Mum. It wasn’t that she needed a bunch of flowers on her kitchen table, but she had hoped for some feedback from the Principal. As any director or actor knows, silence is the most damning of all reviews.

Finally, Pip sent Warren an email suggesting a meeting to review the program. For over a week there was no response to this either. Pip was a little embarrassed and more than a little angry by this stage. The absence of any official acknowledgment of the drama program would send a message to the school community that it was not important. Silence would suggest, she feared, that the efforts made by Pip, the children and the teachers did not warrant attention. Pip wondered if perhaps she was becoming a little bit paranoid or defensive. Was this an overstatement of the power of Warren’s silence?

Eventually he did reply to her email - he’d inadvertently overlooked it he said, and yes, he’d be happy to talk about the program. They set up a meeting. Pip felt the conversation was insubstantial and skirted around any potential issues lurking below the surface. Pip suspected that her issues were different to Warren’s, but she could not even speculate on
what might lie beneath the surface for him. As she stood to leave the
meeting, he said, “Pip, thanks.”

Still, she felt that all she had learned in their chat was that Warren had
no real understanding of the potential for performing arts in his school.
Also it seemed that he had no reference points to draw on to give it
meaning in his Educational Administrator’s paradigm. Perhaps if he’d
come to one or two of the classes, or spoken to the kids about the work
his horizons might have been expanded, Pip mused. Perhaps not. This
absence of useful points of reference made it really difficult for him.
Perhaps it was a failure of imagination? This was harsh, she chided
herself, but then it was a thought fuelled by her disappointment at her
failure to reach him.

She knew this was not her only failure. There was that small problem of
her research question. What about the aesthetic? The very thing she
had set out to achieve - the discovery of a working method to arrive at a
satisfying aesthetic in a community setting - that had not been achieved.
She knew that she’d not unlocked this particular question. And now she
would be judged, as a community artist, by this work. This work did not
reflect her own aesthetic or the community’s for that matter, and yet
this would be her signature: this clumsy, lumbering, imprecise collection
of images and words. She would stand by it, she would claim it, but it
failed where she had hoped it would succeed. Pip hoped that perhaps it
had succeeded where she feared failure.
Pip found some reassurance with the children. The Grade Fives greeted her with a barrage of ideas and suggestions for next year’s performance, which they wanted to begin work on immediately. The Grade Twos were confident and cohesive in ways that were unimaginable back in July. The Preppies knew now who their leaders were, and they weren’t necessarily the loudest and the bossiest. Juanita had discovered drama and Gareth happily told the checkout girl at the supermarket about how he was in two plays on one day, including one with only adults, and would she like to hear the song they’d sung?

The Grade Sixes invited Pip to their graduation night, a rare honour. They made a card with special messages for her and gave her flowers when she made her final visit to their class.

So Pip did have the bunch of flowers on her kitchen table after all. And as gratifying as these responses were, she knew that this project couldn’t just be about ‘being appreciated’, or the kids ‘enjoying themselves’ or even ‘gaining confidence’. The questions posed had been much larger, and in the fractured and disengaged Belbrook community, the stakes were high. To be participants in their community; to engage in a collective and creative endeavour; to encounter imaginative worlds and to imagine possibilities; to be, for a brief time, in an engaged space: this was, perhaps, what the Belbrook Stories project had offered.

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Chapter Eight: Belbrook and the Community Theatre Matrix

8.1. Introduction: The Matrix in Practice

Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change. 347

In this chapter I intend to use the Novella as a springboard to examine the performing arts project at Belbrook Primary School and its community theatre context. The Community Theatre Matrix, first proposed in Chapter Five, provides the framework through which the practice is explored. In order to usefully 'apply' this matrix to the Belbrook Stories project, it is necessary to accept the premise that this Matrix serves as a framework for community theatre practice. For convenience, the Matrix as it appears in Chapter Five is repeated here.

### 8.1.1. The Matrix revisited

**A COMMUNITY THEATRE MATRIX**

**STEP ONE**: Community

**STEP TWO**: A Call for Community Theatre

**STEP THREE**: The Engaged Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Participants / Facilitators / Artists</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARTISTRY</td>
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**STEP FOUR**: An act of community:

*Community (re)defined*
8.1.ii. An overview of the chapter

The discussion of the Belbrook Performing Arts project and its community theatre context falls into four parts, reflecting directly on the Four Step sequence identified in the Matrix. In the opening section, 8.2 ‘A Community Takes Action’ I consider the origins of the project; the nature of the Belbrook community and its need (from my perspective as a community member); the impetus for community theatre; and the positioning of those who initiate this call. I look at key roles and relationships, and questions of responsibility arising from the differing forms of participation in the project. In this discussion I tease out some of the tensions embedded in the novella and I also look more closely at some of the relational issues that emerge in the novella.

In the second part, 8.3 ‘The Building of an Engaged Space’ I consider the place of each of the four key elements in turn: Agency, Pedagogy, Artistry, and Pragmatics. The structure of the Matrix suggests that these four elements operate as parallel endeavours in the course of a community theatre project. While I still hold to this proposition, I discovered in the process of applying the Matrix to the Belbrook project that at any given point one of the elements predominates. In the Belbrook project four distinct phases of the work emerged, each characterised by the dominance of a different element.

The review of these four key elements concludes with a discussion of the question of performance and community enactment. What is the community event at the heart of this project? Is it the collection of plays staged in Brinkley Hall and surrounds on the day of the Fair, or is it the Country Fair itself? What is the role of audience and the wider community in this project and on The Day itself?

The discussion in this section focuses on the role of the community artist. The corollary here is that the building of the Engaged Space is examined as a function of the craft of the community theatre practitioner.
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The third section of this chapter, 8.4 ‘Redefining Community’ takes up where the novella leaves off, in the aftermath of the Performing Arts Project. In this section, I examine the final proposition of the Matrix: that participation in a community theatre project leads to an act of community definition. In using the Matrix as a means to illuminate a particular example of community theatre practice, I am mindful that although it was developed out of a reflection on practice, it has not previously been applied to practice. Section 8.3 offers a review of the Matrix itself in the light of the Belbrook experience, and considers ways in which the Matrix might be enhanced to better reflect the critical elements of community theatre practice. I conclude with a proposal that the Matrix be ‘reloaded’ (with apologies to Keanu Reeves and the Wachowski Brothers) to accommodate vocabularies of both practice and reflection.

The final sections, 8.5 ‘Questions of the Research’ and 8.6 ‘A Community Aesthetic as Emancipatory Practice’ provides a conclusion to the chapter. Here I revisit the original research questions relating to rehearsal processes and aesthetic outcomes and deliberate particularly on the two key emergent propositions: the community aesthetic, and community theatre as emancipatory practice.

8.2. A Community Takes Action - Needs, Responsibilities and Agendas

The interactions within a group of people who choose to see themselves as a community continually alter the nature of that community, so that it is always in a state of 'becoming'.

8.2.i. The community

Throughout this research project I have experienced frequent shifts in positioning as I moved from insider/ community member, to outsider /community artist, bringing (outside) expertise and training in to the community. As insider, I examined the community I lived in and rankled at its seeming limitations and imperfections. As outsider I looked for ways to understand the community, and later to be admitted into the

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working community of the school. As researcher, I sought to make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. The shifting ground provided benefits: glimpses of other perspectives, of alternative points of view. It also generated difficulties. If I was at times confused about my positioning, then the ambiguity must have been disorienting for my collaborators especially during the fieldwork. At Belbrook Primary, was I Max’s mum, or the drama lady? Was I the professional artist or an interested community member helping out?

Therefore, when considering the first step in the Matrix, ‘the Community’ I must allow for the shifting lenses of my perception. To me, the Belbrook School Community represented many disparate small clusters of interest and affiliation. This was a geographic group who had little in common except postcode. Throughout any school year there were many scattered enterprises initiated by members of the school community. Of those that I witnessed, few gathered momentum or galvanised the collective energy of a wider group.

8.2.ii. The call for community theatre

I drew on my credibility and expertise as a community artist and educator when persuading the Belbrook school community to take on the performing arts project. My role as a community member certainly gave me access to the community decision makers, but this could not be seen as a clear cut instance of a community-initiated project. While this is not unusual in community theatre, there are ramifications for a project when it is a not organically conceived within the community. As the person who originated the project, co-opted the involvement of others, and placed myself in a pivotal

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role, I had a greater investment in the whole event than other members of the community. With investment comes responsibility. The responsibility for the project remained with me, as instigator and manager. Ironically, my efforts to minimise the impact of the project on the school and the teachers ensured that the responsibility for the project remained with me.

8.2.iii. A community in a state of 'becoming'

The temporary community of art-makers assembled for the Belbrook Stories project consisted of school students, teachers and support staff, parents who performed and who supported the performance, and myself. On the day of the performance, a new 'temporary community' crystallized: a Belbrook community participating in an arts event by, for, and about them, albeit fleetingly. For some people it lasted just a few minutes, the time it took to find a seat in the hall to watch their child perform. For others, this experience of community sustained itself through the chain of events over the course of the day. For another group, the experience of this temporary community was not as performer or audience, but as a helper, sweeping the hall, stacking chairs, or videoing performances. The performance event at the fete invited participation from every member of the school community. Regardless of the ways in which different groups and individuals chose to participate, through this event, the Belbrook community temporarily became an expressive community, one that embraced embodied expressions of itself. This chapter considers the movement a community makes towards redefining itself in action or perception.

8.2.iv. What lies beneath- agendas and preconceptions

I believe it is critical for a community artist and any facilitating team to recognise the personal agendas and the sets of preconceptions and misapprehensions that all participants (including the community artists and facilitators) might bring to any art-making project that is mounted in a community. I would suggest that even in the very first stages of the building of a community project any opportunity to identify agendas and preconceptions should be taken.
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The next step is to articulate these agendas and preconceptions and if possible address their impact on the project. This process can be seen as integral to the structure of the project, and can be embedded in the content and form of the art-making. It is also not a linear process but complex and laden with obstacles. It is not always successful. Careful examination of the exemplars discussed in earlier chapters can illuminate this point.

8.2.v. Key roles and agendas

There appears to be a strong link between role and responsibility in community theatre. Key participants emerge as those who assume responsibility for the project and within the project. This can be seen as a core tenet of cultural democracy: a community participant embraces the project and accepts individual and collective responsibility for participation in the process.

I have identified the following key roles in the Belbrook Stories performing arts project:

- Project Facilitator/s
- Gatekeepers
- Leaders
- Participants as Art-makers
- Participants as Volunteers
- Participants as Supporters

• **Project Facilitator/s - The community artist/management 'team'**.

In this instance, this was myself as the Community Artist, initiating and guiding the project. I set up 'webs of relationships' encompassing the key participants. These relationships were highly idiosyncratic. They were reactive to needs expressed by others, and reflected each person’s relationship to the collective art-making process. Relationships shifted and evolved over time, mirroring my position within the various

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community clusters and micro-communities. I had a distinctive relationship with each of the grades.

Agendas
I believe my many agendas in taking on this particular project suggest that I was both ambitious and perhaps somewhat naïve in my approach to community arts in Belbrook. As a parent and an arts educator, I saw what I perceived to be a gap in the educational program at the primary school in my own community. The arts were under-represented. This absence created a hole in the school curriculum where opportunities for individual and collective expression, imagination and independence might reside. Not only did I hope to fill this hole with my program, but I hoped that a demonstration of the power and possibility of education through the arts would convince the school community that they could no longer do without arts practice in their school.

I also had a range of artistic and research agendas. I wanted to more closely examine the role of the play and the playwright within a community theatre paradigm. I also wanted to address the vexed question of the aesthetic in the community theatre context. I hoped I might discover rehearsal processes that would lead to satisfying aesthetic outcomes. Personally, I also wanted to connect with the community I had lived in for ten years.

Each of these agendas informed my interactions with other key participants. They also informed my practice. They go some way towards explaining why, ultimately, I privileged elements of agency and pedagogy in this community theatre project above artistry. This is a key point in this discussion, and will be considered in greater depth in a later section of the chapter.

•  **Gatekeepers – Designated leaders**

The Gatekeepers are those who 'open the door' to the community artist and to the arts event. In a community such as Belbrook, these could be Designated Leaders (eg Principal, Teachers, parents).
Visible support from Gatekeepers can communicate the value of a project to other potential participants. Such an imprimatur can make the difference between a project developing momentum within a community or remaining peripheral.

In Belbrook, Warren the Principal did not become actively involved in the performing arts project. He gave important institutional approval for the project to take place and at key moments during the several months of Belbrook Stories he reiterated this support. However, he did not take an active role in any aspect of the project, or demonstrate more than polite interest in the evolution of the project or its impact on his students and staff. I had not anticipated this perceived detachment from a key Gatekeeper, and was somewhat bemused by it. Even with hindsight, and a lengthy interview, I can only speculate on the Principal's perception of the project, and the reasons for his lack of involvement. These are my speculations. For Warren, isolated in his office, both the concept and the practice of performing arts as a potential component of his school's program was not compatible with his understanding of the school or its curriculum. He did not see how it might relate to his conception of primary education or even community arts. Without a context, he did not find a point of entry into the project. And perhaps, in the absence of prior experiences to guide him, he could not see the possibilities that the project might offer his school community. Without educational or community imperative, there would be no reason for him to become involved.

**Leaders**

The Leaders are more clearly identifiable: those who take a leading role in the implementation of a project. Baz Kershaw provides a clear example of this in his accounts of *Glasgow All Lit Up!* Across Glasgow teams of community artists are dispatched to teach lantern making skills to small groups, led by key individuals such as teachers, youth workers etc. Together, they encouraged and supported the smaller groups in their participation in the event. In Belbrook, the community leaders were the teachers, working with the community artist, as they guided their micro-communities of art makers.
My relationships with teachers were influenced by a number of factors:
-a past relationship (with some teachers I had a long history and had built up some trust, while with others I was an unknown quantity);
-their attitude to having another 'teacher' in their classroom;
-their attitude to their class;
-their attitude towards the performing arts and understanding of the program and its potential, and any associated preconceptions and agendas; and
-their present health, state of mind and well-being,
-attitude to the school, to being a teacher, to being co-opted into a new project.

Leader (Teacher) agendas
I would speculate that teacher agendas were as diverse as the teachers themselves. Some teachers actively embraced the performing arts project. This was particularly the case with those teachers who had had some previous positive experience with drama and children. (Janet)

In contrast, some of the other teachers took longer to discover the potential merits of the program for their classroom community (Pete, Lotte) but were strong advocates once the program became tangible to them.

My perception of initial teacher agendas was that they ranged from the pursuit of new educational input into their programs; to, an easy way to satisfy the CSF performing arts requirements; to, one less hour a week to teach; to, "its important that I am seen to be in step with other teachers". However, regardless of the level of participation that teachers showed, it was clear through their actions that my role as the drama expert remained unchallenged. 'Drama' belonged to me.
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- Participants as art-makers

In Belbrook, these were the school students who developed expertise, contributed to play-making and became performers. The guiding principle in their involvement was participation in the aesthetic enterprise.

The relationship between this group and the community theatre artist/facilitator was at the heart of the project. The shared endeavour provided the foundation for the link between artist and community, and the catalyst for the fashioning of the new, temporary community of art-makers, to which both community participants and artistic facilitators belonged.

The forging of powerful, if temporary, bonds was not without its tensions. For some, the collective art-making process excluded rather than included. There were some who found themselves on the margins of the venture. (Warren, the Principal, for example). Perhaps for some, the institutional, Education Department-ratified school community was the dominant Belbrook community. Perhaps this reformulation of community prompted by the art-making event challenged institutional perceptions of itself and Belbrook? The opportunity for all participants to speak, to listen and to be valued, underscored this new, temporary community. Perhaps this imprecise, but significant rendering of cultural democracy represented a tangible subversion of the school community’s existing order?

Participant Agendas

It is worth noting that this group had the least developed set of agendas regarding the performing arts project. They had the least control over whether the project went ahead. Their powerlessness in the initial decision-making was inversely proportional to their power and significance once the project was underway. After all, they were central to the performance outcome.
• **Participants as volunteers**

Volunteers as a group emerge as a project progresses I believe. As their grasp and appreciation of the project grows through observing the activities, they identify a place for themselves. Alternatively, they might articulate a need or desire to become involved because they recognise the possibility of benefit for themselves, their children or the wider community.

In Belbrook, this group consisted of parents who attached themselves to the play-making activities of the grades their children were in. Their engagement was principally practical. They made props and costumes and organised rehearsals.

I suspect that it is this group more than any other that represents the greatest potential in any project. It is through this group that the project can grow beyond individual efforts. If a suitable infrastructure can be built for a project, these individuals can more easily and effectively identify a place for themselves and suitable conduits for contributing the collective effort.

Pip gave a fine performance of confidence (even if she did say so herself). The parents (all Mums) had suggestions about how they could organise themselves, and what they would need from her. *Could we have an outline of the plays, so we know what they’re about?* They asked.

No problem.

*What about rehearsals,* another suggested. *Perhaps we could come and watch rehearsals, so we can get more involved.*

*Great idea.* *(Novella, p.269-270)*
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- **Participants as supporters**

In any project, there are participants whose tacit and overt support translates into practical action and contributes to an atmosphere of acceptance for the work at hand. They may observe first and commit subsequently, requiring proof of the value of the project before becoming involved. At Belbrook, these key participants were the school Bursar, a teacher not directly involved in the classroom activities, and a small number of parents (e.g., the Fete team). These participants at various times contributed to pedagogy, agency and the pragmatics of the project.

8.3. Building the Engaged Space

If we accept that the four principles of artistry, agency, pedagogy and pragmatics inform and shape a community theatre project, then it is possible to use the Community Theatre Matrix as a framework for the examination of the Belbrook Stories project.

8.3.i. *The first phase: meeting the other (Agency)*

It is not just that (the teacher) will provide care in the form of physical skills…Rather it is a moment in which each must decide how to meet the other and what to do with the moment…..Problem solving is involved of course, but it is preceded by a moment of receptivity - one in which the full humanity of both parties is recognised - and it is followed by a return to the human other in all his or her fullness.\(^{351}\)

When I began work at Belbrook, I thought that my first task would be an instructional one. I would be introducing the children to a new language, a new way of working with ideas, of expressing themselves, and discovering new relationship with space. My first stage would be entitled ‘skill building’. Closer examination of the data reveals that my single most important concern in the early weeks related to issues of agency.

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These were my concerns in the early weeks:

- To build trust
- To reconfigure the classroom space into a space of possibilities.
- To temporarily realign existing power relations within the grade
- To introduce the child’s voice to the working process
- To establish attitudes of attention

**Trust through relationships**

My first task was not to teach 'freeze frames', but to establish trust. With each group of students, I sought to build a relationship that was particular to that group, and from this base, to build individual relationships.

**A space of possibilities**

The physical space represented a space of possibilities. With each group, I addressed the question: How can we transform this classroom space for this new, shared work? With the Grade Fives and Sixes we claimed the spare room in the Double Storey Building as our drama room. With the junior school classes we also claimed a spare room where Reading Recovery was conducted and made it our drama space. The physical act of moving from their own classroom to the spare room marked the beginnings of the symbolic agreement to form our new temporary community of art-makers. The students were willing to shift from their existing position to this new place to allow for new possibilities. Also, their teachers were willing to lead them, or to be led.

After a few weeks, some children ran from their room into our drama space, formed a circle and sat ready, breathless, waiting to begin. Some children, especially in the Grade 1s hovered on the edge of the space, on the edge of commitment to the drama work and to the group. With the Grade Threes and Fours, the first task of the weekly drama session was to transform their classroom into a room where drama could take place. Desks were moved aside, rubbish cleared, chairs stacked. This was done as a whole group, quickly and co-operatively. This became the first ritual of the newly constituted community. The
space created was not just the actual space but, like Salverson’s container, our room became the container that would hold the stories of the group.

**Challenging power relations within the grade**

One of the stated intentions of the performing arts project was the sharing of individual and possibly, community stories. The sharing of such stories and the transforming of them into theatrical form required trust and mutual respect for the value of each individual's contribution. However, each class had a set of formal and informal power relations that inhibited some and privileged others. In the early workshops, a set of rules and rituals were introduced to diffuse potentially toxic power relations, and to build towards culturally democratic working processes. For example, drama sessions began in a circle, with an activity requiring a contribution from each person, and often ended with a reflective comment from everyone, once again in a circle. The teachers were participants rather than leaders. The leaders in the class became those who could demonstrate mastery of an idea or a new skill, or could make others laugh. My authority in the class, I believe, was vested in my mastery of the dramatic processes, and the responsibility I held for the project itself. As other participants gained mastery and accepted responsibility, I ceded some of my authority to them.

**Voicing the working process.**

The project was founded on the premise that I would be representing the voices of individuals and the stories of the community through the plays that I would write. To achieve this I found it necessary first to create a safe space in which all were free to speak, to be listened to and to be valued. I would also suggest that individuals and groups needed practice at being heard. Learning how to translate ideas and experiences first into words and later into dramatic forms, requires skill, and therefore practice.

In my early weeks I sought to demonstrate the many links between content and form, between having something to say, and having a way to say it. When I introduced an activity that invited individuals to speak up and to share their own ideas or experiences,
they responded with enthusiasm and energy. These individual, personal contributions became the bridge to learning about dramatic forms for expression. Quickly, I chose to make this a central tenet of my work at Belbrook.

Content
One of the assumptions I brought to the Belbrook work was that we would draw on the stories of the community and that this would be the key to building dramatic expressions of community (hence the title: Belbrook Stories). This transaction proved somewhat more complex than I first anticipated. In the early days of the work, when Agency was my primary concern, I tentatively tapped into personal stories (“They Were Young Once” was a collection of stories I collated from the Grade Three/Fours, based on stories their parents had told them, and community stories (the historical records of the founding of Belbrook school in the 1930s). While we did incorporate some of the stories of parents as children in the Grade Three/Four play, The Time Machine and the Grade Twos told the story of the school in The First Day, on the whole the response to community stories as stimulus for drama activities ranged from mild disinterest to active resistance. I came to realise that the stories of the ‘community’ did not seem to reflect the experiences of the participants. To continue to pursue this stated agenda of the project appeared to me to be an imposition of the adult world, perhaps even an unexpected form of cultural imperialism. I diverted from my original stated aim. I looked ways in which the stories that had most resonance with each group of performers could best be shaped to express something of the community that had chosen to tell it. In this way I hoped that a Belbrook rendering of Rapunzel or Jack and the Beanstalk might serve this particular community as effectively as a more overt community story might.

• Relationships of attention
Julie Salverson suggests that community-based drama can promote a “relationship of attention”352. She develops her argument as follows: even when the theatre form doesn’t

succeed with its more lofty aspirations, to create an attitude of attention is a fundamental 
recognition of others and their meaningful contributions to the making of community. 
Schools do not necessarily foster attitudes of attention. Certainly, a lot of time is devoted 
to encouraging children to ‘work quietly’ and to ‘pay attention’, but this is a one-way 
process. The child attends to the adult and to the work.

In the early weeks of the performing arts project, I strove to introduce children to the 
notion that they attend to others. I modelled “relationships of attention” and sought to 
engender it within our temporary communities. The Agency which characterised my 
eye early weeks was not simply situated in my own work, but by implication and inference, 
was to be engendered in the way individuals in our temporary communities of art-makers 
took care of each other.

For the second time Pip asks the group to form a circle on the floor. Pip 
sits down and waits. There is no circle. The children of Six A huddle 
around Pip on the floor. The movement is spontaneous and without 
rancour. They look expectantly at her, waiting to hear what might come 
next. Pip and Janet exchange glances. Has something just happened 
here? (Novella, p. 222)

8.3.ii. The second phase : Building a vocabulary of experience (Pedagogy)

However, the energy was palpable. The children were jazzed. They were 
making up plays and characters, rehearsing and plotting and planning. 
School had a different dimension. ...Some of the least likely children had 
emerged from behind their usual personas. Nicholas, the quiet and 
eager-to-please was the one with his hand up first to do a new scene or 
drama activity. Jessie the sullen showing the occasional signs of interest
in something other than himself and the wall he was building to keep himself safe. (Novella, p.275)

• Perceptions

The relationship I built with the staff of Belbrook Primary School was a complicated one. It was fraught with misunderstandings and lost opportunities, on both sides. I was their colleague, but an outsider. I was 'the expert', but they were in the role of experts with their children. I was conscious that when the teachers observed my work, they did not necessarily grasp its significance. It occurred to me that perhaps the artistry of the community artist/practitioner/teacher was not always visible to the observing teachers. I made a number of overt attempts to illuminate my practice for the teachers. Before the project started, I offered to run a Professional Development program for the staff, to introduce them to the techniques I would be employing, the pedagogy that informed them, and some ways in which they might also be able to use drama strategies in their own teaching. I also put together a booklet at the mid-way point of the project. Each booklet was custom-made for each teacher. There was no response to either overture, although more informal discussions about the work seemed to scaffold teacher understanding more effectively.

I believe the explanation for the teachers not being as fully integrated into the project as the children relates to Agency. As with the children, I had assumed that my first task would be to address skills. My early encounters with teachers were all based on this assumption: that the key to participation was expertise in the form. With the children, I intuitively re-oriented the early workshops to Agency, but I overlooked this stage with the teachers. In hindsight it is clear that building trust, shifting power relations, and providing opportunities for individual teachers to be heard would be as important for these community participants as it was for the younger ones. I assumed that those in leadership positions did not require the same attitude of attention that I had given to those participants who were performing. As I have discovered, the building of trust and reciprocity laid the foundations for the later work in drama. It follows that such
foundations could possibly have facilitated a different relationship between teachers and community artist in the later phases. Naturally, a different set of strategies would have been needed to build strong and trusting working relationships with teachers. The dynamic is very different between peers and the work therefore more delicate, the interactions more sensitive, and the stakes much higher.

- From skill building to play building
A conscious development of skills, language, and imaginative and dramatic concepts characterized this second phase of the performing arts project. My desire to produce a play with each grade drove this cultivation of skills and ideas. Relatively quickly, I moved the focus of the work from overt skill-building activities to activities that would yield material for each of the plays. The artistic frame provided by a ‘play’ incorporated a broader agenda of skills development and learning through the art-form.

The network of skills and activities that the participants encountered gave them vehicles for expression, a language to talk about the drama, and a body of experience that generated a context and a set of references upon which later work was constructed and refined. This is what I have now come to call the ‘vocabulary of experience’.

The quality of engagement manifested itself in many different ways. For some it was transitory, for others it was a total commitment to an imagined world. With the younger children, the key was to invite participation framed by an imaginative pretext. This was most frequently a narrative offered at the beginning of the workshop, or one that emerged through the workshop itself. In the Grade Fives and Sixes, engagement was invited principally through participation in the craft of performance making.

Many of the strategies I employed in this phase were drawn from the world of classroom drama. Ironically, once I had made the conscious and deliberate decision to concentrate on my role as community artist, I felt freer to tap into my resources and experiences as a classroom teacher. During this time, the other elements, particularly those related to
Agency and Artistry, were interwoven into my teaching. This juxtaposition served both participants and myself well, I believe.

Pip arrives at the classroom ready to talk about the Time Travellers and their experiences. Has Pete read out the story to the children? It had been sitting in his pigeon hole for a week. ... No, Pete hadn’t read them the unfinished story, or brainstormed about it. Quick adjustments to the lesson.

Pip introduces Three/Four B to some more performance techniques - ones she thinks might be useful for the play. They’ve already done activities about character and story, and even transforming actors into inanimate objects (or was it the other way around?) Today they play 'Zip Zap Boing' and 'Hunter and the Hunted', and then do some Soundscapes. All designed, in Pip’s mind, to help them with concentration, focus and the senses. *(Novella, p.254)*

As the experienced drama teacher, I focussed on building a drama vocabulary. I introduced key craft words that children could understand and use. I also tentatively introduced some aspects of an aesthetic language. However, the most valuable of all was the acquisition of a battery of common experiences. With each group, these experiences, replete with both smatterings of craft language, and language we had appropriated from everyday idiom for our specific use, became our working vocabulary. It was intuitively acquired and adopted, democratic and accessible in its nature, and practical and contextualised. It represented the beginnings of the shared language of our unique vocabulary of experience.
Bernie's class, where more frenetic energy is rife, offers more surprises. They are more playful and the sound of possibilities unfolding draws the disparate group together into the ritual of the brainstorm. Pip writes, in less teacherly handwriting, as the children speculate about the fate of the time travellers. Dinosaurs and aliens, of course. But what if the travellers go back to the seventies and see their parents when they were at school? ... The butcher's paper is ceremonially pinned to the wall, to be visited from time to time during the week. (Novella p. 329)

8.3.iii. The third phase: Speaking up - collaboration and negotiation in art-making (Artistry)

The later drama workshops held the most striking evidence of Artistry within the Belbrook Stories project. In the third phase of the project we moved from so-called 'play building workshops’ to ‘rehearsing the play’. There was a more energetic juggling between elements in this third phase. Artistry was not as clearly pre-eminent as Agency and Pedagogy had been earlier on.

In Belbrook Stories, Artistry was also evident in workshop activities that encouraged the participants to move into acts of transformation, imagination and collaboration using a theatrical form.

The transition from the drama activities to the ‘play’ has been interesting. There is no doubt that putting ideas into the form of a ‘play’ is a legitimising activity and the way the children respond to and talk about the process changes. For most of them, the idea of being given a part seems to be tremendously exciting. Even before there was a part per se, by just naming someone as their character, there seemed to be a
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different engagement with the activity. This was very noticeable in Grade Two...as if naming them made it so. (Journal 6/10/01)

The role of Artistry in the development of scripts was also critical. There was a delicate fusion of Artistry with Pedagogy and Agency when participants began their explorations of the theatre form. In attempting to address the needs of each group, I selected theatrical devices and conventions that I believed best reflected the cross-section of play ideas generated by that group. Most importantly, I selected those that I felt confident that I could teach the group to employ. This was not a single exchange between artist and performing group, but a dynamic set of negotiations evolving over a number of drafts of each play. (See Appendix Five). In certain instances, I sacrificed Artistry in order to attend to what I sensed were more pressing demands. For example, I wrote a play with ten leading roles for the Grade Three/Fours because there were at least ten students who would benefit from the experience of being recognised or challenged. It’s entirely possible that I may have written a better play with just four central characters.

Similarly, the pragmatics of managing so many mini-projects influenced my decision to have just one play for the Grade Three/Fours. In making this decision, I then had to deal with the artistic challenge of incorporating the ideas of fifty nine and ten year olds into one play. And then, to create a form that could sustain parallel rehearsals: small groups of nine and ten year olds all rehearsing at once with minimal supervision. Within that same form I needed to accommodate small groups moving on and off stage in simple logical sequences. Ultimately, I don't believe The Time Machine served all the agendas required of it.

- Acts of translation: from script to performance

The children do not have any experience of ‘performance’, and certainly, no experience of performing in a play. So, when confronted with a script, they have no reference points to draw on. Their concept of performer and audience, performance space, and performative mode which might be different from any other mode, is non-
Therefore, I must remind myself, that this experience is the laying down of those reference points. The understanding probably won’t crystallise until after the performance day. So, for the future, this could be invaluable. For this time, who is going to appreciate, or understand that they are watching learning, not performance? (Journal 27/10)

After the plays had been written, I set about guiding participants on the journey from script creation to the delivery of a performance text. I called this transition ‘rehearsal’ and my role slowly changed from ‘writer’ to ‘director’. I anticipated that the artistry of crafting a text into performance would dominate here. For many reasons, it did not. Artistry was thwarted by a complex set of project and community needs. My current understanding of the obstacles to artistic realisation is outlined in the following three key points:

1. **Vocabulary and experience**
   -the vocabulary of experience was incomplete. As the journal entry indicates, the participants did not have the tools to make the rehearsal process meaningful. (The Novella documents this in Part Four). I assumed that the skills that had evolved during the workshop process, and the acquisition of a language of performance would be sufficient. I believe I was mistaken. I was asking the participants to engage in a very particular act of imagination: to imagine the presence of an audience, and the implications this might have on the way space, their bodies and their voices were used. How could the ritual of ‘sharing’ promoted in the safety of the drama classroom prepare these inexperienced performers to present their pieces outdoors, surrounded by a myriad of noisy distractions, with an audience who had also not had any preparation for such a performance? Clearly, being able to speak about performance does not indicate a readiness to actually do it.

   -the artistry required was not the artistry I brought. I approached the ‘rehearsal' period as I might with any group of performers. However, each group I worked with required a different set of rehearsal strategies, depending on the nature of the group, the
particular set of skills they had developed in their preparation and their understanding of the concept of 'performance'. Preparations for the many performances were frantic and I didn't adequately attend to these individual differences and needs. Consequently, I didn’t find time to question whether the form of the performance I’d developed with a particular group matched their skills, their experience, and the content of their piece.

2. Giving voice/Being heard

-the script became the obstacle. Giving the children their words back in the form of the script legitimised their input during 'play-building’, but signified very different things during ‘rehearsal’. Those who couldn’t read well were alienated by the written word and struggled to rehearse even with their own words and ideas. The very act intended to make them powerful denied them

3. Reformulating the cultural tool kit

-inhabiting the performance space required a very specific set of skills. Learning the skills for performance was another stage of development in a performing arts project. Perhaps it could only be learned by performing, not rehearsing (perhaps this is what the Welsh delegation understood better than we did). Through performing, participants not only acquired specific skills relating the chosen performance form, but preconceptions about the nature of theatre and performance (the pre-existing cultural tool kit) could be displaced by first-hand experience

-the aesthetic tool kit that community performers bring to performance is enriched when it includes fundamental (modernist) performance skills such as voice projection and articulation, focus and concentration, and an understanding of dramatic elements such as time (pacing and pausing), and space. The question remains, at what point, and in what context, are these skills 'taught'. Given the earlier discussion on the vocabulary of experience, perhaps it is necessary to see the acquisition of performance skills (building a vocabulary of performance experience) must be incremental rather than intensive. And perhaps it also requires greater attention to the processes of reflection and critique.
Chapter Eight: Belbrook and the Community Theatre Matrix

- Discovering artistry

A closer examination of the ways in which artistry manifests itself within a community theatre project provides a useful insight into the complex nature of cultural democracy and those who attempt to achieve it.

Pip decides to throw out her plan, her carefully constructed set of activities building from a simple introduction to skills related to focus, concentration and co-operation, to more complex performative applications. In their place, she proposes clowning.

"Do you think anyone here could do a stage fall?" She asks.

Of course. Falling over on purpose is a class specialty.

Really! She feigns surprise.

Troy volunteers to demonstrate a fall. Pip reminds him that this is a stage fall. The skill is in not hurting yourself, or anyone else. Darren tries. Jonas takes himself off into the corner of the room and has a few practice goes.

Those who succeed teach those who are more tentative. Phillip applies himself to the task with fierce concentration. Jonas has no concentration at all today, but is unable to divert the usual crowd.

Pip proposes an elevation in the degree of difficulty. Incorporate the fall into a story - the story itself is simple. It's a greeting, the fall, and a farewell.
The class works together on their reinvention of a five hundred year old lazzi. They examine their work, and the work of classmates, critiquing it for narrative clarity and the success of the fall. If it's funny, they know they have succeeded.

Hints of character appear. The stories are embellished. The empty classroom that has become their drama studio is noisy and chaotic. Both Janet and Pip attend to the task of helping the children of Six A to fall over, on purpose. (Novella,p.257-258)

I have included this rather long extract from the novella because it effectively illustrates three aspects of artistry in the community theatre project.

*Artistry unearthed*

The first is the artistry of the participant. The workshop begins with an invitation (one of Salverson's gaps) to contribute to the discovery of shared talents. Part of the joy of falling down resides with the existing expertise that many of the participants have. Through the workshop they discover that something that they do for fun at recess can be harnessed into an 'artistic' process. There is a natural evolution from the invitation to fall down on purpose, to the shaping of a narrative and the development of technique. Drama as a site to be resisted at all costs becomes drama as a site of possibility and, indeed validation. The artistry is in the hands of the participants. Darren and Phillip are far better at falling down on purpose than Pip is. From this position of expertise, the boys are introduced to clowning, and the nature of their participation in the performing arts project shifts tangibly.
Chapter Eight: Belbrook and the Community Theatre Matrix

**Discovering Partnerships**

This extract from the novella also reveals the organic evolution of partnerships. Janet and Pip become active and actual partners in the development of her grade's contribution to the Country Fair. While this is not exclusively in the domain of artistry, I would suggest that artistry is at the core. It is the discovery of artistry and the promise that it brings (engagement, creativity, collaboration) that is the catalyst for partnerships. Such partnerships are invaluable in the community theatre making processes. The teacher has insights into the students and into the community that are beyond the community artist, while the artist has a distinctive perspective on artistic form and on the community. The forging of the two forces can extend the scope and dimensions of the art-making, tapping further into the potential for artistry of all participants (students, teachers and parents in the case of Belbrook).

**Invisibility**

In the above extract I allude to the cascade of decisions I make as the community artist before the workshop begins. This highlights one of the ways in which the craft of the community artist is invisible. In my attempt to create a seamless workshop experience, I bury the craft of the community artist. The artistry is no longer apparent, just the outcomes. This is a deliberate strategy used by many community artists as a mechanism to direct focus onto the participants and their contributions. There are costs to this. How can the participants become fully aware of what it takes to transform an idea into a performed play, if the person who makes this possible does so out of view, or as an elaborate sleight of hand?

There is also an irony in this: in the desire to create a culturally democratic environment, the community artist risks jeopardising genuine cultural democracy by obfuscating the nature of her role within the art-making. The need for a transparent process and the introduction of tools of legitimate critique and reflection emerge yet again in this discussion.

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8.3. iv. The fourth phase: Running the show (Pragmatics)

The days leading in to performance are dominated by management considerations. The key to understanding the importance of the pragmatic dimension of the performing arts project rests with two issues: the symbolic dimension (or semiotics) of pragmatics, and the mechanics of pragmatics. The latter relates especially to the way in which the management of the project provides for the distribution and redistribution of responsibility for tasks and the project as a whole.

- The Semiotics of Pragmatics

By this I mean those aspects of the management of the project which either intentionally or unintentionally signal deeper meanings. For example, the avalanche of information sent out in the early days of the project to inform and solicit agreement to participate in the research component, further compounded the separation between the community artist and the school community. As one of the parents remarked prior to returning her forms, 'there's so many words!'

On the other hand, the negotiation and implementation of the drama timetable reflected my intention to work within existing school structures, and my desire to be inclusive. The failure of the Steering Committee to establish itself and therefore to take an active role in the management of the project provides a powerful image of the difference between the agreed support for the project and the actual support given by teachers. It also clearly demonstrates my choice to undertake solo management of the project despite my stated intentions to do otherwise.

- The Mechanics of pragmatics - Logistics and responsibility

The practicalities of managing Belbrook Stories, a complex community theatre project, dominated the final days prior to performance day. There were two critical dimensions to the pragmatics at this time.
Chapter Eight: Belbrook and the Community Theatre Matrix

Logistics
The first was in the simple logistics of preparation: rehearsing, communicating with parents and teachers; arranging props and costumes and access to the space; and timetabling the program of events.

The Handover
The second dimension was the deliberate hand-over of responsibility to the community participants. In the same way that any director of theatre must do, there is a critical point in time in which the play becomes the property of those who perform it. This was an even more crucial event given the community theatre context. Indeed this investment in ownership is critical to a culturally democratic practice I believe. The hand-over to the community symbolizes the recognition of ownership of the project:

Pip made one final discovery during these last days. For her, at that moment in time, it was probably the most important lesson of all. She came to the realisation that this event would be whatever the community would let it be. It was, after all, their event. She could not make it something that it wasn’t. Whatever happened on The Day would truly be a reflection of the Belbrook community, and this would be enough.
(Novella, p.289)

8.3.v. The final phase: community enactment
…it is the very ambiguity of symbols which makes them so effective as boundary markers of community. ..... However, the efficacy of symbolism which we have described …. indicates precisely the opposite: that people can participate within the same ritual yet find quite different meanings for it.353

In Anthony Cohen's book, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, he describes the Notting Hill Carnival as a community event, and then proposes an interpretation of that event in terms of community and how it might be defined. There is some resonance here with Belbrook and the Country Fair and the enactments of community that it prompted. Cohen describes the way in which different groups within the Notting Hill community responded to the Carnival, based on their own backgrounds and their own needs. The Carnival accommodated a diverse range of understandings of the nature of Carnival and an equally diverse range of responses (in the realm of collective art making and cultural expression). As Cohen suggests, it was sufficient that the community recognise the symbolism of the Carnival. They did not have to agree on what the symbolism meant in order to participate in the event. By implication, the act of participating translates into an act of community, as it brings with it a set of agreements about the boundaries of participation, the nature of participation, and parameters for inclusion and exclusion.

Drawing from Cohen's analysis, it is not necessary to have a shared understanding of the meaning of the event, and therefore, shared intentions and responses to the event, in order for the event to facilitate an enactment of community.

The Country Fair provided this symbolic opportunity for enactment for the Belbrook community. Children performed in their plays about Belbrook, time machines, murder mysteries and monsters, and their families gathered in the school hall to watch them. By the end of the day, there was an accumulation of events, some performative and others simply participatory (Devonshire Teas, and Jumping Castles), reminiscent of Kershaw's description of *Glasgow All Lit up!* In which he invokes Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia". 354

The performance program was essential to the event as a whole. It was through the process of preparing and presenting performances that an agreement to participate

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354 See Chapter 4, part b - Kershaw is quoted: “They were heteroglossic in that they did not subscribe to a single set of explicit enunciations, there was no dominant language of imagery or form…While many images were totally engaging, none of the voices represented was predominant: all were expressive of a plurality rooted in many local, distinctive communities.” 1999, *The Radical in Performance*, Routledge, London & N.Y., p.81.
collectively was achieved. The framework for this collective enterprise was an artistic one, requiring an acknowledgement of form and tradition, creative expressions of ideas and stories, and the acquisition of new skills. The day of performance provided the focus for this collective effort. It became a galvanising factor that elevated individual effort in the pursuit of a collective benefit, and it provided one final shifting of boundaries for the art-makers. The audience was invited in to participate in what Richard Schechner calls the “constellation of events” that constitute the performance.  

Through participation and enactment, the community, albeit a temporary one, is redefined.

In *The Symbolic Construction of Community* sociologist Anthony Cohen suggests that while boundaries of identity hold great meaning for the individual, these boundaries are more perceptual than actual, and can thus be redrawn. As a site of re-presentation, performance becomes a medium through which this redrawing can occur. The performance process reinforces commonalities, illuminates difference, and alters boundaries of identity.

8.4. Redefining Community

8.4.i. *What's missing from the Matrix - The Matrix reloaded*

Self-enquiry and critique requires a theoretical framework, and all too often marginalised groups have failed to structure their own theoretical framework precisely because ‘theory’ itself has appeared to exist as privileged knowledge.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the need for community theatre practitioners to engage in a critical discourse about practice. This implies the development of a language and practice of reflection and critique. I argued for the importance of critical discourse for Community Theatre Practitioners at length in Chapter Three, and yet I omitted the associated elements of ‘reflection and critique’ from my original conception of the Matrix. This omission warrants some consideration now. My understanding of the significance of a critical discourse for community theatre underpinned this research and gave it momentum. However, this understanding focussed on the key principle of theorising practice and articulating the concerns of practice rather than a consideration of

Chapter Eight: Belbrook and the Community Theatre Matrix

the function of critical discourse in practice. Three key events changed my perspective. Firstly, I undertook a sustained investigation of my own practice through the Belbrook Stories project. Secondly, I subjected this practice to the scrutiny facilitated by the tools of the Reflective Practitioner: data analysis and the writing of the novella as a form of arts-based inquiry. Thirdly, I reviewed my own community theatre project using the Matrix in its original form as an analytical tool and a paradigm for practice. Such is the reflexive nature of these processes that the potential role to be played by reflection and critique (in practice) emerged fully only after this examination of practice. When I returned to the theoretical foundations of this study, it became apparent to me that critical reflection was implicit in all sound community theatre practice and was a key to community participants gaining informed access to the theatre as art-form and attendant theatre-making processes.

Reflection and critique are essential tools in the development of aesthetic understanding and a mastery of form. Clearly, the aesthetic I refer to here is a community based aesthetic, and the form is the artistic form most appropriate to the community context for which it is employed. Opportunities for reflection and critique were present in the Belbrook Stories although they were not always taken. Certainly, my role as a Reflective Practitioner/Artist/Teacher directed me towards critical reflection of my own processes and informed my daily practice, but I would suggest that the function of critical reflection is a much wider and more important one than I was aware of during the project, and indeed, in the earlier stages of this research. Developing the tools of critical reflection as a central process in the making of community theatre is the key to sustainable and informed art-making, and I suspect, the development of genuinely culturally democratic practice. I would now propose that The Community Theatre Matrix accommodate a fifth element, Critical Reflection in the construction of the Engaged Space.

Building a process of reflection and critique into the collective art-making:

-signal shared responsibility for the art-making, enhancing the culturally democratic nature of the process;
-through usage, builds a language of reflection and critique, and potentially builds on the language of the practice also;

-provides perspective. Participants can stand back from the process they are engaged in, and through reflection and critique, own and shape the work, offers a mechanism for evaluating the work that is informed by the participants and their context;

-contributes to the sustainability of artistic practice. Arts projects in communities are frequently one-off events. Without a conscious development of the vocabularies of reflection and critique, and the vocabulary experience, it is difficult to for the cultural capital generated by one project to accrue for future projects.

There are three important points of clarification to be made about this proposed amendment to the Community Theatre Matrix.

The first is that the processes of reflection and critique are embodied in sound pedagogy and in sound artistic practice. Many community artists assume the inclusion of reflection and critique in the structure and management of their arts practice. I draw attention to it here to ensure its centrality to the process, and to make the links between each of the other four elements, and critical reflection, explicit. The sustainability of collective arts practice in community settings, and the place of cultural democracy in that practice, hinges on the capacity of the facilitators to build the language of reflection and critique in tandem with the development of a vocabulary of experience.

The second point is that this language is specific to the context in which it evolves. A language of reflection and critique reflects the specific experience and context of those who use it. It is not necessarily interchangeable between communities, and interchangeability would not be a signifier of the efficacy of language for the community who has formulated it.

The third point is somewhat speculative. I would suggest that a conscious commitment to the development and implementation of a vocabulary of reflection and critique, within
collective art-making, may promote acts of reflection and critique **through** the art-making process. In this way, collective art-making provides a forum for reflection on and critique of community through the artistic expressions the participants are engaged in. In other words, a deliberate focus on skills of reflection and critique may be a key means to facilitate one of the underlying agendas of community arts practice, to engage in a critical discourse about one's own community.

8.4.ii. The Matrix reloaded.

This then, is the revised Matrix for community theatre practice.
A COMMUNITY THEATRE MATRIX

**Step One:** Community

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**Step Two:** A Call for Community Theatre

*(initiated within or outside the community)*

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**Step Three:** The Engaged Space

*(AESTHETIC, COMMUNAL, OPEN, REFLECTIVE)*

Community / Project Facilitators / Artists

(Community Artist, Gatekeepers, Leaders, Art-makers, Supporters, Volunteers)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

ARTISTRY AGENCY PEDAGOGY PRAGMATICS CRITICAL REFLECTION

↓

Community enactment

Inhabiting the Border Territory

The engaged space

↓

**Step Four:** Acts of Community Definition

Community (re)defined
Chapter Eight: Belbrook and the Community Theatre Matrix

8.5. Questions of the Research (Rehearsal Processes and Aesthetic Outcomes)

This thesis began with a question: what are the rehearsal processes that will yield a satisfactory aesthetic outcome in community theatre? During the project the question continued to challenge me. In the writing of the novella, I articulate, through Pip, the quest for a greater understanding of how the aesthetic might play a part in community theatre practice.

The question of the aesthetic is a critical one in community theatre. I also believe that it is critical to place the aesthetic at the heart of the work. The question then becomes, what kind of aesthetic are we talking about, how do we identify it, achieve it, and measure it?

8.5.i. Belbrook Stories and a community aesthetic

If a community aesthetic implies a participatory aesthetic, associated as much with process and participation as with agreed qualities of artistic performance, then there are a number of ways in which the Belbrook Stories project achieved a community aesthetic.

There are three key points of clarification to consider in this discussion

- **Aesthetic process rather than aesthetic outcome.**

  The novella juxtaposes accounts of increasingly satisfying events in the process of collective art-making, with the complex, layered accounts of performances which do not provide a satisfying aesthetic for community or artist. In the workshops and in play-building, there are examples of an aesthetic imperative at work. There are moments of transcendence and transformation, and powerful experiences of learning through the collective, artistic endeavour. The drive to create and nurture these moments is perhaps the best example of the aesthetic imperative at work for me as community artist.

  As I proposed earlier in this chapter and in the novella, a community produces only what is possible and appropriate for that community. Perhaps this statement can be expanded
to propose that the community generates what the community needs. In the interplay between all the members of the temporary community of art-makers, we make the choices that serve the most pressing needs. As community artist, I chose to emphasise agency and opportunities for the voices of the young people in our temporary community to be heard through the work, although they were not always heard in the work. I believe that the aesthetic limitations of Belbrook Stories reflected the limitations in our ability to build shared vocabularies of experience and critical reflection.

**Finding the form**

During my analysis of Belbrook Stories I identified the building of an Engaged Space as central to the process of community theatre practice, and by implication, to the achievement of a community aesthetic. Clearly there are ways in which this did and did not occur during the Belbrook Stories project. In workshops, I gave considerable attention to finding and generating aesthetic moments. Those moments of liberatory imagination occurred for individuals and whole groups. They were frequently characterised by the use of strategies in which there was openness within structure. They may have been framed by a question or an invitation that layered the new and challenging upon the familiar and the local. *(What does it look like inside the time machine?)*

The aesthetic processes at work in play-making were not mirrored by the form of the plays themselves. The choices made with regard to dramatic form did not offer the same opportunities for openness within structure, and did not effectively juxtapose the familiar with the new and challenging. While the content of the plays suggested an effective juxtapositioning, the form did not. Therefore, the skills required to translate the dramatic scripts to performance texts were not the skills that had been nurtured in the play-building processes. The skills that had been nurtured enabled participation in aesthetic workshop processes, both individual and collective. The skills required to translate dramatic texts,

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in the form in which they emerged, were conventional, modernist performance skills, built on assumed knowledge of conventional stagecraft (projection, spatial awareness and characterisation for example).

For a community aesthetic to be present in both process and outcome, there needs to be a synchronicity between the vocabulary of experience that is built, and the expressive form created to translate it. The question that must be asked when considering experimentation in form in a community theatre context is: does the outcome house the process, in terms of artistry, agency, and pedagogy, and ultimately in terms of cultural democracy?

- **Shaping, reading, and valuing the work: tensions of the modernist aesthetic in a community context.**

The greatest challenge to an evolution in form is the community itself. Whether we are producers, audience or critics of the community art created by us and for us, we are not free of the past. Inevitably, as Steve Gooch said in 1984, whenever we “approach the stage” we bring something of the past with us.\(^{359}\) I have strongly advocated the necessity for building a vocabulary of experience that is specific to the community and to the project being mounted. However, it is essential to recognise that regardless of the desire to base the work we create on a foundation of shared, collective aesthetic experiences, we enter the working space with a cultural tool kit already assembled. How we negotiate the terrain already cast is the critical factor in the establishment of a new and shared art-making landscape.

Creating a new and shared aesthetic landscape for collective art-making relies on a renegotiation of the ‘cultural tool kit’ which all participants, including 'trained' community artists, bring to the project. I would suggest that there are at least two beginning strategies to address the hurdle of past preconceptions. Firstly, the process of building a vocabulary of experience is a conscious attempt to construct an appropriate

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‘cultural tool kit’ for a specific art-making context. This should be a pro-active and explicit exercise. The process is 'named' and the tools being shaped and placed in the tool kit are identified, not just in terms of their function in current art-making activities, but in terms of what it is that they might be superseding from past understandings of art-making. The process of identifying past preconceptions and assumptions thus becomes part of the collective enterprise. Differentiation between past work and the work at hand becomes an early strategy in the building of the Engaged Space. This is a key to individual’s taking responsibility for their own contribution to work that will ultimately be shared. It is also important that all participants, including facilitators and artists, engage in a process of identifying the past influences.

The second, related strategy in addressing the challenge of the preconception is to ensure the early development of a vocabulary of reflection and critique. If such a vocabulary becomes an active tool in the collective art-making processes, individuals will have at their disposal a language through which to negotiate the complexities of ‘upgrading’ their cultural tool kit. The key here is that the processes are transparent and the purposes explicit, even when the work is subtle, complex and layered.

8.6. A Community Aesthetic as Emancipatory Practice

Community theatre often seeks to take individuals and groups into a place of common interests and shared purpose that seems to be elusive. A community theatre project offers membership of a temporary community of art-makers. The art-making offers the participant the possibility of emancipation - whether it is a fleeting foray into imagination and momentary freedom from daily life; or the prospect of a “heightened sense of significance” that transcends daily experience; or a glimpse of old order and existing hegemony overturned through “rehearsals for life”. The act of engaging with the art-

making in an aesthetic space is at the core. This is what differentiates this kind of community activity from non arts-based activity. The opportunities for emancipation and potentially for change are stimulated by the formulation of the temporary community through the act of making art. The aesthetic experience becomes the catalyst.

Finally, I return to a summary of Lucy Lippard's description of a community based aesthetic as a useful reminder of dimensions of the aesthetic in a community setting.

According to Lippard, a community based aesthetic is:
- SIMPLE and FAMILIAR
- LAYERED, COMPLEX AND UNFAMILIAR
- EVOCATIVE
- PROVOCATIVE AND CRITICAL

The value of this framework is clear: we work from what we know. We embrace first, through agency. Then we provide a framework (a collective, aesthetic framework) which takes individuals beyond the known by scaffolding the experience so that the individual offerings accrue rather dissipate. The experience is evocative: it reaches back into past known stories and re-articulates them in a new aesthetic frame. Through participation, as maker or audience, the community member is challenged to look freshly on the assumptions of their own community, to critique and formulate new understandings, and this, potentially, paves the way for change.

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The play was fantastic because it was raining so everyone came in and watched. The highlight was probably the end part where the couples married and they all lived happily ever after. (Marissa, Yr 5, Belbrook P.S.)

Daryl Wildcat: See again there’s that sacredness of the theatre. To legitimise the community. By having everybody speak of something and using that theatre for discussion then, that’s your forum, eh. So you could maybe build a legitimate space…… The theatre of open space, the theatre of open discussion. Then that’s where democracy is in that openness……

Heather: I think that the theatre in many places actually creates community. Not always in earth shattering ways. But the act of creating a piece that is based on talking to people or having people in the community performing their own stories or creating scenes about issues that go on in that community, actually does create community…… In that physical space. Common unity. It may not be very long lasting, it may not have a community that goes on … but for a period of time, what happens is people see one another. And the act of seeing one another and one another’s lives is… I don’t know how you make anything change until that happens. 363

9.1. Pip's Return: The Irony of the Quest

One year passes, then another. And no mention of a fete. However, plans are made for a school performance. A teacher is assigned to make the arrangements. She finds a local company who writes musicals for schools to perform. The school acquires the rights for *The Quest*. It's a whole school musical with just six speaking parts. Pip pops her head in and proposes that the older children create some additional scenes, so that more people can be involved. Sure, they say. Rehearsals begin for the Belbrook version of *The Quest*. Pip offers to help. Thanks, say the teachers. So Pip directs and helps the children write the extra scenes.

This year, after much discussion and debate, the play will be in a theatre, hired at expense unprecedented for Belbrook Primary. There are no such venues in the hills, so this year's event will take place in a suburb off the mountain, a thirty minute drive away. Parents, teachers and children will all have to travel. There'll be no rehearsal in the theatre. The teacher who makes the arrangements trembles at the enormity of her decision. What if everyone hates it? There have already been rumbles about the cost, and the drive.

Pip hates the play. It is trite and badly written, and, from her perspective, doesn't seem to have a point. The kids are enjoying making
their own little interludes. All of the Grade Fives and Sixes who want to have a 'speaking part' have one.

In rehearsals Pip turns her attention to the impossibility of performing in a theatre venue that no one has seen. Some of the children have never been in a theatre. She encourages some activity with regard to a set and some more 'theatrical' props and costumes. She meets with the theatre technicians and prepares a lighting plot. She drills the children in the vagaries of 'entrances and exits'. It is very challenging. Two years on, she is still reaching for a shared language. Interestingly, with Fran and the Grade Fives and Sixes, this is now so much easier. This is now their third production together. They have some kind of vocabulary of experience.

On the night of the performance, there is an extraordinary storm. Whole areas of Melbourne are ravaged by unexpected and savage wind, rain and hail. At the theatre in the suburbs, there is a minor leak in the foyer. None of the families encounter any difficulty in the thirty minute drive. They skirt the storm.

Pip sits in the lighting box, calls cues to the lighting technician, and calls stage cues to one of the teachers back stage over the intercom. The 'play' proceeds without a hitch. Pip is worried for her son Max, now in Grade Six. Max has a leading role, but is not feeling well. He performs valiantly, Pip the parent thinks.
The play is a success. Everyone is thrilled. Warren is thrilled. The teachers are delighted. The parents think it’s the best thing Belbrook has ever done. Being in the theatre makes all the difference, they say to each other. Great job, Pip. Pip is bemused. From where she is sitting, the play is clumsy and the staging awkward. The children enjoy themselves and particularly love being on the stage with all the lights on them. What can the parents see that she can't Pip wonders. She feels like saying to people, as she had felt so many times before, please don't judge me as a theatre director on this work. I can do better. But Pip doesn’t say this on the night. She accepts the unexpected compliments graciously, although in her heart every acknowledgement for the Quest feels like a slight to her earlier work with the children of Belbrook Primary. At the end of the night, Warren makes a thank you speech to all the parents, the children and the teachers and those who've helped out. Pip is singled out for special attention. She accepts her bunch of flowers graciously as well. She thinks, two years too late, Warren.

The experience with The Quest reminds Pip there is still much for her to learn about her community and their relationship to performing arts. She reminds herself that community theatre has to be about the community first. The question for the community artist has to be, what does this community want, and not, what do I want for this community.
For several months after *The Quest*, Pip lives with the certainty that she has butted up against impermeable rock, in her own quest to introduce performing arts practice into the fabric of Belbrook Primary School. Max heads to High School. *The Quest* was to be her last arts encounter with the school. In the new year, a letter arrives from Warren. It is another thank you for her wonderful contribution to the successful play, *The Quest*. Pip shakes her head. Finally, she understands what is important to Warren, and to many members of the school community. If she had her time over, she thinks, she might have done things differently.

But then, Pip reads on. Warren concludes his letter with a promise to Pip. "I would like to assure you that we are committed to continuing to promote and display the performing arts at Belbrook Primary School."

Pip puts the letter in a safe place.
9.2. Reclaiming Art : The Last Public Forum

This thesis began with an account of two contrasting theatre events. One took place in a community hall, and the other in the city's Arts Centre. Throughout the thesis, the question posed by Andrea Hull\textsuperscript{364} and cited on the first page has recurrd. “Why aren't the arts an experience shared by all? Why are they not part of everyday life?” And for me, this transforms into the question: \textit{Why are we not communities of art-makers? And further to this, how can we become communities of art-makers?}

By posing such questions and attempting to respond to them, I have also considered an associated set of propositions: that collective art-making is desirable and has the potential to contribute positively to the life of a community and its individual members. A more provocative set of implications has also been canvassed. These are the provocations associated with the proposition that community art-making can be a site of critique and change for communities, and that this is also, potentially desirable.

My study has come to focus on the detail: on the human dimension of community theatre practice, on the day-to-day interactions between participating individuals, and on the challenges encountered and overcome by the community artist in the pursuit of artistic practice in a community context. There is however a wider dimension to this exploration. There are the broad principles of community theatre practice. How does the local example inform the general principles of cultural democracy; of community theatre as a popular forum; of art for ordinary people; and of community theatre as a site of critique and change? This thesis concludes with a return to where I began with the early chapters, to broad principles, to consider the implications for community theatre practice as a potentially emancipatory practice.

In the early chapters of this thesis I attempted to make a case for community theatre as a site for cultural democracy. A collective art-making experience, facilitated by experienced community theatre practitioners, offers a vehicle for individual and community expression. Both process and form are implicated in the achievement of a shared aesthetic experience. This culminates in an expression of community which may be affirming or challenging of that community and the wider society of which it is a part (or on the margins on). Possibly. I emphasise here that the processes and outcomes that I have explored in the preceding chapters allow for the possibility of cultural democracy, and provide for the potential for critique, and in some instances pave the way for an opportunity for change. There are no absolutes, and no fool-proof formulas. As this account of community theatre practice reveals, there are no certainties when engaging with communities. Communities are not fixed entities, and as I have so recently observed, they are constantly “in a state of becoming”. Regardless of the commonalities that bind them, even temporarily, communities are also fluid and shifting affiliations. They are diverse and idiosyncratic, driven by a multiplicity of agendas, and informed both subtly and overtly by past shared and individual experience. With such complexity, it is wise to frame every schema and each proposition for rehearsal processes and especially for outcomes, with a ‘vocabulary of possibility'. Words such as 'potential' and 'opportunity' and 'possible' are not equivocations but an acknowledgment of the mutability and unpredictability that characterise community theatre practice.

Having closely examined the practice of the community artist in my pursuit of a set of rehearsal processes that serve both artists and communities, I would like to conclude with a consideration of principles in community theatre practice. For me this requires an exploration of the most pressing sets of 'possibilities' that in turn present themselves as a series of questions for further research.

The first is the question of form. My discussion of a community aesthetic is an open-ended one, I believe. While this thesis argues strongly for the presence of a community aesthetic at various points in the making, presenting and viewing of a collective theatre
event and provides some examples of how this might occur, the question of form begs further investigation. If there is a set of principles which inform the community artist in the building of an Engaged Space, is there a similar set of principles to guide the choice of theatre form which might best support the activities in the Engaged Space. Some community artists favour particular theatrical forms for community practice. A number of these practices have been alluded to earlier. For example, highly ritualised, large scale events are especially popular with practitioners such as Neil Cameron, the Welfare State, Bread and Puppet Theatre, to name a few.

Regardless of the form chosen however, the process of determining form is one of the central negotiations between community participants and facilitators. Finding the form also tests many of the vulnerabilities of community theatre making. Both useful and unhelpful pre-conceptions about theatre form surface when groups negotiate about how they wish to express their ideas for an audience. The balance between community performers' ideas about their performance, and the skill base they are able to draw on in order to execute their ideas, is a very delicate one. It is at this point that a culturally democratic process may be sacrificed in order to achieve a particular kind of performance aesthetic.

Further investigation into the possibilities of form is warranted here. Richard Schechner's seminal work in the field of the social and ritual meanings of performance would be a very useful starting point. By beginning with social, political and anthropological interpretations of communities seeking individual and collective cultural expressions, questions of form will inevitably and usefully be placed in a context beyond theatre-making.

There are two further questions I wish to raise in this conclusion. Both relate to the nature of cultural democracy and the opportunities afforded by participation in a collective art-making experience in a community. There has been an emphasis in this thesis on the

importance of culturally democratic principles informing practice. However, a culturally democratic process is not always achievable. Indeed, community members may not agree on what constitutes cultural democracy, and may value different aspects of a practice that accommodates and values all manner of participation in production and reception.

9.3. Critique and Change

The first of the two questions I would like to consider in further research is a relational question: what is the relationship between critique and change in community theatre. There are many facets to this question. Is change inevitable in community theatre practice? Does change, on occasion, precipitate critique? Or, is the inverse true, that when community theatre deals with critique of the community and/or the wider society, does change follow? Is change a desirable outcome?

The positioning of community theatre practice at the margins of dominant cultural and social practice has been discussed in the early chapters of the thesis but warrants further exploration, particularly in relation to both critique and change. Ron Short, of Roadside Theatre, maintains that theatre, and “grassroots theatre in particular” is the “last public forum for the common people”. The provision of an artistic vehicle for the purposes of public discussion and debate lies at the heart of much community theatre practice. The questions that I believe warrant further investigation here are questions of substance. Can a community critique itself or the wider society, simply by engaging in an act of community art-making? Does the critique necessarily have to be overt, and carried not just through the substance of the art-making (eg a play about timber mills and logging in a forest community) or can it be carried by the form? . In other words, if the Belbrook community creates a site for expression through art at its annual fete, and generates performance based on shared interests and a commitment to collaboration, is this a preliminary act of critique? Is it perhaps the first and necessary building block to a more

366 Ron Short, Roadside Theatre, Kentucky in Performing Communities: the Grassroots Ensemble Theatre Research Project, Community Arts Network, Community Arts Network Website.
conscious manipulation of theatre as a vehicle for the expression of community needs and identity? The questions surrounding the sites for community expression generated by community theatre making are complex and compelling. In the same way that the Engaged Space offers a site for aesthetic and collective expression perhaps community theatre itself as a 'forum for the common people' requires closer examination. I would begin with the question of 'space'.

A space is not the substance of a place but the product of its transformation. It exists only in relation to vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Space 'occurs'; composed of intersections of mobile elements, it is actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. With none of the univocity or stability of the 'proper', it is produced by the operations that make it function in 'a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities'.

The space in which community theatre is played out is a public space, discursive and creative in nature and, as Morris suggests here, a site of inherent tensions borne of the multiplicities in agendas and juxtapositions of those who inhabit it. It is my contention that the tensions and the creativity generated when various individuals and forces come together to make collective art for community purposes provide the pre-conditions for constructive reflection and critique. The space is in which community theatre takes place is active and enactive, and thus is a 'product of its transformations.' Further research into the practice of community theatre as a site for community and societal critique is warranted. As an extension of my current research, I would choose to focus particularly on the interconnections between a community's construction of a discursive public space located on the margins, and the community participation in an Engaged Space facilitated by a community artist.

9.4. The Arts and Everyday Life

Finally, I return to the very first question of my study. Why are the arts not an experience shared by all people as a part of their daily lives? This is a question articulated in a

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number of different forms during this study: by Andrea Hull; later by Raymond Williams; John Dewey; and then by various social commentators and theatre practitioners. A cornerstone for cultural democracy must be, by definition, participation by 'the people'. The story of the Belbrook project is a collection of accounts of intersections between people and art in a community context. For very many reasons the story carries with it the tension of elements colliding or running parallel rather than intersecting. The story also carries with it moments of possibility, when a temporary community of art-makers lays claim to an art form on their own terms, and expresses their ideas through this art-form, for a brief moment in time. The art created in these brief moments may not be art that is recognisable in form or content in another community. However, the process of claiming both the content of the art and the opportunity to be producers and receivers of it, is essentially an act of community, with the potential to inform, enrich or redefine that community on its own terms.

I've walked up the hill from Belbrook School for the last time. My experience in the school and in the community reminds me that the act of restoring the arts to the every day is a longer trek than up this one hill. Is it possible for a community such as the one I live in to restore arts practice to the every day, and to embrace arts practice as a vehicle of choice for expressing who it is? Is it viable to consider that the Belbrook community might elect to critique itself through a community theatre project? What might it take for a community such as my own, to choose theatre as the means by which they express their view of themselves and the society they find themselves at the edges of? How can theatre, like culture, be ordinary?

_The tale is as old at the Eden Tree - and new as the new-cut tooth -
For each man knows ere his lip-thatch grows he is master of Art and Truth;
And each man hears as the twilight nears, to the beat of his dying heart,
The Devil drum on the darkened pane: "You did it, but was it Art?"_ 368

368 Rudyard Kipling, _The Conundrum of the Workshops_,
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