Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi: Engaging with oral art forms to support drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding

By

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALLY

I certify that this is my original work and that all sources have been acknowledged. This thesis has not been previously submitted for any other degree.

Carol Helene Carter
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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father and of my mother who was always there for me and was still with me at the beginning of this research journey.

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ABSTRACT

This study tells my research story about my discoveries and challenges within an investigation of the role of oral art forms in supporting drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding in a tertiary education environment. My practitioner-led action research took place at the University of Melbourne within a course designed to inform pre-service learner-teachers about drama pedagogy. While my research was firmly located within an Australian context it was influenced and informed by my South African background and experiences.

The central research question was: What role can culturally specific oral art forms play in supporting drama pedagogy and learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding? In addressing this question I interspersed formal prosaic discourse with storytelling, research poems, graphs, tables, chants and dialogue; the source of these are field-notes, my meta-journal, questionnaire responses, interviews and learner-teachers’ written work. The key theoretical areas that I have drawn on in this research include: Action Research; Arts-based Research and Narrative Inquiry; Learning and Teaching; Drama Education; Oracy and Oral Art Forms; Education Policy and Higher Education; Postcolonial Theory, Culture and Intercultural Communication; and Constructivism and Socio-Constructivism. Within this study I link terms such as hybridity and essentialism to participants’ oral art form experiences. I consider the interplay between a teaching and research agenda. I describe, and reflect on, learner-teachers’ experiences of engaging with oral art forms.

I found that oral art forms can be effective in supporting drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding provided that the facilitator builds on diverse participants’ pre-existing familiarity with oral art forms. This action research provides the practitioner researcher with deeper understanding of the use of oral art forms as viable learning and teaching strategies. It also delineates effective and non-effective pedagogical strategies for enabling tertiary students to experience and engage with oral art forms. The research indicates a need to continue to explore the use of oral art forms as well as other expressive art forms within a tertiary teacher-education environment.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
OF A RESEARCH STORY

Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the critical researcher... [focuses] on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers [as]... they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research story is about an action research process that explored oral art forms within a drama education course at the University of Melbourne. I investigated how such forms could be identified and engaged with to support intercultural understanding and drama pedagogy within a tertiary educational environment. In this study I used drama contexts to frame the participants’ access to culturally specific oral art forms within learning and teaching experiences. These experiences, which form the basis of this research, took place within a course I taught that is designed to inform pre-service learner-teachers about drama pedagogy.

The central research question was: What role can culturally specific oral art forms play in supporting drama pedagogy and learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding? I intended to interrogate how I and the group of learner-teachers that I was working with could share culturally specific oral art forms. I also wished to examine the potential and effectiveness of using oral art forms to support pedagogy and intercultural understanding within a drama course designed for learner-teachers.

In this chapter I provide an introduction and overview to the study and the specific form that the report takes. I position myself, my knowledge interests and my educational philosophy within the investigation and delineate the way in which the writing up of this research may differ from the more ‘traditional’ thesis.
format. I conclude the chapter by outlining the structure of the thesis and the issues and ideas discussed in each of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 POSITIONING MYSELF

The research topic is grounded in my passion for finding alternative educational approaches that resonate with my assumptions about learning and teaching. I favour approaches that have genuinely moved away from transmission-based learning, and that broaden the type of knowledge envisaged for learner-teachers. I pursue approaches that do not reside exclusively in western views and practices but remain embedded within specific socio-cultural contexts while simultaneously reflecting global ideas and practices. As Bishop (1991: 89) states, “To ignore the [local knowledge] would lead to indoctrination, while to ignore the [formal knowledge] would lead to anarchy… [learning activities need to take place] within a certain knowledge frame but with the goal of recreating and redefining that frame”.

For this reason I examined the impact of an educational strategy on intercultural understanding and drama pedagogy. The educational strategy made use of oral art forms within the context of educational drama. I am influenced by contextually based approaches to learning including ‘situated learning’ (Lave and Wenger 1991), ‘problem-based learning’ (Stepien, Gallagher and Workman 1993), ‘experiential learning’ (Kolb 1984) and ‘collective learning’ (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993).

I hoped that contextualised learning, within frames that are highly familiar to students would assist in moving away from:

...contemporary educational aims and directions [which] commonly proceed as though they exist in isolation from the lived experiences and knowledges of students and local community stakeholders
I believed that culturally specific oral art forms could have a role to play in linking learning to learner-teachers’ ‘knowledges’. I also wished to explore how learning could be rooted within ‘lived experiences’ through engaging with oral art forms from the learner-teachers backgrounds and experiences.

1.2.1 Background to my story

Educational interests as well as personal and professional experiences have guided me towards my selected field of study. My experience in education has been predominantly from within a South African context, although, during 1991, I had the privilege of spending seven months visiting schools and observing drama lessons being taught at various schools throughout Australia including private, semi-private and state, or government, schools. I have also gained some international experience through attending conferences and presenting papers in Australia, Malaysia, Greece and Hong Kong.

In January 1982, I began my teaching career in South Africa, teaching learners in school environments as well as facilitating drama groups in ‘township’ areas. The learners I have taught have been from diverse social, cultural, racial, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Throughout my classroom teaching career I was acutely aware of the ‘outsider–insider’ status which operates at a conscious and unconscious level in schools as well as classroom power dynamics - both of which influence the focus for my research. ‘Outsider’ status refers to those for whom the institutional discourses, where learners receive their education, are ‘foreign’. ‘Insider’ status refers to those whose ‘socio-cultural capital’ is more closely aligned to the predominant institutional discourses (Gee 2004).

In January 1993, I took up a position as Educational Director at a South African non-governmental organisation, Young People’s Theatre Educational Trust (YPTET) where I remained until the end of 2000. To understand the essence of my work at YPTET, it may be useful to include the mission statement which read:
YPTET as an NGO supports community development and the redress of educational imbalances through offering education, training and development programmes. The ultimate goal is to promote arts education nationally by utilising drama as a tool for enhancing experiential learning, independent thought, creativity and the realisation of individual and group potential YPTET (1999: 1).

My work at YPTET had multifarious facets including the facilitation and supervision of Drama in Education courses for educators in rural and township areas in the Western Cape, South Africa and supporting and guiding Trust staff members. Although I continued to involve myself in teaching learners in classrooms, it was during the years at YPTET that my journey began to move in the direction of teacher education. At the beginning of 2001, I started my lecturing career in the Education Department of a university in South Africa - and so the journey into Higher Education began…

My experiences of being a student at different universities has varied considerably and impacted on my interest in alternative approaches to education. At the one end of the spectrum, being at a highly prescriptive traditional institution where one was not encouraged to think for oneself and where I learned a great deal about what education ought not to be and, at the other end of the spectrum, being at a highly enabling institution, where I began to develop a passion for process drama which still exists today. Though, my passion is in a more realistic and productive form than my original ‘fanaticism’ and belief that everything could and should be taught through this powerful teaching tool.

On some occasions I valued having the opportunity to focus on full-time study and, on other occasions, I discovered how advantageous it can be to work and study at the same time - as links can immediately and consistently be made between theory and practice. My experiences range from being in an uncomfortable and ‘foreign’ feeling space to being in a comfortable, familiar space, surrounded by colleagues and friends.
My Master of Education study, though not directly linked to this study, has had an impact on the content, focus and purpose of this PhD. While the topic and research questions are entirely different, they resonate in relation to examining potential ways of supporting and extending drama pedagogy albeit through collaborative projects (MEd) or oral art forms (PhD). When examining factors that prevent the use of drama and potential strategies for encouraging and supporting greater use of drama within classroom settings, in my Master of Education thesis, the focus was on teachers’ and university lecturers’ actions and perceptions. In this study the focus shifted to students’ or learner-teachers’ actions and perceptions. Further impact has been in the development and extension of ideas and concepts I explored at an MEd level.

While my research was strongly influenced by my South African background, this study was firmly located within an Australian context. I brought to this study my South African experiences and my emerging understanding of an Australian university environment. As I was embarking on research in an Australian context, I initially observed a series of classes. Prior to beginning my field work I taught groups of pre-service tertiary students who were completing a drama subject as a component of their course. This enabled me to get a ‘feel’ and sense of people and institution and to test the waters for my proposed thesis.

1.2.2 Motivating Influences

There are a number of personal and professional influences and experiences that have motivated me to undertake this particular study. Some of these influences, constructed from refined extracts of my research meta-journal, have been woven into the various chapters of the thesis. Placing prior experiences alongside the experiences of this research process and “learning by letting them speak to each other” contributes to the strength of insights and understanding I gained (Bateson 1994:14).

According to Richardson the “narrative of the self is a highly personalised, revealing text [of one’s] own lived experience” (2000: 521). The following
narrative was written shortly after I began my research. It provides a personalised picture of how my childhood impacted on my choice of research topic.

**Bible-Women, ‘Grey-hairs’ and Creative Caregiver**

Since I began preparing for this research story, I have been repeatedly asked. “Why oral art forms?” As I reflect on this question, I begin to realise the inevitability of my interest. From an early age through to young adulthood I was exposed to festivities, ceremonies, celebrations and rituals that were a rich source of what I now consider to be oral art forms. This was through my parents, religious, medical and political beliefs and agendas that saw me accompanying them to remote rural areas and township dwellings of poor, frequently illiterate, people. Or growing up in a home that was frequently furtively filled with what, in retrospect, I now see as ‘intercultural’ meetings and gatherings.

The Bible-Women were a group of, women who gently and unobtrusively helped the sick and ‘ministered’ to those in need. These Bible-Women, themselves not highly literate and communicating orally with the largely illiterate people that they ‘served’, taught me much about the power of the sung and spoken word. I met ‘grey-hairs’ (respected for age) in these communities, who though they did not read or write, shared their considerable knowledge and wisdom with me.

Also, as my parents both worked, I was looked after by a caregiver, who remained with our family for many, many years. Labelled by terms such as servant, maid, nanny and domestic, she was in actuality my second mother who was at times closer to me than my biological mother. When I think of her I am flooded by memories linked to ‘real’ cultural experience. The radio is playing in the kitchen and she is sharing her bowl of ‘umngqusho’ (samp and beans) with me. The African music and beat is calling to us and we start jiving. Soon it turns into an informal lesson for me about kinds of dance styles – phatha phata, mpantsula, kwaito – you name it. I’m not a good dancer – but a willing learner.
Other songs bring other lessons like the dance rituals of ‘rites’ of passage, weddings and engagement parties, learning to ‘toyi-toyi’ (used in protest) or songs which prompt the telling of an iintsomi (traditional story). Creatively and playfully I was introduced to the rich isiXhosa traditions of the Eastern Cape, the region where I grew up in South Africa.

Meta-journal (10/08/2008).

Embedded within my childhood experiences are influences and techniques that informed my pedagogical approach in exploring and engaging with oral art forms. From these early experiences, and later through teaching experiences and reading about various learning theories, my valuing of learning through play and through experiential and situated learning emerged. I learned first-hand about the educational potential of ‘rhyme, rhythm and repetition’ (Fox 1999).

In the light of my interest in South African, particularly isiXhosa, oral art forms, the question of what motivated me to conduct this research in Australia needs to be clarified as I explain the positioning of myself.

Studying in Australia

My choice was informed by both a desire to live nearer my siblings and their families and a conviction that Australia would be the place that would be the most beneficial for my research. I had been to Australia a number of times, including in 1995, where I attended my first IDEA conference where the seeds of studying in Australia were initially planted. In my continual research for my work at a South Africa university, it seemed to me that, in both my areas of interest, that is Language and Literacy and Educational Drama, Australia was where the most ‘cutting edge’ and innovative academic texts were being produced.
There was also my desire to produce my research under the supervision of John O’Toole because of his impressive experience and body of work. In addition because, the organisation that I worked for (YPTET), was visited by a number of ‘overseas drama specialists’ before and during my time and he was the only one who, I was told, did not display the attitude that most of these visitors came to South Africa with. That is the attitude of showing us ‘ignorant’ South Africans the way to teach drama.

Lastly, I believed that Australia was an ideal place for accessing oral art forms because of rich indigenous ‘dream-time’ stories and because of the wide variety of cultural backgrounds and influences that make up modern day Australia. This was more challenging than I assumed...

Meta-journal (01/06/2009).

1.2.3 Constructivist Influences

My teaching and research is deeply embedded in constructivism, in particular, social constructivism. Constructivism is a theory of knowledge (von Glasersfeld 1991) that argues that people construct bodies of meaning and knowledge out of experience. Social constructivism, influenced by Vygotsky (1978), suggests that knowledge is constructed in a social context and emphasizes the importance of ‘co-constructing’ meaning from within socially framed activities. Vygotsky (1978: 89) states that learning by people “presupposes a specific social nature” and the learners’ development “into the intellectual life of those around them”.

In social or socio-cultural constructivism, as opposed to individual cognition proposed by constructivists following a Piagetian interpretation of constructivism, meaning construction is embedded in social and cultural contexts and requires social interaction. Wood (1998) believes that social constructivism combines various aspects of the theories of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky.
The isiXhosa phrase "Umntu ngumntu ngabantu" is not well understood within western contexts even when it is translated, ("I am a person because of other people"), since it is not seen to be significantly part of western oriented thought, which tends to promote the idea of the development of the individual by individual efforts. However it seems likely to me that Vygotsky would have understood it very well, as he introduced the notion of learning through the mediation of other people, and the role of culture as a context in which the learning takes place.

The kernel of constructivism, which has influenced my learning and teaching, is based on three principles - active construction of knowledge, meaning-making through the process of organising one’s experiences (von Glasersfeld 1987: 7) and the view that knowledge is socially, historically and culturally constructed. This view does not ignore the inner cognitive constructed knowledge of individuals, but rather stresses that knowledge is situated in a human context.

A quotation by Bruner echoes some of my sentiments. While it applies particularly to children, I believe it to be relevant to the teaching of university students as well.

… most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture...in a community of those who share a sense of belonging to a culture. It is this that leads me to emphasise ... the importance of negotiating and sharing - in a world of joint culture...


I entered this research process with a firm conviction that drama and culturally specific oral art forms have a powerful role to play within teacher education. Drama, as a learning tool for constructing and making meaning; and culturally specific oral art forms, as a means of accessing alternative ways of knowing. My conviction was based on multifarious positive experiences of using drama techniques and Indigenous South African oral art forms with university students in South Africa. I believed that the research questions were ‘real’ questions that needed to be explored and that they were aligned to the notion of working from the known to the unknown.
1.3 STORY FRAMEWORK AND FORM

This study is predominantly based in qualitative research though there is a slight element of ‘mixed-method research’ which “focuses on collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study” (Creswell 2003: 210). The data that I have expressed and interpreted numerically in the form of graphs forms a small part of this study. This data constitutes a quantitative component.

I view qualitative research as an ‘umbrella’ concept that includes several forms of inquiry which focus on interpretation and meaning (Merriam 1998). Qualitative research acknowledges and embraces subjective perspectives and personal biases which may impact on the study and accompanying findings. This is in contrast to the “supposedly value-free knowledge” (Conole 1993: 17) associated with quantitative research.

My approach began as participatory action research, within the framework of arts-based research enquiry and what O’Toole refers to as ‘third space’ methodologies “that simultaneously examine a phenomenon and intervene to change, or develop it” (O’Toole 2006: 28). For reasons that are explained within the body of this research document, participatory action research shifted towards what I have come to call a practical practitioner-led action research approach within the research process. An action research approach enabled me to access a variety of data and to move freely from, and between, interpretivist and interventionist paradigms. Tables drawn from the research I conducted for my M.Ed. (Carter 2006) were useful in conceptualizing the research framework.

In a study of this nature there are no absolutes in the way in which the research story is structured and reported on. However, not without causing myself prior pain and anxiety, I did eventually heed the advice to ‘marry’ the way in which I wanted to artistically and unconventionally report my story with the “demands and criteria of orthodox research” (O’Toole 2006: 171). In the end I decided
that I did not have sufficient confidence in both my “artistic prowess and [my] research skills to put them both up for [too much] scrutiny” (O’Toole 2006: 171).

Nevertheless there are some aspects of my reporting that are not conventional. Within my chapters, I have integrated appropriate literature, data analysis and interpretation of findings. Analysis and interpretation “weaves through the completed document as it is structured” (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul 1997: 161). They are part of the complementary aspects of process and product.

Rather than having an entirely separate literature review the literature has been ‘folded’ into various chapters of the research – an idea that is neither new nor unique. As Bruce points out more than a decade ago a literature review was conventionally a separate chapter in a thesis but depending on style, in some cases, “may appear throughout the work” (1994: 144). I wished to do, as Wolcott (1994: 17) suggests, that is “draw upon the literature selectively and appropriately as needed in the telling of [my] story”. However, in order to clarify the field of study, terms that I use throughout the research are defined and briefly reviewed within this introduction.

As I was working within the realms of arts-based research and my data is both qualitative and quantitative, I chose to intersperse formal prosaic discourse (Polkinghorne 1995) with storytelling, research poems, graphs, tables, chants and dialogue. My intention, in using a range of writing styles, was to evoke the essence of cognitive and aesthetic responses. Throughout the study where direct speech from learner-teachers’ responses has been used this has been written in italics and a different font (Calibri). Likewise material from my field-notes and reflective journal has been written in italics and a different font (Times New Roman). Where possible I have placed extracts from my field-notes, journal and learner-teachers’ responses in a text box.
1.4 DEFINING TERMS

The key terms that I have used throughout this study and briefly defined within this introductory chapter include ‘drama pedagogy and ‘educational drama’, ‘culturally specific oral art forms’ and ‘intercultural understanding’.

1.4.1 Drama Pedagogy and Educational Drama

Pedagogy is the art of teaching; as such it is “the underpinning philosophy that drives education: the how and why we educate” (Waters and Angliss 2005: 4). It encompasses knowledge, skills, principles, theoretical perspectives, teacher-learner relationships, teaching approaches and learning processes requisite for effective teaching. Critical pedagogy interrogates “the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power” (Giroux 1994: 30). Discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge includes presenting and depicting subject knowledge in ways that are useful and understandable (Shulman 1986).

Drama pedagogy, involving a multiplicity of dimensions and skills, “simultaneously evokes and extends students’ intellectual, social, emotional, physical, moral, creative, communicative and aesthetic abilities” (Verriour as cited in Gay and Hanley 1999: 365 - 366). Aesthetic responses; artistic and imaginative expression and experiences; perspectival learning; embodied, existential, contextualised and experiential knowledge; and the creation of ‘metaphoric worlds’ and symbolic representation are cornerstones of drama pedagogy (Henry 2000; Reimer 1992; Wright 2003; Ostern 2006). However, within drama pedagogy one needs to be aware of over-reliance on drama weaving its ‘magic’ rather than focussing on one’s own practices of drama.

As Neelands (2004: 48) states:

Drama cannot, of course teach in any kind of way, nor can it, of itself, be powerful. It is what we do, through our human agency, with drama that determines the specific pedagogy and specific power that...examples of rhetorical elision ascribe to the idea of drama itself.
Robinson asserts that drama in schools “goes back as far as schooling itself” (1980: 141). While the factual basis of this statement is difficult to determine, it would appear that drama for educational purposes, in the form of plays enacted by children in the classroom, “… can be found dating from when the educational system first began to keep documentation” (Urian 2000: 2).

Educational drama, as the name implies, can be used to refer to drama which has an overarching educational purpose or “…drama that connects with other educational aims” (Wagner 1998: 5). Process drama refers to educational drama where the participants explore a problem, situation, theme, text or idea by working in and out of role. The vehicle for exploration is the artistic medium of unscripted drama (O’Neill 1995). The predominant focus within this research is on drama as a method of learning and teaching and as “…a form of learning about the world” (Roper 2003: 36). For this reason the drama process is of paramount importance.

However, as process and product are, “…interdependent, not polar concepts” (Bolton 1998: 261), I have pursued a broad and inclusive definition of what constitutes educational drama to make full use of the potential that drama has for educational practices and learner-teacher support. Therefore, educational drama utilised within this study includes various aspects and conventions of drama from within both the process and product domain - sometimes referred to as ‘new wave drama’ (Clipson-Boyles 1998) or the ‘conventions’ approach (Neelands 2000).

Drama for learning and teaching purposes and drama for the purposes of theatre production undeniably have the same roots; they are not mutually exclusive, but are interrelated and should co-exist and work together. However, they each, according to Bolton (1998), belong to a ‘particular category of acting behaviour’ [emphasis added] dependent on the focus and purpose of the drama activity.
The relationship between process and product, as well as the focus and purpose of various forms of ‘acting behaviour’ are central to later discussions within this study. For this reason, I have used the following diagrammatical illustration of the relationships, taken from my MEd (Carter 2006: 19).

**Different categories of Drama**

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 1.1: Categories of Acting Behaviour (Carter 2006: 19)**

While my personal bias is towards drama as a teaching method in the form of Drama-In-Education or process drama, I believe focus needs to be on both drama as an art form and drama as a teaching method as together they form a valuable and significant part of drama education. Current drama publications generally no longer assume that there are dichotomies between ‘process and product’, ‘theatre and drama’, ‘drama for understanding’ and ‘drama as art’ and ‘experience and performance’.

Regardless of how educational drama is viewed, it appears crucial to utilise whatever drama techniques and forms are available that will serve to enrich one’s classroom practice and are consonant with one’s learning and teaching.
intentions. Gavin Bolton’s statement is as applicable today as it was when he wrote: “[a]ny exclusive use of a particular form invites a deteriorating educational experience...” (1979: 5).

As Fleming (2000: 34) states:

> Essentialist definitions of ‘drama as an art form’ or ‘drama for learning’ at one time prevented some teachers from importing useful techniques into their lessons (mime, movement, and dance) because these were considered to be ‘not drama’. Arguments in favour of placing theatre practice at the core of a drama curriculum help to highlight the public and cultural aspects of the subject but may result in restricted forms of practice if a narrow definition of theatre is employed.

My choice of educational drama is grounded in the effectiveness of my prior experiences when using drama for learning and teaching. Process drama links the thought and feeling domain and encourages multi-perspectival viewpoints. It broadens and challenges “the parameters of what can be seen as legitimate knowledge ... to experience and explore the issues of human concern and intellectual enquiry” (Carroll 1988: 21). As Crumpler (1996: 39) states, it acts as a “catalyst to explore meaning”.

1.4.2 Culturally Specific Oral Arts Forms

Oral art forms are a variety of forms which contain performance and non-verbal elements as well as the predominance of the spoken word. These elements, as symbolic modes of representation create multifarious opportunities for human expression and ‘engagement with the world’ opening up diverse potential possibilities for learning (Kress 2001). The symbolic modes of representation are generally culturally determined ways of communicating shared understanding and meaning (Chinyowa 2006). Oral art forms are exhibitional in nature and are usually viewed by an external participating, or non-participating, audience.
The emphasis of this research is on the use of culturally specific oral art forms in present-day contexts. I do not subscribe to the “once dominant traditional/modern opposition” (Finnegan 2001: 279-280). Drama Australia, the peak national body for drama educators has produced some guidelines. These Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guidelines for theatre/drama education (Drama Australia 2007: 8) state that the term traditional is usually associated with performance practices “regarded by communities as sacred, secret and strongly connected to culture, society, land, objects, dreaming and history”.

The term traditional also generally refers to pre-colonial practices while contemporary performance is post-colonial and “therefore within the frameworks of European dominance” (Drama Australia 2007: 8). I focus on contemporary forms and culturally specific traditional forms, within a contemporary, though not necessarily European dominated, framework.

Indigenous oral art forms from South Africa, used in this study, include the iintsomi (or traditional isiXhosa stories) and the izibongo (or praise-poetry) specific features of which will be clarified within the study. The use of these, and other oral art forms generated from participants, has been discussed extensively within subsequent chapters in this study. Contextualised and deepened definitions of oral art forms emerged as part of the action research process.

The first part of my research title, ‘Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi’ comes from a traditional isiXhosa chant that, in various forms in different regions in South Africa, is chanted when traditional stories are told during the daytime. It stems from a belief that stories should not be told during the daytime or the listeners will grow horns on their heads. So, if stories are told in the daylight, the magic chant below is said to prevent horns from growing...
Figure 1.2: Traditional Storytelling Chant

I have used the first line of the chant, in my title, as the research is about engaging with culturally specific oral art forms of this nature, and because this study is about the telling of my research story.

Drama and oral art forms have a number of commonalities and can be seen to be interconnected through performative, expressive, aesthetic and symbolic functions. The interconnectedness led me to believe that oral art forms may be used to complement and support drama pedagogy. There are direct links between drama as a ‘performing art’ and oral art forms and drama in certain forms could be classified as a type of oral art form. However, the term drama is a broader concept. It is inclusive of genres other than oral art forms within its more process, non-exhibition, written text-based orientations.

1.4.3 Intercultural Understanding

As drama education can include “cultural and pedagogical dimensions” (Ostern 2006: 13), I have explored both intercultural understanding and drama pedagogy within this research process.

Social constructivism emphasizes socio-cultural and contextual understanding and knowledge construction (Derry 1999; McMahon 1997). Learning is not only influenced by but grounded in culture “...understandings are constructed in
culturally formed settings” (Mercer and Fisher 1997: 112 - 117). This social constructivist emphasis on the cultural basis of learning renders investigating the potential of culturally specific oral art forms to support intercultural understanding feasible.

A study that hoped to promote intercultural understanding needed to define what is meant by culture. While culture is an intangible and extremely elusive concept, Banks, Banks and McGee (1997: 8) view culture in the following way;

*The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized society; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human society.*

James and Biesta (2007: 22), referring to Williams, articulate three views on culture, which are culture “as a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development... as a particular way of life ... and as the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity”. All three of these views impacted on my interpretation of culture in this study though engaging with oral art forms aligned itself most closely to examining the “practices of artistic activity”. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007:223) provide a basic, succinct and, cohesive definition of culture as “the shared behaviour and symbolic meaning systems of a group of people”.

The above definitions contain, to a greater or lesser degree, elements of cultural dynamism, relativism, and symbolism that are important considerations in the promotion of intercultural understanding. Intercultural relates to “experiences of other conventions, beliefs, values and behaviours” within groups other than one’s own. (Donelan 2005: 28). The term ‘intercultural’ refers to cultural interaction that is grounded in reciprocal respect (Fennes and Hapgood 1997).

Intercultural understanding requires sharing and negotiating within a range of situations and settings. It involves the ability to “know and understand ‘your’ culture, ‘another’s’ culture and have skill in working between your own and
another’s culture” (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training 2005: 25). While cultural similarities and differences are both important aspects of intercultural understanding, Barna (1997) argues that assuming similarity is a central cause for a lack of intercultural understanding. Difficulties in communicating with people within intercultural encounters will be experienced if we are unaware of, or trivialise, differences (Barna 1997).

My aim in investigating ways to support intercultural understanding does not reside in destructive and ill-advised notions of assimilation, appropriation and ‘the liberal idea of toleration’ (Gray, 2000). Rather it resides in constructive notions of crossing cultural boundaries and borders. I embrace a view of cultures as rich resources for expanding our understanding of diverse worldviews by “… engaging the students in the interpretation of various knowledges and modes of knowledge production” (Semali and Kincheloe 1999: 34).

In a world where we are continuously confronted with shifting conceptions of what constitutes knowledge, the ability “to be open to new and diverse experience... becomes essential” (West, Alheit, Anderson and Merrill 2007:18). As McNeil (2000: 271) states, “We must pursue scholarship that, in the words of Maxine Greene, ‘encourages multiple readings of the world’”. A scholarship that encourages us to “join the conversation of [hu]mankind” (Oakeshott as cited in Bates 2005: 101).

According to Bates (2005: 107), an advantage in seeking to promote intercultural understanding is a greater awareness of the “subjugated knowledges of people at the margins of our awareness”. It entails reflecting carefully and critically regarding significance derived from bringing “a wide variety of cultures into dialogue with each other” (Veblen, Beynon and Odom 2005: 2) as well as shifting from ‘ethnocentrism’ to ‘ethnorelativism’. Ethnocentrism refers to the privileging, valuing and centralising of ‘own’ group or ‘culture’ and the marginalising of others.’ Ethnorelativism’ refers to no groups being central, or more important, and no groups being peripheral, or marginalised (Bennett 1986).
Further in-depth discussions pertaining to intercultural understanding form an essential part of subsequent chapters in this study. This includes; an examination of the complexities of culture in Chapter Three; tensions related to learner-teacher perspectives of their intercultural understanding at the commencement of the action research process in Chapter 4; and an exploration of oral art forms in relation to intercultural understanding in Chapter Six.

1.5 POTENTIAL VALUE OF THIS THESIS STORY

The potential value of this study lies in finding creative ways to support drama pedagogy and the development of intercultural understanding - methods that respond to the learning and teaching needs of a divergent student population. In conducting this research I wished to contribute to a re-visioning to provide greater resonance between universities and increasingly diverse student populations.

Though this research is focussed specifically on an Australian context, an international “trend towards a mass participation in higher education” resulting in an increase in “potential users of higher education” (Murray and Lawrence 2000: 5) is a significant reason for finding alternative ways to support drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding.

I believe that a re-visioning is essential to align students’ ‘socio-cultural capital’ to institutional discourses where they receive their education. A re-visioning that could contribute to less “cultural disjuncture” (Cumming 2006: 14) by engaging with culturally specific oral art forms that learner-teachers from diverse backgrounds within an Australian tertiary learning environment may be familiar with. Sharing their own, and exploring others, culturally specific oral art forms could support intercultural understanding.

Anderson (2004: 282) identifies an increase in drama research as evident from a number of drama journals generated in recent years. However, despite this increase in drama research, and a growing body of work that details teacher development in the arts, there is still a paucity of drama research in comparison
to other pedagogical and curriculum areas, particularly in the area of higher education specifically initial teacher education (Hundert 1996; Shu and Chan 2007). This paucity, in conjunction with the need for more arts-based research (Barone and Eisner 1997; Eisner 2008), and an identified gap in current research relating to cognitive development within educational drama (Anderson 2004; Caterall 2002) are significant reasons for this study.

This research is linked to both aesthetic and cognitive development. The aim was to reinterpret aspects of drama pedagogy texts through culturally specific oral art forms by employing the whole brain, “both the left hemisphere associated with factual, analytical, verbal reasoning” and the right hemisphere or more affective part of the brain (Rossiter and Clark 2007:27).

Where drama research on pre-service teacher education does occur it largely focuses on learner-teachers’ exposure to, or use of, drama to educate children rather than as a pedagogy for older, mostly adult, learner-teachers studying at a tertiary level. Reasons for this may reside in attitudinal barriers that are evident when engaging adult learners in drama processes.

These barriers are linked to notions of the ‘seriousness’ of adulthood and the fear of embarking on activities that are considered inappropriate, as they are seen to be exclusively within the domain of childhood. Consciousness of what others may think of them, how others will judge what they see and being outside their ‘comfort zone’ contribute to challenges encountered when requiring adults to participate in drama activities. As O’Toole states, “... in Western society and increasingly in others, many adults are dismissive of manifestations of drama and theatre as ‘just play-acting’...treating it jovially, or demeaning it. It is often characterised as trivial... not serious” (2000: 19 - 20).

Drama has its roots in play and, in oral art forms, “stories are told...drums are beaten and poems are sung, all in the spirit of play” (Chinyowa 2007: 34). The concept of adults playing is not a widely accepted notion. Texts on, particularly, dramatic play are generally relegated to early childhood; and even when I have conducted workshops with adults, using storytelling, the suitability of stories for
adults has been questioned. Indeed, readers should be warned that an internet search, using the words adult and play, produces very interesting results – though not very productive for the purposes of my chosen topic!!

When engaging adult learners in drama processes, I have frequently encountered an initial reluctance to participate and an inertia that is more difficult to break through than when working with children, who more readily commit to a fictional ‘as if’ context. As I have been privy to the ‘magic’ and power of learning and teaching through drama, I am often frustrated by my inability to share this ‘magic’ when working with groups of adults. Therefore, it seems imperative that, within a justification of this research, the possibility, desirability, and potential benefits, of encouraging adults to participate in drama activities and oral art forms should be examined.

Adults have the capacity to be playful when deemed permissible, as indicated by, amongst other behaviours, participation in sport, joke-telling and storytelling evident in everyday conversations. As Langellier and Peterson (2004: 1) state:

“Let me tell you about something that happened to me,” one friend tells another as they walk through the park… “Did you see last night’s episode on television? Let me tell you what happened,” a worker tells a colleague during a coffee break…”…Such storytelling… is an integral and consequential part of daily life.

In daily life, “imagination emerges as an essential human capacity” (Trotman 2006: 2). What is required, for ‘playing the drama game’, and exploring ‘alternative possible worlds’ (Bruner 1986), is essentially an imagination. Therefore, it is highly possible to engage adults in drama processes, particularly as, “…most adults do actually enjoy drama. For them, as for children, drama is both fun and liberating” (O’Toole 2000:21).

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1 The ‘as if’ world or context of meaning is the “…vehicle or context for teaching and learning through the fiction that is established” (Holden 2003: 36). Process Drama takes place in the real ‘as is’ world of the classroom and within the world created by the fictitious ‘as if’ context.

There are vastly different fields and ways in which drama has been utilised. For example, in decision-making, problem-solving, thinking skills and ‘thinking on your feet’ (For example Anderson 2002; Luff 2000; Pipkin and DiMenna 1989; Meyers and Cantino 1993; Rogers and O’Neill 1993); co-operative learning (For example Rosenberg 1987; Tarlington and Verriour 1991); preparing children for globalisation (For example Morgan and Saxton 1996); empathy, moral education and values clarification (For example Winston 2000; Edmiston 2000; Bolton 1984; Courtney 1989); self-esteem and social development (for example Buege 1993); mastery of cultural symbol systems and multiple intelligences (For example Roper and Davis 2000; Baldwin and Fleming 2003; Neelands 1998); diversity and cultural perspectives (For example Grady 2000; Marshall 2004); and imagination (For example Cremin 1998).

Drama’s use across the curriculum is well documented (For example Goerecke 1994; Booth 1994; Winston and Tandy 1999; Poston-Anderson 2008; Baldwin 2008). Drama has been linked to the facilitation of subject areas including language arts, environmental studies, history, science, mathematics, physical education and social studies (For example Anderson 2003; Holden 2003; Morris and Nowell 2001; Luff 2000; Taylor, 1996; Goalen and Hendy 1993; Stewig, 1983).

Educational benefits of drama have also been highlighted within research in the field of learning through play (For example Toye and Prendiville 2000; Dunn 2003 and 1999; Lewis 1999; Beardsley 1998; Moyles 1993). The benefits of
using drama to ‘learn about the world’ and identify differing viewpoints and perspectives (For example O’Toole and Dunn 2002; Mallika 2000); and examining and understanding the complex nature of controversial, contemporary and social issues (For example O’Toole, Burton and Plunkett 2004; O’Mara 2002; Williams 2001; Grady 2002) have also been documented. Apart from experience that needs to be taken into account and a general awareness of preferable learning styles, adult learning is not totally divorced from the way in which children learn. For this reason, the efficacy of using drama as a learning tool with children, which has been widely documented, also applies to adult learning.

...Effective learning at all ages requires a balance between, on the one hand, well-learned routines that provide efficiency, and, on the other hand, opportunities for innovation that involve play and social interaction, which often allows new insights to emerge.

Schwartz, Bransford and Sears as cited in Arts Education Partnership (2004: 9).

In addition, the transformative theory of learning that has emerged in literature on adult learning adds credence to the view that dramatic activity is desirable. Transformative learning involves moving beyond factual knowledge and becoming changed by what one has learned in a meaningful way (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative theory, rooted in constructivism, has many of the features embedded in drama processes and oral art forms such as; evaluation of and critical reflection on assumptions, beliefs and values; multi-perspectival viewpoints; problem solving; ‘disorientating dilemmas’ (Mezirow 1997); and transformative learning as an intuitive and emotional process (Boyd 1991).

Metacognition, that is knowledge of one’s own thinking and the factors that influence one’s thinking, appears vital to transformative learning. Drama activities continuously provide “opportunities for productive metacognitive reflection” through such processes as “invention, trying-out, reflecting and reinventing so characteristic of drama” (Caterall 2007: 164).
While motivating learner-teachers to participate in educational drama is not always an easy task, it is definitely possible and worth the effort as “drama can provide ... a social permission to play” (O’Toole 2000: 25). A response from an initially reluctant learner-teacher suggests that drama can play a vital role in educating adult learners. “So next time someone walks into our lectures and tells us to get ready to go to a new planet I’ll say without hesitation, ‘when do we leave?’” (Carter and Westaway 2006: 6).

The key lies in “removing those obstacles of grown-up suspicion that drama might be just childsplay, at focusing it clearly on contexts of the adult learning, their workplaces and communities” (O’Toole 2000: 21), gradually building up trust and confidence, re-teaching adults how to play, ‘hooking’ on to the familiar and making reasons for activities highly explicit.

This investigation sought to develop and refine learning and teaching methods within higher education that encourage active, experiential learning approaches that have moved away from “dysfunctional conventional university pedagogical approaches...created centuries ago” (Levin and Greenwood 2006: 103).

1.6 TENTATIVE BEGINNINGS

My initial explorations into the use of Indigenous South African oral arts forms and life experiences occurred through my lecturing, in both process drama and language and literacy courses at a South African university. These tentative beginnings, described in the extracts from my meta-journal on the next page (26), appeared to support the use of oral art forms and led me to consider a more-in depth, expanded and formalised research story. The story spoken about in the second extract is included in the appendix (Appendix A: STORY OF A LAND CALLED HIGHER EDUCATION: 317 - 319).
**Oral Art Form Exploration**

I experimented with oral art forms in my drama and language courses in South Africa. I was teaching first year students about home and school talk. Each group was given a particular part of the reading to do for homework. I then got the groups to decide on a main idea within their section of the reading, create a chant and then create a story to expand on the chant and illustrate the main idea....

With the fourth years I looked at praise poetry and traditional stories... Many of the learner-teachers, especially but not exclusively isiXhosa students, were very excited by this...I remember one particularly disinterested student who seemed to spend most of the sessions sleeping suddenly coming alive, showing such passion and being the first to share her praise poem... first in isiXhosa and then in English. Some of the learner-teachers began writing praise poems outside of class and bringing them to me... I had never had students doing anything extra like that before. Lots of them came from the learner-teachers from Lesotho.

The success of both of these activities led to me to think about researching oral art forms. I kept some of the praise poetry but unfortunately they got lost in my move to Australia.... I was both elated and saddened when one of the fourth year students during her public presentation of at the end of her fourth year said that the only time in her university career when the learning was connected to her own culture and where she could freely ‘speak in her own language’ was when she had participated in this activity. This made me determined to find culturally specific oral art forms that could be used with learner-teachers and more opportunities for students to find their voice and speak their language.

**Meta-journal (14/05/2007).**

**Writing a story**

When I began my research story I explored the use of different writing styles.
I wrote about my experiences with students and academic writing (which was part of my original research topic). The story is written in the style of an iintsomi (or traditional isiXhosa participatory story) which includes songs and chants. The aim was to contextualise this story within rich cultural African traditions and to explore the use of a writing style that I may pursue within my study.

Meta-journal (03/07/2007).

The progress and outcome of the rest of my research story is described in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

1.7 PROGRESSION OF THE THESIS STORY

The thesis has seven chapters. The first three chapters largely contextualise the study through introduction (Chapter 1), methodology (Chapter 2) and an articulation of cultural complexities and oral art forms (Chapter 3). The next three chapters are the largely empirical chapters that are structured around specific topics namely, tensions and challenges (Chapter 4), supporting drama pedagogy (Chapter 5) and intercultural encounters (Chapter 6). In each of these chapters I tell an independent but interconnected part of my research story that addresses the central research question. The last chapter (Chapter 7) is the final chapter where I present the overall conclusions I have reached. The content and progression of the remainder of the study is as follows:

Chapter 2: Research Characters and Setting

This chapter discusses the context and methodology used in the study. It outlines the characters and setting of the research. This includes; a description of the learner-teachers involved in the study; an account of the learning and teaching context and the research framework; information concerning the learner-teachers’ prior experiences and understanding of intercultural communication and learning within a tertiary environment; as well as an explanation of, and reflection on, my research process.
Chapter 3: Oral Art Forms and Cultural Complexities

The chapter begins with a clarification of oral art forms for the purposes of this study. I articulate students’ understanding and experiences within the complexities of culture. The plot, or storyline, is continued with an account of South African examples that I used to assist students to identify oral art forms. Literature pertaining to oracy, oral art forms, cultural and postcolonial theory, and drama education is used in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Tensions and Climax within the Research Story

Chapter 4 provides an account of the tensions and challenges I encountered throughout my research process. In this chapter, I reflect on the identified tensions, examine possible reasons for these tensions and potential ways in which the tensions could be addressed. I also include a reflective dialogue on the challenges of accessing oral art forms. I felt that it was important to address these tensions and challenges within this chapter of the study as they impact on the research conducted and reported on in subsequent chapters. Discussion of these tensions and challenges inform my understanding and are crucial to the learning that took place during my research. Literature pertaining to learning, teaching and research, reflection, empowerment and power relationships, drama education, constructivism and socio-cultural constructivism and cultural issues and protocols are to be found in this chapter.

Chapter 5: The Drama Pedagogy Story Strand

This chapter identifies and reflects on the accessing of oral art forms with a view to supporting drama pedagogy within the teaching of a nine week course. Focusing on two sub-questions that are directly linked to the key research I present, and reflect on, narrative accounts of the ways in which the learner-teachers and I engaged with oral art forms in relation to drama pedagogy. Literature in this chapter includes drama education, emotional and cognitive experiences of texts, learning styles and theories of adult learning, constructivism, multi-modal communication and multi-literacies.
Chapter 6: The Intercultural Encounters Story Theme
This chapter focuses on tertiary students’ sharing and using oral art forms within the teaching of a nine week course designed to support intercultural understanding. I present and reflect on a multi-voiced story of the ways in which my learner-teachers and I engaged with oral art forms to support intercultural understanding. The chapter is structured around four sub-questions which are linked to the central research question and seek answers to various aspects of intercultural understanding. Literature in this chapter includes the changing nature of higher education, narrative ways of knowing, adult learning, intercultural communication and understanding, drama education, the third space and other spaces for intercultural encounters and reflection.

Chapter 7: Conclusion to my Research Story
In this chapter of the research I present my findings, recommendations and conclusion. I reflect and make recommendations in relation to; action research processes involving teacher as researcher; oral art forms within drama pedagogy and tertiary environments; supporting intercultural communication; improving research processes; and suggestions for future research. I formulated these recommendations based on my main findings within this study.

1.8 SUMMARY
In this introductory chapter I have provided background information which sets the scene for my research story. This includes factors that have motivated and influenced my topic selection, brief definitions of key terms, the potential value of the study, the beginning of my exploration into the use of oral art forms prior to this study and an outline of the progression and content of the remainder of the study. The following chapter, Chapter 2, continues the setting for my research story by providing a comprehensive picture of the research framework, process, participants and context.
CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH CHARACTERS AND SETTING

The research process ... At its best it is a rewarding and exhilarating experience. At its worst it is an unbearable chore. In large measure the research problem is what makes the difference. You must live with the problem a long time, so make sure you choose it well

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I focus on describing the setting and the characters (research participants) of this research. The setting consists of the research framework, the research process and the learning and teaching context. It also includes background information relating to the learner-teachers’ experiences of understanding subject content and academic texts as well as their experiences and opinions in relation to different world views and cultural beliefs.

I had initially intended to treat the research context, method and methodological issues in the same way as the literature reviewed for this study. That is, I believed I could weave them into the different research chapters. As the study progressed, it became increasingly evident to me that a chapter of this nature was essential if the rest of the study was to be understood by readers.

Why do I always want to make life difficult for myself? Is there some driving force that says fight against conventions and challenge yourself to the hilt. Instead of complicating the writing of this thesis and frustrating myself by developing a research story that is becoming muddled and confusing, even to me, I am going to write a contextualising chapter. Supervisors who seem to have so many contradictory opinions but who agree on a ‘methodology’ chapter can’t all be wrong.

Meta-journal (06/01/2010).
2.2 THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

As previously indicated, the purpose of this research was to investigate how pre-service learner-teachers and I could use oral art forms within a drama education course.

My objectives were to:

- Identify ways in which oral art forms could be engaged with in the teaching of a nine week drama course;
- Examine the potential for using oral art forms to support drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding

The research framework comprises: an examination of the research approach selected for this study, namely action research; a discussion of arts-based research as an alternative form of inquiry; an explanation of the data generating techniques I used and the way in which the data was analysed; and a description of the approval process that I underwent with accompanying ethical considerations.

2.2.1 Action Research

Action research is “self-reflective enquiry” which socially situated participants conduct with a view to improvement and understanding of settings and practices (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 162). It is “… a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world” and relies on in-depth reflection and critique of the intervention consequences (Cohen and Manion 1994: 186). Greenwood and Levin (2008: 72) refer to action research as “cogenerative inquiry” as it is collaborative and “aims to solve real-life problems’ in context”.

The idea of action research is attributed to the non-school based work of Lewin which took place in the 1940’s. Lewin (1946: 36) suggested that action research
could be based on two differing ideas “the study of general laws … and the diagnosis of a specific situation”. As Lykes and Mallona (2008: 107) state, action research has progressed from “marginalised efforts” to gaining legitimacy within such echelons as research universities and national and international political arenas. The increasing popularity of action research, the extension of its use and increase in forms within a range of fields, including education, has brought about changes in original perceptions and intentions. For example, action research in some forms has shifted from a focus on the behavioural changes of others to a focus on the researcher’s own behavioural changes (Arhar, Holly and Kasten: 2001). As Macintyre states, it can take the form of “carrying out self-appraisal through evaluating ... activities which make up classroom practice” (2000: xiii).

Features that appear common to all forms of action research are that it is “problem-centred”, action and specific process-driven, linked to progress, development and positive change and is “concerned with problems in social practice” (Orton 1994: 87). Another common feature is that it is ‘spiral’ and ‘cyclical’ in nature and consists of a number of steps, or stages.

Various models of action research are represented diagrammatically, including in Elliott (1981), Ebbutt (1983), McLean (1995), Stringer (1996), Zuber-Skerrit (1992), Cherry (1999) and McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (2003). I take note of the suggestion that more effective models “are those that try to present the fluidity of open-ended, free enquiry” (Mc Niff et al 2003: 28). However, the model I prefer, as it appears to be clear and uncomplicated and I have found it useful in my prior research experiences, is that of Kemmis (Kemmis and McTaggart 1981; Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998) where action research has a ‘spiral of self-reflective cycles’.

These cycles include, planning, observation and action, reflection and then re-planning as illustrated in figure 2.3 on the next page (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998: 21). It is, “recursive and reflexive, with researchers examining and re-examining how changes in their actions, change their situations” (Edmiston and Wilhelm 1996: 94).
A universal definition of action research is elusive, though there are some common features of most action research processes. The most significant reason for the elusive nature of an all-embracing definition is that there are different types and approaches within the inclusive term action research which may be seen to form a continuum. The diagrammatical continuum, represented by the table below, is my own interpretation based on literature on action research.

![Action Research Continuum Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.1:** The self-reflective spiral in action research (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998:21)

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**An Action Research Continuum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Technical Rationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Practice</td>
<td>Critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed responsibility</td>
<td>Increasingly emancipatory goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solitary self-reflective</td>
<td>Collective responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented organisational/structural constraints</td>
<td>Collaboration and collegiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenging constraints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.2: An Action Research Continuum (based on Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998; Scott and Usher 1999 and cited in Carter 2006: 54).*
I initially aimed to conduct this research in a way that operated at the emancipatory and participatory end of this continuum. That is, within a framework of values that “foster independence [and interdependence], equality and co-operation among those involved” and where the emancipatory nature of the process should “increase the power of the participants over themselves and their situation; they should emerge from the experience with a better understanding of themselves and their world” (Orton 1994: 87 - 88).

I sought to embark on an action research approach that took place within a context of active participation and input where there was a spirit of collegiality, mutual ‘ownership’, creation and reflection, the freedom to determine the nature and direction of the process. In this Participatory Action Research (PAR) “the issue of what each stakeholder wants out of the research needs to be negotiated carefully if reciprocity is to be achieved” (Herr and Anderson 2005: 39).

As Somekh (2006: 23) states:

> collaboration should not aim to ‘empower’ [participants] by inducting them into new understandings of our world, but … each side of the partnership should learn to respect the others’ values and assumptions in a participatory process …moving between and inhabiting each other’s worlds. There is after all something inevitably patronizing in the concept of others needing to be emancipated...

I believe that participation should be based on willingness as opposed to coercion. Any sense of coercion and imposition would be detrimental to an envisaged participatory action research process and would be contrary to any ethical considerations. I was acutely aware of various challenges pertaining to a Participatory Action Research approach engendering trust and co-operation, the time-consuming nature of collaborative processes, challenges arising out of different ways of viewing the world, “complex human interaction” (Orton 1994: 91) and an ‘unequal’ power relationship between myself and the learner-teachers.
Some of these challenges, as they manifested themselves within my research, resulted in my shifting the type of action research undertaken within this study; these are discussed in the action research processes in this chapter as well as in Chapter 4 of this study.

2.2.2 Basis for the Selection of Action Research

Action research is ideally suited to a study exploring culturally specific oral art forms as, one of its features is “to reflect critically on how ... present knowledge frames and constrains ... actions” (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998: 24). Within this study I investigated how culturally specific oral art forms could be a supportive (or constraining) framework for an alternative to the ways knowledge of drama pedagogy is acquired.

Aspects of action research resonate with the nature and purpose of educational drama. These aspects include its focus on “diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that context” (Cohen and Manion 1994: 186); “learning by doing”; and that it “depends on doing for its being” (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1996: 24 and 36). The idea of the researcher as co-participant working alongside the other participants in the research as opposed to being an “outside expert” working with so-called “subjects” (Zuber-Skerritt 1992: 12 - 13) mirrors the role of the educator within any drama activities.

Praxis appears to be crucial within any learning and teaching. Action research links improved practice and theoretical understanding through “an integrated cycle of activities, in which each phase learns from the previous one and shapes the next” (Winter 1989:11). This statement reflects the fundamental research perspective of action research that enables researchers to view theory from within the framework of their own practices and educational contexts. It supports concrete practice, informed and underpinned by theory, as opposed to abstract theorizing about possible practice with “praxical knowledge” implying that theory arises from practice (Barrett 2009: 6).
In discussing action research, Scott and Usher (1999: 35) state; “First, while it is an approach to research in its own right, it is also a concrete way of doing research that has proved to be very influential in the world of education”.

Action research also suits my personality which functions best within flexible and not too tightly structured, or narrow processes;

*In reality the process may not be as neat as this spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting suggests. The stages overlap, and initial plans become obsolete in the light of learning from experience. In reality the process is likely to be more fluid, open and responsive*

### 2.2.3 Action Research and Constructivism

My axiology, or personal belief system, is inextricably linked to constructivism. Therefore, although boundaries between paradigms have become increasingly blurred (Geertz 1993) and “interbred” (Guba and Lincoln 2008: 256), my research is firmly positioned within a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist research paradigm which is orientated towards “reconstructed understandings of the social world” (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 246 - 247) and ‘learning by doing’ is strongly connected to my selection of action research as a methodological approach.

### 2.2.4 Arts-based Research

Arts-based research, as an alternative to more conventional representations of research, was used within the action research process. I used drama forms as a way of investigating as well as representing the outcomes and findings of my research. Arts-based research and action research are inter-complementary and can be connected as they “converge on action and practical knowing” and involve engaging with research participants’ experiences (Liamputtong and Rumbold 2008: 4 – 5).
Arts-based research\(^2\) has “certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing” (Barone and Eisner 1997: 73). It is grounded in the arts, “…uses aesthetic qualities to shed light on the educational situations we care about” (Eisner 2008: 22) and “brings together the systematic and rigorous qualities of inquiry with the creative and imaginative qualities of the arts” (Barone 2001: 24).

Design elements, which are appropriate to the art form selected, are used in arts-based research. The employment of these elements is helpful in “recasting the contents of experience into forms with the potential for challenging (sometimes deeply held) beliefs and values” (Barone 2001: 26). The presence of the researcher is evident by means of an “explicit reflexive self-accounting” (Cole and Knowles 2008: 66). Finley characterises arts-based research as: engaging with constructivist, experiential meaning-making including attending to emotive and aesthetic experiences; influencing and determining meaning through focus on, and careful attention to, form; and present within “the tensions of blurred boundaries” (2008: 72).

I am drawn to notions of employing colloquial and “sometimes even poetic” styles that may be accessible to an assortment of audiences including those not involved in education, academia or research. I endorse notions of an “era in which a thousand research flowers can bloom…[of the narrowing of ] “the chasm that separates my lived-in world…and the technical world of the traditional research text”. I wanted to “inhabit temporarily the souls of [my] students without remaining lost in them” (Barone 1997: 114 - 119).

I am attracted to these notions, not only because they ‘speak to me’ but also because I believe that my research on culturally specific oral arts forms is deepened and enriched by my writing in the styles that are appropriate to these various forms. Within this study, I explored different narrative writing styles. This was attempted to mirror and complement the research, rather than being contrived and they were not simply used for the sake of exploring a particular

\(^2\) My use of the term arts-based research is inclusive of what some authors have delineated as arts-informed research (Cole and Knowles 2008).
I tried to “pursue novelty without sacrificing utility” (Eisner 2008: 24) and to align artistic expression with academic rigour (Cole and Knowles: 2008). I specifically wished to avoid using technical jargon that would be “alien to most teachers” (Hargreaves 2004: 28).

Although narrative discourse can be interpreted broadly to include any ‘prosaic discourse’ (Polkinghorne 1995), I made use of narrative as storytelling as it “links narrative inquiry to art making” and “inhabits both social science and artistic space” (Blumenfeld-Jones 1995: 26). I used “narrative-type narrative inquiry” (Polkinghorne 1995: 5) and identified how I might transform story material from the ... “literary to the academic and theoretically enriching” (Wolcott 1994: 18). Narrative inquiry in arts-based research evokes a rich understanding of self and others (Diamond 1999). As Conle (2001: 22) states, in educational research narrative inquiry can have a dual purpose of being an inquiry method and a “means of personal, professional development”. It has been used in both these ways, that is, method and means within this study.

I made use of research poems, “narrative as experience” (Butler-Kisber, Li, Clandinin and Markus 2007: 224) and other writing styles to represent data in a form that complements the research process and tries to evoke the essence of the cognitive and aesthetic responses. What makes research poems distinct from any other poetry genre is that they are “written with the expressed purpose of presenting data that remain faithful to the essence of the text, experience, or phenomena being represented” and are “a form of data reconstruction that creates evocative presentations” (Furman, Leitz and Langer 2006: 3 and 7). Research poetry provides “... a compact repository for emotionally charged experiences” and opens up greater possibilities for interpretation (Furman 2007: 1). I found research poems to be particularly helpful both as a research tool that “stimulates and formulates the conception of ideas” (Cahnman 2003:31) and as a research product within this document.
2.2.5 Data Generating Techniques and Data Analysis

My major sources of data were questionnaires, field-notes and a reflective or meta-journal, interviews and learner-teachers’ work. These sources enabled me to investigate how groups of learner-teachers experienced and engaged with oral art forms in my classes. Using a variety of data generating techniques provided me with opportunities for data ‘crystallisation’ and the accessing of ‘rich data’ through the inclusion of a variety of voices.

Questionnaires

The researcher devised questionnaires were largely used to provide background information to inform the action research process. I also made use of the questionnaire responses to clarify the learning and teaching context and write about it in this and subsequent chapters of this study. To obtain qualitative and quantitative data, as well as cognitive and affective responses, I used a combination of closed, open-ended and ‘projective techniques’ (Pearce 2003) within the questionnaires. All 83 learner-teachers who participated in this study signed consent forms. However, only 71 learner-teachers (28 in 2008 and 43 in 2009) completed a questionnaire at the start of the action research process. This is clarified and explained in the action research process section (2.3) of this document.

Section A of the questionnaire consists of closed techniques where the learner-teachers were required to tick boxes depending on their response which were categorised as ‘regularly’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘seldom’, or ‘never’ (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS, SECTION A: 320). Section B consisted of open-ended questions relating to cultural identities, oral art forms and world views (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS, SECTION B: 321 - 322).

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3 Crystallisation is a term used by Richardson (2000) and will be defined at a later stage in this chapter.
Section C consisted of ‘projective techniques’ which are used to get participants to express their feelings and attitudes in potentially non-threatening ways. These techniques and, specifically, “cartoon bubble completion”, which I used, are believed to “provide a useful and creative means of bypassing a respondent’s defence mechanisms” as “after all the cartoon character is making the response” (Pearce 2003: 158 - 159). This means that, in theory, responses are not directly those of the participants but projected onto a character. As Pearce (2003: 159) states, the cartoon characters should preferably be “as vague and non-descript as possible... [ensuring] that ‘leading clues’ are not provided”. Therefore, stick figures (a circle for the face and lines for arms and legs) were used in the questionnaire (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWS, SECTION C: 322 -324).

Although I did not pilot the questionnaires, I did receive feedback and suggestions from supervisors and critical readers prior to finalising the questionnaires.

**Field-notes and Reflective Journal**

Field-notes are personal, partial, subjective recorded and observed descriptions. They are “the written record of the data as shaped through the researcher’s eyes” (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul 1997: 17). At the conclusion of the drama sessions I reflected on and wrote field-notes to “represent a firsthand account of the world” (Merriam 1998: 94). The ‘world’ of the weekly drama sessions seen through my eyes were written by hand and then transcribed onto computer.

In Semester 2 2008 the class-times were on a Wednesday afternoon – Class A from 14:15 - 16:15 and Class B from 16:15 - 18:15. So my notes about both classes were written on a Wednesday evening. In Semester 1 2009 the classes were on a Thursday morning – Class C from 09h00 - 11h00 and 11h00 - 13h00. The advantages of having both sessions in the morning in 2009 was that notes could be written at a more leisurely pace in the afternoons. There was more
careful thinking about and filtering what I was going to write rather than simply writing down notes for later refinement.

My hand written notes were, nevertheless, largely free writing with a free flow of ideas and impressions from the classes. The writing was extended and refined as further reflection occurred during the computer transcription and in re-reading and ‘picking up’ on certain issues and discussions. Sometimes the writing was spontaneous and unplanned. At other times I set myself particular tasks and questions – to answer, note, or look out for. Below is an extract which records some of my initial difficulties in setting up a writing routine.

**Writing on the Bus**

I decided to write on the bus going home. Not a good idea!! I started using my laptop. Every time the driver braked, which seemed like a lot, I clutched onto the laptop as it seemed as if it was going to slide right off my lap. I didn’t think this through very well. Now I am writing free hand but fear I will not be able to read what I write as my handwriting is shaky and I’m feeling a little ill writing while the bus is moving. Next week I am definitely going to find a quiet corner (with a cigarette) to write before I leave for home. ...

Reflective memo week 1, semester 2 2008 (30/07/2008).

My writing consisted of two interconnected processes. These were weekly reflections on the learning and teaching directly after the classes as well as ongoing writing where I recorded my thoughts, reflections on readings and ‘eureka’ moments and frustrations throughout the research process. The ‘eureka’ moments were triumphant, exciting moments. They occurred when I made a discovery or came to a realisation that I considered particularly illuminating.

I was aware of the need to write often, consistently and in different ways to reflect and analyse throughout the research process. Therefore, in addition to
the weekly field-notes, to “write [my] way into understanding” (Ely et al 1997: 27), I kept an ongoing meta-journal that was started in May 2007, near the start of my doctoral studies and prior to the action research process. The extract below is from my first entry.

**Getting Started**

On Friday 04 May I was encouraged by my supervisors to begin writing a meta-journal in which all my thoughts and reflections about the research process are formalized. Although reflections have been continuously ‘going on in my head’, I have been puzzled by the problematic nature of beginning this journal, a task which I would ordinarily relish. Why has it been so difficult to begin and why have I only managed to start today? Perhaps trying to find my way in a new environment and situation, or perhaps needing still to internalize new readings and experiences, is contributing to writing inertia. Now that a paragraph, any paragraph, has been written I feel the desire to write returning and will hopefully begin my journey of reflective journal writing.

Meta-journal (09/05/2007).

Initially my writing centred around various articles I had read.

**Exciting Readings**

I have just been reading two pieces of text which I found particularly fascinating and refreshing. “Ex-citing Writing…” really speaks to me as I have frequently articulated my concerns about the conventions embedded within ‘academic’ articles and how patterns emerge which paralyse any new and innovative thoughts and ideas. Yet, my own writing is closely aligned to the ‘bad habits’ in the RIDE example.

⁴ O’Toole (1997)
How does one reconcile dire warnings about plagiarism, adequately acknowledging sources and using the findings of others to support/contradict your arguments with writing in the style suggested by this article?...

Meta-journal (11/05/2007).

Ultimately, in this meta-journal I extended and reconfigured my field-notes, produced poems and other forms based on the field-notes, positioned myself, gained insights about my teacher and researcher self and examined my assumptions and experiences. I used the term meta-journal, or reflective journal, to evoke connotations of a journal that attempted to transcend and move beyond the ‘everyday’ reflections within the field-notes. My meta-journal entries frequently transformed my thinking within the reflective process and consisted of less immediate and more cogitated reflection than the field-notes.

Reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action (Schön 1983, Cowan 1998, Moon 1999) should inherently be a part of any learning and teaching practice that ascribes to deep learning and the continual improvement of teaching practice. Schön (1983) refers to reflecting while, at the same time, engaging in activity as ‘reflection-in-action.’ It focuses “interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action” (1983: 56).

Reflection-on-action is retrospective ruminating about actions or events. This reflection may be immediately after the action has occurred, where the boundaries between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action may become slightly blurred. At the opposite end of the spectrum, it may take place years after the event or action and could also be labelled as ‘recollective reflection’ (Van Manen 1991). Reflection-for-action is the kind of reflection used in planning and includes ‘anticipatory reflection’ (Van Manen 1991).

There is a symbiotic relationship between reflective practice and process drama (Taylor 1998) and reflection is “the core of our practice” (Miller and Saxton
As a drama practitioner and researcher, different kinds of reflection are an essential component of one’s classroom toolkit as we are constantly reflecting in order to make decisions for further action (Taylor 1996 and 1998; O’ Neil 1995). Drama is “an invitation to reflection about manners, morals and the human condition” (Bruner 1986: 128).

In reflective writing I have consciously applied these different but complementary and frequently overlapping kinds of reflection that constitute reflective practice. Reflection-in-action was the most difficult to record as I did not wish to interrupt the flow of the classes or lose my focus on the learner-teachers by writing during class-time. So reflection on classes generally took place after classes within the blurry boundaries of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

I have found this extract from “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire” most useful in understanding reflective writing.

Harry stared at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original, silvery white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze.

“What is it?” Harry asked shakily.

“This? It is called a Pensieve,” said Dumbledore. “I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind.”

“Err,” said Harry who couldn’t truthfully say that he had ever felt anything of the sort.

“At these times” said Dumbledore, indicating the stone basin, “I use the Penseive. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one’s mind, pours them into a basin, and examines them at one’s leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form.”

(Rowling 2000).

Although I do not have a ‘Pensieve’, the extract accurately reflects processes that I went through. Beginning with free writing, which I ‘poured’ onto paper, as
opposed to into a basin, and then continuously refining through ‘patterns and links’ to ultimately include what I hope to be examples of three levels of reflection outlined by Bolton (1979: 126), that is personal, universal and analogous reflection. I attempted to continually represent a reflexive researcher characteristic within my writing process, that is “evoking a feeling of immediacy and self-presence” (Knowles and Cole 2008: 470).

**Interviews**

In addition to my observations in the form of field-notes written after each drama session and my reflective meta-journal, I conducted semi-structured interviews (Merriam 1998; Denscombe 1998; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport 2002; Hitchcock and Hughes 2005). Semi-structured interviews are “organised around particular areas of interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth” (de Vos et al. 2002: 298). Below is an example of some of the difficulties experienced within the interview process, some of my discoveries and some of the questions which the interviews raised for me.

**First Interview**

*At last, I was able to arrange a time and place for my first interview. I was beginning to think that interviews would never take place. Two learner-teachers from Class B said they would meet me at the Deep Dish at two o’clock. Two o’clock came and went... no learner-teachers. I paced up and down outside the entrance, wondering how long I should give them. I would not be so anxious except that this interview seemed to take forever to set up. What do I do if I don’t manage to conduct any interviews? I have already not used image theatre to reflect.... I nearly hugged Ryan when he arrived... After 35 minutes I had given up when I saw him running down the steps. We had just started the interview when Jenny came in through the door...*

*They have left and I am still sitting in the cafe reflecting on what took place. Meeting here caused unanticipated difficulties but also contributed to a comfortable and*
satisfying interview process. I felt that the location of the interview contributed to the learner-teachers being relaxed and more freely able to share their thoughts and ideas. I tested the tape-recorder and found that there was too much ambient noise for me to record the interview which threw me a little... In the end it turned out to be a good thing as I had to be very careful with my notes.

So, the learner-teachers talked and I wrote down what they said. Every now and again I asked them to stop and then I read back to them what I had written. While this slowed down the process, it also turned out to be effective, as they would confirm, or clarify, what they had said. They also extended their responses, or they would revise their thoughts, or tell me when I just ‘didn’t get it’. ..I also found myself abandoning the ‘formal’ questions more and more and ultimately having a conversation with Ryan and Jenny. This felt far better and less contrived to me.

Sitting here looking through the notes I made, I am excited by the richness of this first interview and the student comments. They seemed really honest and sincere in what they were saying but I can’t get rid of this nagging doubt that at times the learner-teachers are saying what I want to hear. This is of course linked to some of the dangers that I read about conducting one’s own interviews and by asking for volunteers I am likely to get those learner-teachers who are largely positive about the process.

Meta-journal (02/09/ 2008).

When I have conducted interviews in the past I have made use of audio and video footage and simply made use of written notes as a backup. Through not being able to record the first interview, I inadvertently discovered that focusing more carefully on the written notes was an extremely important part of the interview process and provided me with the means to instantly verify that I had accurately understood what the learner-teachers meant by their responses.

I identified and recorded specific questions for the purposes of my ethics application. In conducting the first interview I asked particular questions from the lists (see Appendix C: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS: 325). I discovered
that this led to what Rubin and Rubin (1995: 123) refer to as sounding like “... the interviewer has an agenda that he or she wants to get through, rather than hearing what the interviewee has to say”. So, while some of my original set of questions continued to be drawn on, I used a conversational approach to interviewing for all subsequent interviews. This consisted of dialogue, information sharing and engagement (Foley & Valenzuela 2008: 295).

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for easier collation and comparison of specific questions and responses as well as encouraging learner-teachers to talk about what they wanted within the terrain of drama pedagogy, intercultural understanding and oral art forms. The time taken for interviews, depending on student availability, ranged from 10 minutes to 45 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

Most descriptions of how to do qualitative analysis stipulate that the advice or account provided is by no means the one best way, but rather a sharing of experience (Symon & Cassell, 1998). The following is a description of my analysis techniques.

Both qualitative research (Bateson 1994) and drama rely on identifying patterns and emerging themes where we see “the tapestry in the thread and the flower in the seed” (Heathcote & Bolton 1995: 93). Data was analysed using the “constant comparative method” (Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 127) which entails categorising with a concurrent comparison of all ‘units of meaning’ identified across categories. This method was used to identify themes and patterns in the data: the questionnaires, interview responses as well as field-notes and observations.

These patterns applied both to where the data varied and where there was consistency. I also made use of narrative analysis in conjunction with the constant comparative method. Narrative analysis frames, synthesises and shapes data and research events into story form (Polkinghorne 1995).
Although I did make use of systematic methods to analyse data, I tried to be flexible and avoid a fixed and inflexible way of managing data that could “lead to lack of creativity and violation of the spirit of qualitative research” (Sandelowski 1995: 371). An arts-based approach could be considered to be within the realms of the unconventional and comprises what Eisner (2008) refers to as ‘persistent tensions’ between; imagination and communicability; particularity and generalisation; and aesthetics and unsupported, or exaggerated evidence.

The challenge for me as an artist-researcher was, therefore, to articulate the rigour and quality of my own research within this methodological approach and to submit this particular work for appraisal of its educational contribution as an example of arts-based work (Eisner 2008; Cole and Knowles 2008). Within a reflexive process, I attempted to find creative ways of analysing and interpreting data while maintaining research rigour through ‘crystallization’, reflexivity, resonance and contestation.

‘Crystallization’ is a term Richardson uses that deconstructs the traditional notion of ‘validity’ and “provides us with a deepened complex, thoroughly partial understanding” (Richardson 1997: 92). ‘Reflexivity’ is a term that is understood in a multiplicity of ways (Burr 1995). For me, it refers to self-theorising and continuous critical reflection of the role of the ‘self as researcher’ (Guba and Lincoln 2008; Bath 2009). It involves: positioning myself within the work; critically interrogating my learning and teaching processes; and making my personal mark, or ‘signature’ on the research text (Cole and Knowles 2008).

Mtose’s statement resonates with how I view reflexivity which is “as a means by which I can be made accountable for my analysis through an explication of my interests and context” (2008: 92). My ‘self’ as reflexive practitioner includes notions of the self as: having plural dimensions; fluidly changing; and being situated in and shaped by socio-cultural and historical settings and discourses (Kemmis 2008).

As O’Toole (2006: 37) explains, resonance “links the data together and outside the project by finding echoes of commonality and convergence with other data,
and with other contexts beyond the project”. Equally significant is the need to find as much of the “whole story” as possible by actively seeking contradictory data or inferences (O’Toole 2006: 38).

**Approval and Ethics**

I followed ethical procedures and took ethical considerations into account within the processes of generating and analysing data. My ethics application to undertake my research within the university was approved on 24 July 2008 (see Appendix D: ETHICS APPROVAL: 326) and I adhered to subsequent ethical requirements such as yearly ethics reports with a final report submitted in January 2010. I followed the procedures outlined in my ethics submission and informed participants about the nature of this research and how their responses would be used. The way in which I informed participants was by means of discussions and a plain language statement.

In keeping with ethics requirements I obtained informed consent through distributing a plain language statement, or letter, inviting the learner-teachers to take part, discussing the contents of this letter, answering any questions and getting them to sign consent forms (see Appendix E: OBTAINING CONSENT: 327 - 330). The consent forms emphasised voluntary participation and the non-penalising of those learner-teachers who did not wish to participate in the research but who were still required to be a part of the class.

Though the obtaining of informed consent is a practice required for the granting of permission by university ethics committees, we need to be mindful that this, like many research processes and practices, is based on an:

...*entirely Western assumption that it is the individual who owns knowledge and who can participate or withdraw from a study as he or she pleases...this construction undermines the sense of the collective, the tribal, and the concept of communal and ancestral knowledge.*

The questionnaires were filled in anonymously by the learner-teachers at the start of each nine week course. It is only within the interview process that there was any real possibility of individual contributions being recognised. Anonymity was sought by the use of pseudonyms within interview transcriptions. Pseudonyms and initials have occasionally been used within my journal reflections and field-notes. The initials used do not represent the actual initials of the learner-teachers involved.

I have attempted to stick to ethical behaviour and writing in relation to other ethical issues which, according to Babbie (1998: 444), include no harm to participants, confidentiality, lack of deception and accurate reporting and analysis.

2.3 THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

The action research consisted of 3 cycles. The aims of cycle 1 were to: ascertain learner-teachers’ prior knowledge and understanding; identify a range of culturally specific oral art forms; and to investigate the use of these art forms collaboratively with the learner-teachers. The aims of cycle 2 were to: guide the learner-teachers through a process of engaging with oral art forms based on my understanding of workable contexts, strategies and techniques identified through the cycle 1 review process; and to evaluate the effectiveness of the various oral art forms to support drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding. The aims of cycle 3 were to: further evaluate and refine the ways I tried to engage learner-teachers with oral art forms; and to seek more and deeper responses to the questions and issues raised in cycle 1 and 2.

I include, within the discussion of the action research process, information relating to my original intentions and the amendments I made as well as how I built from one cycle to the next.
Cycle 1 and Cycle 2: 30 July to 02 September 2008

Today I was very anxious and consequently arrived really early. No matter how many times I have taught, I am always nervous at the start of a course. But today I was even more so asking myself questions like - will the learner-teachers sign the consent forms and will they participate willingly in the research process? It was a relief when some learner-teachers arrived early and I started to relax as we chatted happily.

Field-notes, week 1, semester 2 2008 (30/07/2008).

Planning (Week 1: Wednesday 30 July 2008)

During this phase, after consent forms had been signed by all learner-teachers (see Appendix E: OBTAINING CONSENT: 327 - 330), culturally specific oral art forms which the participants were familiar with were identified and discussed (as listed on page 88). I tried to ascertain their responses to, and prior experiences of: culturally specific oral art forms; cultural identities and beliefs; and understanding and using information in academic texts and class readers. This was by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS: 320 - 324). Based on the questionnaire responses and their expressed needs the first ‘acting’ cycle was planned.

What an idiot. I knew it was not a good idea to let the learner-teachers take the questionnaires home last week but they promised faithfully that they would bring them back today. There were a few who did but I could kick myself – I will remain hopeful but fear I have lost the chance of getting many more questionnaires in.

Field-notes, week 2, semester 2 2008 (06/08/2008).

In this cycle, I experienced difficulties in getting the questionnaires back. My original intention was to get the learner-teachers to fill the questionnaires in at the end of the first session. Due to time constraints, and not wishing to take up
teaching time with this process, I allowed the learner-teachers to take the questionnaires home and complete them after receiving verbal assurances that they would bring them back the next week. Of the 38 questionnaires that I handed out, 16 were completed and handed in on the day and 12 were handed in at a later stage. Although most of the learner-teachers did eventually hand in the questionnaires, (28 of a potential 38) it took 4 to 5 weeks for them to do so. While some did complete the questionnaire in week 1, delays by other learner-teachers had a negative impact on student involvement in the planning process.

**Acting (Week 2 to 5: Wednesday 06 to Wednesday 27 August 2008)**

Two groups of learner-teachers participated in an action research process during the course of their weekly lectures. The action research process was based on the ‘planning’ phase in cycle 1 within the frameworks of the drama course requirements. For example oral art forms could easily be accommodated into a workshop in the course that was entitled *Traditional Games and dramatic elements*, while another workshop, previously entitled *Cultural storytelling and performance*, was extended and entitled *Cultural oral art forms and performance*.

### Multi-layered Engagement

*I planned this week (Cultural oral art forms and performance) to provide the learner-teachers with different cultural experiences. This included activities and discussions focusing on ‘synaesthesia’ or dramatic multisensory, multilayered engagement providing a sense of ‘teaching in the Aboriginal way’ (Marshall 2004), an introduction to some South African oral art forms and encouraging learner-teachers to share stories and oral art forms…*

*With the South African repetitive story, we set up a rhythm and I told a line of the story with an action and then the learner-teachers repeated the line and action.*

*So it went, to a rhythm:*
Once, once upon a time (me)
Once, once upon a time (learner-teachers)
There lived, there lived a great big gorilla (me)
There lived, there lived a great big gorilla (learner-teachers)
Hohohohoho hohoho

And so on.... Suddenly I stopped and burst out laughing. What an unexpected ‘cultural experience’. Not only were the learner-teachers repeating my words but I became aware of a load of learner-teacher repetitions in South African accents!! It was completely unconscious and they only realized that they were doing this when I drew their attention to it. We continued amidst lots of laughter as the learner-teachers found it ‘hard to stop’.

Field-notes and meta-journal, week 4, 2008 (20/08/2008 and 21/08/2008).

Reviewing (Week 5: Wednesday 27 August 2008)

Throughout weeks 2 to 5, reflection on action, as well as reflection-in-action took place. However, in week 5 the process was reviewed through analysis of my field-notes and observations recorded after each week of the drama course. The intention was that, in addition to my own observations, 4 to 6 volunteer learner-teachers from each of the two groups would participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview (see Appendix C: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS: 325).

This was to take place in week 5 (end of cycle 1) and again in week 9 (end of cycle 2). However, time constraints and learner-teachers’ other commitments prevented this from taking place. So instead of the volunteer groups being interviewed twice, as originally proposed they were only interviewed once. Also, due to the difficulty of learner-teachers having different times when they were available, the interviews did not take place in groups of 4 to 6.
Two learner-teachers were interviewed together in week 5, one in week 6, another two together in week 6 and one in week 7. These learner-teachers were all from Group B as Group A was more difficult to persuade to participate in an interview. Two learner-teachers from Group A did eventually participate in a brief interview at the end of week 9. Also, due to time constraints, image theatre (Boal 1979; 1995) while introduced to the learner-teachers within the drama course, was not used to review the action research process as I had originally planned.

My initial planning for the action research process was influenced by the view that “collaboration must be based on an interaction between local knowledge and professional knowledge” (Greenwood and Levin 2008: 72). With this in mind, I had planned two action research cycles that required the learner-teachers to be actively involved in directing the research process.

During the review process, I acknowledged the action research process was more about my own practice than an envisaged ‘co-generative’ inquiry. Rather than collaborative action research with the learner-teachers as active participants in the research process it had become firmly practitioner research which refers to:

...forms of enquiry which people undertake in their own working contexts and, usually, on their professional work, in whatever sphere they practice. The main purpose of the enquiry is to shed light on aspects of that work with a view to bringing about some benevolent change.


According to Kemmis (2009: 463), action research focuses on “practitioners' practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practise”. The action research process I engaged in certainly embraced these aims and matched other criteria of action research as discussed earlier. However, the focus had shifted from participatory action research to what is described by Kemmis (2009) as ‘practical action research’.
Practical action research, as distinct from the critical, participatory research that I originally aimed for, is practitioner-led, guided and directed, as opposed to collegial, communal and co-generative. Nevertheless, unlike technical action research, practical action research still fits into the way in which I believed this process should be conducted in that the ‘voice’ of others involved is still considered crucial.

The practitioner [is] the one who decides what is to be explored and what changes are to be made, but in practical action research she or he remains open to the views and responses of others, and the consequences that these others experience as a result of the practice. In this case, there is a transitive, reciprocal relationship between the practitioner and others involved in and affected by the practice. Kemmis (2009: 470).

Dillon (2000) asserts that within a university course, particularly at undergraduate level, at least two systems ‘overlap’, that of the teacher and that of the students. Within these ‘overlapping systems’ I found in this study that objectives, perspectives and responses to the action research process differed. The “object for students is [generally] meeting graduation requirements and the course is an instrument for doing so” (Dillon 2000: 5). For this reason, my initial expectations were perhaps naive.

While learner-teachers were willing to participate in the research process, most, with the exception of those who volunteered to be interviewed, simply required it to be ‘folded in’ to the course requirements and were not particularly interested in collaborating in the research process. This influenced my amendments to the action research cycles and the shift from participatory to practical action research. In this, and other aspects of the research, praxis became as much about self-development as a reflective practitioner as the achievement of external research goals (Dunne 1993: 130). As Taylor (1996: 40) points out “reflective practitioners use their own instrument, themselves” to examine how “their emergent findings will impact upon their lifelong work”.

The difference between this and previous participatory action research processes that I have engaged in, is that the participants in the previous
experiences were well known to me and I had been working with them for some time before embarking on collaborative research projects with them. Perhaps this is an essential ingredient if action research processes are to be genuinely participatory.

Re-planning (Week 5: Wednesday 27 August 2008)

This took place based on the information obtained during the action research and review process in cycle 1. I continued to review and re-plan during a four week break between teaching week 6 and 7 when the learner-teachers were on school experience placement (two weeks) and a non-teaching period in the middle of semester 2 (two weeks). My re-planning was based on my observations and discussions with learner-teachers in class during the first cycle because by week 5 only two learner-teachers had been interviewed. These two learner-teachers, nevertheless, provided me with a great many insights and useful suggestions in relation to planning for the second semester.

Most of the interview comments from interview 1 were ‘cut and pasted’ into the various themes or ‘units of meaning’ identified through my data analysis. The learner-teachers’ responses fitted into the discussions on oral art forms in subsequent chapters of this research report. However, when asked what we should focus on in weeks 6 to 9 of the drama course their suggestions helped me in my planning for this second cycle. These were some of their suggestions, as illustrated below.

**JENNY:** We need to concentrate more on the benefits oral arts have in the [primary] classroom. We know what they are but some of the others need it to be made clearer to them...Especially traditional art forms are so important and they [the other learner-teachers] need to understand why traditional forms need to be preserved.

**RYAN:** For me, planning a drama unit... how to finish off your piece. Where a unit can lead to...how to include oral art forms...how to plan and teach a unit of work.
RYAN: What about SMS language..creeping into language, like lol (lots of love), shortening abbreviations.

JENNY: Looking at the oral art of public speaking and great speeches, like Martin Luther King, Julius Caesar, John Howard, American Governor, at rallies...

Interview 1, semester 2 2008 (29/08/2008) and meta-journal (02/09/2008).

I built-in the benefits of oral art forms for the primary classroom and their inclusion into a drama unit, taking cognisance of Jenny and Ryan’s suggestions. The use of oral art forms for their future classroom teaching became a significant part of the learner-teachers’ engagement with oral art forms as can be seen in Chapter 5. Planning a unit of work was already a part of the drama course. Ryan’s suggestion worked well in linking this part of the course to oral art forms. I found the other suggestions interesting and, time permitting, would have definitely tried to find a way to explore them further.

Acting (Week 6 to 9: Wednesday 03 September and Wednesday 08 to 29 October 2008)

The same two groups of learner-teachers continued to participate in an action research process during the course of their weekly lectures. The action research processes was based on the re-planning phase in cycle 2 within the frameworks of the drama course requirements.

Reviewing (Week 9: Wednesday 29 October 2008)

As in cycle 1, my review was not exclusively in week 9. However, in week 9 the process was reviewed through an analysis of field-notes and observations and participant input. Group devised performances which were presented in week 9 also formed a part of my review process.
As explained previously, the learner-teachers who volunteered to be interviewed did not participate in a second in-depth interview as originally planned. Those who were interviewed provided useful information and gave serious attention to the research questions. However, their responses informed my critical reflection on the research process rather than leading to any significant re-shaping of the research process.

It was during this review process that I decided to continue the action research process in 2009. My reasons for this decision included: the valuable experience I gained through cycle 1 and 2 which I believed could strengthen my research process; an awareness of ‘mistakes’ I made that could be rectified by further research; a need to build on and further develop the data generated; and a desire to examine further questions that emerged for me during the research process. Areas I pinpointed within the review process that required extension and further exploration included: the impact of different learning styles; strategies for involving reluctant participants; ways of introducing oral art forms as drama conventions; and knowledge of potential cultural resources. These areas are discussed and expanded on in subsequent chapters in this study.

Artificiality of Cycles

Having two cycles in such a short frame was artificial and didn’t really work. I also needed to introduce oral art forms at a later stage, once the learner-teachers were more familiar with drama concepts, which I couldn’t do because of the short cycles. Class B’s definition will be helpful in getting the 2009 classes to understand oral art forms for the questionnaire but I am not going to do any practical work with the forms until at least week 4. A definition created by learner-teachers should be clearer. I need to first work on introducing them to drama and gaining their trust... I am going to work with whatever they give me and not ‘push’ and be anxious about meeting my research objectives...

Meta-journal (30/10/2008).
I also focused on what I would do the same and what I would do differently based on my reflections as exemplified by the above extract from my meta-journal. For example, I believed that it would still be useful for my understanding of learner-teachers’ experiences and planning of the next cycle of experiences if a questionnaire completion and pre-questionnaire discussion took place in the first week of the next cycle but that all other engagement with oral art forms would begin in week four and I created one longer cycle for 2009.

I identified ways of working with oral art forms that had not worked and that I would either not use again in cycle 3 or that, where there still seemed potential, I would try out again with a different class. I recognised workable strategies for engaging with oral art forms from cycle 1 and 2 and decided to use these again with a different class to provide further support of their effectiveness. I planned one other way of engaging with oral art forms to replace what had definitely not worked. I determined that, for me, where there was a potential clash, my teaching agenda would take precedence over my research agenda.

**Cycle 3: 05 March to 14 May 2009**

**Re-planning**

While cycle 3 began on the 05 March 2009, re-planning took place from November 2008. Based on the information obtained during cycles 1, planning for cycle 3 took place. I also used additional information gained from the questionnaire in week 1 of cycle 3 in the re-planning phase. I extended the questionnaires to include a further question. Interview questions were reviewed to introduce questions raised during cycle 1 and 2. I planned for those areas, particularly within the interview, that I wanted to revisit and examine more deeply. The nine week course in semester 1 2009 consisted of one action research cycle as opposed to the artificial split of two cycles in 2008.
This time I insisted that the learner-teachers filled in the questionnaires before they went home. It made a huge difference as I got all the questionnaires back. Even though I can see some have not completed all of part B and C.

Field-notes, week 1, semester 1 2009 (05/03/2009).

Two students were not present on the first day of the course and so did not complete the questionnaires, so 43 out of 45 questionnaires were completed in cycle 3.

**Acting (Week 1 to 9: Thursday 05 March to Thursday 14 May 2009)**

Two different groups of learner-teachers participated in an action research process during the course of their weekly lectures. The action research process was based on the reflections and reviews that took place in cycle 2 resulting in the re-planning phase for cycle 3 within the frameworks of the drama course requirements.

Two classes and again one willing and one not so willing but neither class as resistant as the class from semester one. At least not openly, though the body language and passive inertia is there. I have been trying to figure out why there has been the same pattern in both semesters. It is not the order in which the classes were taught as in this case the order is the reverse of cycle 1 and 2. Nor times as they are totally different. Perhaps it is my attitude. Certainly at the start it wouldn’t have been different as I was unaware of potential reactions. Of course, as we have continued to work, there has been a difference between, ‘oh yes, this great group’ and ‘oh no, not them’ but I have consciously tried to avoid this and, if anything, worked harder with the reluctant groups to ‘win them over’.

Two possible reasons are maturity level and relationships of power and dominance. The serious and committed classes are those that have a number of older and more mature
students in their midst. They also seem to be controlled by certain learner-teachers in the classes that seem to wield power and respect which draw the class either into co-operative or non-co-operative frames.

Field-notes and meta-journal, cycle 3, semester 1 2009.

Reviewing (Week 9: 14 May 2009 and onwards)

As in the previous cycles, review was ongoing and not exclusively in week 9. However, in week 9 a more thorough review took place. Volunteer learner-teachers participated in in-depth interviews, as originally planned. I believed the streamlining of the research to include a longer cycle period and one interview per class would provide me with an opportunity to arrange the interviews so that groups of 4 to 6 learner-teachers could be interviewed together as this is said to be more conducive to an interactive interview process.

I still did not get 4 to 6 students together at one time, although I did manage to interview 3 students together (Class C) and 2 students (Class D) on the 14th May 2009. I actually found that the number of learner-teachers (between 1 and 3) interviewed at a time did not have an impact on interactive engagement in the interview. Rather, it was the level of serious consideration of the questions and the time that the learner-teachers could commit to the process that impacted on the quality of the interview.

2.4 THE LEARNING AND TEACHING CONTEXT

Australia is well-placed demographically to be the site of a study that examines intercultural encounters. As Donelan states; “Successive waves of migration have created modern Australia – one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse countries in the world” (2009: 23). Diversity also extends to the university environment. Cumming asserts that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students whose home language is not English
studying in “English-dominated universities, both in their home countries and overseas” (2006: 14).

Many students from non-English and English backgrounds, studying overseas, have found their way into Australian universities. According to James (2007: 14); “One quarter of students in Australian universities are international students”. In terms of access and representation of diverse groups, based on generation of data from a national equity policy framework, James (2007: 5) believes: “There is much to be proud about in Australian higher education but it is impossible to be fully proud until we do better for Indigenous Australians”.

No learner-teachers in this study stated that they had any Indigenous Australian connections. However, the presence of international students as well as the diverse backgrounds of the learner-teachers confirmed Donelan and James’ assertions concerning modern Australia. The range of backgrounds created learning and teaching environments where I could investigate intercultural encounters and the supporting of intercultural understanding through oral art forms.

The research was conducted with pre-service tertiary learner-teachers completing a drama course as a component of their Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree. This 400 credit four year degree (when studied full-time) is a generalist course designed to qualify learner-teachers as primary school teachers. The three compulsory components of study in this degree are school experience, education, and learning areas. The drama course fits into the learning areas component.

The learner-teachers are required to complete Primary Drama (6.25 credits), Primary Visual Arts (6.25 credits) and Primary Music Component (6.25) as subjects within the learning area study component. They are “allocated to one of the following subjects in first and second semester and semester 1 in second year” (The University of Melbourne Website 2010). In their second or third year the learner-teachers also complete an Integrated Arts subject of 6.25 credits. I conducted my research within the Primary Drama course, identified above.
Research is not conducted “on a social reality in its entirety; the researcher needs to settle for a sub-set of this reality” (Corbetta 2003: 210). My reasons for the choice of participants in this research were accessibility and opportunity. The learner-teachers, with whom I had the opportunity to work, constituted a group of people who met the criteria for my particular research interests. Further considerations taken into account in selecting a research sample for this study included manageability in terms of processing data and organising data collection.

To ‘learn from below’ (Spivak 2004), in this case, to learn from the learner-teachers who were engaged in the learning process rather than imposing top down ideas about their learning experiences, was an important consideration. My intention was to tap into the direct experiences of learner-teachers with different exposures to culturally specific oral art forms.

As Ramsden (1992: 8) states, learning and teaching are interlinked in a way that is impossible to separate the two. “To teach is to make an assumption about what and how the student learns; therefore to teach well implies learning about students’ learning” (ibid). For this reason I believe that hearing the learner-teachers’ voices within this research was of fundamental importance. A further reason why I wanted to hear the learner-teachers’ voices is tied to my choice of a constructivist paradigm, or “basic set of beliefs that guide action” for this research (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 245).

The drama course duration was 9 weeks of 2 hour sessions per week, constituting 18 hours per class per semester. The course was designed for learner-teachers who will be teaching in primary schools and has specific drama objectives delineated within the course outline.

**Drama objectives:**

On completion of this subject learner-teachers will be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of drama as an art form and as a learning process
- articulate the relationship between play, drama and theatre
- participate in creating, performing and evaluating drama
- demonstrate a knowledge of current curriculum frameworks and drama’s role in children’s learning
- design, implement and evaluate drama learning programs for the primary curriculum

Bachelor of Education (Primary Drama) Course Outline (2008).

Before I embarked on the action research process, I became highly familiar with the course content by observing the primary drama course being taught by another lecturer in semester two of 2007 and, then, teaching four groups (about 100 learner-teachers) in semester one of 2008. For the purposes of this study, I worked with two classes (A and B) in semester two of 2008 and two classes (C and D) in semester one of 2009.

Class A consisted of 28 learner-teachers, Class B consisted of 10 learner-teachers, Class C 23 learner-teachers and Class D 22 learner-teachers making a total of 83 learner-teachers. As previously stated, all 83 learner-teachers participated in this study although only 71 learner-teachers (28 in 2008 and 43 in 2009) completed the questionnaire.

The learner-teachers were predominantly from an Australian background and categorised their culture as ‘Australian’ and two more specifically as ‘white’ Australian. The extract on the next page is a compilation of 25 learner-teachers’ responses to question 1 Section B of the questionnaire which asked the learners to briefly describe themselves in terms of their own cultural identity (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS: SECTION B: 321 - 322). It typifies the way in which these learner-teachers viewed their ‘own’ Australian culture. As stated previously, no learner-teachers mentioned any Indigenous Australian background.
I consider myself to belong to an Australian, or Anglo-Australian culture because my family has been born in Australia for more than 5 generations. I don’t know how to describe our culture except as Australian. I view this culture as having Western values and traditions, based on a Judeo-Christian foundation, though not tied to any particular religious or spiritual beliefs. It is a culture that is hard to define. It is a rather boring cultural identity. I would describe my own Australian culture as being family orientated and stereotypical ie beaches, barbeques, footy etc!! I see Australian culture as being fairly laid-back and easy. Everyone has a fair go. There is a big emphasis on mateship. This culture is friendship, fun and unity. I think valuing family is an important part of my Australian culture. I believe myself to belong to an Australian culture which borrows its identities from around the world and is a very broad and inclusive term. I am a part of the multicultural society of Australia.

Questionnaire Section B (2008 and 2009).

This compilation of 25 responses provides a clear and powerful sense of how ‘Australian’ learner-teachers viewed themselves. It contains what I consider to be some fascinating opinions and the stereotypical nature of some of the ideas of being ‘Australian’ is acknowledged. For me, the notion of an Australian culture which ‘borrows its identities’ was insightful and useful for my gaining a greater understanding of the participants in this study. Within the learner-teachers’ description of Australian culture were references to the importance of family. Family was also mentioned as important by learner-teachers who classified themselves as part of a Chinese, Greek or Italian culture.

Seventeen learner-teachers had their roots in a range of Asian countries. All seventeen were born in Asian countries with some of them now living in Australia and others being international students studying in Australia. One was born in Pakistan and spent part of her childhood in Pakistan before moving with her family to Australia. One was born in the Philippines and came to Australia when she was only a few years old. One learner-teacher classified herself as Egyptian though she has been living in Australia for some years.
Some Australian learner-teachers had particularly strong connections to their Italian, Polish, Irish, Greek, Macedonian, French Canadian, Japanese and Jewish familial backgrounds. Other familial background information provided in the questionnaires, as summarised in Figure 2.1 below, did not appear to feature as strongly in the open-ended questionnaire responses or in the discussion and identification of oral art forms as those familial connections mentioned above.

Figure 2.3: Backgrounds mentioned by learner-teachers in questionnaire
The learner-teachers’ identified home language, as captured in figure 2.2 below, was predominantly English (76.47%) with less than a quarter of the learner-teachers listing their home language as being other than English (21.51%). In addition to providing useful background information in contextualising this study, the familial influences and identified home languages are significant in terms of my discussion with learner-teachers in the classes concerning oral art forms and challenges I encountered in this study. The range of background and familial influences provided potential sources for our engaging with different oral art forms.

![Home Languages of Participants](image)

Figure 2.4: Home Languages of Participants

A narrative description, compiled from field-notes, of my experience of two of the groups with whom I worked, is indicative of the contrasting responses of learner-teacher participants in this study.
Class A
Arms folded and staring stonily in the distance, their body language appearing to indicate that they would rather be somewhere else right now. They cast nervous, or dismissive, glances at their peers seeking approval and guidance. I have never had to work so hard with a group before to gain their trust and get them to participate actively in the process. I appeal to them in role “Great elders, I have always relied on your wisdom in the past, and you have always given me sound advice, what do you think we should do?” Some are highly involved and participating while others offer monosyllabic responses, or grunts, their faces registering reluctance and discomfort. Their backs pressed up against the wall physically as far removed from the action as they can get. Even when I try a South African storytelling practice that requires learner-teachers to copy my refrain and movements, up to this moment guaranteed to ensure participation, there is little response. Some mumble the refrain but there is absolutely no movement, eyes staring at the floor, or furtively looking at each other, arms pinned to their sides. I sense that some want to participate but no-one wants to be different from the group and the group rules.... As the weeks go by there is definitely an improvement and there are some moments of complete engagement and serious commitment. One particularly reluctant participant makes my day by saying, ‘this is not as bad as I thought it would be’. Still throughout the process I constantly had to work against group inertia, giggles and private conversations.

Field-note compilation, cycle 1, semester 2 2008.

Class B
Immediately signalling interest, their body language appearing to indicate that they are thoroughly engaged in the process from the start. Despite my initial fears, that such a small group would constrain active participation, I have seldom before worked with a group that immediately and unwaveringly throw themselves into the drama process, constantly ask reflective questions without solicitation and supply carefully considered and thought provoking answers to questions. They take ownership of the drama and their roles and move the drama in different and exciting directions.
When I try a South African storytelling practice that requires learner-teachers to copy my refrain and movements, the response is ‘magic’. They creatively and imaginatively weave their own movements and responses into my own. Even on a day when a strong smell of gas permeates the drama room and causes some concern they continue to participate actively.

Field-note compilation, cycle 1, semester 2 2008.

The location of the drama course forms an integral and important part of the learning and teaching context of this study. For this reason I have included the extract below that is my brief physical description of the room where the drama sessions took place.

The Drama Studio is located on the first floor of a 10 floor Education building. As is ‘customary’ with most drama studios, the colour scheme is black; black curtains that can be pulled to display the projector screen at the front of the room or the whiteboard on the left-hand side of the room. A charcoal carpet covers the floor. There are black rostrum blocks and boards that can be easily moved around the room to create different drama spaces. Chairs, rostrum blocks and boards are neatly stacked on the right-hand side of the room.

The studio is windowless but not airless and what seems to me a universal difficulty occurs between the temperature needs of different learner-teachers resulting in those who claim the air conditioner is too ‘cold’ or too ‘hot’. There is a sophisticated lighting board and stage lights as well as a lights panel that can be used to light up or darken different sections of the room to create various lighting effects and moods. The room is equipped with quality audio, video and computer equipment.

The learner-teachers are adept at creatively using the space, blocks and chairs to represent a variety of contexts. They begin each session by each getting a chair and forming a ‘drama circle’. One distinct disadvantage of the space, for me, is that
because, it is a shared space everything needs to be put back in its place at the end of a session. This means that it is challenging, but not impossible, to use posters, props and material to build up the dramatic space from week to week.

Field-note compilation, cycle 1, semester 2 2008.

2.5 LEARNER-TEACHER INDICATION OF UNDERSTANDING

Howe (2004:54) delineates mixed-methods research as having a hierarchical order with quantitative research being uppermost and qualitative methods as having “a largely auxiliary role”. However, the opposite is the case in this mixed-methods research project. The quantitative data obtained from section A of the questionnaire (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS: SECTION A: 320) has largely been used in a supporting role to frame the research and supply background information in relation to research participants.

The figures in this chapter were obtained by combining the questionnaire responses from all four groups of learner-teachers who participated in this study. This was to obtain an overall sense of the learner-teachers’ perception of their ability to understand subject content and academic texts. The responses of the 71 students (28 from cycle 1 and 43 from cycle 2) who completed the questionnaire are represented in the graphs below. In the interests of clarity, the percentages in the graphs used in this chapter and in Chapter 3 have been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

As can be seen from the figures in the various pie charts the learner-teachers in this study generally rated themselves highly in terms of academic ability.
This is most clearly represented in Figure 2.5 which shows that over half (66%) indicated that they never (18%) or seldom (48%) experience difficulties in understanding the subject content and readings of their courses. Learner-teachers’ claims of never experiencing difficulties with subject content (Figure 2.5 - 18%) and academic texts (Figure 2.6 - 4%), appears inconceivable, as I would have imagined that all students, even the most capable of students, experience difficulties with subject content at some stage and to some extent.

It raises questions outside the scope of this study. That academic texts frequently contain discourses that “work with propositional meanings of a decontextualised and abstract nature...shared within the knowledge community” (Northedge 2003a: 172), and therefore may initially be difficult to understand, also renders this claim inconceivable.

It is possible that there was misunderstanding in relation to the questions asked particularly for those learner-teachers for whom English is a second or additional language. I did not find specific evidence of this as the learner-teachers interviewed at a later stage within the research process considered the questions pertaining to subject knowledge and understanding of academic texts to be clear and unambiguous.
It is also possible that my experiences of working within environments where many of my students had been ‘disadvantaged’ may impact on my perceptions. The ‘high’ academic capabilities of learner-teachers within this research context and the confidence which they had in their abilities may result in fewer difficulties with subject content but not absolutely no difficulty at any stage as is claimed by some learner-teachers.

However, the confidence of a large percentage of the students in their abilities was seen as having positive implications for this study. My focus could then be on the potential of oral art forms to support understanding at various levels rather than an assessment of, and focus on, the more remedial or special needs nature of understanding.

Conversely, I believed that the claim by some learner-teachers who indicated that they experienced difficulties was important to this study. The 34% (figure 2.5) who regularly, often or sometimes experience difficulties understanding subject content and readings and the 58% (figure 2.6) who regularly, often or sometimes find academic texts difficult indicated to me that there was a need to find alternatives to support the understanding of subject content and academic texts.

The greater numbers who claimed they experienced more difficulties with academic texts, than in understanding subject content, pointed to a need to focus specifically on this area. For this reason I focused on using oral art forms to understand academic texts prescribed for the drama course.

All students in this study indicated that they were able, to some degree:

- Use information in class readings to support their opinions and arguments

- Link theory with their own opinions, thoughts or experiences
In response to the question, ‘Are you able to use information in class readings to support your opinions and arguments’ (Figure 2.7) more than half of the participants (62%) indicated that they were regularly or often able to use information in class reading to support their arguments.

Also more than half of the participants (Figure 2.8 - 58%) indicated that they were regularly or often able to link theory with own opinions, thoughts or experiences.

Figure 2.9 indicates that 60% sometimes, 12% often and 6% regularly experience difficulty putting their thoughts into words. All learner-teachers indicated that they experienced some difficulty with this task.

These initial findings from section A of the questionnaire (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER- TEACHERS SECTION A: 320) prompted me to give priority to assisting students to putting thoughts and ideas from class readings into their own words. The way learner-teachers’ engaged with oral art forms such as chants to interpret ideas from class readings will be examined within Chapter 5.
2.6 DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS AND CULTURAL BELIEFS

The experiences and opinions in relation to different worldviews and cultural beliefs recorded and interpreted in this section are from the responses of the same 71 students whose responses to other questions have been recorded in the previous section of this study. The graphs are compiled from learner-teachers’ responses to questions from section A of the questionnaire.

Figure 2.10 indicates that 75% of learner-teachers, in this study, believe that they regularly, or often, easily make friends with people of different cultures, backgrounds, nationalities and beliefs. With figures 0% (never) and 6% (seldom) indicating that learner-teachers, mostly, easily make friends.

Learner-teachers’ positive (Figure 2.11) and negative (Figure 2.12) experiences of different worldviews and cultural beliefs, traditions and practices match each other. No learner-teachers seldom or never had positive experiences and no students regularly or often had negative experiences. The most significant result seems to lie in 38% who indicated that they sometimes have had
negative experiences and 25% who indicated that they sometimes have positive experiences.

In relation to different worldviews, Question 4 (Section B of the questionnaire) asked the learner-teachers - What challenges could there be when interaction takes place between people of different beliefs, values, worldviews or backgrounds? How can these challenges be overcome? The various responses in relation to perceived challenges and overcoming those challenges, focused on similar ideas within both the 2008 and 2009 class groups, and are summarised in the following paragraphs. The words contained in this text are the exact words used by learner-teachers in their questionnaire responses but I have organised them into two themes: Challenges and Overcoming.

**Challenges**

_We see the challenges as clashes or disagreements caused by cultural differences. These differences may lead to conflict or hostility. This is what sometimes causes world wars and religious worlds. People are intimidated by differences. Differences may lead to values which may be counter to other people’s beliefs. Where values are completely conflicting there is no way of sharing in other people’s beliefs. Clashing belief systems, communication and language barriers are all challenges to intercultural understanding._

**Overcoming**

_We think that education and exposure to different cultures will lead to understandings, and appreciation, of beliefs, values and worldviews. It is most important to see people as individuals and not to inflict your beliefs on others. We need to value other beliefs in order to have harmony. This takes time but tolerance, acceptance and respect are vital. Where there are directly clashing views and beliefs, a ‘medium’ should be reached. Cultural sensitivity is key. We need to ensure a fun-filled and inclusive classroom environment._

Questionnaire responses 2008 and 2009.
The ‘projective’ responses (APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER TEACHERS: SECTION C: 322 - 324) were not as useful and effective as I had hoped they would be. When I used projective techniques within my questionnaire in my MEd I got some really interesting and useful data. However, these projective responses did not contribute in any significant way to my understanding of the learner-teachers’ knowledge and attitudes.

The reason for the lack of substantial contribution to my understanding was that I did not consider carefully enough the kinds of statements that would best suit projective techniques. Also I inadvertently embedded a reductionist notion within the two options for projection. These statements were not particularly projective and largely mirrored the learner-teachers' particular positions in relation to how they viewed culture. The flaws in my initial definitions of culture are discussed in Chapter 3 of this study.

I did not believe that the responses of the learner-teachers in relation to the statement ‘I think it is important to focus only on our own oral art forms’ would contribute significantly to this study. However, I have included them in the Appendix (QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER TEACHERS: SECTION C: 324) as a collection of interesting statements made by the learner-teachers.

The learner-teachers' ‘projective’ responses in relation to the statement, ‘I think we should be exposed to as many different oral art forms as possible from different countries, cultures and traditions as possible’ are summarised in the composite ‘character’ below. I have included these responses because, despite, what I believed to be the lack of a substantial contribution to my understanding, there were some insightful comments embedded within the learner-teachers’ responses.
I felt that the importance of culture was expressed in some different and insightful ways. Various terms including appreciation, respect and empathy which are considered crucial for intercultural encounters were mentioned.

There was a strong emphasis on understanding, experiencing and living different cultures as opposed being in ‘conflict’ and ‘detached from the world’. However, more than half of the learner-teachers who filled in this questionnaire,

I think we should be exposed to as many different oral art forms from different cultures, countries and traditions as possible because...

Trying different foods, dressing up in different traditional clothes, for example. Every culture should be explored in class. It broadens horizons, gives us a wide exposure. It opens our eyes and minds to different ways of living and to the many other rich cultures beside our own in this world. This gives us a greater understanding of, and insight into, different cultures. We can develop a better understanding of how different cultures work. How other cultures interact as a community is also important perhaps for benefitting relationships. It exposes us to traditions that we may even like to integrate and incorporate aspects of different cultures into our own lives. Australia is a very multi-cultural country and we need experiences of the different cultures in our country. We can learn from different cultures and take the best from different way of doing things, to make us the best ‘people’ we can be. It provokes deeper thought, empathy, compassion, tolerance, respect and understanding. This enables everyone to form a greater appreciation of how different people live and their views of the world and helps people to feel equal. It can help resolve conflict and against discrimination and racism between different cultures. We can be more accepting of cultures different from our own. It will allow us to break the boundaries between different cultures. To be detached from different cultures is to be detached from the world.
focused on ‘cosmetic aspects’ of culture in the form of different food and traditional clothes.

2.7 SUMMARY

This chapter maps out the stated familial and cultural identities and expressed views and attitudes of the learner-teachers involved, and the research undertaken, in this study. I begin by providing a research framework that includes objectives, an action research approach, arts-based research as an alternative reporting form, data generating and data analysis techniques and ethical considerations. This is followed by an account of the action research process consisting of two cycles in 2008 and one in 2009. I then provide background information relating to the drama course and the pre-service tertiary learner-teachers completing this course. I provide further background information pertaining to learner-teachers’ responses to various questionnaire sections. The next chapter, Chapter 3, continues my research story and begins my investigation of the supportive potential of oral art forms.
CHAPTER THREE
ORAL ART FORMS AND
CULTURAL COMPLEXITIES

Copy Cat from Ballarat, went to school and got the strap
Came home with a broken back

Copy Cat stole a rat; put it in his Sunday hat
When he went to Sunday School his teacher called him ‘Silly Fool’.

Copy Cat, dirty rat, stole my brother’s baseball bat

Copy Cat from Ballarat, went to school and got the strap
Teacher said it wasn’t fair because he lost his underwear
(Anonymous).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays the foundation, or initial storyline, for investigating the potential of culturally specific oral art forms for supporting drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding. I begin the chapter by outlining issues pertaining to the place of oracy within educational institutions and within my life experiences. I then discuss the concept of oral art forms, as defined by selected literature and by participants in this study, as well as assumptions which I brought to the study pertaining to the use of oral art forms. I include in this chapter examples of South African oral art forms that I introduced to the learner-teachers.

Within the chapter learner-teachers’ understandings and experiences of oral art forms, in relation to culture and the complexities of culture, are explored. The graphs in this chapter, providing background information on learner-teachers’ initial questionnaire responses in relation to oral art forms, are interspersed with discussion. This interpretive discussion is based on interview data, my recorded observations and reflections, as well as supporting literature.

The data which forms the basis for the analysis of the learner-teachers’ experiences of oral art forms consists of information gathered from 71 learner-
teachers’ responses to the anonymous questionnaire, 13 learner-teachers’ interview responses as well as my field-note observations and journal reflections. The graphs for Cycle 1 represent the responses of 28 participants (out of a potential 38) and the graphs for Cycle 3 represent the responses of 43 participants (out of a potential 45). I have included graphs from cycle 1 and cycle 3 to illustrate the largely similar responses from the 2008 and 2009 cohort of learner-teachers who participated in this research.

3.2 THE PLACE OF ORACY

Oracy, as the skills involved in communicating effectively by means of speech, is “the forgotten basic that some educational systems assume happens by osmosis and so they spend no precious curriculum space on it at all” (O’Toole, Stinson and Moore 2009: 50). It is the ‘basic’ as it lays the foundation for the development of other language modes. As Wagner (1998: 35) phrases it, it is “the seedbed for later growth in literacy”. Oracy requires saying words out loud and using the voice as a tool for communication. It is an expressive aspect of language in that it requires putting information, thoughts and ideas into words for an audience, even if that audience is oneself. Vygotsky (1978: 45) points out that in both childhood and adulthood speech is primarily for communicating, making “social contact” and “influencing surrounding individuals”.

While effective speaking requires the development of numerous communication skills, these skills fall into two major categories. The first are motor-perception skills – recalling and voicing sounds and structures of a language. The second are interaction skills – decision making in terms of what to say and how to say it within different contexts in which communication may take place.

The ability to speak grows with age, but it does not mean that increasingly effective oral communication is automatic. Constant practice is necessary in order to speak with increasing fluency and clarity within a range of situations. Practice and reflection are also required in order to increase sensitivity to different audiences and situations.
Drama practitioners value oracy and the developing of oracy skills. Drama has been promoted and used as a method of oracy development since, “the nineteenth century at least” (O’Toole, Stinson & Moore 2009: 52). Mc Kean (2007) states that research has constantly shown the positive effects of drama on the development of oracy and story writing.

Institutions of higher learning continue to privilege writing, over other forms of communication and seem at times to ignore the primacy of speech for social learning. As well as being an essential way of learning, oracy also provides a ‘window’ into what is being learned (Barnes 1992; Gilles and Pierce 2003). As Chinyowa (2001a: 128) phrases it, “whatever” [humans] derive from written sources has to be oralised for it to make sense.

Cumming (2006: 10) claims that in “academic contexts attention focuses on writing because it is through written texts that students demonstrate knowledge. He states that academic literacy in the form of the written word “is central to university studies” (ibid). Though I do not endorse the notion that students’ knowledge can exclusively be demonstrated through written texts it is clear that, despite inroads having been made into producing different kinds of video and audio texts, as well as performances in the arts, the written text is still the predominant form of evaluation and assessment within tertiary environments.

**Looking Back on Oracy**

When I look back on oracy within my university career, which ultimately led to an exploration of oral art forms I see...experiences of past students in my classes who were highly articulate, able to express themselves well in oral form and ask extremely insightful questions but did not perform well in written work. I remember...being amazed at the richness of written essays when students were asked to deliver a one or two minute oral presentation on these essays. I hear ... students being interviewed on their language portfolios having to have a far greater insight into the different language modes than if they had completed a written examination.
When I look back on my interest in oral art forms within my adult life I see enormous potential identified within a project where caregivers and teachers shared local activities such as indigenous games, iintsomi, songs, rhymes, and riddles that could be used to develop literacy and numeracy. I remember... being excited by the many contemporary uses of oral art forms and folklore which were presented at a conference in Cape Town in 2006. I hear a concert hall in Melbourne 2009, filled to capacity with mainly South Africans and descendants of South African who have moved to, or were born in, Australia. I feel the common bond and indescribable passion as all are swept to their feet and start dancing and singing to ‘Scatterlings of Africa’. The same passion that is evident at various sports events. I want to be able to harness and use similar passion within the use of culturally specific oral art forms to support learning.

Meta-journal (12/02/2009).

I believe that the privileging of writing needs to be continuously challenged and that more space should be given to oracy within teacher education. On the basis of this belief, I began researching ways in which oral art forms could be utilised within the teaching of a nine week drama course.

The following praise poem may assist in conveying the special powers of the spoken word - as expressed in a Bambara praise poem.

### Praise of the Word

*The word is total: it cuts, excoriates forms, modulates perturbs, maddens cures or directly kills amplifies or reduces According to intention It excites or calms souls.*

Praise song of a bard (Quoted in Agatucci 2004).
3.3 ORAL ART FORMS CONCEPTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Oral art forms are ‘oratures’ that are auditory, verbal and, like Shakespearean plays are meant to be performed. They are creative, non-static, evolving expressions that may be ‘living traditions’ that have been reinterpreted or fused with newer creative forms. They may also be oral forms of creative expression that have been created within a more contemporary, popular cultural, performance arena, such as Australian football chants. (Groenewald 2001; Agatucci 2004) They consist of both “well-known formulaic expressions ... and the coinage of new metaphors, the forte of praise poets in Southern Africa” (Groenewald 2001: 29).

Oral art in such forms as the praise poem features strongly throughout Southern Africa and emerged in the early seventeenth century (Chapman 1996: 55). It is “one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres in Africa” (Opland 1996: 2).

Visibility, knowledge and use of these forms may differ:

While for some observers - African and non-African language speakers alike - praising may be little more than a curiosity [or unknown], what cannot be denied is the fact that this ancient form of verbal art remains a vibrant, highly developed genre in Southern Africa
Groenewald (2001: 30 - 31).

Although oral art forms are associated with the spoken, or sung, word, they may involve “intertextual approaches” (Valk 2003: 140), “digital texts” (Tangherlini 2003: 137) and various written forms. For example, traditional oral poetry, which relied exclusively on the spoken word and was performed in small community settings, may be accessed on internet websites “allowing for its absorption into the modern technological arena” (Kaschula 2001: xi). As Hale (2003: 91) states, “the barrier between [oral and written forms is] artificial and fluid”.

In distinguishing oral poetry from “the quieter stage of the printed text”, emphasis is placed on the performative nature of oral poetry that “is performed
with the accompaniment of musicians, drummers and dancers in the presence of live audiences who often participate in events” (Newell 2010: 1). However, this distinction is no longer as clear-cut; increasingly written poems are performed as poets stage performances of their written poetry and “have scripted drums and dancers into their verse” (Newell 2010: 1).

Within this study Indigenous South African oral art forms which I am familiar with were used where applicable, as well as culturally specific oral art forms which research participants brought to classes and thus to the research process. As Marshall states, “We are all, in a sense indigenous to the places where we live” and learner-teachers should create their own “indigenous drama” (2004: 62). I therefore, attempted to get participants to access culturally specific oral art forms from their own histories, backgrounds, birthplaces and cultural identity. As can be seen from the journal extract below, my expectations were at times very different from what happened in reality.

**Australian Assumptions**

*I woefully overestimated my ability to get the learner-teachers to share oral art forms. I thought that I simply needed to ask and guide and the drama classroom would be filled with ‘dream-time stories’ and other Australian storytelling forms. I presumed that some Australian learner-teachers would be highly familiar with Aboriginal oral art forms. I also thought that the international students in the class would be willing and eager to share different forms from their ‘own’ culture. Not so...*

Meta-journal (03/02/2009).

I seriously considered reframing my research question as a result of challenges to my pedagogical assumptions and to the kind of action research envisaged. I decided, on reflection, that finding ways to engage with oral art forms, though more challenging than I had initially envisaged, was still at the heart of my research. Despite, or because of, multifarious difficulties and a process fraught
with challenges we did eventually get to engage with oral art forms within the drama course.

My research question continued to be: What role can culturally specific oral art forms play in supporting drama pedagogy and learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding? However, in addressing this question, emphasis was placed on my learning as a practical action researcher and reflective practitioner. How to engage with oral art forms was embedded within my discoveries, as teacher-researcher, about the use of, and problems of using, oral art in a supportive role with tertiary students. As a reflective practitioner I did not explore ‘quick fixes’ but instead used thinking and reasoning skills, as well as intuitive, practical, and subject knowledge of drama education and oral art forms, to respond to the challenges of the learning and teaching processes within this study (Kerchner 2009).

Agatucci asserts that “[a]frican oral arts traditions find their way into almost every form of contemporary African creative expression” (2004: 3). Although this may be overstated, my previous experiences had been that I was easily and quickly able to tap into storytelling and oral poetry practices with South African learner-teachers. I found that, understandably, within an Australian context, a number of examples needed to be provided before the learner-teachers began to grasp the notion of oral art forms and to share examples from their own experiences, cultures and backgrounds.

The learner-teachers’ lack of familiarity with the term necessitated a pre-questionnaire discussion about what could be considered an oral art form as well as ongoing discussions throughout the action research process. The learner-teachers’ responses to the questionnaires were thus informed by a brief class discussion and clarification of the term ‘oral art forms’. My varying success with the pre-questionnaire discussion can be seen from the extracts on the next page (86).
The students sat with their pens poised to respond to the questionnaire. Confusion, puzzlement, frustration, you name it, anything but understanding was on their faces. I noticed the two female students who had positioned themselves out of the circle, looking at each other and giggling. I found it interesting that no-one was talking and almost everyone was focused on the questionnaires. Even though I had tried to explain oral art forms to them and they had read some of the information on it in the statement of intention – from what I observed nobody had a clue – though some were ticking furiously.

There was a silence and then a brave soul ventured, “Tell us again what you mean by oral art forms!” I heard murmurs of agreement, “yeses” etc. I saw heads going up and people looking at me expectantly for answers. I tried again though I sensed that understanding would take more than me telling them. The second class went a little better. It is a small class. I performed an improvised praise-poem for them – in praise of the University! I could also spend more time with each student, getting them to think about oral art forms. They expressed their appreciation of the performance but I’m not at all convinced...

Field-notes, week 1, cycle 1 semester 2 2008 (30/07/2008).

I tried out my different plan for getting the students to understand oral art forms. I wrote the definition that Class B and I had worked on together in their last class. “An oral art form is a performative mode of oral communication, or expression, shared by a particular group or community and containing elements of improvisation and pre-design”. Each group took a phrase and had to talk about and then report what they thought the phrase meant. We then compiled a list on the board of possible oral art forms. This worked really well with Class C but not so well with Class D. I am going to have to find another way for them...

Field-notes, week 3, cycle 3 semester 1 2009 (19/03/2009).
Fook (2002: 89) maintains that the central focus of critical reflection is to uncover how we “participate in discourses which shape existing power relationships”. My critical reflections led me to examine my implicit and explicit assumptions (Morley 2008) that impacted on my communication relating to oral art forms. I constantly reflected on the way in which I presented and explained oral art forms, as exemplified by the extracts from my field-notes on the previous page (86). Through my subsequent replanning for the action research cycles the term gradually became clearer to the learner-teachers and indeed to me.

Each class differed in terms of the support they needed to understand the term and the ways in which it began to make sense to them. Building on previous classes’ ideas was helpful in providing an increasingly clear definition of oral art forms which is what they needed to fully engage with the idea. Our analysis and discussion of the definition and the compilation of a list of oral art forms placed the term more firmly within an Australian context. Providing of practical examples, as discussed more fully later on in this chapter, was also extremely useful to the learner-teachers.

In defining oral art forms with the learner-teachers within this research, we established that the source could vary and that it was the purpose of the form that determined whether it was an oral art form or not. We decided that in order to be classified as an oral art form, spoken communication with the purpose of representing or displaying something to others, an element of performance and a shared understanding of the art form needed to be present.

On the next page (88) is a summary of the learner-teachers’ stated experiences of oral art forms and what they identified as constituting oral art forms taken from their responses to questions in Section B of the questionnaire (Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS: SECTION B: 321 - 322). What is recorded in the summary is in the learner-teachers’ own words.
## Oral Art Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences</th>
<th>Kinds of Oral Art Forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African and Aboriginal music</td>
<td>Ancient stories, spoken stories, music and spoken rituals, chants, football theme songs/chants, songs, poetry. Plays, drama, grace, mass, nursery rhymes, fairytales, traditional festivals and events, Haka, tribal dancing, cultural traditions passed down by word, rather than writing, experiences that are pertinent to a particular culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African and Japanese drumming</td>
<td>Displaying something to others in an oral, organised, well-known way, represent and display culture/emotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Maori culture and traditions</td>
<td>A performance that involves speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Dreamtime stories /Aboriginal tales’ and Aboriginal dance</td>
<td>History being passed down in oral form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural days and excursions</td>
<td>People expressing themselves through voice (spoken or sung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to other cultures through food and sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying different languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry recitals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Irish folk songs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Musicals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents and parents telling stories when they were young</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian bush poems and anthems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew Shabbat prayers and declarations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish dancing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF STORIES

I identified the sharing of childhood and ‘family’ stories as a potential way of initiating an engagement with culturally specific oral art forms. What is included in this section is a brief description of the learner-teachers’ childhood experiences of stories and the kind of stories that emerged within the action research process.

The graphs on the next page (89) are based on the learner-teachers’ responses to the question; “Were you told stories as a child that were particular to your culture, nationality and background?”
As I anticipated, all learner-teachers had some childhood experiences of stories from their own cultures with 0% responding never to the question, “Were you told stories, as a child, that were particular to your own culture, nationality and background?” In cycle 3 (figure 3.2) there were 12% (5/43) of respondents who were seldom told stories as opposed to 0% in cycle 1 (figure 3.1).

One question I did not ask, in cycle 1, was the learner-teachers’ childhood experiences of stories from ‘other’ cultures. In order to get a more comprehensive picture of the participant’s childhood experiences of stories, a question, “Were you told stories as a child, from ‘other’ cultures?” was added to the questionnaire for cycle 3.

As was the case with stories from their own cultures, all learner-teachers, in cycle 3 (figure 3.3), indicated that they had some experience of stories from ‘other’ cultures. Experiences of stories from ‘other’ cultures was not as regular (7%) or often (19%) as experiences of stories from their own culture. Only 11 out of 43 learner-teachers responded that they were regularly or often told stories from other ‘cultures’.
I planned to get learner-teachers to identify and share stories from their familial and cultural backgrounds. This was based on my assumptions, discussed earlier, that engaging with stories from diverse cultural backgrounds would be easy. It was also based on the learner-teachers' indication that they had all, to some degree, had childhood experiences of stories on which they could draw.

I had expected a wide repertoire of stories particularly in view of the learner-teachers’ responses. As Ewing argues: “Storying is part of being human...Narratives...become part of the parent-child interaction for children from various cultural backgrounds from about two years old [and] it is through storying that children are initiated into their cultures” (2004: 33 - 34).

However, when the learner-teachers were asked to share stories from their childhood within the drama sessions these were largely drawn from well-known ‘western’ stories. Although getting learner-teachers to share culturally specific stories was more challenging than I anticipated ultimately some Asian folktales were shared by Asian learner-teachers, such as stories associated with the Chinese Moon Festival. Also a number of versions of messages associated with stories emerged, “stories that, however different, address the same themes, feelings and attitudes” (Miller and Saxton 2004: 4).

Stories with messages about raising false alarms and then not being believed in reality included ‘The Boy who cried Wolf’, ‘The Girl Who cried Monster’, ‘Cookie Monster’, and ‘King You of Zhou’ and a story a learner-teacher told involving a tsunami. Different versions of ‘The Fisherman’s Wife’ and ‘Stone Soup’ (including the Australian story ‘Wombat Stew’) were also told.

I have been trying so hard each week to at the very least get the students to identify stories that may be culturally specific. Today it happened. After a group had presented the story of the Boy who cried wolf, a female student quietly said that she knew a story “like that”.
Haltingly and struggling with the English language she willingly and with increasing confidence told the story of King You of Zhou who fooled nobles into thinking they were being attacked. When she really stumbled another student, who knew the story, picked up the story-line and then when she was ready she picked it up again – and so on. They criss-crossed until the story was finished.

It is amazing how popular the story of the ‘Boy who cried Wolf’ is. It has appeared in all four classes. None of the classes have been particularly creative in the way in which they have got us to participate in the story. What it has done each time though is to get students to share stories with similar messages. I asked a group of students why they had selected the ‘Wolf’ story. One of the group members said it was because it was one that all the members of their group remembered being told as a child.

Field-notes, week 6, cycle 3 semester 1 2009 (09/04/2009).

Stories with diverse cultural origins were told relating to floods, creation and the ‘Sandman’ who comes to get children to go to sleep. Various Australian Aboriginal stories including ‘Koala and the Bunyip’, ‘How the Emu Lost its Wings’ and ‘The Rainbow Snake’ were also eventually told. What emerged was that, while learner-teachers tended to favour and predominantly use traditional ‘western stories’ they did have a wide repertoire of stories from different cultures to draw on in relation to their childhood experiences.

3.5 ORAL FORMS FROM ‘OWN’ AND ‘OTHER’ CULTURES

In this section of the chapter, my assumptions in relation to culture and the learner-teachers’ experiences in relation to oral art forms are discussed. These are linked to the elusive and complex nature of defining culture and the many different interpretations of culture.
3.5.1 ‘Unpacking’ and Problematising Culture

Roots and Wings

I believe strongly in the dynamic and changing nature of culture. Roots and wings are important to me. When I set out on this research journey and designed the questionnaire, I used the terms ‘own’ and ‘other’ culture simply to try and separate what may be part of the learner-teachers’ background and what may not. However, even though I taught courses on ‘multilingualism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ in South Africa, I had absolutely no idea how complex and controversial the term ‘culture’ could be.

Meta-journal (02/12/2009).

In the introductory chapter of this study I briefly defined the concepts of culture and intercultural understanding. This included my assertion of the elusiveness of the term ‘culture’. Additional literature that I reviewed, rather than clarifying the term, increasingly confirmed this elusiveness. Further reflection revealed the enormous complexity of the terrain of the term ‘culture’ that needs to work against “a reductive, unilateral and oversimplifying reading of cultures” (Hountondji 2002: 81).

I came to realise the terms ‘own’ and ‘other’ culture as I used them in the research questionnaires were indeed over-simplistic and reductive. I displayed “western society’s binary syndrome whereby reality takes shape as ‘either...or’ and prefers a mono-dimensionality to textured and ordered complexity” (Nettleford 1995: 48). However, the learner-teachers did not find these terms particularly problematic and could locate themselves and their ‘own’ cultures within ideas of choice, hybridity and identity.

Also, where there is difference and distinction there must surely be ‘other’ - not necessarily in a divisive, simplistic, ‘binary’ form. Alternative terms, to ‘other’,
such as Gramsci’s inaccessible term ‘subaltern’ used by Spivak (1988) would be equally problematic. It would lead to the need for considerable explanation which I did not want for the questionnaire.

Eagleton (2000: 32 - 33) suggests that the term ‘culture’ has lost its usefulness and that definitions have become meaningless by being too broad or too precise. Indeed imprecise and broad definitions of culture may consist of defining culture as a way of life, or labelling of almost anything as a culture. For example corporate culture, computer culture, research culture, popular culture, classroom culture, culture of peace, culture of resistance, democratic culture, theatre culture, university culture, culture of learning and teaching, internet dating culture and so on.

Precise definitions may apply the term culture specifically to the arts, particular forms of literature, or to mark what may be seen as ‘high’ aesthetic value. It appears that, “we are trapped... between disabblingly wide and discomfortingly rigid notions of culture and that our most urgent need is to move beyond both” (Eagleton 2000: 32).

I have illustrated some of the ways in which culture can be viewed, from particular to universal, in figure 3.4 on the next page (94). The figure has as its core, or centre, some original meanings and early understandings of culture such as in ‘cultivation’ and ‘tillage’. Defining of culture then moves in increasing circles from different elements of a group life-style, to the symbolic and expressive domains of a ‘whole society’, to viewing culture as what is common to all humanity.
As Degenaar (1995: 61) states, emphasis on particular cultural groups “leads to an exclusivist notion of culture as bounded wholes” whereas emphasis on culture as universal “leads to the denial of the rich texture of cultural variety”.

While acknowledging that an all-embracing or a narrowly exclusive and possibly elitist definition of culture would not be useful, there is space and scope for a range of context dependent definitions of culture. “Humans must be located in...
time and space.... always stuffed full of their culture and history...they must ‘nest’ in a universe of contexts” (Plummer 2008: 486). I believe the location of definitions of culture within specific contexts to be essential. This is especially important in view of culture as an ever changing human-made phenomenon that is dynamic, changing and flexible (Brah 1996).

So, the learner-teachers’ understanding and experiences of oral art forms, discussed below, should be viewed against the backdrop of the potential viewing of culture as ‘bounded wholes’ due to my emphasis of the terms ‘own’ and ‘other’. The learner-teachers may also have attributed multiple perspectives and readings to the term ‘culture’.

3.5.2 Experiences of Oral Art Forms from ‘Own Culture’

The graphs below are based on the learner-teachers’ responses to the question; “Did you, as a child, experience oral art forms that belong to your culture?” I have compared them to the learner-teachers’ responses relating to their childhood experiences of stories (figures 3.1 and 3.3).

![Figure 3.5: Childhood Experience of Oral Art Forms from Own Culture Groups A and B (Cycle 1 2008)](image)

![Figure 3.6: Childhood Experience of Oral Art Forms from Own Culture Groups C and D (Cycle 3 2009)](image)

Whereas all learner-teachers indicated childhood experiences of stories, 25% (7/28) of learner-teachers in cycle 1 (figure 3.5) indicated that they had seldom (18%) or never (7%) had childhood experiences of oral art forms from their own culture. The number of learner-teachers in cycle 3 (figure 3.6) who seldom or
never (21% or 9/43) had childhood experiences of oral art forms from their own culture is also greater than the number of learner-teachers who seldom or never had childhood experiences of stories from their own cultures (12% or 5/43).

The reasons for this confirmed directly and indirectly by some participants in interviews, were that stories were told to, or read to or by, learner-teachers as children. This activity was without any performative elements and did not including any explicit cultural style, or genre, of telling that the learner-teachers associated with oral art forms. This may be particular to the learner-teachers interviewed as “different cultural groups will use oral storying differently” (Ewing 2004).

Below are two examples of learner-teachers’ responses from the interviews I conducted in semester 2 2008. One participant classified stories read by her mother as distinct from oral art forms. The other also, initially, did not believe her grandmother’s storytelling to have performative elements associated with oral art forms though, as can be seen, during the interview she began to change her perception.

**Phoebe:** When my mother read us stories at bedtime [um] we mainly listened and didn’t really participate.

**Carol (researcher):** Didn’t you talk about the story or didn’t she ask questions?

**Phoebe:** Yes [pause] but, but [pause] we didn’t participate like in the South African stories... So I wouldn’t say it was an oral art form.

**Carol (researcher):** You said your mother came from Singapore. Would you say that this impacted on the way she read you stories?

**Phoebe:** No, no, I don’t think so...

Interview 2, week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

**Tanya:** We loved listening to my grandmother telling stories... She was the best...It wasn’t a performance...Nobody performed... Actually...that’s why the stories were so
awesome ... she did perform. I hadn’t really thought about it... it could be an oral art form. I saw it as a story not an oral art form...

Interview 4, week 7 semester 2 2008 (08/10/2008).

So, as the learner-teachers interrogated their notions, through the drama course as well as through reflection during interview processes, their idea of what constituted oral art forms broadened and changed from their initial understanding that informed the filling in of the questionnaires. Some learner-teachers stated that they were still unclear about what constituted oral art forms when they filled in the questionnaires. Even with what I believed to be clearer explanation and discussion on oral art forms prior to filling in the questionnaire in 2009, it was felt that the term oral art forms only became clearer when ‘practical work’ took place in the drama class (from interview 7 on 14 May 2009).

In the semester 1 2009, interviews, I showed the learners the graphs and asked them directly why they thought the number of learner-teachers who had childhood experiences of oral art forms from their own culture was greater than the number of learner-teachers who seldom or never had childhood experiences of stories from their own cultures.

Their responses, as typified by the following interview conversations, showed that this was largely due to the learner-teachers not considering storytelling to be an oral art form when the questionnaires were filled in. This indicates the limitations of the questionnaire because the term oral art forms was misunderstood, or not fully understood.

Jane: No idea.
Ruth: I think as young children we would have been read stories... not all of us would have experienced oral art forms.
Anne: Yes [pause] or in primary school we read stories.
Carol (researcher): What do you see as the difference between stories and oral art forms?

[pause]

Anne: [um...] Oral art [pause] focuses on the importance of spoken words... and how they are performed.

Ruth: Oral art is designed to be performed, not read.

Carol (researcher): What about stories that were told to you as children?

[silence]

Carol (researcher): You’ve told me [pause] ... that oral art forms are about being spoken, not read. So where do you see storytelling?

Jane: As an oral art form... only because of this course. When I filled in the questionnaire, I didn’t connect stories to oral art forms.

[sounds of agreement]

Anne: Like... I didn’t think I had any experiences of oral art forms as a child ... now I feel we come into contact with them everyday... in music...Rap, R’nB, education... aboriginal dreamtime stories... movies ... Jewish oral art.

Ruth: and Bollywood ...

Interview 6, week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

The questionnaire data and the learner-teachers' interview responses in 2008 where they had not viewed stories as oral art forms led to my explicitly making learner-teachers aware of storytelling as an oral art form prior to filling in the questionnaires in 2009. Despite my attempts, it was still only when they engaged with oral art forms within the drama course that learner-teachers connected stories to oral art forms.

The graphs on the next page (99) are based on the learner-teachers' responses to the question; “Do you experience oral art forms that belong to your culture?”
In cycle 1 the same number of learner-teachers (7%) indicated that they never currently experience oral art forms from their own culture (figure 3.7) as those who indicated that they never had childhood experiences from their own culture (figure 3.5). A greater number (32%) responded that they seldom currently experience their ‘own’ oral art forms (figure 3.7) compared to seldom having childhood experiences of ‘own’ oral art forms (18% - figure 3.5).

This means that more learner-teachers in cycle 1 (39% or 11/28) believed they currently had little to no experiences related to oral art forms from their ‘own’ culture compared to those who had little or no childhood experiences of oral art forms (25% or 7/28). Though the percentage of learner-teachers with little to no experience were less, the findings were similar for cycle 3 with (26% or 11/43) currently having little to no experiences related to oral art forms from their ‘own’ culture (figure 3.8) compared to those who had little or no childhood experiences of oral art forms (21% or 9/43 - figure 3.6).

Various reasons for the lower percentage of oral art forms from ‘own culture’ were provided during the 2009 interviews and included: the influences of caregivers in ensuring childhood experiences versus the learner-teachers’ neglect of oral art forms in adulthood; and a belief that engaging with oral art forms is the domain of childhood.
Anne: Our parents could have exposed us more to oral art forms than we now look for ourselves. We ignore our own culture.

Ruth: Oral art forms are seen as for children.

Interview 6, week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

I also found that in the drama sessions in 2008 the learner-teachers more readily drew on their childhood experiences through childhood stories, rhymes, jingles and games than current experiences. The learner-teachers’ responses indicating greater childhood than current experience of oral art forms, supported by my experiences in the 2008 drama sessions, led me to plan an alternative way of engaging with oral art forms with 2009 classes. This entailed sharing and creating children’s playground rhymes and chants, as discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

In relation to learner-teachers currently having little to no experiences of oral art forms from their ‘own’ culture the reasons cited were:

Stephanie: While I was travelling overseas I actively looked for experiences from different cultures. Yet we do not seek out cultural experiences that are ‘on our doorstep’.

Candice: It’s strange... I don’t know why we do that. Like, living in Melbourne, I only went to the immigration museum when I took some visitors there.

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

Learner-teachers attributed the lack of experience of ‘own culture’ to the ‘unknown and exotic being more intriguing’ (interview 7 semester 1, 14 May 2009). They felt this was the reason why they tended to ignore cultural experiences on their ‘doorstep’ and focus on ‘different cultures’. In contrast Bhaba (1994: 209) argues that exploration of culture is “not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism
of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity”.

### 3.5.3 Experiences of Oral Art Forms from ‘Other Cultures’

The graphs below are based on the learner-teachers’ responses to the question; “Did you, as a child, experience oral art forms that belong to other cultures?”

![Figure 3.9: Childhood Experience of oral Art Forms from 'Other' Cultures Groups A and B (Cycle 1)](image1)
![Figure 3.10: Childhood Experience of oral Art Forms from 'Other' Cultures Groups C and D (Cycle 3)](image2)

In comparing the learner-teachers’ childhood experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms to childhood experiences of ‘other’ art forms, in cycle 1, more learner-teachers said they never had experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms (7% - figure 3.5) than learner-teachers who never had experiences of ‘other’ art forms (0% - figure 3.9). If the numbers relating to seldom and never are combined then fewer learner-teachers said they seldom or never had childhood experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms (25% or 7/28 - figure 3.5) than learner-teachers who seldom or never had childhood experiences of ‘other’ art forms (46% or 13/28 - figure 3.9).

On the other end of the scale, 0% regularly had childhood experiences of ‘other’ oral art forms (figure 3.9) compared to 25% who regularly had childhood experiences of ‘own’ oral art forms figure 3.5). The results were more consistent in these categories in cycle 3 with fewer learner-teachers both
seldom (16%) and never (5%) having childhood experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms (21% or 9/43 - figure 3.6) than learner-teachers seldom (35%) and never (12%) having childhood experiences of ‘other’ art forms (47% or 20/43 – figure 3.10).

While overall figures indicated that learner-teachers had more childhood experiences of ‘own’ oral art forms than ‘other’ art forms, a discrepancy existed within the ‘never’ category in cycle 1. This raised the question, which was posed in the interview process; why should all learner-teachers, in cycle 1, have some childhood experiences of ‘other’ oral art forms but some learner-teachers not have childhood experiences of ‘own’ oral art forms?

Responses to this question within the 2008 interviews related predominantly to immigration and included the following reasons for this discrepancy.

Phoebe: I don’t really remember my parents sharing their oral art forms with me... I am not saying this is always... some immigrant parents may not share their oral art forms with their children.

Interview 2 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

Alan: Immigrant children could have more experiences of ‘other’ art forms because of a desire to be Australian ... to fit in ... to be part of the new culture.

Interview 3 semester 2 2008 (05/09/2008).

The idea of wanting to fit in expressed by Alan in his interview and surfacing again within discussions in other chapters of this study may be linked to the notion of assimilation where a “sense of self becomes swept into the fluid slipstream of assimilation, forever transforming to what is perceived as the cultural norm of a particular location” (Ricketts 2008: 27). Or, more hopefully, it may be linked to Arnett’s (2002) notion of adaptation to both local and global
societies within a bicultural (part local/part global) or hybrid (combining elements of global and local) identity.

Other reasons to explain this discrepancy within the 2009 interviews were linked to a perception that ‘western’ cultures have no art forms and presumptions about knowledge of one’s own art forms leading to the learner-teachers’ focussing on the ‘other’.

**Candice:** ‘Western’ cultures believe that they do not possess any oral art forms... other cultures, ancient cultures, have more meaning.  
**Stephanie:** At school and during childhood we were exposed more to other forms – maybe because we are supposed to know our own culture – teachers assume we know our own culture’.  

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

Candice’s assertion in relation to ‘western’ and ‘ancient’ cultures, which I found an interesting distinction, echoes some statements made within the written responses to the questionnaire.

**I was born in Australia, both my parents were born in Australia...I don’t even really see myself having a cultural identity.**  

Questionnaire response 2008.

The questionnaire and interview responses affirmed my belief in engaging learner-teachers with culturally specific oral art forms notwithstanding the challenges that this presented. I increasingly saw the need to explore oral art forms as a means to recognise, value and respect a range of cultural identities and to problematise binaries that categorise and essentialise cultures as, for example, exotic or ordinary, meaningful or meaningless.
The graphs below are based on the learner-teachers’ responses to the question; “Do you experience oral art forms that belong to other cultures?”

![Pie chart Figure 3.11: Current Experience of Oral Art forms from 'Other Cultures' Groups A and B (Cycle 1 2008)](image1.png)

No learner-teachers in cycle 1 (figure 3.11) and 2% in cycle 3 (figure 3.12) said they regularly experience ‘other’ oral art forms while 18% (cycle 1 – figure 3.7) and 12% (cycle 3 – figure 3.8) indicated that they regularly experience ‘own’ oral art forms. Comparisons of the learner-teachers’ current experiences of ‘other’ art forms (figures 3.11 and 3.12) to current experiences of ‘own’ oral art forms (figures 3.7 and 3.8) reveal that more learner-teachers never (14% - cycle 1 and 12% - cycle 3) or seldom (36% - cycle 1 and 28 % - cycle 3) currently experience ‘other’ oral art forms than those who currently never (7% - cycle 1 and 5% - cycle 3) or seldom (32% - cycle 1 and 21% - cycle 3) experience ‘own’ oral art forms.

The comparison of current ‘own’ and ‘other’ experiences follows a similar pattern to the comparison of childhood ‘own’ and other’ experiences. In both cases, more learner-teachers seldom and never experience ‘other’ forms than those that seldom or never experience ‘own’ forms. The learner-teachers’ indication that currently their experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms is more frequent than ‘other’ forms appears contrary to some of the views expressed in the interviews. When I interviewed the learner-teachers they talked about seeking out experiences from different cultures, yet not participating in their
‘own’ cultural experiences that are ‘on our doorstep’ (interview 7 semester 1, 14 May 2009).

Figures relating to childhood experience of ‘other’ forms and current experiences of ‘other’ forms show an increase in those that currently never (14% - cycle 1 and 12% - cycle 3) have experiences (figures 3.11 and 3.12) as opposed to those who never (0%-cycle 1 and 12%-cycle 3) had childhood experiences (figures 3.9 and 3.10). This seems to reinforce what emerged in their interviews; that parents, or care-givers, exposed the learner-teachers more to oral art forms than the learner-teachers now seek out for themselves. Less current exposure to ‘other’ oral art forms in adulthood than in childhood may also be linked to the idea that oral art forms are seen as being experiences provided to children. That more learner-teachers in this research indicated they currently have little to no experiences related to oral art forms from their ‘own’ culture (figure 3.7 - 39% or 11/28 and figure 3.8 - 26% or 11/43) and ‘other’ cultures (figure 3.11 - 50% or 14/28 and figure 3.12 - 40% or 17/43) as opposed to those who had little or no childhood experiences of ‘own’ (figure 3.5 - 25% or 7/28 and figure 3.6 - 21% or 9/43) and ‘other’ (figure 3.9 - 46% or 13/28 and figure 3.10 - 47% or 20/43) motivated me to continue to investigate ways of engaging with oral art forms with learner-teachers.

3.5.4 Experiences in the School Curriculum

The graphical representations in this section (3.5.4) are based on the learner teachers’ responses to the questions “Were oral art forms that belong to your ‘culture’ part of your school curriculum?” (figures 3.13 and 3.14) and “Were oral art forms that belong to ‘other cultures’ part of your school curriculum?” (figures 3.15 and 3.16).

Learner-teachers’ experiences of their ‘own and ‘other’ oral art forms within the school curriculum correlate with cycle 1 learner-teachers’ childhood experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms and childhood experiences of ‘other’ art forms.
Once again more learner-teachers said they never had experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms (figure 3.13 - 14% - cycle 1 and figure 3.14 - 9% - cycle 3) than learner-teachers who never had experiences of ‘other’ art forms (figure 3.15 - 4% - cycle 1 and figure 3.16 - 0% - cycle 3). Even when the seldom and never categories were combined, more learner-teachers said they seldom or never had experiences of their ‘own’ oral art forms in the school curriculum (figure 3.13 - 43% or 12/28 - cycle 1 and figure 3.14 - 51% or 22/43 - cycle 3) than learner-teachers who seldom or never had experiences of ‘other’ oral art forms in the school curriculum (figure 3.15 - cycle 1 - 29% or 8/28 and figure 3.16 - cycle 3 - 19% or 8/43).

Though school experiences and school environments may differ significantly, findings, from both cycle 1 and cycle 3, support the view that schools tend to focus on ‘other’ cultures. There may be a number of reasons for this including
curriculum focus on inclusivity and diversity and classroom curricula based on assumptions that learners already have extensive knowledge of their ‘own’ cultures. This may also link to Egan’s (2003) view that curriculum has become controlled by structuring experiences around children’s prior knowledge, or in this case, what is believed to be prior knowledge.

One learner-teacher’s experience differed from most of the learner-teachers that I interviewed who believed there was a focus on ‘other’ cultures. This student recollected a range of cultural experiences.

**Michelle:** Remembering back to primary school I recall listening, reading and watching plays, books and tapes expressing stories from our culture. I in particular also recall learning and being exposed to a lot of Aboriginal/Indigenous stories.

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

I understood that, while the collective information provided useful background, learner-teachers in this study had not had homogenous experiences of their ‘own’ and ‘other’ oral art forms. This is evident from four very different accounts below, written by learner-teachers in response to question 1 in the section B part of the questionnaire (Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS SECTION B: 321 - 322). In question 1 the learner-teachers were asked to briefly describe themselves in terms of their own cultural identity. They were given some sense of what they could include in their answers relating to such aspects as birth-place, nationality, values and family background.

The four extracts from learner-teachers’ responses are representative of those who frame themselves within a particular culture or set of cultural experiences and those who consider themselves to be ‘multi-cultured’ (learner-teachers’ word) or to have had experiences from a variety of cultures. These extracts link to the issues discussed in the next section of this chapter and reflect the complexities of cultural identity within contemporary Melbourne Australia.
I was born in Australia and have not moved from Melbourne at all in my life. I live in a wealthy area that is heavily Caucasian, as are almost all of my friends. My contact has been very minimal with people that are different to me and therefore my views of other cultures is very limited.

I was born in Australia and lived here for the first five years of my life. I then moved to Singapore when both parents got jobs as teachers...I was exposed to different cultures that many young children are not at such an age...When we moved back to Australia it was hard to understand why other children were not as tolerant of other cultures.

I am half Australian and half French Canadian with a Japanese aunt and Muslim and Jewish uncles. I consider myself Australian but have strong ties to Canada. Japanese culture has always been part of my life...living there for a short time...I value all cultures as I have grown up in a very multicultural family.

My parents were both born in China. They experienced a far more deep Chinese background then mine. ...My Chinese culture is difficult. Sometimes I even can’t fully understand. It’s just too much to go through the 200 years of history.

Questionnaire responses 2008 and 2009.

3.6 CULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN CULTURAL COMPLEXITIES

This section of my study contains a consideration of ambiguities and alternative viewpoints with regard to culture. I have drawn mainly from postcolonial, feminist and transnational cultural theory in exploring and defining the terms hybridity, essentialism, choice and globalisation and linking them to learner-teachers’ definitions of their cultural identities. I consider these to be crucial concepts in my attempt to understand some of the cultural complexities within the 21st century in which we encounter “the ever-present push and pull of globalisation” (Richter, van der Walt and Visser 2004: 5).
These theories are almost as broad and elusive as the term culture. Certainly the borders of postcolonial theory are extremely uncertain, fuzzy and continually changing. Those who have been categorised by others as postcolonial theorists frequently do not define themselves in these terms. For instance Spivak (1999) believes herself to be inaccurately linked to postcolonialism. I see the common features as preoccupation with uneven power relationships and a commitment to ‘liberation’ in very broad and figurative terms.

3.6.1 Hybridity and Essentialism

Within a theoretical context of shifting definitions of culture such concepts as ‘cultural hybridity’ and ‘essentialism’ become significant (Hoogvelt 1997). Postcolonial theory problematises and questions ‘western’ binaries and polarities in relation to these and other concepts. Postcolonialism emphasises historicity\(^5\), diversity, possibility and contextuality in understanding socio-cultural phenomenon (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995).

‘Hybridity’, or mixture, in relation to culture, refers to the state of belonging to more than one culture and “the creation of new transcultural forms” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 118). It has been viewed as one of the most disputed terrains of cultural theory and postcolonial discourse. The notion of hybridity featured strongly within many of the learner-teachers attempts to define their cultural identity. This is evident in the following excerpts from learner-teachers’ responses to Question 1, Section B of the questionnaire (see Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNER-TEACHERS: 321).

> My one parent is Chinese and my other one is Indian. I was born in Australia... I have a lifestyle and cultural identity that is a mixture of Indian, Chinese, Malaysian and Australian... I belong to all and none of those cultures.

\(^5\) Taking place or existing in history
I was born in Hong Kong... I was brought up in Australia ... and have adapted a western lifestyle. I describe myself as Chinese... I think that most parts of my lifestyle (food etiquette, celebrations, choices that I make) are more heavily influenced by my Chinese culture but also some western influences.

Too mixed to have a strong cultural identity.

I am Jewish. I ...grew up in a Jewish community... I am also Australian and identify myself with Australian culture, however, I consider myself to have a mixed culture. I consider myself a Jewish Australian rather than an Australian Jew.

I consider myself an Australian born Macedonian and have adapted a mix of these two cultures.

Questionnaire responses (2008 and 2009).

For some theorists hybridity is seen as a strength (Bhabha 1994; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995) and upheld as a type of “superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweeness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference” (Hoogvelt, 1997:158). While, in my view, the notion of a so-called “superior cultural intelligence” is highly problematic, being ‘inside’ more than one culture does appear to be advantageous. In addition to the advantage of being able to negotiate differences it would appear, from the learner-teachers’ responses, that the ability to adapt is seen as an important advantage. Embracing cultural hybridity is also seen as a means of avoiding the reproducing of problematic binary categories of the past and “developing new anti-moholithic models of cultural exchange” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995: 183). As Bhabha (1994: 37) argues, hybridity challenges homogenous, united views of culture “authenticated by the originary Past, [and] kept alive in the national tradition of the People”.

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For others the term is viewed as highly offensive (Mitchell 1997; Werbner and Modood 1997). This is largely due to its negative historical usage where it was an insulting term for people of mixed-blood, a colonialist communication of inferiority and racism. Hybridity can also strengthen unequal relationships of dominance resulting in undesired combining of cultures and enforced integration (Garcia Canclini 1995; Kraidy 2005). Some learner-teachers’ responses reflected a sense of disconnection from their cultural identities or a lack of belonging that could be associated with hybridity.

Essentialism is frequently viewed as a pejorative, anti-hybrid term. It assumes “categories or classes ... have one or several defining features exclusive to all members of that category” (Ashcroft, Griffiths &Tiffin 2000: 77). For example, from some learner-teachers’ descriptions of Australian ‘culture’, from an essentialist view one would assume that all Australians are ‘laid back’ and live to barbeque, party and go to the beach. The term multiculturalism, though used by learner-teachers in questionnaire responses, is viewed by some in a negative light as it is said to “reify essentialist cultural self-definitions” (Werbner and Modood 1997: 22 - 23). Fuller (2000: 16) suggests that it is “an exaggerated ...sense of cultural difference that tends to unwittingly incapacitate the people on whose behalf it advocates”. Papastergiadis (1997: 258) raises a critical question by asking “should we use only words with a pure and inoffensive history, or should we... tak[e] on and subvert ...their own vocabulary?”

Essentialism may be effectively used at “strategic moments” (Spivak 1993: 3) for example, to unite people in a common cause, such as within ‘black pride’ or ‘black consciousness’ movements. Spivak acknowledges that essentialism, as a strategy “can turn into an alibi for proselytising academic essentialism” (1993: 3). She (1993: 4) claims that arguments for or against essentialist strategies entail viewing where the group, individual or movement is placed within any given situation as “strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory”. Rather than expose or “discredit closet essentialists”, feminist theorist Diana Fuss (1989: 3) argues that it is more important to probe the purpose of essentialism within “a particular set of discourses”. Certainly, essentialism can be pejorative
when it leads to severe and debilitating stereotyping. Within considerations of the intercultural, stereotyping needs to be safeguarded against.

Bhabha critiques the ‘western’ myth of treating the ‘other’ culture, as a singular, uniform entity (Bhabha 1994; 1996). ‘Western’ polarisation of ‘them and us’ and ‘us and other’ places people into cultural boxes and draws a distinction in behaviour between the positive, ‘right’ and wise, image of ‘us’ and the negative, ‘wrong’ and unwise image of ‘them’.

This is well illustrated in “Complete Kak! The Comprehensive Whinger’s Guide to South Africa and the world”, a ‘tongue-in-cheek’, ‘non-academic’ book:

“They”

As in “they broke into my house”, “they stole my car” and “they are ruining the country”. It’s such a commonly used euphemism – most frequently employed by bitter expats and when-we Saffers... – that most of us don’t think twice about it... it implies that there is a special group of people, known to everyone, responsible for all the terrible things that happen in this country...simply a disguised form of racial obsessing. Might as well just say “the masses” or “those bloody blacks” which is what ‘they’ were known as a couple of decades ago

Richman and Schreiber (2009: 159).

Rather than this divisive reading of the ‘other’, “... we need to find those words with which we can speak of ourselves and others... elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (Bhabha 1994: 209).

3.6.2 Choice

Within a world of migration and changing affiliations and where people may feel more closely aligned to cultural, national and social groups that are not necessarily a part of their ancestry and familial background, the notion of choice in relation to culture becomes significant. Kristeva argues that in contemporary society we have moved past the restrictions of our “origins that have assigned to us biological identity papers and linguistic, religious, social, political, historical
place”; a person’s level of cultural autonomy lies in “their ability to choose their membership”. The extent of democracy within countries or social groups is directly related to the extent to which individuals (my emphasis) “exercise that choice” (Kristeva 1993: 16).

An element of choice was evident in many learner-teachers’ definitions of their cultural identity. These are some examples.

I also would say I choose to belong to the music culture particularly theatre. I have been involved with and loving musicals all my life.

I am closer to my Italian side of my family than my Australian side. I choose to follow certain Italian customs and traditions.

I choose to be a member of the university culture.

I don’t want to be a part of any ‘country’ culture. I am more of a city person.

My friends and I are part of a teenage culture.

My cultural values are empathy, compassion, laughter, food, wine, friendship and knowledge... I feel drawn to feminist culture.

I consider the sense of belonging in my family as a kind of personal culture.

Questionnaire responses (2008 and 2009).

3.6.3 Cultural Implications of Globalisation

Globalisation may bring “inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas” (Gilroy 1993: xi) and consequently greater potential for cultural encounters and
intercultural understanding. However, Smith believes, globalisation also brings with it certain losses in relation to culture.

For indigenous cultures the “something lost” has been defined as indigenous knowledge and culture. In biological terms the “something lost” is our diversity... culturally it is our uniqueness of stories and experiences and how they are expressed... [lost] through the homogenisation of culture Smith (2008: 126).

Globalisation may lead to closer links with different communities and people and the negotiation of shared human values. It may also lead to superficiality, sameness, “the creation of a McWorld society” (Richter,van der Walt and Visser 2004: 7) and erosion of cultural identity.

The effects of globalisation are uncertain and ambiguous and appear to result in both homogenisation and heterogeneity. Where globalisation “evokes localization as its counterforce” the cultural contrasting of regional or local customs and the striving for local “authenticity” may occur leading to heterogeneity (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 32). On the other hand, while the idea of global uniformity is seen by some as obsolete, globalisation can lead to homogenisation through assimilation processes. As Giroux writes, in relation to becoming ‘Americanised’: “We melted alright. Melted our heritage right off. We were boiled until we dissolved into one giant heap of nothingness” (Giroux 1996: 57).

Hermans and Dimaggio (2007: 33) identify two interrelated patterns:

a) globalization as boundary crossing... leading to international and intercultural connectedness ...and
b) localization as sets of customs or practices emerging from particular places, regions, or countries.

They believe that globalisation and localisation are not mutually exclusive. They “coexist and fuel each other in dialectical ways” so that people are “increasingly living on the interfaces of cultures” (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 35).
The learner-teachers in 2008 did not mention global or local considerations while the 2009 learner-teachers appeared to have a clear sense of the interconnection between local and global considerations and the world as a ‘global village’.

When I was growing up I did not have much experience with people from other culture but this has changed a lot since I became an adult. The world has become smaller through the internet. It has also become easier to travel ... I have travelled a lot through Western Europe, Malaysia and Dubai.

I understand oral art forms to be linked to our Australian heritages and also as a global perspective as we live in a multicultural society.

Questionnaire responses 2009.

3.6.4 Identity and the Dialogical Self

Despite my awareness of some of the difficulties and assumptions surrounding my use of the term ‘own’ and ‘other’ cultures within semester 2 2008, I continued to use these terms within semester 1 2009. I still wished the learner-teachers to define, frame and contextualise what they viewed as their cultural identities and to juxtapose what they viewed as different, or outside, these cultural identities. However, with the later class groups, I emphasised the notion of cultural identity far more strongly than ‘own’ and ‘other ‘culture’.

Although the South African notion of a ‘rainbow nation’ (attributed to Bishop Tutu) has become somewhat clichéd I found Baines’ (1998) explanation of this metaphor to be useful in defining for the learner-teachers what I meant by ‘own’ and ‘other’ cultures. The colours in the rainbow do symbolise different cultural groups represented by discrete colours. However, the colours all blur slightly into one another; there are no clearly defined and distinct borders between each
colour and none of the strands of colour are more or less dominant. Each is essential to the composition of the entire spectrum.

Identities are linked to hybridity and choice; they are “socio-historical constructs” that, like culture, are not absolute or unchangeable (Martin 1995: 14 - 15). There are at least two theories of identity. According to Hermans and Dimaggio (2007: 42) social identity theory entails categorising oneself as a member of a group “in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group” while within dialogical self theory the ‘self’ is seen as “voices that are able to entertain dialogical relationships” with other people and oneself. These voices are quiet or dominant through “internal negotiations and conflicts”.

A dialogical identity is, therefore, one where there are multiple ‘I’s’ involved in continuous, uncertain, ambiguous internal and external dialogue. It is concerned with both social positioning (race, gender, class etc) and personal positioning (‘I’ as victim, ‘I’ as tenacious, ‘I’ as ambitious) (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 35).

The theory of the dialogical self can be linked to, or is directly influenced by, such concepts as James’ (1890) psychology of self, Buber’s (1958) philosophy of personal dialogue, Mead’s (1934) concepts of the mind, self and ‘inner voice’ and Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogism. Reasons for a dialogical self-concept and identity include the development of multiple selves and identities, the importance of “developing a dialogical capacity, and the necessity of acknowledging the alterity of the other person with whom one enters in dialogical contact” (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 35).

**Top Deck and Coconut**

*Working with a group of isiXhosa youth in a township in Port Elizabeth was one of my first adult encounters of different oral art forms. These exuberant, mainly boys and young men, taught me so much, particularly about oral art forms associated with courtship, weddings and township life. They loved performing, weaving between practiced, polished performances and constantly improvising even when it was agreed that the theatre piece was ‘set’. To such an extent that despite strict rehearsals, getting*
the timing ‘right’ and trying to convince them that ‘less is more’ – 45 minute performances turned into hours!! It was from them that I first heard the words Top Deck and Coconut. They were talking animatedly, using the political catch phrases of the day and how when they became men they would help to ‘throw all the white’s into the sea’. I asked them, “What about me?”. They stared at me incredulously and for what seemed like a long time, no-one said a word. Then one spluttered and stuttered, “B-B-B-But you’re not white” he said. Another boy shouted “You’re a top deck” Everyone nodded and smiled. “What’s that?” I asked. Amidst much laughter it was explained to me. “White on top and black underneath. I was then also educated in the “ways of the coconut”.

Meta-journal (08 06 2008).

Cooper and Hermans (2006) argue convincingly for the development of a dialogical capacity to cope with the group and the self as well as uncertainty, ambivalences, differences and conflicts which are all part of healthy internal and external dialogical positions (Hermans 2002). While the theory of dialogical self has, I believe informed my thinking within an examination of intercultural perspectives there are some risks involved. The bombardment of a “cacaphony of voices” (Lysaker and Lysaker 2002) may lead to paralysing inaction and inability to problem-solve or make decisions and, in extreme cases, unhealthy personality disorders and psychosis. There is a need for people to be grounded within certain unwavering convictions and positions and a need for a stable ‘site’ within the self that remains continuous and consistent (Falmange 2004).

Other risks include “monological domination by only one voice (e.g., nationalism, fundamentalism, sexism, or terrorism) …. identity confusion, lack of a meaningful direction in life, or rootlessness” (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 50). As dialogical selves individuals should use their experiences of uncertainty in creative ways and to “open and close themselves dependent on their own needs and the possibilities offered by their situation”.
Adapting from, Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) some of my internal positions are - I as a woman, white, non-religious, teacher, student, researcher, wife, aunt, South African, immigrant, lover of rituals and traditions but also belonging to the extended domain of the self - my husband, my family, my colleagues, my country, my enemy. An example of an internal dialogue could be between my positions as a wife and a PhD student.

3.7 EXEMPLIFYING ORAL ART FORMS

Since a part of my intention was to share oral art forms with the learner-teachers and as I became increasingly aware that practical examples were needed to clarify the term for the learner-teachers, my introduction of oral art forms began with South African examples. My sharing of traditional South African stories, poems and storytelling practices with the learner-teachers assisted them to view their own backgrounds and find suitable oral art forms that they could relate to.

The first South African oral art form that I introduced to the learner-teachers was the iintsomi (or traditional isiXhosa stories). The iintsomi contain songs and chants and are Indigenous South African oral art forms requiring audience participation. Improvisation, creativity and originality are viewed as important and the storytelling performance is frequently evaluated on the innovative ‘externalisation of images’ (McKenzie 1999).

Within an oral culture the iintsomi were first told, usually by a female narrator and often a grandmother who, if highly skilled in the art form, would be able to create, “a complete aesthetic experience” (Okpewho 1992: 224). A ‘basic aesthetic element’ of the iintsomi is the use of repetitive refrains, or ‘core clichés’ (McKenzie 1999). Repetition is essential to most oral art forms as a way in which the audience learns these core clichés and as a fundamental element that allows the storyteller to easily and smoothly “move the narrative forward from conflict through climax to resolution” (Chinyowa 2001b: 25). Oral societies devote energy in repeating aloud over and over again, so that
knowledge, concepts and values vital to a community do not disappear (McKenzie 1999).

Another feature of the iintsomi is that reality and fantasy co-exist. Like many storytelling forms the iintsomi “combines entertainment with utilitarian functionalism” (Seda 2001: 95). The iintsomi has a variety of pedagogic roles and possibilities. The communal nature of the storytelling engenders turn-taking conventions, collaboration and speaking and listening skills (Hufford 2008). It also encourages learning the art of storytelling through example and experience. The formulaic opening, ‘once upon a time’ in African storytelling begins the “flow of reciprocity between teller and audience” that signals, signifies and supports the story world (Hufford 2008:9). The story opening, in conjunction with other structural elements (such as repetitive refrains, chants and vocal affirmations) transforms the iintsomi into a “collective performance” (Chinyowa 2001b: 23).

Driver (1998: 13) refers to ritual as “our first language, not our ‘mother’ but our ‘grandmother’ tongue”. Through the performance of ritual and ritualistic moments embedded in African storytelling practices and active engagement in the storytelling conventions, the storyteller and audience become part of a community. Pryer (2004: 3 and 8) views ritual as an “antidote to feelings of isolation” and a moving away from an “atomistic notion of self”.

African storytelling models social norms and transmits community and cultural values, memories, histories, knowledges, beliefs and wisdoms (Chinyowa 2001b; Hufford 2008). I place high value on the notion of African storytelling as a traditional “bridge of knowledge and wisdom between past, present and future generations”. Those who do not may criticise the iintsomi and other oral art forms as outdated, irrelevant and antiquated (Chinyowa 2001b: 29). In addition, the repetition within these stories may be seen by some to place an overemphasis on transmission as opposed to construction of knowledge.

The exemplifying of the features of an iintsomi is discussed in my description of the learner-teachers’ participation in the story, ‘The Chief’s Ring’. The story is
about a wise and good chief of a village who was loved and respected by all his people. The reason for this was because, unlike most chiefs, he worked with, and acted like one of the people. He believed it was his magic ring that made him powerful and loved. In the story the ring gets stolen and the chief calls in the sangoma (traditional healer) to help him find the thief. The sangoma tricks the thief into confessing by giving all the villagers a stick and saying that when she returns in the morning, the thief’s stick will be a certain amount longer than anyone else’s. Of course, to prevent this, the thief cuts the stick precisely that amount thereby being caught.

In my version of the story, at the conclusion in role as the chief, I ask the audience, as villagers, to decide what is to happen to the thief. This mirrors a convention in African tales known as “dilemmas” where the audience debate the story ending and provide justifications for their decisions. “For many generations these mental and rhetorical exercises have formed the training ground for ethical decision-making and oratory” by children from different parts of Africa (Hufford 2008: 9).

I used a traditional story taught to me when I worked at YPTET. I deliberately chose a story that was not filled with fantastical creatures that frequently appear in African stories but that still contained particularly African ritualistic components associated with a traditional healer. I have repeatedly tried to find it in written form so that I could reference the text. However, despite the story being well known by friends, colleagues and students from Southern Africa, there is not, to my knowledge, a written form of this particular story. In keeping with the usual practices of telling an iintsomi though I have told the story of the Chief’s ring a great many times and it has a basic structure that remains the same, the words have never been learned. They change and rely on the immediacy of the performance. I have found that how it changes and what is improvised is very much dependent on audience participation and response. The richer the participation, the more enticed I am to draw the audience in further, the more improvisatory the story becomes.
**The introduction** was designed to prepare the learner-teachers for their participation in the story and initiate them into conventions related to participation though no such introduction would be necessary for those familiar with the iintsomi.

These were:

a) The ‘magic chant’ to prevent growing horns on the head from listening to stories during the day time. The learner-teachers were interested in the chant but were concerned about getting the Xhosa words and pronunciation right until I explained to them that it was just to get a sense and feel and that they were to follow me as best they could. They followed the chant written on the whiteboard and I got them to focus more on the gestures that go with the chant so that they were no longer so intent on getting the words right but simply on enjoying the chant.

b) A dance-song and repetitive refrains which would be used in the story to introduce the sangoma (witch doctor) and help her with her ritual in the story. The song and refrains would also be used to build tension and emotion.

*One half of the class learned and sang the line – Onomatotalo*  
(Ancestors, spirits or little dwarfs)  
*The other half learned and sang the line – Bayeza Kusasa Bayeza*  
(They are coming in the morning they are coming).

At first no-one sang and then slowly I began to hear them and they sounded good. It felt special singing a song that I knew so well with a group of people who hadn’t heard it before but really began to feel it and ‘get’ the overlap of the lines. I did not push it but let those who wanted simply to sit and sing do so – while others automatically got to their feet and danced with me as we practiced the song. I had been in the centre of the circle ‘conducting’ and dancing. I got H who, based on previous ‘willingness’ I believed would do so, to enter the centre of the circle and create her own moves for the song – dance. Soon others took over.
A repetitive refrain that is said throughout the story when the traditional healer throws her bone:

I say: Vumani Bo
(literally – do you agree)
The learner-teachers respond: Siyavuma
(literally – we agree)
(actual meaning – symbolic of the ancestors giving their blessing)

I found that once I made use of gestures to symbolise the ritual of the sangoma’s throwing of the bones and put a great deal of energy into my articulation of Vumani Bo, the learner-teachers responded Siyavuma with energy and enthusiasm. These were both traditional, isiXhosa songs and refrains. In addition, I adopted the idea of a core cliché which is a statement at the heart of the iintsomi that is generally conventional and stylised. I introduced this to the learner-teachers as something else that would be said throughout the storytelling. This was; “Thief will be caught, thief will be found”. The learner-teachers really entered into the spirit of the storytelling and used this core cliché to create tension. Often using it when I did not.

c) Mimicking various actions. Within the iintsomi is the everyday world of basic actions such as ploughing a field, herding cattle and chopping wood. In the case of the story selected this reality is set alongside the fantasy world of a chief’s ring that is reputed to have magical powers. As I felt that the learner-teachers would not engage spontaneously with the various movements that recreate the world within which the story takes place, I introduced the idea of a signal (Brian Way’s arrow)\(^6\) that would be used each time I wished the learner-teachers to become involved in the story by miming a particular activity that various villagers were engaged in, and when the activity would stop.

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\(^6\) Way (1985) describes using an arrow in storytelling. When it is pointed downwards children make the sounds and/or movements. When it is pointed upwards they are quiet and/or still. The volume of noise or intensity of movement can be controlled by where the arrow is situated between the down and up position.
d) I explained to the learner-teachers that during my telling of the tale they could say ‘yes’ out loud when they liked something, or my telling of it, ‘no’ if my telling needed improvement or they were not happy about something, or simply make sounds to indicate like/dislike and so on. They could also interject, interrupt etc if they felt the need to as none of this would be considered impolite for an audience listening to a traditional story. However, none of this took place during my storytelling.

**The storytelling**

Last time they participated in the story as learner-teachers within the drama room setting. This time we decided together where the story would be likely to be told and the class, that I have chosen to describe, decided that we were beside a river, next to a sacred storytelling tree and each learner-teacher decided who they were and why they had come to listen to the story. Some chose to remain as themselves while others took on various roles.

The setting up of the space, and freedom to select own roles, did seem to me to impact positively on the quality of participation. In keeping with the iintsomi form the traditional refrains, saying clichés, dance-song and action were woven into the storytelling. The practising of various participatory aspects ensured that all participated and that the storytelling ran smoothly as everyone knew what to do and what was expected of them. It did however detract from the spontaneity of audience participation. The arrow was not good for me as I get so involved with the story that I forget to put it up, or down. I handed it over to M who ‘led’ the actions. The original story has a ‘blood thirsty’ ending and of course, the first response was to ‘hang the thief’. My role as the wise and kind chief was useful in enticing the learner-teachers to come up with alternative options. This class did come up with options, such as getting the thief to apologise publicly and to do all the ‘messy work’ in the village for three months. They were not convinced though and eventually came to a compromise by banishing the thief from the village.

Field-notes, week 4 semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009) and meta-journal (03/03/2009).
Another oral art from that I introduced to the learner-teachers was praise poetry. The izibongo (or praise poetry) has different 'sub-genres' including praises of chiefs, special people or dignitaries, the ‘common folk’, animals, inanimate objects or ideas (Koopman 2001: 142).

I recited poems to learner-teachers as an introduction and to show them different genres of praise poetry. I chose this poem for its simplicity, because it was not as highly contextualised within a specific cultural framework as some others, because I wanted a poem that was in praise of an object or idea, rather than a person and because I believed a poem about a train was something that all could relate to. I asked the learner-teachers to guess what this praise poem was about – I did not read the title to them or tell them what it was about. There was someone in three out of the four classes who stated that it was in praise of a train.

**The Train**

You are the black centipede,
The rusher with a black nose
You are the black centipede, the drinker of water
You triumph over the man-devouring sun
And over the impenetrable darkness
As carnivorous animals drink blood day and night.
You are the black centipede, the mighty roarer from within;
You are a traveler, the vigorous rapid one,
fed up with the roads;
You are the one who kindles fire in the stomach;
You have defeated the horse.
When you raced, you were the fastest;
Sand filled the air, and you passed, you the black calf.

Demetrius Segooa (in Gleason 1994).

Field-notes, week 4, semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009) and meta-journal (03/03/2009).
Praise poems consist of ‘phrase-images’ and repetitions, which constitute a ‘pool of images’ that can be seen within the same poem, sub-genre or across genres (Koopman 2001). They consist of a:

...concatenation of discrete nominal references [to] the distinctiveness of a person, comprising often elliptical allusions to lineage, physical and moral characteristics, and actions .... Although they traffic in historical allusions and references to ancestors, praise poems are rooted in the present, and readily respond to the context of performance Opland (1996: 1).

Here is a short extract from a praise poem that exemplifies some of these features. A collection of different praise poems that I shared with the learner-teachers can be found in Appendix F: PRAISE POEMS (331).

THE PRAISES OF MZILI KAZI, THE SON OF MATSHOBANA

Bayethe! Ndebele Nation!
You are the knobkerrie that menaced Tshaka.
You are the big one who is as big as his father Matshobana.
You are the string of Mntiti and Ndaba
The string they made until they wet tears
You are the sun that rose from the ear of the elephant,
It rose where upon the birds announced to each other....
(Matshakayile-Ndlovu 2000: 2).

Praise poems are made up of ‘praise names’ or epithets, which are descriptive substitutes for a person, place or object’s name. These descriptive epithets are generally ‘virtues’ but can also be ‘vices’. Simple or compound praise-names are extended into praise stanzas (Opland 1996: 4). In the above example of a praise poem it is clear that symbolic references and epithets within oral arts forms can be highly culturally specific. They are best understood within contexts of shared understanding of meaning or where they have been explained and demonstrated. This is also the case within more contemporary examples such as football chants which are best understood within the context of an AFL (Australian Football League) football match.
I have made use of this particular example previously and have found it to be effective in providing learners with a pattern, or frame for their beginnings into praise poetry. I discovered it some years ago and was struck not only by its clarity and the transportability of praise poetry to a ‘celtic’ context. It made the idea and a simple form of praise poetry easily accessible to the learner-teachers.

**Animal medicine woman**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call:</th>
<th>Response:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jillian</td>
<td>Animal medicine woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in snow</td>
<td>Animal medicine woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Dane and Scot</td>
<td>Animal medicine woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Wolf I walk</td>
<td>Animal medicine woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper of the animals</td>
<td>Animal medicine woman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The learner-teachers found the line by line explanation useful

**Line 1.** Jillian (The individual’s name)

**Line 2.** Born in snow (I came into this world early, in a snow bank outside the hospital.)

**Line 3.** Of Dane and Scot (I come from Danish and Scottish ancestry.)

**Line 4.** With Wolf I walk (My companion and protector and in some ways my spiritual guide is my wolf-hybrid pet.)

**Line 5.** Helper of animals (My social role in life when I have attained my full humanness on my life journey will be Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.)

Field-notes, week 4, semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009) and meta-journal (03/03/2009).

Praise poetry can be accompanied by music, drumming and dancing. As with the iintsomi (stories) there is generally audience participation. The imbongi (praise poet) rhythmically chants the lines of the poem while the audience responds as a chorus. The audience usually repeat the same line throughout the poem while the poet's lines are different. Performances, by a Xhosa imbongi, are direct responses to a particular and unique context. They are never the same textually. “The Xhosa imbongi uses stable phrases as springboards to improvisation in much the same fashion as does the teller of Xhosa folktales” (Opland 1996: 5). The imbongi does not conceive of plagiarism or copyright and “borrow freely apposite words or phrases ... heard elsewhere” (Opland 1983: 95).
The unique place that praise poems occupy in South African society is to provide a critique of socio-economic and political issues (Mpolo 2007: 1). African oral poetry is “used to comment on and criticise current affairs, for political pressure and propaganda, and to reflect and influence public opinion” (Gelaye 2001: 207). Modern constructs of praise poetry may be seen, for example, at political rallies and trade union meetings, in the work of contemporary African musicians; they were delivered to Nelson Mandela and outside the courtroom at the trial of President Jacob Zuma where adversaries and supporters alike made use of the praise poetry genre.

Once the learner-teachers got the idea and realised that we, as a group, could define what we understood by oral art forms, rich and interesting examples began to emerge. These included ‘footsy chants’, children’s games and ‘calls’ and oral performances at family celebrations that were particular to individual participants in this study. These alternative popular culture oral art forms and how they emerged from the classes are discussed later on in this study.

### 3.8 SUMMARY

The plot for this chapter is centred on culturally specific oral art forms and includes descriptions, examples and discussions of oracy, oral art forms and culture. I argue for the place of oracy and oral art forms within tertiary environments and reflect on a number of assumptions that I brought to the research process. These assumptions resulted in my maintaining my research question but shifting my focus to my discoveries as teacher-researcher. I explain the need for the provision of examples and ongoing discussions of oral art forms to familiarise the learner-teachers with the idea of oral art forms. I identify the learner-teachers’ definition and understanding of oral art forms within this research.

Within this chapter I describe the learner-teachers' childhood experiences of stories and the kind of stories that emerged within the action research process. I unpack my assumptions in relation to culture and discuss the learner-teachers’ experiences in relation to oral art forms. I link these assumptions and
experiences to the elusiveness of the concept of culture and multiple interpretations of culture. I explore and define the terms hybridity, essentialism, choice and globalisation and link them to the learner-teachers' perceptions of their cultural identities.

In the section on exemplifying oral art forms I describe the South African oral art forms that I introduced to the learner-teachers, namely the iintsomi (traditional story) and the izibongo (praise poetry). I clarify the learner-teachers' participation in a traditional South African story as well as the way in which I exemplified praise poetry to them.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, is the first of the chapters in this study where I focus particularly on a specific topic emerging from the action research, in this case classroom tensions and challenges.
CHAPTER FOUR
TENSIONS AND CLIMAX
WITHIN THE RESEARCH STORY

*Men (sic) still want the crutch of dogma, of beliefs fixed by authority, to relieve them of the responsibility of directing their activity by thought*
Dewey (1916: 339).

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight various tensions and challenges I encountered throughout this research process. They impact on the research I conducted and how I report on it in subsequent chapters. The issues I discuss inform my understanding and are crucial to the learning that took place during the action research processes.

In this chapter I consider the interplay between a research and a teaching agenda within a university environment. I examine the resultant tensions between my dual roles as both researcher and educator. I discuss the complexities and nuances of power which is a thread that emerges again and again within this dual relationship. I articulate some challenges I encountered when facilitating the learner-teachers’ access to oral art forms and I explore some gaps between constructivist ideals and classroom practice.

There is an element of overlap between certain themes and issues considered within this chapter and those considered within other chapters in this research. That is because this chapter is rooted in tensions and challenges and applies more generally to the research process then the specific foci on which other chapters are based. Some issues are introduced in this chapter and further extended in discussions on drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding in subsequent chapters.
4.2 WEARING TWO CAPS

Teaching and research have increasingly been seen as connected and integrated pursuits and teaching and research goals are frequently interlinked. Some scholars believe that in order to achieve quality learning and improve teaching a ‘symbiotic relationship’ between research-focused and teaching-focused activities is essential (Sadler 2000; Clark 1997; Garnett & Holmes 1995; Barnett 1992). The linking of teaching and research, particularly within an action research process, breaks down the ‘binary’ between research and practice (Møller 1998).

While Levin and Greenwood (2008: 212) support the connectivity of teaching and research, they believe that changes in universities away from a Humboldtian university tradition means that teaching and research are being “driven apart”. The references that I could find to teaching and research being divergent, or in conflict, were old and few (Kerr 1963; Sample 1972; Clark 1987; Schon 1983). That is, they were all written prior to 1990. I believe the view of teaching and research being incompatible and the idea that the interconnection between teaching and research is “much more myth than reality” (Weimer 1997: 53) pre-dates more openness to approaches that link teaching and research.

Weimer suggests that: “To move the [teaching/research] relationship into more productive arenas, we need to change the terms, to redefine research and reorient thinking about teaching” (1997: 53). Action research, particularly, purports to be concerned with “closing the gap between the roles of theorist and practitioner” (Kemmis 2009: 468). However, throughout this study I have been aware of walking a tightrope between teaching and research, considerations that resonate with Schon’s view that the variance between research and practice “exacerbates the practitioner’s dilemma” (1983: 308).

My research experiences in this study led me to reflect on the tensions and difficulties that have surfaced while wearing two different caps, as a teacher and

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7 An originally German university model which was based on the principles of academic freedom and self-governance as well as uniting teaching and research. This was to ensure scholarship and originality and to share ideas with ‘young minds’ (Shils 1997).
researcher. These tensions include: the need to follow different agendas, disparities between me and the learner-teachers’ perspectives of learning and teaching; my challenge to engage students and develop their negotiation and participation; curriculum and time constraints; and tensions linked to ethical issues impacting on the research process. In examining these different tensions useful insights have emerged.

4.3 DIFFERENT AGENDAS: WHICH CAP TO WEAR?

Deciding where best to place a poem or “any literary device is not haphazard”. Rather, it is “a careful reflective action” (Ely et al 1997: 139). In this case the poem below has been placed in this position for two distinct purposes. As an introduction to the discussion about ‘which cap to wear’ and to encapsulate emotions and tensions I experienced within the research process, as recorded in my journal. This poem emerged for me as I considered my research experiences and “filter[ed] them through my subjective interpretation” (Lyons 2008: 81). As a reflective practitioner, I embrace the subjective and the poetic and refute the “mistaken assumption that disembodied and distanced language carries more weight or is owed more authority” (Neilsen 2008: 98).

The tapestry and the carpet
Colors are glistening and the thread is pure and strong
The students weave a drama tapestry of indescribable quality
What shall I do - the tapestry is incomplete?
The carefully planned research carpet is waiting for us
Blinded by the beauty of the tapestry and its special promise
What shall I do - the research carpet is beckoning?
We hold on to the tapestry and fulfil its promise to us
The carpet is discarded without revealing how exquisite it could have been.

Field-notes and meta-journal, week 2 semester 2 2008 (06/07/2008 and 08/07/2008).
On a number of occasions, where I had carefully planned the drama sessions to include work with oral art forms that would assist in this research, I found myself abandoning my research agenda. This was because the drama experience took unexpected directions and provided enormously rich learning environments. I felt that sticking to my planned research agenda would detract from the quality learning that was taking place. It would also disempower the learner-teachers, as steering the drama towards what I required for this research would be in contrast to the direction in which they were taking the drama.

For example, in one session, a process drama context was explored in which the students were all descendants of a matriarch who was turning one hundred. My intention was to get the learner-teachers to plan for a 100\textsuperscript{th} birthday party for this relative and to share oral art forms that had emerged from the different branches of the family as part of the party celebrations. During the initial phase of the drama, the learner-teachers’ belief in their role as family members led to one group’s conviction that this was a dysfunctional family who required conflict resolution skills before they could work together and plan for the event. This resulted in the drama moving in the direction of dealing with conflict.

There was a real buzz in the classroom as ‘Grandmother Smith’s relatives, some of whom had not ‘seen each other for many years’ became reacquainted with each other. As ‘one of the gang’, that is one of the relatives, I was going to introduce myself to any relatives that I saw not taking part but, in this case, everyone was moving around and ‘getting to know each other’ so I simply moved around as well and got to know my relatives... Suddenly, Jenny (in-role as grandmother’s 90 year old sister) began to verbally attack a number of the relatives with issues that she had been ‘holding onto’ for a number of years!! There was a deathly silence from all the other relatives as Jenny began to rage....I tried to get their attention and explained that we didn’t have much time to plan for Grandmother’s birthday... that we needed to get started immediately... and so on but it all fell on deaf ears... The learner-teachers were totally mesmerised by Jenny, ‘hooked’ into the ‘dysfunctional family’ and joined in the fray...
As the relative who had got them all together to plan for Grandmother’s birthday, I called them to order and asked them if we could begin the planning... ‘We can’t work with each other’, ‘Do you expect me to just politely talk to her after everything she’s said to me’, “Keep that bitch away from me” etc, etc.

Today, I REALLY panicked...
That’s when we, still as Grandmother Smith’s family discussed the situation and decided that our family needed conflict resolution skills...

Field-notes, week 2 semester 2 2008 (06/07/2008).

Within a drama course designed for pre-service primary school educators, I believed that this was a worthwhile direction to follow as it provided an opportunity to experience how human issues could be explored within a drama context. I regretted that valuable research opportunities were lost, as oral art forms were ultimately not explored on this occasion. However, as an educator, I believe that the learner-teachers and I were moving away from a research and teacher-directed focus “towards good learning, that is learning that is significant, up-to-date, and enduring in both value and depth” (Sadler 2000: 3). Certainly it was what Edwards (2001: 37) refers to as student-centred learning which focuses on “placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs” and learning what they believe to be relevant.

Bath (2009: 215) suggests that within action research the teacher-researcher’s reflection-in-action should be deepened through incorporating both autobiographical and theoretical reflexivity. Here I include my autobiographical panic followed by a more theoretical perspective. Autobiographic writing contributes to the practitioner-researchers’ capturing of practices and understanding of a particular situation by interconnecting: the “self-conscious with experience”; direct experience and reflective interpretation; and prior and present experience (Stewart 2009: 129).
Today I REALLY panicked...not sure why... the learner-teachers were taking the drama in a productive direction that they wanted to go and the learning opportunities were endless. My internal dialogue went something like this, but far more panicky!!

Oh &*V# this drama's going the wrong way.
No It isn’t, this is a great opportunity – let them go with it.
But we’re never going to get to the oral art forms.
So what –this is more relevant and important...
Now I’ve agreed to the dysfunctional family, Ok so the drama is rich but I should have pushed them towards the oral art forms.
Rubbish ‘real’ learning is taking place here.
But what about all my careful planning.
For goodness sake –you have thrown lots of plans out in the past –you have never struck rigidly to one. That’s what drama’s about.
Yes, but what about my research!!! Help!!!
Just relax and look at where it’s going...
But I’ll never know where the oral art forms could have gone.

Field-notes, week 2 semester 2 2008 (06/07/2008).

What was required here was an ability to “cope with the troublesome divergent situations of practice” and the allowing oneself, as practitioner, to “experience surprise, puzzlement or confusion [my emphasis] in a situation in which he [sic] finds uncertain or unique” thereby promoting new, or deeper understanding. (Schon 1983: 62). McNiff (2008) asserts that, while we may possess intuitive knowledge concerning potential discoveries, meaning emanates from the unanticipated, or surprise, inherent in creative processes.

My reflective conversation and consequent decision-making within that, though not unique but certainly uncertain situation, led to my functioning as an “experient” and shaping and making sense of the situation through reflection-in-action (Schon 1983: 163). Since, the situation was not working in the way that I had envisaged it, I had to listen and “re-frame” it. In this case the reflection
was not implicit but highly explicit and conscious reflection-in-action, followed later by reflection-on-action (Schon 1983: 131-132).

Allowing the learner-teachers to take the drama in a productive, unpredictable direction was authentic process drama. “Drama teachers must know how to ‘give up’ power in role” (Gallagher 2000: 114). I ultimately managed to do this despite initially struggling to maintain a ‘cool strip’ (a term attributed to Dorothy Heathcote) which would permit me to make this informed decision.

At the risk of oversimplifying a research process, where tensions exist between teaching and research they frequently occur because of the fluid and unpredictable nature of learning environments, or the ‘indeterminate zones of practice’ (Schon 1983) which do not always fit ‘neatly’ into the proposed research. Despite my initial disappointment at not being able to fully pursue my research agenda on this occasion, I wore the drama practitioner’s cap which enabled me to authenticate the learner-teachers’ and my own “intuition and experience” within the drama process (Norman 2004: 239).

Despite for a moment being enticed by obtaining research data for my selected topic, the drama process was an example of a quality educational experience. I acknowledge, however, that like so many examples of teaching what is shared later in language is “a mere shadow” of the rich drama experience (Gallagher, Freeman & Wessells 2010: 6).

During the reflection phase at the end of the ‘grandmother’ drama, I asked the learner-teachers whether the tension between my dual roles was apparent. Their replies, as I recorded them later and the brief notes I took as they talked, went something like this:

Not at all. I didn’t know that was going on, Did you?
[Various indications of no from the class]
I thought that was part of your plan, to let us go with the drama. To see where the
drama took us.
You set up the roles and the drama so well and, in my role, I knew we were a dysfunctional family...

Field-notes, week 2 semester 2 2008 (06/07/2008).
Checked and confirmed in interview 4, week 7 semester 2 2008 (08/10/2008).

This was one of the few occasions on which I took notes during class. Most frequently I had to rely on my memory of events as I recorded them as soon as possible after the classes had ended. I viewed this as a tension which existed between my dual roles.

**One or Many Perspectives?**

Sometimes I think the research would have been richer if I had collaborated with someone else. If the teacher and researcher roles had been distinct then the researcher could have had an 'outside' view of the process, the notes taken could have been more immediate and far more detailed. I know that writing as a teacher-researcher from inside one’s own particular perspective does have clear advantages as well... For me, the most effective research experiences have been where I have been involved with research where there has been more than one teacher-researcher and where there is more than one perspective recorded... Of course the aim of the various inputs from the learner-teachers was to provide different perspectives and different ‘voices’. However, despite my best efforts the student and teacher relationship impacted on the various responses. I was conscious that, at times, the learner-teachers appeared to tell me what I wanted to hear within the interview processes. This was most apparent when I asked learner-teachers to identify disadvantages to using oral art forms or weaknesses of the research process...

Meta-journal (03/08/2009).
What is most pertinent for me, as I reviewed and analysed this extract from my meta-journal is the distinct possibility of research participants, who are also being taught by the researcher, giving the teacher what they consider to be ‘right-answerisms’ (Holt 1964) - what they consider the teacher-researcher wants to hear.

Within literature on action research projects I have found strong support for the promotion of collegial research (For example Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy 2004; Hulme, Cracknell and Owens 2009). Research which takes place within ‘interactive-professionalism’ (Fullan and Hargreaves 1991) and communal research that aims to promote ‘professional learning communities’ (McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins, Brinley, McIntyre and Tabor 2006), does eradicate the tensions that are present within solitary practitioner-based inquiry; collaborative research has the advantages of researchers working with their different strengths and supporting each others’ reflective processes. However, these types of research potentially may carry their own challenges such as inflexible ideas and defensive behaviour resulting in flawed relationships that impact negatively on reflective dialogues (Bradbury, Mirvis, Neilson and Pasmore 2008). Also, wearing two caps within practitioner-based research may lead to productive tensions.

Within my dual roles of teacher and researcher I needed to identify my particular priorities and emphasis. Academics in several studies, (Boyer 1990; Bieber, Lawrence and Blackburn 1992; Marchant & Newmann 1994; Gray, Diamond and Adam 1996; Honeycutt and Ford 2000) believe that it is teaching that is of fundamental importance and the primary reason for being in the university classroom. The findings of a Carnegie Foundation survey, conducted in 1991 with approximately 20 000 participants in 14 countries, including Australia, found that while there was a significant preference for research over teaching amongst university faculty members, teaching was still viewed as the core of academic work (Forest 2002). It should also be noted that this was the overall finding and that the results from some countries, such as the USA, reflected a preference for teaching. This is supported by studies conducted in

Forest (2002: 440) claims that those who “prefer to teach emphasise their disciplinary affinities while those who prefer to research lean more towards their institutional loyalties”. My commitment to drama education may well have impacted on the choices I made when tensions occurred between my teaching and research agendas.

Within my dual roles I needed to be aware of ethical considerations and to try to ensure that the needs of the learner-teachers were best served and were not compromised in any way by my personal interests or research agenda (Brydon-Miller 2008). As Fraser (1997: 169) states, the model of teacher-researcher has resulted in “credible educational research”. However, “the ethical dilemmas ... are likely to be more problematic” than those faced by researchers from outside the classroom who are not involved in the learning and teaching process.

Due to these ethical considerations and the purpose of the particular course that I taught and based the research on, I believed that the teaching focus needed to be of primary importance. As O’Mara (1999: 84) states, “focus on the teaching and learning experience is paramount”.

Segmenting a teaching orientation and a research orientation is in many ways artificial and unrealistic as effective teaching requires both the act of teaching and the act of research. Emphasis on teaching does not preclude my research focus that was integrated into many aspects of this study. However, I found that wearing a research cap and a teaching cap simultaneously creates tensions in terms of which agenda to follow at any given moment. Within her PhD research O’Mara also confronts this dilemma and returns to it repeatedly; she asks questions concerning how to collect data while simultaneously teaching. A central question for her is: “Should my attention be to the teaching and learning or to the data collection?” (1999: 84).
I believe is possible and desirable to incorporate research into undergraduate teaching processes and to use research to inform teaching. However, where unproductive tensions do occur, I believe vigilance is required so that research conducted is not at the expense of the teaching and learning that takes place. Yet, within a university environment it is frequently the research agenda that appears to take precedence over the teaching agenda. Academics within higher education tend to be rewarded and promoted on their research output and not on their teaching practice (Menon 2003: 41). O’Mara (1999: 22) believes that the privileging of research is evident from the “value placed by the universities on publication and research rather than teaching”.

My interpretation of the ethics application which had to be accepted before field research could take place also had an impact on the nature of my action research process. While a higher education degree does provide some scope for flexibility and change, it seems that, to some extent, the predetermined nature of the research process contributes towards the tension between teaching and research.

As McMahon and Jefford (2009: 359) state, a key quandary in “assessing action-research reports inside academic programmes [is] the competing needs of the action-researcher to follow the investigation wherever it leads and the need for the student to meet pre-set criteria for assessment”. Vincs (2009) describes the rhizomic\(^8\), retrospective and emergent nature of practical research in the arts which she believes is counter to a research degree’s admission requirement of a definitive research question and methodology.

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**Ethics Application**

It was a ‘minimal risk’ application but before my ethics application was finally accepted I had to be very specific about my research, research participants and the kinds of questions I would ask. This is perfectly understandable in terms of ensuring

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\(^8\) “…like the underground root systems of wild grasses that extend in all directions” (Vincs 2009: 103).
that the research is ethically and ‘properly’ undertaken. Of course there is still room to manoeuvre within these confines but I do feel that this limits the possibility of flexibility. I wonder what would happen if I presented a proposal that said I’m going to research my work with these learner-teachers and see where the teaching context takes me in my research? Perhaps there is less likelihood of tension where the process is initially a ‘blank slate’ and where learning and teaching guides and directs the research process and the research questions.

I don’t have the answers, only the questions.

Meta-journal (01/08/2008).

4.4 PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES

Further tensions that I encountered are illustrated in the research poem on the next page (141). The first line of each couplet consists of an aspect of my research agenda that I then juxtapose with sentiments expressed by learner-teachers. These sentiments, contained in the second line of each couplet, were compiled from transcripts from interview 1, 2 and 4 conducted in 2008.

This data is constructed as rhyming couplets in a ‘call and response style’. The poem is followed by a discussion of each of the tensions contained in the poem. In this way, the poem, data collection and discussion became “mutually informative” (Kusserow 2008:75).

Participation Challenges

Co-generative, emancipatory and collegial enquiry are ideas that I hold dear
But you must tell us what to learn – that’s why you are here.
You must access oral art forms from your own background
But fitting in, not standing out – that’s why I’m around.
How oral art forms support drama pedagogy is what we need to explore
But links between drama and our backgrounds was useful - time that’s what we need more
Intercultural understanding is what needs to be investigated
But our good relationships we have clearly stated
You provided a canvas, we began to understand
So, part of the process, went as planned


4.4.1 Research Process and Learner-teacher needs

Co-generative, emancipatory and collegial enquiry are ideas that I hold dear
But you must tell us what to learn – that’s why you are here.

The research was “predicated not only on the active engagement of the learner... but on the agency of the learner in [co]determining the nature and direction of the learning” (Rossiter and Clark 2007: 62). However, I discovered that tensions existed between the learning and the research process and the needs of the learner-teachers. This impacted on the way in which I ultimately taught the course. I observed that the students found it difficult to actively participate in determining the direction of the learning, even in the initial phase where I expected them to provide familial stories to work with. They appeared more comfortable with me taking control of decision-making in terms of content and direction of the sessions.

My views were supported by data from learner-teachers in their interviews. They indicated that I needed to ‘tell them what to learn’ (Phoebe interview 2 2008). Northedge (2003b: 17) articulates some views of adult students in this regard who were “paying good money to be ‘taught’ and to be “learning what educated people know, not ‘exploring’ collaboratively with ‘uneducated’ peers”.

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Although these tensions were identified in 2008, and I tried to overcome these particular problems by explaining my intentions and way of working more clearly to the learner-teachers in 2009 similar comments were recorded in the interviews I conducted in 2009.

Candice: We felt that, at times you needed to give us more direction. We wanted you to teach us about other oral art forms that we can use in our classrooms.

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/07/2009).

Some possible reasons for the tensions I experienced within this discrepancy between the learner-teachers’ needs and my desire for collegial enquiry may stem from the power relationships which existed between the learner-teachers and myself as well as my interpretation and practice of constructivist learning and teaching.

Issues of Power

There were unequal power relationships within the drama course where I had expertise and experience that the learners did not share. The view the learner-teachers had of my role appeared to be embedded in their expectations and experiences of university learning and teaching. As Cosgrove suggests (cited in Grundy 1987: 137) “The practice of negotiation ... confronts and challenges the very basis of power relationships upon which education traditionally depends”.

As Giroux (1997: 23) states:

A more critical view of knowledge would define it as a social construction linked to human intentionality and behaviour. But if this view of knowledge is to be translated into a meaningful pedagogical principle, the concept of knowledge as a social construct will have to be linked to the notion of power.
I viewed power in this context to be negative. As someone whose ideas have been influenced by the work of Freire (1972) and Boal (1979; 1995), I tend to see power in terms of the ‘oppressor’ and the ‘oppressed’. Foucault views power as a positive and productive “network” that “doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no” and that operates in the entire “social body”. It has far more functions and connotations than simply negativity associated with oppression and repression (1980: 199).

Peer power relations displayed through the learner-teachers having overt or covert influence, had both a positive and negative impact on the class dynamics. Kemmis (2009: 466) claims that it is always the case that the way humans relate to each other within educational environments is “shaped by previously established patterns of social relationships and power”. I wrote the following extract on a day when I experienced the productive potential of power relationships within one class and the destructive potential of power relationships with another class.

Patterns of power sweep through classroom drama plains.
Blue productive skies of power - or drought, or flood.
Clear skies of power that guide, enable, facilitate and strengthen the ambience of the drama plain.
Power that is silent, sultry, hot and dry - threatening destruction.
Power that pours and hurls down large hail-stones that leave only the very brave not ducking for cover.
Field-notes, week 8 semester 1 2009 (07/05/2009).

Downing (2008) believes that Foucault’s view of power, in addition to being voiced, also crucially works in ‘secrecy and silence’. This idea of power as silence can be linked to Scott’s (1990: 2) notion of “offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations”. Within this study I have been aware of, and recorded in my observations, power relations related to silence.
I am greeted by silence – the silence of being too polite to express anything but a passive resistance – the silence of a perceived power distribution – the silence of peer pressure and waiting for ‘permission’ from dominant peers - the silence of not knowing what to say...the silence of disinterest...the silence of...

These silences are different the silence of reflection... the silence of peripheral and interested participation... the silence of calmness... the silence of co-operation... the silence of empowerment... the silence of inviting ideas and collaboration of others... the deliberate silence of non-domination... the silence of...

Field-notes, week 5 semester 1 2009 of cycle 3 (02/04/2009).

Silence was a recurring theme within my field-notes and meta-journal reflections and revealed both the debilitating and enabling perspectives of the role of silence within a learning and teaching environment. I found that resistant silence, or other forms of non-participation, was linked to peer pressure and that classroom dynamics were frequently dictated by learner-teachers who wielded both positive and negative power and control. I found that resistance of the learner-teachers, while impacting directly on their various levels of engagement with oral art forms was also a challenge within the context of my introduction of drama as an arts-based pedagogy.

**Issues of pedagogy**

As I state in Chapter 1 my learning and teaching is informed by socio-cultural constructivism. I consider multiple theories and strategies in my construction of what may be effective in supporting learning within tertiary education environments. This means that although I firmly believe in constructivism and am resolutely disposed towards constructivist methods, I endorse the view that proficient pedagogy is not based on individual theories or single theoretical perspectives (Richardson 2003). Indeed, constructivism itself is not a specific, or particular, pedagogy.
Phillips (1995: 5) points out that literature on constructivism in education is “enormous and growing rapidly”. Constructivism has been viewed as a learning theory for a “number of decades” and focuses on creating understanding from interaction between what learners known and “ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact” (Richardson 2003: 1623 - 1624). Richardson states that there has only been interest in constructivism as a teaching theory in recent years, “for approximately one decade”.

There are numerous and differing views, perceptions and forms of constructivism. However, von Glasersfeld (1991) believes that active participation in learning, or learning by doing is an aspect that is common to all who consider themselves constructivists. Learning and teaching methods and approaches that have developed from constructivism tend to favour a ‘hands-on’ approach, based on direct experience and experimentation.

The ideas of Phillips (1995) have been instrumental in my learning and teaching approaches and I have drawn on them to interpret the tensions I encountered in this research. I have found the graphical representation in Light and Cox (2001: 18) useful in representing Phillips’ ideas and explaining the differences amongst constructions of knowledge as illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

![Figure 4.1: Three dimensions of Constructivism (Light and Cox 2001: 18)]
Phillips (1995: 5) believes that many “sects” of constructivism can be placed somewhere along these “dimensions or axes”. In the horizontal dimension (Figure 4.1 on page 145) there is continuum of reality. On the one side of the continuum knowledge is discovered in a somewhat passive way. On the opposite side of the continuum knowledge is relative and actively invented. Phillips believes this to be the most vital and complex dimension of constructivism. Though he believes that constructivist theory can embrace both natural discovery and meaning-making, or human invention, those constructivists that are completely at the “discovery” end of the axis are “only minimally constructivist, or not constructivist at all” (1995: 7). As many constructivist theories consider discovery as a crucial part of learning the focus here is that there is a body of knowledge out there to be naturally discovered rather than constructed.

In my attempts to get the learners to co-generate culturally specific oral art forms I did not initially take into account the learner-teachers’ needs to be directly instructed about a variety of oral art forms and to be guided and led into finding culturally specific forms. I wished them to be immediately and actively involved in the meaning-making process and in generating these forms.

Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006: 75) criticize “minimally guided” methods of instruction such as constructivism and suggest that more directly guided and structured activities are required for learners with little to no prior knowledge. Their ideas can be criticized for creating a false dichotomy between guided and unguided methods of instruction and ignoring the direct guidance involved within constructivist notions such as the ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky 1978) and ‘scaffolding’ (Bruner 1990). However, views of “direct instructional guidance” (Kirschner et al 2006: 75) or ‘guided discovery’ (for example Mayer 2004), resonate with learner-teachers’ comments that I needed to provide more direction within the learning process. They pointed to the need for me to give more structure and guidance within the process of identifying and sharing oral art forms with learner-teachers.
The vertical dimension (Figure 4.1) examines knowledge construction. It indicates knowledge that is individually constructed through “internal cognitive processes” (Light and Cox 2001: 18) to publicly constructed knowledge. Phillips (1995: 8) believes this dimension can be labelled as “individual psychology versus public discipline”.

The third dimension (Figure 4.1) reflects the extent to which knowledge is an active or passive process. This refers to the extent of human involvement in the construction of knowledge, whether learning and knowing requires active engagement or merely being a spectator (Light & Cox 2001: 18-19). Phillips (1995: 10) states that constructing knowledge is an active process where the activity can “either be physical or mental”. Given Phillips argument, I interpret the ‘passive’ side of the continuum as being physically passive.

Some learner-teachers in this study referred to the need for listening to lectures, observing lessons and demonstrations using volunteer class members (interview 6 and 7 semester 1 2009). This indicates that some learner-teachers preferred less active participation and more transmission modes of learning within the course.

Some studies support an active constructivist approach to learning. This includes Bainbridge and Macy’s (2008: 65) study “around pre-service teachers’ perceptions of preparedness for literacy” in which they found constructivism worked well but that the use of the transmission approach “led to feelings of frustration”. Other research (for example Mayer 2004) found that teaching approaches based on constructivism are not all effective or suitable for all learners. Mayer believes that this lack of effectiveness is sometimes due to teachers misunderstanding constructivism and equating “active learning with active teaching” which he sees as a “constructivist teaching fallacy” (2004: 15). He points out that constructivism is misused in the promotion of the exclusive use of discovery-based teaching strategies.

The type of constructivism, socio-cultural constructivism, which informs my teaching, is based on communal construction, active participation and human
creation of knowledge. I brought to this research study my belief that effective learning and teaching incorporates elements of self-invention, active participation and joint decision-making. My experiences and observations within this action research study, literature on constructivism and the various tensions within the research process have led me to reflect on my approach. I acknowledge an over-emphasis on active, discovery learning and my neglect of the notion that constructivism may incorporate being cognitively active or mentally active rather than exclusively physically active within learning processes (Mayer 2004).

In describing the tensions I encountered in this study, I am not undermining the importance of collective responsibility, or collaboration, in learning and teaching situations. However, as their teacher I needed to recognise the learners’ needs and adapt my teaching strategies to accommodate those needs, while at the same time gradually moving the learners forward towards an environment that created optimum learning potential. The time and work required to establish this environment, gain the learner-teachers’ trust and willingness to fully collaborate in the learning process required me to rethink my teaching and research plan.

As will be seen from the discussion in subsequent chapters, learner-teacher input into the learning content and context did take place albeit in a different form than I initially anticipated. At this point a distinction needs to be drawn between active participation, taking responsibility for learning and collective decision-making relating to the overall direction and content of the course sessions and what took place while the learner-teachers were in various roles within the drama frames or contexts.

Decision-making in role was a frequent occurrence whereas there was a general reluctance to influence the course content and direction. When the learners were in role I was able to get them involved in decision-making and become “a facilitator and co-constructor of meaning” (Crumpler 1996: 39). This difference may be ascribed to a difference in our relationship from within or outside the ‘as-if’ world of the drama. Outside the drama frame, it seemed that the learner-teachers saw me more traditionally as a ‘gatekeeper of knowledge’.
Inside the drama frame “there is a more democratic dynamic relationship between the [learner-teacher], the teacher and knowledge” (Somers 2001: 69 - 70) enabling effective active participation to take place.

**Drama Decisions**

*I think that some of the reasons why I can’t seem to get learner-teachers to make decisions, or enter into a learning partnership with me is because there is not enough time to really get to know these students and maybe simply because some of them are not interested. They make lots of decisions within the process dramas even though, with some groups I have to work to get them to move beyond decisions that seem to inevitably connect to alcohol and partying...*

Meta-journal (04/07/2009).

For example, the learner-teachers made decisions about the nature and direction of the ‘Grandmother Smith’ drama I have described in 4.3 above. Within the drama contexts that the learner-teachers and I explored, their decision-making included: establishing ways of life and problem-solving within a drama where they were in role as elders responsible for a fictitious tribe; creating infrastructures, values and rules for a new society; and setting up how this new society would be launched. With the two more challenging classes (A and C), I had to work harder to steer them towards more serious decision-making and away from an initial tendency to try to de-rail the decision-making processes.

From the pioneering of Drama in Education by Dorothy Heathcote in England, the works of drama practitioners, including Bolton, Neelands (England), O’Neill (USA), Morgan, Saxton and Miller (Canada) and O’Toole (Australia) have contributed to the understanding of constructivist learning and teaching within the practice of process drama. From its emergence as a significant learning and teaching tool in the early 1970’s, educational drama’s emphasis has been on the construction and pursuit of knowledge within a drama context. Within a
framework of active participation and a dialogical meaning negotiation in drama, “teachers and students learn from and with each other” (Miller and Saxton 2009: 549).

4.4.2 The Actual Teaching Experience

You must access oral art forms from your own background
But fitting in, not standing out – that’s why I’m around.

A tension also existed between my expressed aim of getting students to share oral art forms from their own backgrounds and the actual teaching that occurred in the classes. This could be viewed as a positive tension as it led to my discovering, and critically interrogating the assumptions that I brought to this research. It also contributed to the study generating findings that were distinctly different from some of my expectations.

A discrepancy between my aims and the actual teaching experience was not exclusively because my agenda included both teaching and research. However, the decisions that I took were directly linked to the challenges that I faced when concurrently teaching and researching. Useful and different oral art forms (discussed in Chapter 5) did eventually emerge in my classes. This was after much persuasion where I continuously invited students to share different oral art forms and after introducing a number of examples from South Africa as well as Indigenous Australian stories from published texts.

The students relied heavily on traditional western fairytales as their resources and frequently claimed not to know any other stories. It seemed to me that there were a number of reasons for this. One of the reasons being that the students did not want to appear different and ‘other’ than their peers and so tended to suggest safe oral art forms that they believed most of their classmates would be familiar with. Where this differed was the sharing of modern stories with a cultural dimension that had some perceived status afforded to them because they were made into movies, or were a part of popular culture, for example ‘KungFu Panda’.
I can only describe the presentation of ‘Kung Fu Panda’ as aesthetically beautiful. It took my breath away... That I was not alone in my feeling that we had witnessed something spectacular and special was clear from the class response. The leader of the group, an international student, was so absorbed that at the saddest moment in the story there were real tears which she later told me were because of the story itself and because the telling of the story suddenly made her ‘miss home’.

There was total silence followed by a burst of clapping and shouts of ‘awesome’, ‘amazing’ etc. I had not seen the movie but the learner-teacher audience assured me that it was ‘better than the movie’. The four female learner-teachers who presented this story, while using what could be recognised as Kung Fu movements, turned the Kung Fu fighting routines into inspiringly graceful dance sequences that, for me were the highlight of their presentation. I asked them why they chose this particular story and they said because it is well known and Kung Fu has become important and recognised through movies.

Field-notes, week 9 semester 2 2008 (29/10/2008).

Williams (1995) refers to ‘socially inherited forms’ which individuals use. In this research it seemed to me that, at times, individuals wanted to move away from their ‘socially inherited’ oral art forms towards what would fit into their understanding of the socio-cultural ethos within the university classroom. The learner-teachers took on a ‘socially situated identity’ (Gee 1996). Other reasons for the students predominantly suggesting western texts could be the reliance on printed texts available to them in libraries and bookstores, the possible predominance of these stories in their life experiences and the influence of popular culture.

My misunderstanding of the international students, specifically the Chinese learner-teachers arose from my lack of experience in an Australian tertiary context. I expected them to freely share stories and oral art forms despite having witnessed first-hand within African classrooms the absolute authority
wielded by teachers. One Chinese learner-teacher explained the authority of teachers in China. I checked the following with her for accuracy.

In China I have to follow everything that teacher said. Different from Australia, children can have their own thoughts, their own ways to do the things. It is still difficult to say my own thoughts...

Field-notes, week 1 semester 2 2008 (30/06/2008).

This view was supported by similar comments from two other Asian (not necessarily Chinese) learner-teachers. Kainzbauer and Haghirian assert that learning and teaching methods that rely on learner or peer input instead of a teacher’s words of wisdom can be problematic within Confucian cultures, where a teacher’s authority is ‘not to be challenged’ (2005).

This generalisation was challenged by another learner-teacher who made the point that she has adopted ‘modern Chinese thinking’ as opposed to ‘traditional Chinese thinking’. Beekes (2006: 28) points out that “it emerges from Chinese students’ perspectives” that self-study is given high priority while inhibitions exist with regard to class participation. She acknowledges that this is changing but believes that ‘inertia’ in discussion and traditional perceptions is still dominant.

These cultural influences may have contributed to some learner-teachers’ reticence. My experiences in this ethnically diverse Australian educational context lends support to Richardson’s (2003) view that constructivism is a ‘western construct’, that learning occurs within an eclectic use of a variety of strategies and forms and that constructivism may not be the best practice for all educational contexts.
4.4.3 Curriculum and Time Constraints

How oral art forms support drama pedagogy is what we need to explore
But links between drama and our backgrounds was useful - time that’s what we need more

The students I interviewed all expressed in different ways their belief that the exploration of oral art forms and linking drama to their own backgrounds, had helped them in their understanding of drama pedagogy. However, some students believed that insufficient time and a feeling of being rushed made this exploration less useful than it could have been.

Phoebe: Sometimes I become stuck when it comes to activities. You gave us so many ideas to work with. Like the storytelling and the different types of narratives. That was so interesting and enjoyable... I felt so rushed ... We needed more time to explore and think about things... and create and present chants...

Interview 2 week 6 (03/09 2008).

The tension resulting from limited time and needing to decide what fits best into the allocated time frame, particularly within a nine week course, is frequently present in teaching and is not reserved exclusively for an agenda that includes both teaching and research. As Upitis (2005) states, time constraints are the perpetual and ‘universal lament’ of arts teachers specifically and all teachers generally. The tension of time constraints also impacted on trust and confidence issues (as discussed in Chapter 5) and the level of intercultural understanding developed within this study (as discussed in Chapter 6).
4.4.4 Perspectives on Intercultural Understanding

*Intercultural understanding is what needs to be investigated*
*But our good relationships we have clearly stated*

A central aim of this research was to examine how oral art forms could support intercultural understanding. However, some learner-teachers’ perspectives indicating that they already had ‘good intercultural understanding and relationships’ contributed to the tensions within this study. These initial perspectives were indicated within the learner-teacher questionnaire responses.

In many instances, the students and my perspectives differed as I had the distinct sense that at the start of the drama course, many of the learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding could be described as shallow and superficial. My reflections on the questionnaire responses as well as class discussions confirmed my sense of our different perceptions about intercultural understanding.

**Work to be Done**

*This may be harsh and unfair but I believe there is much work to be done despite the learner-teachers’ beliefs in their intercultural relationships. Strong emphasis on clothes and food to define culture needs to be challenged and such statements as, ‘having a universal view of the world is good for everyone’, requires serious problematisation.*

Meta-journal (15/08/2008).

The source of my concern was that when I was initially discussing the research project with learner-teachers within various classes to obtain their consent, a number stated that while they could see the benefits of being involved in a project concerning oral art forms and drama pedagogy they already were proficient at intercultural communication and therefore did not need any further
understanding. This view, in conjunction with many of their questionnaire responses linking culture and cultural identity to cosmetic and external aspects such as food and clothing, led me to a sense of the superficiality of most of the learner-teachers intercultural understanding. Also, in terms of their intercultural relations, when they were given a choice in forming groups, learner-teachers tended to stick to their own ethnic or friendship groupings. For example, students of Asian backgrounds were not readily admitted into other groups and tended to form their own discrete groups.

Despite the learner-teachers’ statements about not requiring further intercultural understanding they did work with me in exploring this understanding within the various nine week courses. In collaborating with the students, I believe some useful data and experiences were generated in relation to intercultural understanding (discussed in Chapter 6).

Besides the more explicit tensions, there were also implicit tensions relating to what Winograd terms “instruments of power” (2002: 344). In this study “instruments of power” include the prescribed content of the nine week drama course and the expectations embedded within curricula that I was required to teach. So my teaching choices were constrained by external power relations, which are viewed as “existing asymmetrically and hierarchically in relation to other choices” (McLaren 1991: 19).

My desire to respect the wishes of participants was also an important consideration within this study and played a part in changing it from my original research design. For example, I wished to include photographs and video footage of some of the classes. However, the groups of students were not comfortable with the idea of being photographed, or videoed, while they were exploring different oral art forms. Consequently this data was not collected.
4.4.5 The Perceived Benefits of the Process

You provided a canvas, we began to understand
So, part of the process, went as planned

Despite the challenges and tensions of the research process, all the learner-teachers interviewed articulated a range of benefits of the process. I have selected the following extract of data from a learner-teacher who is particularly articulate. The views are typical of the kinds of opinions expressed by the learner-teachers I interviewed.

Jenny: You provided a canvas. On top of this canvas, understanding of drama pedagogy was promoted through taking people’s personal experiences to create drama. Students were able to have a go. Oral art forms as a dramatic skill and for the creation of drama understanding were really effective. Not only were people able to see components of drama. They were able to put in a context and create their own persona in a non-threatening environment.

Interview 1 semester 2 2008 (29/08/2008).

4.5 ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGES

I encountered a number of challenges in exploring oral art forms in the nine sessions with my four classes of learner-teachers. Challenges first became apparent to me when I was asked a question about my use of isiXhosa oral art forms by a learner-teacher. Savin-Baden (2008: 53) points out the need for spaces “in which critical conversations occur”. She believes, learning spaces involving challenge are infrequent, or absent, in tertiary educational environments and “need to be framed, delved into, argued for and prized” (2008: 65).

I certainly prized the critical conversation I had with this learner-teacher and a few of her classmates that joined in. It provided me with an invaluable
perspective and insight into attitudes and perceptions about my use of oral art forms that are not considered directly a part of my culture. It showed a learner-teacher engaging deeply, thinking critically and showing interest in cultural dimensions and sensitivities. My reflection-on-action and the conversation which followed is included on the next page (157).

Today Tanya asked me a question I did not expect but that really got me thinking. The conversation went like this.

**Tanya:** How can you present this story to us?

**Carol:** What do you mean?

**Tanya:** Well you’re not ... [Xhosa] it’s not part of your culture.

**Carol:** Not directly but I am South African and I choose isiXhosa traditions as a part of my culture... and what I value.

**Tanya:** That’s very brave.

I was puzzled by this and asked her why?

**Tanya:** Don’t people criticise you for using forms that are not yours? I really want to use Indigenous Australian forms but there are all sorts of things that prevent me. I don’t have any right to use other people’s cultures as my own.

[She apologised profusely and said she wasn’t trying to have a go at me]

I’m pretty sure I would be told that they aren’t mine.

I was fascinated and wanted to hear more of her opinion but also wanted to use the opportunity to get other learner-teachers involved. I tried opening up the floor and getting learner-teachers in the class to participate, though only two, whom I identified as Tanya’s friends as they always sit together at the beginning of class, joined us and engaged in a ‘real’ conversation. I was aware of quite a few listening intently and relating to what was being said. A learner-teacher, Greta, told me about her ‘bad’ experience of acting in a play when she was at school where totems were used from a different Indigenous Australian group than the traditional owners of the land where the play was performed. She spoke about the way this was not acceptable and the ‘fighting’ that took place because of it.
Tanya: Didn’t your teacher get permission before the play was performed?

Greta: I don’t know but I don’t think so because the principal made her change the play and get rid of the totems.

I explained to the learner-teachers that, no such constraints existed for me. And that when I use them in South Africa people who belong to these groups are excited by my acknowledgment of these traditional oral art forms. I also shared some of my negative experiences with people who refused to sing various songs that were associated with ancestor worshipping.

Field-notes, week 4 semester 2 2008 (08/10/2008).

I explore these challenges through embedding them in a dialogue I have constructed from field-notes and reflections. This is informed by literature, experiences and conversations within an Australian and South African context. The dialogue is largely based on my ongoing internal dialogue between these experiences and conversations and the issues raised by three learner-teachers that I reflected on within this study. Drawing from Mead’s (1934) notion of the mind as being engaged in a kind of internal conversation, Burr (1995) explains that this internal ‘discourse’ is a way representation, narratives and images link to create a specific, personal account of events.

The following dialogue is based on such an internal creation, informed by my research and external conversations; it is not an attempt to create a highly engaging play with colourful and interesting characters which, in my view, would lead me too far away from my internal dialogue. What I am attempting here is to keep it close to my internal conversation while making use of “immediate focus” and “complexity of plot” that is gained by dramatising events (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul 1997: 123). Within a dramatic framework I wished to convey my “landscape of consciousness” (Bruner 1986: 14) that emerged through, and
grew organically from, the learner-teacher raising the question, “How can you present this story to us?”.

**Susan:** Welcome everyone to our first rehearsal. I am so excited that we have been given this unique opportunity to devise a play for young people incorporating different oral art forms. I know that you will all be able to contribute to this process as many of you shared your different experiences with me at the auditions. Is there anyone who would like to tell us a little about yourself and why you chose to be involved in this play?

**Mbuso:** Hi Everyone. I’m Mbuso. I want to be involved because I would like to share my oral art forms from South Africa and learn about other oral art forms. I don’t want to dwell on the history of our country but my people’s oral art forms, including indigenous performances of African rituals, storytelling, praise-poetry and work songs, were marginalised for a very long time. In my country: “To deal with the legacy of cultural intolerance...learners need to experience, understand and affirm the diversity of South African cultures”\(^9\) and I believe oral art forms are an essential part of this process.

**Sam:** Yes Mbuso, I agree with what you’re saying but we need to be very careful about appropriating other people’s oral art forms and displaying them as our own. We need to be sensitive to “practices that are regarded by communities as sacred, secret and strongly connected to culture”\(^10\).

**Susan:** Certainly respect and sensitivity should be key elements in our play devising and performing but are you suggesting that we can only perform an oral art form that belongs to our own particular culture or background?

**Jo:** Working in a South African context, that certainly hasn’t been my experience. For instance, I often make use of Nguni\(^11\) oral art forms that I have come to appreciate and ‘own’ even though I am not Nguni. When I perform

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\(^2\) Drama Australia (2007: 8)
\(^3\) Nguni- represent about 2/3rds South Africa’s Black population - divided into four groups; the Central Nguni (Zulu), the Southern Nguni (Xhosa), the Swazi people and the Ndebele people
isiZulu or isiXhosa traditional chants, praise poems and participatory storytelling practices people who belong to those groups are excited by my acknowledgment of these traditional forms and that I am using and spreading knowledge and understanding of these art forms. As a South African I am encouraged to share and be proud of African oral art forms even where they are not from my immediate culture.

**Sam:** That’s all very well for you, but it seems to me that it is more complex within an Australian context. There’s the land to consider – beyond simply acknowledging the owners of the land. I remember when I was involved in a play some years ago where totems were used from a different Indigenous Australian group than the traditional owners of the land where the play was performed - all hell broke loose. There have been an “explosion of protocols and guidelines”\(^\text{12}\) that need to be considered before we can simply include Indigenous Australian oral art forms.

**Mbuso:** Of course sharing South African oral art forms is not without its difficulties. I have had Christian ‘fundamentalists’ refusing to sing the songs and participate in the rituals within an iintsomi, or traditional storytelling, process because they are associated with ancestor worshiping - seen as worshiping false gods or idolatry. Some people just can’t see what is clear to me that speaking to the ancestors and speaking to a God can go hand in hand.

**Jo:** And there are, obviously, also some forms that are traditionally the domain of women or men, only observed during initiation and so on.

**Les:** I think the ‘right of Indigenous people to keep secret and sacred their cultural knowledge’\(^\text{13}\) so that it cannot be accessed by people outside of that particular group is so –oo-cool. There has been too much appropriation in the past. ‘The rights of Indigenous people to own and control their cultures should

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\(^\text{12}\) Drama Australia (2007: 8)  
\(^\text{13}\) Cultural Protocols (2009)
be respected”14  “The appropriation of cultural forms from communities...is not really flattery. [Some people see it as] a twisted embrace...”15

**Sam:** The reverse could be argued. Being too sensitive about appropriation and protocols could be detrimental. Also appropriation does not only need to be negative or pejorative. It has positive meanings and connotations too such as “to make proper and appropriate – to give new life in a new age”.16 For me, one of the most important aspects of developing the kind of work Susan has in mind is the potential benefits for the audience. Oral art forms could provide a unique understanding of different cultures and groups – but how can we hope to create an effective play if we are too scared of ‘stepping on toes’ and consequently end up ‘walking on egg shells’.

**Mbuso:** It’s not only a matter of ‘stepping on toes’. Remember, some of the more ‘traditional’ examples “can only be appreciated and seen to make sense if one has knowledge of that history, or local environment”.17

**Jo:** “Drama does colonise and appropriate the ‘other’ ”18. So, the challenge is to use the forms and relate them to our contexts. For example, “women praise poets drawing on revitalised oral tradition have shown how women activists can harness language and public performance to trade union activity and general consciousness-raising.”19 Also protest poems are often used at public gatherings” and continue to change and evolve.

**Les:** Yes, there is a ‘dynamic interaction’ between ‘so-called traditional and modern forms’.20 There are many examples of oral art forms, such as the izibongo and oral arts call and response genres that are used in African contemporary songs21.

14 Cultural Protocols (2009)  
15 Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2008: 383)  
16 O’Toole and Stinson (2009: 203)  
17 Matshakayile-Ndlovu (2000: 2)  
18 O’Toole, Stinson and Moore (2009: 203)  
19 Clayton C (1993:30)  
20 Agatucci (2004.)  
Susan: Maybe we should begin work on our play by looking at oral art forms that have been re-interpreted within modern contexts, like praise poetry and ritualistic chants...

Les: and oral art forms evident today like footy chants and rap songs

Jo: and children’s repetitive rhymes and chants used in games

Sam: starting with forms that we know and are familiar with

Susan: That’s a good idea let’s start with us each sharing an oral art form from our own backgrounds and experience...

A reoccurring theme, and a particular challenge, within this study with the use of oral art forms is the perception of appropriation. Given the histories of the two countries within which I have sought to engage with oral art forms, this is perfectly understandable. As illustrated in the above extract appropriation can be interpreted in different ways.

While I was writing this research document, I continued to record my reflections in my meta-journal. Towards the end of the research process, when looking back on Tanya’s question and the above dialogue I wrote a final entry in my meta-journal that best describes the issues of appropriation in relation to my views and research observations.

Diving for Treasures

As a former scuba-diving enthusiast it seems to me that diving for oral art form treasures within familiar South African waters is within optimum diving conditions. The visibility is excellent and I am welcomed by others in the water as long as I wear a mask of acknowledgement and sensitivity. Others in the water welcome my bright
flashlight which throws light on the treasures and adds a different dimension to my and their unique diving experiences. Diving in increasingly familiar Australian waters, with pockets where I feel the need to be careful of unchartered and unfamiliar currents, the still murky waters make the visibility less clear and I have to increasingly adjust my mask. I can see the edges of the barrier reef, renowned for its coral treasures... I begin to reach out and touch the edges but am a little afraid of the sensitivities lurking in the waters that have been pointed out to me by those who have dived here frequently.

Meta-journal (07/02/2010).

4.6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter I examine what was confirmed and re-enforced for me within the study as well as what I consider to be ‘new’ discoveries. The discussion takes place within the following headings; action research and teacher-researcher roles; overlap between different chapters; encountering challenges; and overly ambitious concerns.

4.6.1 Action Research and Teacher - Researcher Roles

This action research study has confirmed the close and mutually beneficial relationship that exists between teaching and research and has left me even more strongly committed to the notion of teaching being informed by research and vice versa. However, what I discovered was that my dual roles of researcher and educator led at times to contrasting agendas. The relationship between my teaching and research was not always as symbiotic as literature, my expectations and experiences and the long history of drama practitioners grounding their research in practice had led me to believe.

The flexible and unpredictable nature of process drama, specifically, as well as the fluid nature of learning environments, was re-enforced for me. I found that because of my preoccupation with my research and concerns about not being able to follow my research agenda I did not immediately and fully embrace the
qualities that contribute to my belief in drama as a powerful teaching tool. These qualities include: the unexpected directions that drama can take; the learner-motivated and learner-driven potential of the process drama partnership; and the provision of rich learning environments. I found that, to some extent, the predetermined nature of research for the purposes of assessment exacerbated the tensions between teaching and research.

Various challenges spoken about within literature on action research were evident within this study. These included: ways of gaining participation; issues of power; relationship-building; constructing and eliciting change; and “establishing credible accounts” (Grant, Nelson and Mitchell 2008: 591).

4.6.2 Overlap between Different Chapters

A common thread running through Chapter 3, where I outline the research process and this chapter is the expectations that learner-teachers had of my role. This resulted in a re-orientation of the kind of action research I had envisaged, from a collaborative participatory stance to practitioner-led research. It also led to critical reflection on the efficacy of constructivism for all learners and contexts. Another theme is the choice of stories and their pedagogical role. Learner-teachers predominantly selected stories, such as western fairytales, that they felt did not make them stand out or appear different. This is a reoccurring theme in this and other chapters of this study.

4.6.3 Encountering Challenges

I found many complexities in engaging with oral art forms that I had not considered prior to this study and that impacted on the oral art forms that were ultimately explored. Within this action research they presented specific challenges that needed to be overcome. They also had a broader impact leading me to an enlarged understanding of the exploration of oral art forms within an Australian context. They led me to invaluable insights that assisted me to gradually move away from my earlier assumptions and towards workable
ways of getting the learner-teachers to identify and share culturally specific oral art forms. These insights will be useful in framing any further research students’ engagement with oral art forms.

4.6.4 Overly Ambitious Concerns

During my ‘darkest hours’ within this research process and in my reflection on the tensions and challenges I encountered within my research story, I did consider whether or not this study had been overly ambitious. However, on reflection I believe that while challenging for both me and the learner-teachers it was still within our ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky 1978). My zone of proximal development was the distance between my understanding and assumptions about oral art forms within an Australian context and the level of understanding I achieved with the learner-teachers’ guidance and response to oral art forms.

4.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter I reflect on tensions and challenges that had an impact on the progression and content of my research. This includes: reflection on wearing two different caps as a teacher and researcher; discrepancies between the envisaged research process and learner-teachers’ needs; the actual teaching experience versus my expressed aims; curriculum and time constraints; and perspectives on intercultural understanding and encountering challenges. I have presented and structured reflections in this chapter through research poems that attempt to encapsulate various emotions and tensions. I also use constructed dialogue to discuss the challenges I encountered. The next chapter, Chapter 5 examines, and reflects on, my discoveries about how oral art forms could be used to support drama pedagogy within the teaching of a nine week drama course.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE DRAMA PEDAGOGY
STORY STRAND

Let me dedicate my poetic praise
To the symbol of resistance
Let me dedicate my poetic praise
To the symbol of hope and prosperity
Let me dedicate my poetic praise
To the fountain of wisdom and inspiration.
I talk of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela
The leader that stood the test of time.
Like gold and diamond in order to be refined
Comrade Mandela, you are like an oak tree
You have gone through the fires of time...
Part of poem presented at Nelson Mandela’s inauguration
by Mzwakhe Mbuli.
Flynn (2008).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I reflect on the ways I used oral art forms to support drama pedagogy and identify the learner-teachers’ responses to these forms within the teaching of a nine week course. I present examples of ways in which oral art forms were experienced and their relationship to the drama pedagogy. Themes and issues that emerged from my participant observations and student interviews in relation to their engagement with oral art forms are interpreted and reflected on.

Chapter 1, 2 and 3 contextualised the study and explained various aspects of the action research process. Chapter 4 addressed issues pertaining to the ways I attempted to give learner-teachers access to oral art forms and discussed tensions and challenges I encountered within this study. In this chapter I focus specifically on drama pedagogy in relation to oral art forms. The chapter is structured around two questions central to my thesis:
• How were oral art forms used to support drama pedagogy within the teaching of a nine week drama course?
• What themes and issues emerged for me as a teacher-researcher in examining my use of oral art forms to support drama pedagogy?

5.2 ENGAGING WITH ORAL ART FORMS

As exemplified in Chapter 4 in some cases, my plans to get the learner-teachers to engage with oral art forms did not take place due to the learning and teaching moving in alternative directions. However, I did explore a number of ways of using oral art forms to support drama pedagogy with the four groups of learner-teachers who participated in this study.

In this section of the chapter, I seek answers to the first question which structures this chapter. The specific focus relates to a key aspect of the central question in the study, namely the ways in which the learner-teachers and I could share and use oral art forms to support drama pedagogy within the teaching of a nine week drama course. My reflections and interpretations of themes and issues that emerged during our participation and experiences with these oral art forms are to be found in the next section of this chapter (5.3).

5.2.1 From ‘page’ to ‘stage’

With Class A the text I used was ‘Singing your own songlines: approaches to Indigenous drama’ (Marshall 2004). This text was part of the required reading for the primary drama course. The learner-teachers were divided into groups. Each group was given a narrative type - that is oral narratives, visual narratives, auditory narratives, body narratives, smell and taste narratives, landscape narratives or multi-layered narratives (Marshall 2004: 64 – 76). The learner-teachers were asked to identify key words and main ideas that they thought captured the essence of the particular narrative type and to create a chant, rap or song that encapsulated these main ideas.
Last week I reminded the classes, and literally begged them, to read Anne Marshall’s article. “I’m assuming everyone has done the reading for today” I said hopefully. Silence. Heads down, mutterings, people trying desperately to avoid my gaze, or stare straight ahead as if they were mute, or had not heard the implied question in my statement. “I want you to be honest with me. Who has read the article?” One hand proudly and boldly shot up, another hand made its way up reluctantly, as if the owner was being forced to admit something unacceptable and outrageous against her will. Looking guiltily, from side to side at her peers. Eventually it was established that 5 had “definitely done the reading” while 2 had “sort of looked at it”.

I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that reluctance to do the readings seems as common here as elsewhere I have taught. Though we discussed and explored aspects of this article through the workshop – when it came to choosing who to work with - I noticed that the groups were strategically formed around the group members that had ‘admitted’ to doing the reading. In an attempt to get the groups to choose the forms that interested them, each group was encouraged to select a narrative type as long as all the types were ‘covered’.

As I moved from group to group, they were all doing more or less the same thing, though I had not given them this as a task instruction. They were all listening intently to one person reading as the others wrote down words, or each person in the group was reading silently and writing down words. I had presented them with what I thought were innovative, enticing options for doing this task but despite my best efforts, this is what they all chose. It struck me how resistant most of these learner-teachers are to activities that they believe to be out of the ordinary and how readily they engage in a task that is clearly highly familiar to them. At least they are all engaged in the reading. Even T, who is still physically a little away from the group, but has not turned her back on the group, as is often the case.

Field-notes, week 4 semester 2 2008 (20/08/2002).

The students then created and presented participatory stories, using the chants, rap or songs as a base, to further explore the narrative type. Below is an
example of a group of learner-teachers’ chant based on their understanding of oral narratives. I have placed some of Anne Marshall’s (2004) description of oral narratives next to the learner-teachers’ chant and underlined key words in order to provide a sense of how the chant interprets the text from the class reader. It also shows that the learner-teachers made the information their own as well as using some direct words from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral narratives</th>
<th>Indigenous communities spend a great deal of time telling stories. In communities for whom the written word is not the ‘authority’, older people in the community have the responsibility for ‘keeping culture’ and passing it on to the younger people as they live it together. This is why older people are so respected and why the word of a community elder is more relevant then books.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living, breathing stories</td>
<td>Verbal and physical instruction is the main teaching activity for all young people before they learn to read and is reinforced by the fact that daily living follows these precepts and teachings...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping, Culture stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We pass on well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kin and Homeland stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We speak, don’t read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaces, Places stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We respect indeed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This activity was deliberately framed in other ways with the classes B, C and D. With class B, using the same text and making use of the students’ knowledge of and passion for football we imagined that we were at a football match. As this was a small class, there were only three groups. Each group created a football chant with actions based on a ‘narrative type’ of their choice (Marshall 2004).

We set up the space to represent a football stadium. Two groups were the players, using their football chants and songs, as they got ready for the match, went on to the field, faced their opponents and mimed the actions on the field.
The other group were the supporters who, as spectators, ‘barracked for their team’.

Ryan came into the class bursting with excitement about the Olympic gymnastics he had been watching on TV. Others agreed with him when he said “I’ve never been a great gymnastics fan but these gymnasts are brilliant and so great to watch!” This led us to a discussion about sport which moved smoothly and effortlessly into introducing the ‘footy’ context, planned for the session. It has been my experience that this enthusiastic class are always keen to participate, even though some of them, such as Ryan, who “wants to teach sport” expressed reservations at the beginning of the course. Faced with the prospect of thinking about footy in a drama session, they were more enthusiastic then ever and rearing to go!! “Can we base our chants on our real footy teams?” I was asked. Of course, I replied, getting increasingly excited as these learner-teachers threw themselves into the tasks and provided the first truly authentic example of the use of oral art forms within this research. Well this class and I, despite, or because of, their use of exaggerated, stylised movements ‘stumbled upon moments of authenticity’, involving spontaneous interspersing of ‘real’ speed action, slow motion ‘retakes’ and ‘fast forwarding’ entirely orchestrated by class members. I felt like I was at a footy match and I believe they did too. They certainly said so. I was ‘swept up’ by the passion and emotion of the re-designed footy chants based on narrative types. The ideas and words contained in an academic text came alive and became filled with feeling...

Field-notes week 4, semester 2 2008 (20/08/2008).

As I have indicated I experienced mixed levels of success in facilitating learner-teachers’ engagement with oral art forms within the drama courses described in this study. However, in this case, I felt unequivocally that the form used contributed to the richness of the drama experience and the understanding of drama pedagogy. It should be noted that this session was with Class B, which was one of the classes I regarded as ‘easy’ and enthusiastic.

22 Heathcote (1984)
Below is an example of a chant by one group of learner-teachers based on their understanding of visual narratives. The group of learner-teachers used ‘Good Old Collingwood Forever’ as a frame for their work. Marshall’s description of visual narrative types as well as the words to the Collingwood chant can be found in Appendix G (EXTRACTS FROM TEXTS: 332).

**Visual Narratives**

Visual narratives forever
Cultural images not the same
Visual symbol and meaning together
Body inscriptions to name
See the symbols on rock walls, poles, ground and paintings on wood
All the messages are conveyed
As this good old narrative should

Learner-teachers’ work, Class B (20/08/2008).

Group C and Group D were given extracts from the text, ‘Beginning with story’ (Dickinson and Neelands 2006: 58 - 85). Group C created chants and participatory stories based on these extracts and Group D created ‘footy chants’ and participated in ‘footy matches’. The extract from Dickinson and Neelands (2006), which was used as the reading for the chant created below, can be found in Appendix G (EXTRACTS FROM TEXTS: 332).

**We are, we tell**

**We shape, we feel**

**THE STORY**
The new, the different
The personal, cultural and religious
STORIES...
Learner-teachers’ work, Class C
(26/03/2009).

I felt that what the learner-teachers presented in terms of participatory stories interspersed with chants was effective in that it gave me a sense that the texts had been understood. However, both groups of learner-teachers that were asked to create participatory stories (Group A and C) appeared to me to distance themselves from the ‘story’; they were comfortable with the writing of the chant but appeared uncomfortable with the performance aspect of the chant and storytelling. They also initially struggled with both the tasks of creating a chant and a participatory story. My reflective analysis is illustrated in the extract from my field-notes below.

How will an enthusiastic class of learner-teachers respond to participatory stories and chants compared to a less enthusiastic class?
They tried, oh my word did they try! Though they found it difficult, they created chants and raps which they were immensely proud of and insisted that they enjoyed the challenge. Whew!! When it came to the stories, this is where they really battled. “It’s impossible”, “We can’t think of a story that fits”, “Do we have to do this?” Whew, Whew!! Eventually they did it. They heaved a sigh of relief only to be reminded by me that they needed to perform their chants and stories and find ways to get us to participate with them. Whew! Whew! Whew! This is where this eager and enthusiastic class dug their heels in, in a gentle but insistent way. “Do we have to”, “We really don’t want to perform”, “We’re not comfortable with that”, “Can’t we just tell you our story and our ideas” I folded as I knew the pointlessness of pushing any further. Oh, alright, I said.

Field-notes, week 4 semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009).
The learner-teachers working with the football chants and football matches (Group B and D) appeared far more comfortable and relaxed. Through their highly stylised performances and, due to the learner-teachers’ familiarity with the oral form of football chants (and passion for their footy team), these experiences seemed to link thought and emotion as well as the aesthetic with the cognitive.

What will be the impact of using the structure that worked well in Cycle 2 with more reluctant group in Cycle 3?

I spoke very severely to myself about ‘self-fulfilling prophesies’ and teacher attitudes though this did not in any way alleviate my concerns that I would find that the ‘footy match’ would not live up to expectations within the context of this class. It did not by any means counteract and eradicate the challenges regularly encountered. I still had to work hard but there was definitely more enthusiasm and ‘hooking’ into the footy context. Most workshop sessions have looked and felt like this - a handful of learner-teachers are keenly involved at the centre of any action or activity, a lot are involved but in as peripheral a role as possible and frequently under duress and a few are totally uninvolved. This workshop session looked and felt like this - more than half were actively involved with the rest showing some sign of being ‘there’. I have noticed that learner-teachers at the end of a session say ‘thank-you’ sometimes followed by ‘I enjoyed... I found that interesting...That was good...That made sense and so on. This has never happened with this class until this session where I got a number of ‘thank-you’s’.

Field-notes, week 4 semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009).

The experiences reflected in my field-notes relating to using structures that did and did not work in 2008 with enthusiastic and less enthusiastic class in 2009 constituted important and valuable aspects of what I learned through the action research cycles. I learned that even willing learner-teachers would be disengaged from the use of oral art forms if the task required of them was considered too difficult and complicated. I re-affirmed the significance of finding what motivates particularly disengaged learners and using their interests and passions within learning and teaching.
5.2.2 Prescribed texts linked to ‘Drama Worlds’

My plan was for the learner-teachers to create and perform poetry to explore the essence of concepts such as ‘drama’, ‘dramatic play’ and ‘role taking’ from their reading of texts prescribed for the drama course. I initially envisaged that praise and protest poems would be created within a drama frame or an ‘as if’ world. I hoped that this task could provide a direct motivation for the creation of poetry relating to such concepts. Mphahlele (1974: 197) defines protest poetry as an art form that speaks to people concerning “their feelings and ideas about the world”. I wanted the learner-teachers to identify relevant information from written texts from within these fictional worlds provided by the drama contexts.

I worked with various fictional drama contexts, for example, a conference for educational policy makers attended by pro-drama and anti-drama lobbyists that could provide the purpose for the poetry. I believed the tasks I set up could contribute to “emotional and cognitive alignments or disaffections...that [learner-teachers] experience as they respond to the complex configurations of text” (Misson and Morgan 2006: 89). So for example, I hoped that “alignments” or “disaffections” with what has been written about dramatic play could be manifested through praise and resistance or protest poems by learner-teachers in role as parents at a school meeting deciding on whether, or not, dramatic play was important for their children’s education.

However, these planned activities were abandoned as I discovered that any context set up with a view to motivating students to write poetry in role based on information from class readings was either too contrived or too close to the ‘as is’ world (or actual experience) of the learner-teachers. In drama education, apart from the “acceptance of the ‘one big lie’” (Wagner 1979: 66) that Heathcote writes about as the fictional context, all else needs to be as authentic as possible. As Anderson (2002: 1) states, when learners are in role they

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23 Dramatic play refers to when young children engage in creating imaginary, ‘pretend’ worlds and situations through spontaneous play.

24 Role taking involves ‘stepping into the shoes of someone else’ and taking on some of the aspects of their lives. It is a “powerful tool for making pupils aware that people in different times felt, thought, believed and behaved differently from ourselves” (Luff 2000:9).
“benefit not only from engaging with realistic problems, but also by working and thinking within realistic roles”.

Hoping for ‘buy in’

I should have known from my experience and years of drama teaching that it wouldn’t work! How many times have I said to learner-teachers, the context needs to be something that the participants will be interested in and to which they can relate. How many times have I spent hours carefully planning how to make a drama more believable and authentic so that participants can ‘suspend disbelief’. I think that intuitively I did know - that’s why I introduced the contexts at the end of the sessions to ‘test’ the engagement level of the learner-teachers. If it worked, my plan was to continue with them in the next sessions. But because I had this research agenda, I was so hoping that they would ‘buy in’ to the contexts...

Meta-journal (06/08/2008).

My experiences within what for me was a relatively new educational context, supports Palmer’s (1998: 63) view of one of the paradoxes of teaching that no matter how much experience we may have “we are beginners whenever we teach a new class”. I attempted to link prescribed texts and oral art forms directly to drama frames only in semester 2 2008 and, on finding this did not work, I did not attempt this again in cycle 3, semester 1 2009. Alternatives, which I planned between cycle 2 2008 and cycle 3 2009 are discussed later on in this chapter.

All four groups of learner-teachers created and presented praise poetry and repetitive chants within fictional context’ not linked to drama terms and concepts. The context I used for one drama was the creation of a new society. Towards the end of this particular process drama the learner-teachers, were involved in a function to launch their new society. They presented praise poems (or in some cases chants and raps) in praise of their new society, capturing
what they thought were its special features. These were presented in the form of songs or choral verse. Below are two examples from 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magical Lake</th>
<th>Yes, We Can!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oh Magical lake</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we welcome all people?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Healer of our people</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes we can!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oh Magical Lake</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we care for all people?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bringer of Life...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes we can!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serenity at its finest</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we feed all people?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>So much space</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes we can!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serenity at its finest</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we educate all people?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work to go around</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes we can!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serenity at its finest</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we entertain all people?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The air is just so clean</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes we can!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serenity at its finest</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we house all people?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyone is Welcome</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes we can!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serenity at its finest...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will we love all people</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learner-teachers’ work, Class D (09/04/2009).

In another drama, where the learner-teachers were all members of a tribe where it had been ‘many moons’ since the ‘sky’s eyes’ had opened, learner-teachers were involved in different moments of ritual chanting or song. During a belief building process tribal groups established their particular groups’ way of greeting the chief and the other groups in the tribe through words and gestures. They also decided how their group would perform the tribal chant. This was performed by each group at the start of a tribal meeting as it was agreed was customary for this tribe.

25 Belief building refers to making the fictional drama space feel more ‘real’ through a range of techniques and strategies.
Sun in the sky
Dust on the Ground
To the sky we cry
Where can rain be found?
Where can rain be found?

At other moments during the four occasions when each class group took part in this drama some learner-teachers began spontaneously chanting or suggested various chants. This occurred when:

- It was suggested that we pass the pipe of peace around as each tribal member had his/her say.
- At the meeting the elders of the tribe placed their different gifts and talents in the centre of the meeting place.
- Many ‘drama years’ later at the opening of a museum where the tribe’s history is documented in various ways.

In each class the creation of these chants within the safe, non threatening environment of a drama context that was not tied directly to class readings worked well in increasing the learner-teachers’ familiarity with oral art forms. I noted that it also appeared to increase the learner-teachers’ confidence in their ability to create praise poems, chants and raps. They were then willing and able to perform poetry to reflect on class readings that were outside the drama framework. The following example was collaboratively created by a class and myself during a reflection phase of the class and was linked to the reading, ‘The Basics of Drama Teaching’ taken from ‘Pretending to Learn’ (O’Toole and Dunn 2002: 2 - 4) to be found in Appendix G (EXTRACTS FROM TEXTS: 332).
**Drama**

*You let us be wherever we want to be*

*Mates of play, imagination and creativity*

*You let us be whatever we want to be*

*Palette of artistry and education*

*You let us explore different worlds*

*Born of process, pretend and participation*

*You let us learn about our world*

*Creating, making and performing are your family*

*You let us discover new worlds*

*With safety, engagement and empowerment you walk*

*You let us be*

Learner-teachers’ work, Class C (09/04/2009).

### 5.2.3 Embodied knowledge

Learner-teachers in semester 1, 2009 (classes C and D) took part in a drama where the concept of ‘dramatic play’ was explored through repetitive chants and the drama context was a children’s playground. I planned and implemented this as an alternative to the contexts focusing on prescribed texts, such as a conference for education policy makers described in 5.2.2 above. I set up activities where oral art forms such as the calls and responses found in children’s games or sayings were explored. Within this class context, learner-teachers drew on their experiences of dramatic play. In groups they decided on different dramatic play scenarios that could take place in the playground.
In these same groups, the learner-teachers created a series of still-images or ‘photographs’ that represented different moments, or stages, in the dramatic play scenarios. One group then provided the voices for another group to capture the possible thoughts, feelings and sayings of the various children depicted in the ‘photographs’. A section of this particular workshop is described below.

To introduce the ‘playground’ I taught the group the chant:

I see you (facing a partner and pointing to partner)
You see me (facing a partner and pointing to self)
I’ll see somebody tomorrow (walking around the room and finding a new partner)
I don’t expect to see

I asked the learner-teachers to imagine that they were children in a playground and that each time they moved to a new partner they should move in a different way but each time in ways that children would move as they are playing. I explained that each time they should find a new partner and that when they got to a new partner they should stand still and wait as I would give them further instructions.

I have found that this chant is a good way of moving people and getting them talking and, as usual, there was a productive noise with a great deal of participation and, from what I observed, enjoyment. Even though we had practised, when they got to their partners, they were so busy with the chant that I had to stand on a chair to get their attention and give them the next instruction. I don’t think it was because they were being children in a playground or that they really worked hard to think of new ways of moving around in a playground. It has been my experience that it takes a few ‘goes’ to get participants to stop and wait for the next instruction when they have said the chant and moved to a new partner. The instruction for the first partner was, ‘If you don’t know each other tell your partner your name and what you think of when you hear the word drama’.
They said the chant four or five times each time moving to a new partner and sharing information such as, ‘what you think of when you hear the phrase dramatic play’, ‘tell your new partner what your previous partner said about...’. Though there was a great deal of sharing of information during the chant part, when we got into a circle and I asked the learner-teachers to share anything that various partners said that they found interesting or different it took a few moments before some volunteered information.

I placed the learner-teachers in groups of five and gave the groups a few minutes to share their memories of dramatic play, what they played, what it felt like, what they learned and/or the purpose of the play etc. Most groups began immediately and chatted about their different memories. Even though there was some evidence of TV and movies impacting on their ‘play’ there were a range of examples. What was also good was that there were examples of ‘projected’ and ‘personal’ play which we could discuss at the end of the workshop.... When they were ready to present their images I asked them to place themselves somewhere in the ‘playground’. I told them that I would be a photographer and would walk from group to group. It was a good idea to get Class D to start with a wall collage and single words and then move to ‘floor’ images with repetitive chants. It appeared to motivate the more reluctant group members.

Workshop plan and field-notes (12/03/2009).

Different characteristics of dramatic play evident from the examples presented were discussed and then each photograph was given a repetitive chant to act as a caption to explain particular features of dramatic play.

Games of prete - end
Symbols without e –end
An example of a repetitive chant linked to a ‘photograph’ Class C (12/03/2009).

26 These are terms used by Peter Slade (1965; 1977) to distinguish between different kinds of dramatic play with personal play referring to the child taking on a role and projected play referring to roles being projected onto inanimate objects.
On other occasions drama elements, such as tension, were represented through oral art forms by all classes. With Class C and D, in an attempt to broaden the oral art forms that could be selected I added a brainstorming session that was not part of the process with Class A and B. In this brainstorming session with the learner-teachers, everything that they thought could be categorised as an oral art form was written up on a whiteboard. Learner-teachers were encouraged to work in groups and select any of the oral art forms listed to represent their understanding of drama elements.

Without exception, groups of learner-teachers in every class selected children’s games, or football chants, to represent drama elements. Games such as ‘Duck, Duck, Goose’ and ‘What's the time Mr Wolf?’ were selected by the learner-teachers as ways to physically embody the different dramatic elements as they understood them. Dramatic and exaggerated moments in a football matches, accompanied by ‘real’ footy chants of the teams the learner-teachers supported, physically and emotionally expressed such drama elements as tension, focus, and space. The learner-teachers were able to clearly articulate how the drama elements were represented in their game or footy chant. Their reasons for their choice of games and footy chants were familiarity and access. As a learner-teacher stated: ‘most people in the class would know them and be able to understand them’ (Stephanie interview 7 week 9, semester 1 2009).

The groups seem much more focussed today. I am going to use this opportunity to write notes in class as they are discussing and preparing. A group is talking animatedly about football. “I hope this is part of the task” I say in my ‘teacher-voice’. “Of course” is the emphatic response. I move to another group. This group is sitting on the floor in a tight ‘drama’ circle. They are going through the list of drama elements and I hear “Yes, not knowing when the wolf will turn will cause tension”. When I get to another group – there is not much happening. “We don’t understand”. “Did you want us to use the game to tell about the drama elements or show them”? “It’s up to you” I say... I spend some time helping this group as the other groups all seem to be productively busy. I leave this group and then sit quietly, watch and write my notes...
Candice seems to have placed herself in charge of the football group. The whole group is very involved but she is definitely directing. Certainly does show the dramatic elements powerfully. She has volunteered to be interviewed so I will see what she says in relation to this and other experiences...

Field-notes, week 8 semester 1 2009 (30/04/2009).

Within these examples, I have shown that I attempted in these classes to link theoretical perspectives of drama pedagogy explicitly to embodied knowledge, symbolic representation and ‘metaphoric worlds’ through my use of culturally specific oral art forms.

5.2.4 Group Performances

Some of the group performances, presented at the end of the drama course by the learner-teachers, included audience participation. One of the ways in which the learner-teachers chose to involve the audience was by inviting them to join in a participatory refrain such as the following examples:

Wombat stew, wombat stew

Icky sticky, licky, picky

Wombat stew...

From group-devised performance piece (29/10/2008).

Katie Sue, smells like poo

Got no daddy, she’s a fatty ...

From group-devised performance piece (14/05/2009).
5.3 REFLECTION AND INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIENCES

In this section of the chapter, I consider the second question that structures this chapter. I examine the themes and issues that emerged for me as a teacher-researcher in my use of oral art forms to support drama pedagogy. The data generated from the participants' reflections on their experiences within this study fell into two categories, namely, their general experiences of the drama course and their specific experiences of using oral art forms within the drama classes.

5.3.1 Experiences of the Drama Course

Learner-teachers’ statements regarding their experiences of drama and the drama course were categorised according to themes. Within this summary I have included a few examples of learner-teachers’ responses. A more comprehensive list of statements can be found in Appendix H (DRAMA COURSE EXPERIENCES: 333 - 334).

Student Learning about Drama

Learner-teachers stated that they had learned a great deal about a variety of approaches, methods and conventions. They emphasised the potential for integration of drama across the curriculum.

Ruth: I learnt a lot particularly using things like the ‘conscious alley’ [learners words] and hot-seating.

Jane: I think conventions are very important when planning a drama lesson or performance... I see lots of potential for freeze frames and the open door technique.

Interview 6  week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009)
**Phoebe:** Drama is more versatile than I would have thought ... [and] the possibilities for integration are endless.

Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008)

Learner-teachers were appreciative of the practical structure of the course and that they were provided with ideas and activities for the classroom. They made insightful comments concerning the drama process and the role of the teacher.

**Candice:** I liked the practical, activity-based way the course was structured

Interview 7 week 9 semester 2 2009 (14/05/2009).

**Phoebe:** It is about trying to get something out of the process. It is not just pretend, or imagine, but something you want to achieve out of this.

Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

**Ruth:** Breaking down into smaller components – allows people to build confidence.

Interview 6 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

**Perceived strengths and benefits of drama**

In their interviews learner-teachers articulated what they perceived to be strengths and benefits of drama. These included social and personal development, enjoyment and creativity, numerous learning opportunities and placing children in new places, roles and experiences. Social and personal development skills seen to be engendered by drama were such skills as self-confidence, expression, communication and empathy.

**Michelle:** A good way to engage ‘creative minds’.

Interview 5 week 9 semester 2 2008 (29/10/2008).
Candice: Learning happens through planning lessons from students’ interests and experiences. There are heaps of opportunities for reading and writing in role.
Interview 6 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

Tanya: I enjoyed the fact that students practice [drama] skills without obvious critiquing of skills.
Interview 4 week 7 semester 1 2008 (08/10/2008).

Embedded within many learner-teachers’ interview comments was an important function of process drama, that it provides the learners with different perspectives “…from which to approach the learning embodied in the drama” (Toye and Prendiville 2000: 63). This is exemplified by Alan’s more overt statement in this regard.

Alan: Children can put themselves in other people’s perspectives.
Interview 3 week 6 semester 2 2008 (05/09/2008).

Perceived weaknesses and challenges of drama

Learner-teachers believed a weakness to be the challenging, tricky and intimidating nature of drama and drama lesson planning. The data showed that a commonly held view was that that one ‘must be creative to plan’ (Tanya interview 4 week 7 2008). There is an interesting contradiction between this view and an assertion, regarding the role of the teacher, that, ‘you don’t necessarily have to be creative or a good person at drama’ (Phoebe interview 2 Week 6 2008). Other weakness and challenges related to the negative perceptions that people may have concerning drama; the data reflected the perception that drama may not be taken seriously.
Jasmine: Drama can be seen as just play and not learning.

Alan: Drama may be seen as a ‘bludge’.

Interview 3 week 6 semester 2 2008 (05/09/2008).

Candice: Drama is sometimes not respected.

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

The mistaken idea of drama being a “non-serious past-time” (Boyd 1995: 3) or “... as no more than ‘a bit of fun’” (Luff 2000: 8) is by no means new or unique to this study. The learner-teachers interviewed hastened to add that this was not their perception of drama but rather how it may be perceived. However, there were a few learner-teachers who, I believe, clung to this perception despite the examples they encountered of ‘serious’ learning within the drama course.

Another apparent contradiction in their views about drama within the curriculum lies within their statements relating to drama and shy students. On the one hand learner-teachers made such statements as: ‘Teachers can incorporate all students including shy students’ (Susan interview 5 week 9 2008); and ‘Can be good for shy children’ (Tanya interview 4 week 7 2008). On the other hand it was stated that ‘Shy students may not engage’ (Ruth interview 6 week 9 2009). The drama literature indicates that shy learners’ responses to drama activities may be dependent on the type of ‘acting behaviour’ (Bolton 1998) focused on. According to Toye and Prendiville, taking on a role within an ‘as-if’, fictional context “…provides distance” (2000: 64) and a safe, non-threatening environment which may increase the participation and confidence level of shy learners.

The views, expressed by the learner-teachers about drama and the drama course, serve at least two purposes. They provide me with an overall impression of the perceived learning which took place within my drama teaching where oral art forms were explored. They also gave a clear indication that my
investigation of the use of oral art forms did not detract from the overall purpose of the drama course.

5.3.2 Experiences of Engaging with Oral Art Forms

These reflections and interpretations of experiences are based, in part, on the responses of the learner-teachers who agreed to be interviewed. They are also based on my observations and reflections during the action research cycles. I was aware that, although the interview process attempted to elicit both positive and negative data, those who agreed to be interviewed were those for whom the course had been a positive experience.

Differing Attitudes

Learner-teachers’ attitudes towards play, acting and drama were linked to their openness to engage with and explore oral art forms. Within classes where there was a positive, enthusiastic ambience oral art forms were embraced and I was able to monitor their effectiveness within an environment relatively free of negative attitudes and disengagement from the activities. It seemed to me that maturity levels and personality played a major part in classroom attitudes I experienced in the four different groups. Those who were eager and willing to participate found ‘it really hard. We wanted to participate but it was difficult when people were not taking it seriously and not wanting to participate’ (Stephanie interview 7 week 9 2009). Attitudinal issues and levels of learner-teacher engagement in the classes are explored continuously within my field-note entries.

Today, workers were in and out of the drama studio - something about a gas leak. I was in the middle of a process drama and had taken care to build belief in our new society through the reading of a pre-text in the form of a letter, the establishing of roles, entry to the meeting by password only and the swearing of an oath of secrecy. The learner-teachers as ‘experts’ were sitting on chairs in a circle and I had just begun introducing
myself in role when the workers entered. Class C is amazing. I used the workers’ entry to make the meeting more secretive and confidential. “We don’t want these strangers to hear what we are saying. We don’t want the information to leave this room... I think they may be spies...Come closer”. To a person, the experts moved quickly off their chairs and formed a tight circle around me on the floor. It was magic, one of those drama moments when belief, commitment and tension are palpable...

I was still on a high when the Class D learner-teachers came into the studio. Perhaps today will be the day that they are all hooked into the drama process. Not to be. I see interest registering on the faces of some but there are Jaws-like undercurrents, in this room, lurking beneath the surface. Undercurrents of disinterest, lack of respect, immaturity. I try to avoid the inevitable duh-duh, duh-duh, dudududu dudududu.... Their attitudes and reactions were very different as we were once again disturbed by workers and I tried to use their presence. I read ... ‘is she mad?’ on some faces. Others see it as an opportunity to opt out of the drama, ignore me and engage in private conversations. I talk about respect. I ask questions to try and clear the murky waters and identify what might interest them. I am greeted by silence...

A postgraduate student, who observed the group D classes, commented that she preferred working with young children as I had to work too hard to get anything out of some of the learner-teachers. This is part of the challenge. While I can’t deny that I am nourished and uplifted by ‘magical’ drama processes, I learn so much more from ‘difficult’ participants. What is it that makes this group’s attitude so different to the other group?

Field-notes, week 5 semester 1 2009 (02/04/2009).

All learner-teachers I interviewed expressed positive attitudes towards the use of oral art forms to support drama pedagogy. However, my observations revealed that this was not so for all participants or all experiences. Positive comments included:
Candice: The repetitive refrains in chants were enjoyable.

Stephanie: I enjoyed the choral verse and praise poems and can see myself using them in my classroom one day.

Candice: I can see loads of learning potential [for oral art forms].

Interview 7 week 9 2009 (14/05/2009).

**Participation and Performance**

The variable levels of learner-teacher participation impacted on the effectiveness of the learning and teaching within the drama course and this impacted on my use of oral art forms. The examples of learner-teachers’ work that I have included within this chapter are those that display careful thought about translating academic texts into oral art forms; they show an understanding of the core of these texts and indicate that oral art forms can work to support drama pedagogy.

However, this work was devised by groups of learner-teachers who actively participated in the tasks and, in some cases, by one member of the group who led the response to the tasks, wrote the words and directed the way in which the rest of the group performed the oral art form. They are examples I have selected to highlight where groups of learners were successful in using oral art forms to support drama pedagogy.

I consistently reflected on ways to engage the disengaged learner-teachers. I used a wide array of strategies to try to ‘hook’ reluctant participants into the drama and the oral art form processes. From my observations in this study, and the data from my Master of Education study (Carter 2006), I am firmly convinced that willingness or a desire to play, take risks, make a fool of oneself, a sense of imagination and openness to change are personality traits that draw people to drama as well as, within this study, to oral art forms.
Introversion or extroversion, being quiet or noisy, shy or bold, flamboyant or restrained, do not appear to impact on whether people are drawn to participating in drama education or not. As Woolland (1993: 13) asserts, “Many of the best drama teachers I have worked with are quietly spoken and would never want to take on an acting role in a theatrical production”. However, introversion and shyness do appear to have an impact on the performance of oral art forms, as evidenced by learner-teachers’ comments in the discussion below.

Oral art forms, particularly traditional forms, frequently rely on performative elements, “living as it does in the performance” (Opland 1992: 17). Though they employ elements of improvisation and spontaneity they require more overt acting or components of exhibition and display for an external audience than can be the case with process drama. I found that such forms as participatory storytelling and praise poetry were, on occasion, problematic in these class groups for ‘shy students who don’t want to act’ (Candice interview 7 week 9 2009). Alternatively, as one learner-teacher stated, ‘Bring it on... I am a poser. I loved performing our praise poem...’ (Anne interview 6 week 9 2009). Those learner-teachers who were keen to perform felt that it was ‘not easy getting some of our group to act. They didn’t want to be ‘on show’ (Stephanie interview 7 week 9 2009).

As Nixon (1982: 16) states, Slade’s work “established the dichotomy between theatre and educational drama”; this resulted for many years in unproductive and divisive debates. I have discussed the inaccuracy of the dichotomy between drama for learning and drama for theatre production in the introduction to this study (Chapter 1). Drama should be used and “developed in all its facets and forms” (Baldwin 2004: 17). Woolland (1993: 17) points out “the sheer wealth of material” that is wasted when forms of drama are seen as totally distinct and separate. Nevertheless, I found that the nature of the acting and performance component within a tertiary drama course for primary education learner-teachers needs to be sensitively and carefully handled.
There are varied opinions about the need for teachers to have acting skills to engage in drama with their classes. Hendy and Toon (2001: 2) believe that there is a mistaken assumption that classroom drama usage requires, “strong personal acting skills”. This supports Woolland’s (1993: 13) assertion that many classroom drama practitioners would not wish to take on an acting role in a theatrical performance. Woolland’s sentiments mirror my own personal experience. I believe I have made extremely effective use of drama pedagogy in my teaching practice and yet I am an introvert who is definitely not a theatre actor.

However, Ackroyd-Pilkington (2001: 21) argues convincingly that acting and role-playing are closely aligned and that a classroom drama practitioner does need to be able to act. In arguing this she recognises that in promoting the position that teacher-in-role requires acting skills “we may have some difficulty in persuading non-specialists to take on roles”. In overcoming this difficulty, she suggests that, “…we draw more analogies with the concept of the social actor, rather than the aesthetic actor”. She believes that this eases the fear of acting and can “aid teacher’s first steps” in role-taking.

**The Deep End of Performance**

*In my retrospective reflection and analysis I have come to this realisation. Through my focusing on oral art forms, the learner-teachers were thrown into the deep end of performance which some ‘loved’. Others wanted to take small steps and get used to the water, hide in the shallow end, or get out of the swimming pool completely...*

Meta-journal (18/05/2009).

My need to access oral art forms for the purposes of this research meant that I did not introduce the learner-teachers more gradually into the performative aspects of drama. Consequently in some classes, the drama process lost its non-threatening environment and ‘no-penalty zone’ because of the way in which
I used oral art forms. In these cases my introduction of oral art forms had the opposite effect than that of supporting educational drama pedagogy.

**A Threatening Environment**

As someone who is shy and was attracted to drama because it was a medium through which I could find my voice, the negative reaction of some learner-teachers to the performance of their praise poem and participatory story was intensely disappointing to me. I have always been struck by the power of the drama process to engage shy learners. Yet, despite my attempts to set the space and conditions to create a non-threatening environment, it was patently clear that some of the shyer learner-teachers were intimidated by the prospect of having to perform their chants and stories even though I deliberately did not use the term performance at any stage.

Meta-journal based on reflection on field-note observations (20/04/2009).

As a drama teacher I believe that in order to support drama pedagogy, particularly with those learner-teachers who enter the drama classroom with reticence and reluctance, what is required is to focus initially and strongly on process and ‘child drama’ aspects. That is where there is no external audience (O’Toole 1992) or “artificial differentiation between actor and audience… Everyone participates, everyone is creating” (Slade 1965: 57).

A ‘performative pedagogy’ (Nicholson 2005: 38) is crucial within a course designed for the teaching of drama in the classroom to create a balance between the pedagogical skills of process and product. However, the data showed that because of the strongly performative nature of the oral art forms that I introduced in the early stages of the drama course, some learner-teachers were rushed into performance before they were ready, before such aspects as trust and safety were established and before they had a sufficient grounding in drama based on non-threatening experiences and explorations.
This was the case even when in cycle 3 2009 I responded to the problem I had encountered in cycle 1 2008 with the sequence of planned activities. In 2009 I began the practical exploration of oral art forms in the fourth week of the course as opposed to the first week in 2008. So certainly within a relatively short drama course (nine week experience) and with learner-teachers who need to be slowly enticed into drama, I think my requirement for them to perform oral art forms, in some cases was detrimental to their positive attitudes towards drama pedagogy.

Learner-teachers’ reluctance to perform was not about feeling that they needed to act well in order to participate in the oral art forms. Rather it was about not ‘wanting to act’ and get up in front of their class mates and ‘be on show’ (interview 7 week 9 2009). I had designed a diagram as a way to understand different ‘acting behaviours’ (Bolton 1998) and the relationship between process and product in drama education. This can be found in Chapter 1 on page 14. While I believe this diagram still to be accurate, appropriate and reflective of the notion that there is no one “correct pedagogical model” in drama education (Gallagher 2003; Bolton 2007: 45), the following journal reflection was based on a critical reflection and reinterpretation of my diagram as a result of this action research.

**Ice in Coca-cola**

As I reflected on the drama sessions, I thought about the way some learner-teachers enjoyed and looked forward to the performance components of the process while, for others this was the ‘dreaded’ part. This may be a strange analogy but the relationship between drama process and product makes me think of my attitude towards putting ice in coca-cola. As a coke ‘puritan’ I hate the idea of ‘watering down’ such an enjoyable drink with ice. For my brother, drinking coca-cola without ice is unthinkable as he believes this enhances the flavour. I agree when it comes to other drinks, such as cordial, which MUST have ice. Rather than thinking of the emphasis on product and process being divided – as is suggested by my diagram – I think process is the coca-cola (or a drink of choice) and products (in the form of performances or presentations).
are the ice cubes. So ice-cubes (product) may enhance or detract, depending on individual taste or choice, the context in which they are being used (in my case coca-cola or cordial) and the purpose (if I am really, really thirsty and I drink coca-cola very, very fast then ice is fine).

Meta-journal (29/05/2009).

Although all methodological approaches to research entail some form of reflection, action research uses reflection as an “agent of change” in its cyclical process through continual re-appraising, critiquing and restructuring of experiences (Burnard 2009). My reflections and experiences throughout the action research cycles led me to re-appraise my diagram in the way described above using the coca-cola and ice analogy.

Essentially, I believe, for some people drama performance or presentation can enhance, complement or complete drama processes while for others it can detract from the potential benefits of being involved in a drama process. The enhancing, or detracting nature of drama performance is also context dependent. For example, attitudes towards presentation and performance may differ in working within the context of learner-teacher education or theatre practitioner education. My belief is supported by the varying performance experiences and inclinations of learner-teachers within this study.

**Familiarity and Comfort**

As mentioned above, learner-teachers’ performance of certain oral art forms was constrained by their shyness and reluctance to participate. However, when it came to the performance of football chants and engagement with children’s rhymes and games there were no such constraints. I found that the more familiar the oral art form, the more the form was perceived to be shared by other members of the class, the more structured and ‘rule bound’ it was, the more comfortable and less constrained was their use of it. Familiarity of the oral art
form provided interest, engagement and motivation. As O'Toole (2009: 9) states “You rarely have to work hard to motivate students to do what they are already interested in”.

What a difference. I felt like everyone in the class was engaged today. No undercurrents that I could feel, we all played and had fun! A member of the class thought she would have an easy target when she picked me to chase her during a game of ‘Duck, Duck, Goose’. “She’s fast!” was her surprised exclamation when I caught up with her. I have to say, I nearly killed myself in the process. A class characterised by laughter, relaxation, motivation and interest. Not usually witnessed with this class. I am ecstatic!! What makes this difference? I believe it is because the learner-teachers were highly comfortable and familiar with the forms used...

Field-notes, week 8 semester 2 2008 (15/10/2008).

My beliefs were confirmed by statements made by learner-teachers in relation to games and football chants. The reasons learner-teachers gave for their choice of oral art forms were largely based on familiarity and comfort.

**Jenny** ...when we could relate to them and they were part of our personal experiences.

**Ryan:** I definitely didn’t think I would be supporting my footy team in class... It’s what I know about.

Interview 1 week 5 semester 2 2008 (29/08/2008).

**Tanya:** I didn’t feel intimidated when we performed the footy chants or the praise poems in our new society.

Interview 4 semester 2 2008 (08/10/2008).

**Susan:** A big oral art form in Australia is footy songs, most Australians follow AFL football, so it is a huge part of the culture to support your team, sing the song and
chant for them. They are well-known.
Interview 5 semester 2 2008 (29/10/2008).

**Ruth:** I liked playing the games that I played as a child and using footy chants.

**Jane:** Games are easier to play because they have rules.
Interview 6 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

**Stephanie:** Most people in the class would know them [games used] and be able to understand them.

**Candice:** They worked because we are familiar with them.
Interview 7 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

A further factor influencing participation was the importance attached to the setting up of the drama space. For example, ‘it felt like we were at a footy match’ (Ryan interview 1 semester 2 2008). One learner-teacher’s observation of the space used for drama, and my reflection on the physical environment, is particularly interesting although other learner-teachers did not feel the same way.

A learner-teacher, in conversation, told me that she doesn’t like the room. That it makes her feel uncomfortable and inhibited. She says it is the ‘blackness’ of the room contrasted with the lights. It feels like ‘we are on show’. Even though I have taught in many contexts and settings, I am struck by the fact that, prior to my teaching experience in Melbourne, none of my teaching has taken place in a room that is specifically a ‘drama room’. I have been a student in rooms like this but seldom, if ever, as a teacher. I suppose it is because I have predominantly chosen to teach in so-called ‘disadvantaged’ environments or where I have been the one to initiate any drama activities. For me, it feels good to be in a ‘drama room’ and the rostrum blocks are useful. I will need to take careful note of reactions to the room....

Meta-journal reflection on field-notes (04/05/2009).
**Learning Potential and Styles**

A common thread running through nearly all the interviews conducted within the 3 research cycles, was the assertion, expressed in different ways, that oral art forms could contribute to learning in two distinct ways: to aid the learner-teachers’ understanding of drama and to provide them with potential activities for classroom use.

When asked specifically about whether they felt oral art forms supported their understanding of drama, learner-teachers’ responses varied from ‘most definitely’ (interview 1 to 4 2008 and interview 6 2009), ‘to a degree’ (interview 5 2008) to ‘Not really. For me oral art forms were just another way of expressing mood, scenes or information. I enjoyed it but I don’t think it made me understand drama any better’ (interview 7 2009).

Something that struck me strongly, when working within an Australian context for the first time, was the different ways individuals made meaning within different sites of learning. I do not support the “dualistic position” that the body and the mind are “distinct entities” (Jarvis 2010: 7) and believe in learning through the whole being. However, from my experiences within different countries and educational environments I believe that while we learn through all our senses and collectively use our minds and bodies to make sense of the world, there are education environments, cultural contexts and individual learning styles that may result in more strongly cognitive or more strongly physical learning. I reflected on what I see to be opposite features in this regard between my experience of Australian and South African learner-teachers.

**Minds and Bodies**

*In so many ways, working with learner-teachers in Australia is so similar to in South Africa. People are people and most of the time it has the exact same feel. But there is one big difference that I seem to see continuously.*
The Australian learner-teachers are highly creative and unbelievably innovative. This is the joy of working with them. I have found this to be the case with all the classes – even those who are less enthusiastic. They are extremely adept at verbally conveying their thoughts and ideas. The problem is it is all in the head, or the mind. They can discuss endlessly, but getting them up and doing is a very different story. Many of them remain glued to their chairs for as long as possible and it is so difficult getting them up. I have to virtually force some of them at times. It is the exact opposite of some of my experiences within a South African context. It is easy to get the learner-teachers up and doing and working with their bodies but they don’t always use their heads. They don’t always want to discuss, or plan, or think – they just want to ‘get on with it’.

Meta-journal (11/05/2009).

My observations do not apply to all the learner-teachers I have taught within Australian and South African contexts. They affirm the findings of various authors I have encountered during my research. Some authors believe that, while they are partly an individual phenomenon, cultural backgrounds have an impact on learning styles (De Vita 2001; Yamazaki and Kaves, 2004; Akella 2009; Manikutty 2009). Cultural experiences and backgrounds shape the manner in which people “perceive phenomena and interpret them” (Manikutty 2009). My experience may also be linked to Sawadogo’s (1995) belief in a western emphasis on cognitive processes.

I have argued in Chapter 3 that an essentialist view of culture can be debilitating and there is the distinct possibility of exaggerating cultural differences in terms of learning styles within an essentialist framework. However, in my view cultural hybridity and choice, as well as common human values and globalisation, does not preclude the influences of cultural background. The complex, human interpreted phenomenon of culture, however it is experienced and perceived, can still be seen to have an impact on students’ learning styles.

Another aspect of learning that was raised in my interview conversations with learner-teachers was whether or not drama and oral art forms would ‘suit the
learning style of all students’ (Anne interview 6 2009). I found it interesting that learner-teachers linked both drama and oral art forms together and believed that their use would be suitable for learners with the same learning style. This is of particular interest to me in the light of my own observations, below.

**Experiences of Drama**

On the first day of each of the sessions I took careful note of those learner-teachers who indicated prior experiences of drama and found that, generally those were the students who responded favourably to oral art forms.

Meta-journal (11/05/2009).

One learner-teacher stated that learning through drama and oral art forms is ‘good for those who do not fit into the conventional mould of learning’ (Candice interview 7 2009). This statement, in my view, feeds into a ‘deficit’ model of drama and resonates with O’Toole’s statement of one of the roles of the arts in schools. “The arts are often most valued in working with the least ‘academic’ students, because they give those students the opportunity both to express themselves and achieve in ‘other’ ways” (2009: 9). The learner-teachers’ views on learning styles resulted in the following ‘retrospective’ reflection.

**Not for All**

From my perspective and experience all young learners can, should and do benefit from learning in and through drama. Sure, there are those learners and classes who may have been labelled as ‘troublesome’, ‘non academic’ etc who are drawn into drama in a way that is surprising to the ‘labellers.’ In an ideal world, learners at school level should be exposed to as wide a variety of learning styles as possible. However, when it comes to learners at tertiary level, as one of my temporary supervisors put it, I ‘need, perhaps, to lose my advocacy for a while’. Well, I’ve tried very hard to do so and have
come to a conclusion, based on experiences within this research, that the use of oral art forms to support drama pedagogy is not useful for all adult learners and, in this case, learner-teachers.

Evidence of this is provided in the very different ways learner-teachers have responded to oral art forms in the various classes. Aside from other issues such as maturity levels, power dynamics and personality, I believe that this is the case because learner-teachers are at an age where they have embraced particular and preferred learning styles as opposed to younger learners whose ways of learning may be more flexible. Besides personal preference which plays a role, it seems to me that their prior experiences of learning and their induction into ways of learning will be instrumental in the learning styles that are valued in adulthood.

Meta-journal (24/04/2009).

I understood that, if this research was to be effective and robust, I needed to leave my potential for advocacy behind, despite the value I placed on the use of oral art forms when I designed the study. I needed to be prepared for unexpected and disappointing data and unwanted findings that would be in direct contrast to what I had previously assumed, or would have liked to prove, when I began this study. My emerging understanding, as recorded in this reflection, that oral art forms may not be an effective means of supporting drama pedagogy for all adult learners constituted such a finding.

This emerging view was based on some of the data discussed above and included: the varied responses of learner-teachers when questioned about whether oral art forms supported their understanding of drama pedagogy; the linking of oral art forms and drama pedagogy to particular learning styles; and the more positive responses to the value of oral art forms from Classes B and D and more negative responses from Classes A and C.

Literature I consulted (for example Jarvis 2010; Goldfinch & Hughes 2007; Milheim 2005; Kolb 1984) supported the view that adults may have preferences
for particular learning styles although there is some debate in the field of education concerning learning styles' importance, relevance and link to educational outcomes (Stellwagen 2001). In the interviews conducted in cycle 3 2009, I sought further data to confirm, or refute, my tentative findings linking oral art forms and drama pedagogy to adult learning styles.

I asked questions relating to the learner-teachers’ preferred learning styles, how they felt people came to particular choices about learning styles and why they felt oral art forms would or would not be suitable for all adults. Within the two interviews conducted in semester 1 2009 there was much overlap and repetition of ideas amongst the five learner-teachers interviewed. I have constructed a composite summary of these interviews which I wrote during the process of interpreting and analysing the raw data for this research.

We each have our own learning styles which we have found works for us. I, for instance, am a very visual learner. I use mind-maps and drawings a lot to make sense of what I am learning. For me, visually seeing drama ideas from the class reader being performed definitely helped me to understand these ideas. This was not the case for everyone in our class. Active learning is important for children. That is why I think drama and using oral art forms will be great. We need to use a variety of approaches in our teaching and so it was good to learn how to use oral art forms. As adults some of us are still active learners and enjoy getting directly involved in our learning. When lecturers just talk I can’t focus at all and end up learning nothing.

Others would prefer to sit on the sidelines and observe. We prefer a more indirect approach where we don’t have to be so actively involved. I’m not saying that we need to sit and listen to lectures. Especially as teaching students we need heaps of practical activities and ideas. We should consider different learning styles and maybe have some more ‘lecturer talk’ and demonstration using some class members while others observe. For those students who learn better that way. Or at least get those of us who like to participate to demonstrate the activities while others observe. I don’t know how people learn, it’s complicated.
All I know is that when I was studying for my VCE year 12 exam I tried to use rhymes and words [mnemonics] which would give me clues because other people said it helped them. Oh my word... it didn’t help me at all. I remembered the rhymes and the words and phrases but not what they stood for.

Interview 6 and 7 semester 1 2009 (composed on 03/08/2009).

The learner-teachers’ responses focused on individual learning styles, as opposed to cultural, social, situational, collective or institutional learning styles. The interview data showed that the learner-teachers believed that they each had their own particular learning styles and that there was a distinct split between those in the classes who wished to be actively involved in the learning process and those who did not. Theories of adult learning, influenced by Kolb’s experiential learning model (1976; 1984) predominantly focus on learning through “primary experience” or direct, concrete, immediate experience (Jarvis 1995: 77 - 80).

Learner-teachers’ assertions that some learners prefer a more indirect and less hands-on style of learning, I believe, supports the position argued by Jarvis (1995: 77 - 80) for the use of more “secondary experience”. These secondary experiences would generally involve linguistic communication as opposed to active exploration through non-linguistic forms of communication as frequently required within the drama courses described in this study.

The learner-teachers’ comments and considerations of different learning styles within a tertiary environment is important. The data in this study points to the value of exposing younger learners to different learning styles and catering for the pre-existing learning preferences of adult learners.

I believe that Kolb and Fry’s (1975) categorisation of learning styles are limited and that their focus on an experiential model may exclude learning styles that are suitable for particular learners and contexts. However, from the learner-teachers’ comments there were participants within this research who can be
seen as inclined towards ‘accommodator’ (concrete experience and active experimentation), ‘assimilator’ (abstract conceptualization and reflective observation), ‘converger’ (abstract conceptualization and active experimentation) or ‘diverger’ (concrete experience + reflective observation orientated learning styles (Kolb and Fry 1975; Kolb 1984; Tenant 1997).

What the learner-teachers’ data highlighted for me within this research was that perhaps the use of oral art forms had resulted in an unproductive over-emphasis on active participation which is an approach that I do tend to privilege within my learning and teaching. There is considerable support for active engagement in learning processes (including Hatfield 1995; Stein 1998; Galbraith 2004). However, this study has led me to review my unquestioning and uncritical belief in the importance of active learning.

Literature and the learner-teachers’ responses also highlight the potential danger of adult-leaners being locked into one dimensional learning styles (Tenant 1997) or there being an imbalance within adult learning processes (Goldfinch and Hughes 2007; Honey and Mumford 1992). Goldfinch and Hughes (2007: 261) assert that university students’ preferences for a particular stage of “the adult learning cycle” tend to distort the learning process. The four stages identified within the adult learning cycle referred to are, ‘activist’, ‘theorist’, ‘reflector’ and ‘pragmatist’ (Honey and Mumford 1992). Since learner-teachers may learn in different ways multiple methods of learning and teaching are required (Biggs 1987; Smith 2002).

**Role of Facilitator**

The role of the facilitator is crucial in engaging with oral art forms, as is the case wherever teaching and learning takes place. It is possible to get learners to share unique examples of stories and oral art forms. However, I believe, the facilitator needs to be able to guide this process by having some sense and knowledge of the potential cultural resources and forms within the classroom. This is based on my reflections during the research process as exemplified by the following extract.
The Fog Lifted

Though I am sure that the fog of confusion will return, for a brief moment, today it lifted. I think I understand one small dimension of accessing oral art forms and it’s not about begging and cajoling which is what I have been guilty of doing. Last night, a fellow postgraduate student from Taiwan told me a story and talked about Tai-Chinese dancing. I mentioned the story and about the dancing to the learner-teachers. Although this did not ‘open a floodgate’ of storying. It did make a difference. Asian students in the class began to tell stories...it was like suddenly they had permission. I realised that a reason for students focusing on footy matches and children’s games is partially because, I, as the facilitator, had a sense that these forms existed... It is almost near the end of my research and I wish I had known, what know seems so clear to me, earlier...

Field-notes and Meta-journal (23/04/2009).

Where the use of oral art forms was most successful was when I as a teacher knew something, however tenuous and tentative about the oral art forms. The introduction of South African oral art forms worked well because of my knowledge of these forms. However, simply knowing about the existence of forms and not necessarily knowing a great deal about them, as described from my field-notes and meta-journal above also contributed to the learner-teachers sharing culturally specific stories and oral art forms. Shulman (1986) emphasises the importance of different kinds of knowledge including ‘subject, content, pedagogical and curricula knowledge’ and the need for there to be a balance between process and content knowledge.

What I am proposing here, based on my study is that there is still room for learner-teachers to share their culturally specific oral art forms and to teach the facilitator about forms that s/he may know very little. However this needs to take place within a framework of knowledge of the potential cultural resources and forms within his/her classroom as well as his/her own distinct and rich content knowledge about oral art forms that s/he can share with the learner.
Providing room for knowledge that may be specific to learners is not akin to the view that facilitation is about getting all the answers from the learners and not needing to know any content oneself; this erroneous view purports to be based on a constructivist paradigm. Richardson (2003: 1631) states that recent research has emphasised the “importance of deep and strong subject matter knowledge within a constructivist classroom.” With particular reference to an investigation involving drama ‘trainees’ and drama teachers, Kempe (2007: 420) asserts that “subject knowledge and pedagogy” are given priority over other factors including practice, policy, support systems and materials.

**Multi-modal Construction of Meaning**

Multi-modal communication (Jewitt and Kress 2003) was a strong feature of my use of oral art forms in this study. Multi-modal semiotic communication refers to the constructing of meaning from a combination of different modes of sign making (Kress 2001; 2003). I found that the interpretation and re-interpretation of texts from the class reader within verbal and visual modes of expression, using oral art forms, did contribute to a greater understanding of drama pedagogy.

I set up the activity so that the learner-teachers would construct meaning from reading the extract from the written text of the class reader and convey their understanding through the oral and visual modes of the art form selected. What I did not anticipate was that, rather than going from reading the text, straight into a oral and visual interpretation, they first engaged in writing and wrote themselves a ‘script’ which was the chant, praise poem etc. I observed that this led to a critical consideration of the various texts which aided their conceptual understanding – a distinct strength. The gestures, physical movements, use of various voices and ‘blocking’ of their pieces were carefully worked out from their ‘scripts’ and enhanced the aesthetic dimensions of the forms. This generally added to a deeper understanding of the ‘actors’ and their class ‘audiences’.
From this scripted use of the oral art form, I noticed that the spontaneous and improvisatory aspects of the form were ‘lost’. For some in the class the performance was less scary as they had a script to ‘hook’ onto. For others it was scarier as they viewed the performance as more formal. I had originally wanted to link oral art forms to writing in some way. Here the learner-teachers automatically wrote down their contributions and so, did the linking automatically. I need to think of ways of incorporating this kind of writing into their weekly tasks as learner-teachers felt that what worked was that extracts from the class reader were linked to class activities, which they don’t always feel is the case. One learner-teacher raised the issue that for her at times the weekly tasks, done for homework, needed to be more connected to the workshop activities in class.

Field-notes, week 4 semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009) and Meta-journal (27/03 2009).

What I allude to, in the extract above, concerns processes of ‘transduction’ and ‘social semiotics’. ‘Transduction’ refers to how knowledge is “reconfigured when ‘it’ is moved from one mode to another” (Jewitt and Kress 2003: 11). In this study this process moves between written texts and oral forms and physical images. A semiotic field employs different modalities (for example oral or written language, images, symbols and artefacts) to communicate messages (Gee 2004).

In this way the learner-teachers ‘reconfigured’ knowledge from class reader texts. These texts became more alive, interesting, colloquial and focused on the main ideas as they were transposed from reading, to writing, to speaking and listening. Dramatic performances involving visual, embodied and kinaesthetic interpretations affirmed and supported the oral text. “[W]hen something can be ‘said’ both visually and verbally the way in which it will be said is different” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 2).

Within new modes of communicating (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), traditionally privileged ways of communicating, for example reading and writing,
are only two of many modes in increasingly multi-modal approaches to reading that include audio, video and computer images. In my view embodied knowledge, or what one learner-teacher called it ‘body learning’ is an area that has not been sufficiently explored within the domains of multi-modal learning and visual literacy.

Meaning-making, including fusing meaning and forms and contextualising of signs and codes was an aspect of various class activities (described in section 5.2 of this study). Although they were specifically referring to semantics, Halliday and Hasan (1989: 10) assert that texts have a “network of meaning potential”. I believe that physically exploring texts expands and enriches this meaning network.

Embodied knowledge was a strong feature within the presentation of oral art forms and, particularly, embodied knowledge that was linked to academic texts that needed to be framed within understandable ways for learner-teachers. As Tindall-Ford, Chandler and Sweller (1997: 285) point out, the auditory and visual integration of material is particularly important when the information is “intellectually challenging” such as in the case of academic texts.

I believed that the use of oral art forms would promote an aesthetic response to texts alongside an analytical response and that this would elicit an understanding of critical themes, principles, concepts and content within drama pedagogy. I felt that it was this aesthetic response that would assist in strengthening the learner-teachers’ commitment to and understanding of drama pedagogy. However, while oral art forms did indeed promote aesthetic responses, it was largely the physical embodiment of knowledge that most effectively supported the learner-teachers’ understanding of drama pedagogy, despite some of the challenges of getting the learner-teachers to use their bodies.

The role of visual images in concept formation has been documented (for example Zeki 1999; Efland 2002), though these visual images usually refer to art works and not necessarily to body images as a drama convention in drama
contexts; yet it is body images that I have linked to concept formation within this research. I am not suggesting that this is a new or novel idea as in drama education meaning making is embedded in action and involves the body in knowledge processes (Osmond 2007). Rather, that I believe this study supports the use of embodied knowledge in concept formation. I suggest that this is an area that could be further explored and developed within the understanding of pedagogy and content knowledge in teacher education. Franks (1996) and Osmond (2007) support the need for further research. They believe there is a lack of research and work in this area since “the body is assumed to be a given presence” within drama education (Franks 1996: 111).

Data from learner-teachers reveals the nature of learning through oral art forms that occurred for some participants and reinforces the point of learning in different ways including through the body.

**Phoebe:** It made me think about information in a different way.
Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

**Michelle:** Oral art forms encourage body learning.
Interview 5 week 9 semester 2 2008 (29/10/2008).

**Candice** I learned heaps from writing and performing our scripts. It’s something I will definitely do with children ... it involves all kinds of communication... and multiliteracies.

**Stephanie:** We focused on intelligences that do not receive a lot of attention within other learning areas.

**Candice:** [Oral art forms] use and promotes different literacies and intelligences.
Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009.

The other learner-teachers interviewed all linked oral art forms explicitly or implicitly to ‘multiliteracies’ (New London Group 2000) and different intelligences. This was based on their experiences and was also, I believe,
influenced by an emphasis on literacies and multiple intelligences within the drama education literature and the nine week drama course. As Baldwin states, drama “enables and relies on the interaction of multiple intelligences” (2004: 242). It is also an effective medium for teaching multiliteracies (Baldwin and Fleming 2003; Martello 2004).

In the drama classes in this study the preparation for, and performance of, oral art forms resulted in the learner-teachers using different language modes as well as other forms of literacy including visual, cultural and bodily-kinaesthetic literacy. I considered this to be a benefit of using oral art forms and it certainly has potential for classroom use with extension into technology and ‘new’ media.

The ‘script-writing’ I facilitated added a writing dimension to the modes of language used. However, the learner-teachers had contrasting views about their use of scripts for the performance of the oral art forms. Examples of these contrasting opinions are included below.

\[\textit{Jane: I think if we had improvised it wouldn’t have been so bad.}\]
\[\textit{Ruth: No...Writing a script helped me. I needed to have something planned.}\]

From interview 6 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009)

The written work which was then translated into performance fits the category of what Prendergast (2010) and others term performative writing. Although the learner-teachers had contrasting views about the role that their writing played, from my observations and perspective, I believe that the writing of oral art forms increased the “affective investment” of the learner-teachers who by committing their poems to paper had a greater “stake in the outcome” of the performance (Pollock 1998: 96).
Conventions and Contexts

Learning through and about oral art forms was framed in two ways in this study; as drama strategies or “...conventions as the basic building blocks of drama”(Carey 1995) that could be used by the learner-teachers in their future classrooms; and as alternative modes for analysing, summarising and understanding information from the required readings for the drama course.

I discovered that where oral art forms fitted most comfortably were when they were used as a drama convention within a process drama context or where the learner-teachers became familiar with particular oral art forms within a drama process and then used them outside the drama to link them to academic texts. Morgan and Saxton (1989) state that expression, in the form of performance, for an external audience is ‘fuelled’ by exploring meaning through drama processes. In terms of this research, I believe the drama context provided the ‘fuel’ for the exploration of meaning through which the more reluctant learner-teachers could then be involved in performances of oral art forms.

Framing the learning within safe, non-threatening fictional contexts enabled learner-teachers to participate more freely in sharing oral art forms familiar to them and exploring oral art forms unfamiliar to them. Sharing familiar forms took place within such contexts as a children’s playground and a football match while unfamiliar oral art forms were explored in such contexts as a new society, or contexts decided on by the various classes, in roles as ‘tribes people’.

What was problematic was when I used oral art forms with academic texts within drama frames. My experience of linking oral art forms, academic texts and fictional worlds was that it led to pursuing artificial, unrealistic and contrived contexts that detracted from rather than supported drama pedagogy. Instead I needed to find further ways of introducing oral art forms as conventions within the drama process.
Ruth: When we worked in a drama like the playground and the new society it was easier to create our chants. It made sense to us and we enjoyed it.
From interview 6 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/07/2007)

The oral art forms themselves spoke to and supported drama pedagogy in a number of ways. In addition to the learner-teachers’ representations of drama elements through oral art forms, I was able to demonstrate the drama elements within oral art forms. For example: I could model the creation of tension and suspense through the iintsomi; the use of symbolic gestures, language and movement within the inbongi; and emotional engagement using football chants. The ceremonies and ritualistic moments within oral art forms and drama contexts help build belief and promote emotional engagement. They also “encourage individuals’ sense of belonging” as they participate in the communal activities (Dissanayake 2007: 792).

In addition to reflecting contemporary social and cultural issues, arts education (including drama education) may be seen to be “an archival repository of cultural values” (Risner and Constantino 2007: 941). Oral art forms supported drama pedagogy by providing direct examples of traditional and contemporary cultural contexts, values and conventions.

As Schonmann (2001) points out ‘wrongly’ exploring issues in drama could have potentially negative results. Drama practitioners need to evaluate educational situations and make careful choices concerning such aspects as pretexts, form and conventions (Bolton 2007). This also applies to oral art forms where values, beliefs and world views are transmitted. For this reason, I carefully selected the South African oral art forms that I used as examples within this study.
5.5 DiscusSion

In this final discussion I draw particular attention to what my discoveries and reflections mean in terms of the central question of this thesis. I found that it is possible to engage with oral art forms within a tertiary environment and they can be effective in supporting drama pedagogy. However, there are potential negative aspects of using oral art forms. I discovered particular ways in which my use of oral art forms was more or less successful within the nine week drama courses.

Differing attitudes and learning styles of the learner-teachers impacted on my level of success in providing them with access to oral art forms and using them to support drama pedagogy. For some learner-teachers their participation in oral art forms was viewed as a positive experience that assisted them in their understanding of drama pedagogy. However, I observed that this was not the case for all participants. In some cases, the highly performative nature of these forms and my use of inauthentic drama frames to link them to academic texts was problematic and did not support the drama pedagogy at all.

With some learner-teachers oral art forms did indeed support the drama pedagogy. In these instances there was active participation and engagement, enjoyment of performance, familiarity and comfort with oral art forms well known to the participants and I was able to guide the process through my knowledge of various forms.

Benefits of using oral art forms within the drama course were evident from the chants and poems produced by the learner-teachers and from the multi-modal communication and linking of various literacies that took place through the use of oral art forms. Learner-teachers viewed these and other practical applications of oral art forms for their future classroom practice to be useful.

So, how can oral art forms be used to support drama pedagogy? Overall I found the most effective way to engage with oral art forms to support drama
pedagogy was where the forms were used as drama conventions, or where the learner-teachers became familiar with particular oral art forms within drama contexts and then linked these forms to their meaning-making of academic texts.

5.6 SUMMARY

The focus of this chapter is on how oral art forms were shared and used within the drama course and what issues and themes emerged in the learner-teachers’ levels of engagement with these oral art forms. I initially describe learner-teachers’ experiences of oral art forms in relation to: presenting ideas from academic texts within oral art forms (from page to stage); linking prescribed texts and oral arts forms (inside and outside drama frames); the physical embodiment of knowledge; and their use of oral refrains within group performances.

I then reflect on themes that emerged within the nine week drama course, namely the learner-teachers’ experiences of the drama course and oral art forms and my use of oral art forms within the drama pedagogy. The themes I identified relating to experiences of oral art forms were: differing attitudes; participation and performance; familiarity and comfort; learning potential and styles; the role of the facilitator; multi-modal construction of meaning; and conventions and contexts.

In the next chapter, Chapter six I discuss the relationship between oral art forms and intercultural encounters.
CHAPTER SIX
THE INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS
STORY THEME

We learn through exchange with others... I negotiate [my identity] through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal with others. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others...

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study I explore two separate but complementary focuses in relation to the use of oral art forms. The focus of the previous chapter was on supporting drama pedagogy. In this chapter, Chapter 6, I have focused specifically on the potential of oral art forms to support intercultural communication and understanding.

I have structured this chapter around three sub-questions through which I seek to answer the central question of this chapter. Can oral art forms be used to support intercultural understanding and communication within the teaching of a nine week drama course?

These three sub-questions are;

- How were stories used within the intercultural encounters of the tertiary classes and what was their contribution to intercultural communication and understanding (6.2)?
- What impact did South African oral art forms and the exploration of ‘multi-layered’ storytelling have on learner-teachers’ intercultural communication and understanding (6.3)?
What issues emerged for me as teacher-researcher that contributed to the levels of effectiveness of intercultural encounters within a nine week drama course (6.4)?

6.2 STORIES USED WITHIN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

In this section (6.2) I seek to answer the first of the three sub-questions. I examine how the learner-teachers and I used stories within intercultural encounters. I also analyse how these stories contributed to intercultural communication and understanding.

Throughout their book, ‘Narrative and the practice of adult education’, Rossiter and Clark (2007) outline the benefits and importance of a narrative way of knowing and meaning-making for adult learners. In a number of drama teacher education programmes learner-teachers have been encouraged to tell their personal stories (Butler-Kisber, Li, Clandinin and Markus 2007). In particular Rossiter and Clark believe that narrative provides a “connected, relational and constructivist orientation for knowledge” and “…offers a framework for understanding the dynamic and complex interdependence of cultural, familial and individual meaning systems” (2007: 16 and 27). According to Neuhauser (1993: 199) information in story format is rendered more memorable and more believable than if it is presented in other ways as it “stirs the mental juices on both sides of the brain”. The narrative is seen by Bruner to be “one of the most ubiquitous and powerful discourses” in human communication (1990: 77).

Storytelling, as an oral art form, appeared to me to have a great deal of potential for exploring intercultural dimensions within my classes. Stories involve making connections through left and right brain processes, framing ‘meaning systems’ and being an ever-present, strong medium of communication. I felt this would be particularly so with stories that would be created by participants that could be autobiographical in nature, or influenced by their cultural and familial roots. As Degenaar states, “It is through the art of storytelling that a culture is enriched with intertextual significance” (1995: 65).
With this in mind, in all four drama courses, the learner-teachers were asked to bring a story to class that had personal meaning for them. As Bruner (1986: 11) states, “A good story and a well-formed argument are different ... arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifeliness”.

Using a style that suits the data; bringing the data and information to life; and focusing on a “narrative way of knowing [that] attends to meaning, not just facts” (Bruner 1986: 15), were fundamental considerations in the ways in which I recorded aspects of what occurred in this area of the research. These notions informed my analysis and interpretation of the data and my use of narrative forms in constructing meaning.

6.2.1 Learning From and With each Other

The following multi-voiced story (pages 217-219) is a representation of what the learner-teachers and I learned from and with each other. It draws on my written observations, the stories learner-teachers told and what they stated in interviews. The different stanzas of the constructed poem within the story consist of the initial repeated couplet that represents the main instruction I gave to the learner-teachers concerning the storytelling activity. The rest of each stanza is based on my written observation and learner-teacher interviews.

I designed the constructed poem to introduce and link the different sections of the story. I have deliberately made use of ‘we’ to represent the ‘multi-voiced’ compilation and have only used ‘learner-teacher’ where the information applies to a particular participant. This is to give the narrative more of a storytelling flow then would be the case with the continual use of the ‘learner-teachers and I’.
Our Multi-voiced Story

Bring stories from home you said
Maybe written or maybe in your head
Ones that have personal meaning for you
Special ones from your background
Ones that are different, known only by a few
Rare ones, not easily found

There was an air of excitement and a continuous buzzing as the group members shared narratives with their peers. In other groups panic filled the air as they searched frantically for stories. For some it was just a task that they had to get through, for others they had come highly willing and prepared to share their stories. Some had forgotten and asked to go to the library to find a story. Some relaxed when I said ‘use a story that you know’ or ‘make up a story about an experience or a family tradition’. Others looked bemused and desperately wanted to go to the library to look for something to hook onto.

Bring stories from home you said
Maybe written or maybe in your head
We were trying to think of stories
We had so-o-o-oo many stories to choose
None of us had stories
We don’t know what you want us to use

We watched as our stories were presented. Familiar stories and themes emerged. Then some unique ones unfolded. Family stories told by parents and grandparents. A learner-teacher with Italian roots led her group into the telling of a story about keeping a wine-making tradition alive. With some dialogue but mainly through mime and movement they wove the story of a young girl introduced to her first experience of a yearly wine-making process and festival.
A learner-teacher, originally from Pakistan, narrated the following story while her group members performed the actions. Once there was a little girl who lived in the Tharparker District in the Sindh Province, Southern Pakistan. This is a very dry region. The first time the little girl had ever seen soaking rain which poured and poured down from the sky was when she and her family moved to Australia. She loved seeing and hearing the rain. Rain was a very good and exciting thing. So, whenever it started raining she would run outside and jump and splash and hop in the puddles. Laughing as she got wetter and wetter and wetter. She couldn’t understand why everyone looked at her strangely and why her mother shouted at her ...

Another learner-teacher told an autobiographical story about her, as she called them, ‘bogan’ family who are ‘mad about footy’. She got her group to show, through various dramatic images, the occasions when her family sing their footy song... At barbeques, at birthday parties, at weddings and funerals, at family get-togethers, Christmas, Easter, New Years... any excuse, anywhere, at every possible occasion... It’s big... one day my aunt brought someone to meet the family... He was a [rival football supporter]...

Bring stories from home you said
Maybe written or maybe in your head
Find ways for the class to participate
Stories are more engaging when they’re told
Movement, chants, mime we incorporate
Storytelling is flexible and visually bold

We felt the frustration of the villagers as we were called again and again by the ‘Boy who cried Wolf” and we were moved backwards and forwards across the drama space. We discovered ways to make the stories come alive through participation. Amidst some grunts and groans we bravely tried to get all our peers to participate but it was really hard. When we only asked certain volunteers to participate they took it seriously because they wanted to act. The first thing we thought of was dialogue and telling the story. We didn’t think of more routes to get involvement... like miming, movement and chanting.
Bring stories from home you said
Maybe written or maybe in your head
Different stories, we could take a peak
Family stories with all their glory
Home storytelling practices may be unique
But everyone’s heard a similar story

We reflected on our storytelling and found we had stories to tell and share. It depends on your practises at home. When we did the ‘rain story’ everyone had heard a similar story. We found different storytelling scenarios were an effective tool in helping cultures relate to each other. It’s about being able to provide diversity – everyone is going to be able to find common ground.

6.2.2 Contribution to Intercultural Understanding

In this section of the chapter I have discussed the constructed narrative, what emerged from the storytelling activity and some of the ways in which we learned from and with each other. I have used additional interview data, meta-journal entries and field-notes in this discussion about contributions to intercultural communication and understanding.

Embedded within the ‘multi-voiced’ story are various ways in which the learner-teachers and I learned from each other. Intercultural communication is seen to be initiated by the coming together of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ (Bharucha 1993). At the core of intercultural communication is the promotion of intercultural understanding. The type of understanding envisaged is based on continuous “redefining and deepening, seeing things from new angles, making fresh connections” (Gadamer as cited in Hulme, Cracknell and Owens 2009: 540).

The challenge, as Bharucha (1993) points out, is to keep the reciprocal nature of a self/other relationship. Interaction between cultures, or discourses, should bring about changes to all sides (Taylor 1994). I have argued that intercultural
understanding within this study was superficial at times. Nevertheless there was a reciprocal dynamic between myself and the learner-teachers bringing changes in assumptions and attitudes to some degree.

As can be seen from the story (6.2.1) compiled from observations and interviews there were mixed reactions to the selection and presentation of the narratives. As far as I could tell this was not linked to any cultural dimensions but rather to personal styles and an individual ability to select and freely tell stories. Of course, it was also linked to whether or not the learner-teachers had considered what stories to use before the class.

In isolation, much of what I learned does not seem to be particularly remarkable. However, when seen as a part of a patchwork quilt of my emerging understanding of diverse learner-teachers within an Australian context that I have gradually stitched together, and will never entirely complete, then even what could be considered insignificant becomes valuable. Amongst other things, I learned about the importance and value of footy culture in Melbournian society and the strong pride in migrant cultural heritage that still exists in young second or third generation Australians.

**Football, Wine-making and Pride**

*It’s amazing. I knew that particularly in Melbourne, AFL, or footy culture, is hu-uu-ge. But I had absolutely no idea how huge. I thought it was only when a match was on. I watched with fascination while Helen’s group dramatised her story about her family and footy. “Is this usual?” I asked. “Yeah” replied many of her class mates. I was assured that within their respective families a large number of learner-teachers sang their songs at family gatherings though possibly not to the same degree as Helen’s family.*
In contrast, Gina’s wine-making story belonged mainly to her and her family, although other learner-teachers could relate to the story. What I learned through the story was not so much about traditional wine-making. It was about pride in her Italian heritage and how cultural nuances could be strongly shared and evoked through simple mime, movement and gesture.

Learner-teachers reflecting on the story and what it meant picked up on this pride. Another learner-teacher stated, ‘Even though my father and I were born in Australia, I feel most closely connected to my Italian side of the family’. When questioned, further reasons appeared to be based on emotion rather than any well thought out, or selected factors. For example Debbie said, ‘I am Egyptian. No matter how long my family lives in Australia and for how many generations we will still be Egyptian’.

Meta-journal compilation from field-notes (28/04/2009).

So, amongst the learner-teachers who participated in this study there was both a strong desire to fit in and not be seen to be different (as discussed earlier) and a pride in their different heritages and familial backgrounds. This is not necessarily a contradiction but rather reflects the differing roles and perceptions that the same person may have within the complexities of culture, hybridity, globalisation and migration.

The learner-teacher from Pakistan, Jasmine, who told the story about rain was in Class B in semester 2 2008. I noted that four learner-teachers interviewed in this class returned to this particular rain story within their interviews. In various ways they mentioned the similarity, yet uniqueness of the story and the finding of diversity within commonality. Of particular interest was Jasmine’s own reflection on the story. Jasmine’s realisation that for her the rain had become a symbol of strangeness resulted in a class discussion about universal, culturally-based and personal symbols and meaning systems.
Jasmine: ...when I told that story in class...maybe it was seeing the others acting it out... I suddenly realised it was rain ... yet... it was also about how strange I felt in a new country...

Interview 3 semester 2 week 6 2008 (05/09/2008).

All 13 learner-teachers interviewed stated that the storytelling activities contributed to their intercultural understanding. They felt, particularly that the sharing of stories helped them to understand their fellow class mates.

Phoebe: We see each other in class but we don’t know each other. Like with Jasmine... Everyone’s heard a similar story...about rain or drought... but I could really see her [strong emphasis] as a little girl... it’s one of the few times I’ve felt like I was getting to know some people in my class even in a small way... of course the small numbers [in our class] have also helped us to get to know each other...

Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

From Phoebe and others’ statements what emerged was that the shared stories facilitated a chance for the learner-teachers to know their fellow classmates rather than being related to cultural dimensions and perspectives of understanding. Perhaps the personal is the cultural.

Pedagogy and research in intercultural communication is frequently based in guiding intercultural encounters towards “open and transformative positions of mutual understanding and respect” (Regan and MacDonald 2007: 267). I believe attitudes of respect towards fellow learner-teachers’ cultural perspectives and experiences was engendered by my pedagogy and maintained throughout the study. I certainly regarded the sharing of stories to be a worthwhile activity in these classes.
My views are affirmed by the learner-teacher statement that ‘different storytelling scenarios were an effective tool in helping cultures relate to each other’ (interview 1, 2008). As Brooks (2000: 169) states:

... the more stories we have available to us the richer are our resources...the more voices and narratives we listen to, the more abundantly we experience our lives...for both their differences and their similarities, we can hardly afford to let some voices remain marginal and silenced and other voices dominate.

I felt that our lives were indeed enriched through the sharing of stories. The class discussions also helped to highlight similarities and differences. Though particular ‘voices’ tended to dominate the strength of the stories were that they were drawn from diverse cultural identities and perspectives. However, once again the depth of intercultural understanding may be questioned. Generally, the sharing of learner-teachers’ stories was within the domain of cross-cultural exchange through getting to know fellow classmates rather than cross-cultural understanding. I could not map any significant transformation amongst learner-teachers taking place or find any evidence of moving “towards the light of epiphany” (Kincheloe and McLaren 2008: 424).

Burton (1996: 80) asserts that when we are involved in drama we transform ourselves, the drama space, materials and objects. For me there is a distinction between this transforming or changing that is an integral part of any drama process and transformation of attitudes or ideas that leads to transformative learning.

As with other aspects of this research, time played a role. I encountered significant time constraints within an intensive nine week course. Yet the relationships of trust that are required when exploring intercultural dimensions are time consuming. A trust relationship is a vital aspect of facilitating transformative learning (Taylor 1998).

In addition to my inability to build up the level of confidence and trust between myself and the learner-teachers and between each other that I feel was
required within a limited time-frame, my research agenda also had an impact. At times I was guilty of ignoring the need to build up trust relationships which I know to be an important aspect of getting adult learners to play and perform. This was because I wanted to get to my research agenda of identifying how oral art forms could be identified, shared and engaged with.

Transformation does not take place over a short period of time or within one isolated event. Rather, it is seen to be the result of accumulative transformations over a significant period of time (Mezirow 1997). The cross-cultural exchange that occurred within the four classes was a start and was viewed in a positive light by interview participants. Their experience within the drama course has the potential to be transformative when linked to other intercultural experiences that learner-teachers may have.

Nicholson’s (2005) problematising of the notion of transformation within applied theatre is helpful in this discussion. Her arguments are equally applicable to drama education and the nine week course that I have focussed on in this research. She validly questions, “Whose values and interests does the transformation serve?” (Nicholson 2005: 12). She points out that although drama provides the space to explore “different identities and test out new ways of being” (2005: 82) the term ‘transportation’ may be preferable. Nicholson believes that this term implies gradual change and open-ended outcomes. She writes, “As...Etchells has said “performance is about ‘going into another world and coming back with gifts”’ (2005: 12 - 13).

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<td>cross cultural exchange</td>
<td>constantly the enemy time</td>
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<td>incomplete superficiality</td>
<td>We might</td>
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Meta-journal (05/06/2009).
6.3 IMPACT OF SOUTH AFRICAN FORMS AND MULTI-LAYERED STORYTELLING

In this section of the study I examine the impact on the learner-teachers’ intercultural communication and understanding within situations where I was responsible for the specific oral art forms used. Instead of eliciting examples from learner-teachers in these situations I more directly planned and guided the way in which oral art forms were used. I answer the second of the three sub-questions focused on in this chapter by considering the impact of South African oral art forms and multi-layered storytelling on the learner-teachers’ intercultural communication and understanding.

6.3.1 South African Oral Art forms

South African oral art forms impacted on the development of intercultural understanding between the participants in this study in a variety of ways. The learner-teachers gained a clear sense of some South African oral art forms and cultural traditions of the amaXhosa. Although, as with most activities, I experienced greater success with some learner-teachers than others, mainly they ‘got it’. In spite of some initial hesitation, particularly from Class A, most learners engaged on a cognitive and emotional level with the South African oral art forms that they participated in. I also spent time discussing these specific oral art forms with the learner-teachers.

Jenny: Learning about traditions from Africa and how they still have relevance today has been important and has been a stand out element...
Interview 1 semester 2 2008 (29/08/2008).

Susan: I did not think this subject was necessary. I admire the love of drama and oral art forms you have but, at first, it did not transfer over to the class ... some thought it was a bit pointless....then it changed for many... I thought most of this class learned a
lot from the South African stories and praise poems.

Interview 5 semester 2 2008 (29/10/2008).

**Stephanie:** You were very enthusiastic ... I was anxious about singing the songs and participating ... You made a daunting task more easier and comfortable and I felt like I ‘was in the shoes ’ of someone in South Africa..

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

This initial hesitance and subsequent engagement of some learner-teachers, towards both drama and oral art forms, is exemplified by the statement from a learner-teacher (Susan) in Class A within the above interview transcriptions. It is also supported by Stephanie’s (Class D) progression from a ‘daunting’ to a ‘more comfortable’ task. It is worth noting that both these comments were from interviewees who were in the classes I regarded as the most challenging in this study.

I felt that my own passionate and heartfelt engagement with and understanding of these forms contributed to the learner-teachers’ engagement. Eight of the thirteen learner-teachers interviewed supported this view and mentioned my enthusiasm, passion or love for oral art forms impacting in some way. The above comments made by Stephanie and Susan are examples of the learner-teachers’ perceptions of my attitude towards drama and/or oral art forms.

I identified that South African cultural traditions had an impact on the learner-teachers by the way in which they talked about and used participatory storytelling practices.

**Story Participation**

*I asked the learner-teachers to find ways for the class to participate in their stories. I was deliberately not specific about the kind of participation because I wanted to see*
what they came up with.... The ‘wolf’ group tried to get us all involved but they didn’t give very clear instructions and also had people opting out as they became weary of moving backwards and forwards... They used mime, movement and different repetitive chants and phrases. The learner-teachers mostly used the types of participation I had demonstrated with the ‘King’s Ring’ including songs and repetitive chants and core phrases...I was surprised at how many groups incorporated iintsomi traditions into their performances. I should have asked them again if I could video them – but missed the opportunity....

Field-note compilation (26/04/2009 and 12/06/2009).

Some of the ways in which the learner-teachers talked directly about participatory storytelling are illustrated below:

**Phoebe:** The first thing we thought of was dialogue and telling the story. We didn’t think of more routes to get involvement. When you told us the South African stories I started to think of ways that I could get children to participate while I told a story like miming, movement and chanting.

Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

**Stephanie:** Most definitely. Stories are more engaging when they’re told... Involving us in traditional South African stories showed us how flexible storytelling can be.

**Candice:** I really liked the repetitive chants and I can see loads of use for them in the classroom.

**Stephanie:** Yeah me too.... I was exposed to some African music and drumming [previously]... but I didn’t connect this to storytelling... or dance...

Interview 7 week 9 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).

As can be seen by these comments, learner-teachers’ assessment of effectiveness was linked to how they perceived the practical use within their future classroom context. This was frequently the case within comments made
by the learner-teachers in relation to this and other issues I have reflected on within this study. The learner-teachers expressed their appreciation of the educational potential of repetitive chants. They explored and experimented with repetition that can “emphasize certain action in order to bring about tension” (Mabuza 2000: 16) or build up pleasant expectations. They began to see the inter-connection between storytelling performances and other arts forms such as music and dance.

Within the exploration of South African forms the learner-teachers were both exposed to culturally specific oral arts forms and actively engaged in re-interpreting these forms to generate new oral art forms. The forms generated were particular to the socio-cultural dynamic of each class in this research context.

Although, overall the evidence suggests that the use of South African forms contributed positively to intercultural understanding these specific forms were, in a way, on show and consequently still constituted relatively shallow understanding in my view. Despite the fact that I was determined, from the onset of this research, to explore and generate authentic cultural experiences this was not always the case. At times it felt precisely like we were engaged in the ‘stomp, chomp and dress-up activities’ (McMahon 2003) that I abhor. Also although I would wish it to be different, I had the sense that a handful of learner-teachers still viewed these activities as pointless.

6.3.2 Multi-layered Storytelling and Intercultural Understanding

In conjunction with South African oral art forms, multi-layered storytelling impacted on the learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding. The extract below describes a part of the multi-layered storytelling session conducted with the learner-teachers in 2009.
Multi-layered Experiences

The focus of the workshop was on traditional and cross-cultural stories and other oral art forms as a resource for Drama. This included South African forms and multi-layered and multi-sensory experiences which are based on an interpretation of Anne Marshall’s ‘teaching in the aboriginal way’. I found that it was not only my direct knowledge of cultural dimensions, but also my indirect knowledge by watching a previous lecturer, which could help me to guide the learner-teachers towards intercultural understanding. The mixing of forms of expression within Indigenous South African and Indigenous Australian oral performances appears remarkably similar to me though the embodiment, emotions and feelings seem dissimilar.

The Storm Game worked well and then moving it into a following of different people as they moved in different ways and directions through the room generated a strong level of interest in both classes - though it took longer to move from one volunteer to the next in Class D. After the ‘spirit of the place’ and getting pairs of learners to share their ‘special place’ with a partner using only sounds and gestures we discussed the potential and possibilities of stories involving all the senses. The learner-teachers and I found it the most difficult coming up with ways to include ‘smell’ in any meaningful way. I was encouraged by the real energy and effort people put into their greetings, the identification of various greetings, and what they told me about where various greetings came from. Each learner greeted a partner in a particular way with words and gestures that could be ‘used by your family or friends or a greeting you’ve seen ... or...’. The ‘partnerships’ then merged their two greetings together in some combination.

I got the learner-teachers to explore the greetings within the physical space - in as small then as large movements as possible, from near then far away, then slow motion and fast forward, different levels and so on. Then they had to combine these different dimensions. By the time – first one half and then the other half showed us their greetings no-one seemed reluctant to perform. Also a number of pairs were performing at the same time. I found pair-work and asking for volunteers, like in the Storm Game, was a good way of engaging the more reluctant learners. I’ve noticed this before and
**should really work at using pairs more often...**

Field-notes, week 4 semester 1 2009 (26/03/2009) and meta-journal (04/03/2009).

One learner teacher from Class B interviewed in 2008 commented on the multi-layered story session which she considered an interesting and positive experience that should have been further extended. As Class B was such a small class we had to select particular narrative forms to focus on in class.

**Phoebe:** *Not enough time was spent on that [narrative types]. I found it very interesting. We needed to expand that. We should have looked at each one and showed what it is...*  
Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).

I specifically asked the learner-teachers interviewed in 2009 about their experiences of multi-layered stories and “synaesthesia” or meaning-making through the “engagement and blending of all the senses” (Marshall 2004: 56).

**Jane:** *The activities at the beginning of the workshop were good to introduce ‘synaesthaesia’. I was very interested as I have ‘synaesthesia’ ... I associate particular numbers with smells.*  
**Anne:** *The way you talked us through our special space was very effective... quite powerful and... almost spiritual.*  
**Ruth:** *I thought it was terrific. It gave us the opportunity to look at stories in a different way ...and ideas for the classroom.*  
Interview 6 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).
The work on multi-layered storytelling was based on my reading and observing of another lecturer. The responses from the learner-teachers were not directly linked to my belief that my indirect knowledge and experience of multi-layered storytelling could assist me to facilitate learner-teacher understanding. However, it indirectly supports my view as their positive responses point to the effectiveness of this aspect of the drama course.

Other themes that emerged in relation to an effective class culture within a tertiary environment were the value of eliciting volunteers and using pair work to build learner-teachers’ participation. This can be seen from the learner-teachers’ and my observations on the effectiveness of using pair work in the above extracts. I found that when I structured the task so that learner-teachers worked in pairs there was greater involvement in the process because of the face-to-face interaction; in comparison in groups people could hide or become passive and leave the work to others.

6.4 CONTRIBUTIONS TO LEVELS OF EFFECTIVENESS

In this section (6.4) I seek to answer the third of the three sub-questions focussed on in this chapter. I explore the various factors and findings that emerged for me in relation to intercultural understanding and communication. I discuss the themes that I identified in my role as a teacher-researcher and that I believe contributed to the levels of effectiveness of the intercultural encounters within this research under five headings: similarity, diversity and difference;

**Candice:** I noticed people were interacting much better.

**Carol:** Why do you think that happened?

**Candice:** I don’t know if it was because of the idea of multi-layered narratives, or because we were working in pairs.

**Stephanie:** I think it was both...

Interview 7 semester 1 2009 (14/05/2009).
spaces for intercultural exploration; connectivity and dialogue; building up a repertoire of cultural resources; and fantasy and reality.

6.4.1 Similarity, Diversity and Difference

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<td>same and different</td>
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<td>meaningless binaries</td>
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<td>finding the common uncommon</td>
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<td>diversity through similarity</td>
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<td>We see</td>
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From my meta-journal (05/06/2009).

Bhabha argues for the identification of cultural difference, as distinguishable from cultural diversity, in order to produce change. He believes that the challenges of interaction are evident only when culture surfaces “as a problem” within the “contestation and articulation of everyday life” among different groups of people (1994: 34). Coming to grips with this distinction between difference and diversity seems to me to be crucial in a study that investigates intercultural understanding. For some time, this distinction was unclear to me and I spent many hours reflecting on what differentiated these two terms. The reflection below displays what I eventually believed to be the distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference.

**Diverse and Different Experiences**

*I have been really struggling with drawing a distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. In analysing what has happened in many of the classes I need to be clear. Finally, I think I am beginning to understand. Sometimes I simply need to put ideas into practical examples, so here I go... Many cultures cook meat outdoors. This can be a diverse experience in relation to what and how this is done – there is variety between an Australian ‘barbie’ and a South African ‘braai’. I have also come across*
the same idea of ‘gossip songs’ within groups both in Southern Africa and Australia but practised in highly particular, diverse ways. Cultural attitudes and practices towards cows can be vastly different – from sacred animals that cannot be touched to slaughtering a cow to cook on the open fire. Culture certainly emerged as a problem on the day YPTET staff members arrived with a goat to slaughter... and I remember embarrassing myself terribly, some years ago, with a group of children when I foolishly misread their downward glances as disrespect rather than cultural difference.

Have I been complicit in not problematising culture sufficiently because of my strong affinity to viewing culture as a resource?

Meta-journal (09/02/2010).

Learner-teachers in interview 1 and 2 (2008) and 6 and 7 (2009) in this study commented on similarity, difference or diversity. The following is a compilation from interviews conducted in 2008 and 2009.

How we tell stories, and what we tell stories about, at home may be unique, but everyone’s heard a similar story....I think that telling our own stories and finding stories from different cultures is important, especially in our classes one day. It’s about being able to provide diversity. In that diversity everyone is going to be able to find common ground. The way that some of our stories were different but had similar meanings was interesting... Like you said, the chant to stop ‘growing horns’ and only telling stories in the winter [in some North American traditions, so that the hibernating animals won’t hear us telling stories about them] may have started for similar reasons.


As stated by Doyle and Carter (2003: 130):
... a narrative perspective holds that human beings have a universal predisposition to ‘story’ their experience, that is to impose a narrative interpretation on information and experience...A story also contains information about presumed intention and motivation...a story by its very nature resists singular interpretation.

Engaging with oral art forms, such as storytelling, within the learning and teaching environments in this study did assist learner-teachers to build up an understanding of similarities in storytelling and storytelling practices across cultures. Differences were also focused on. For example, African storytelling focuses, explicitly and implicitly, on community as opposed to individuality. The learner-teachers and I became increasingly aware of the interconnection of similarity and difference within stories. My research poem (page 232) as well as learner-teachers’ interview comments focus on a sense of different but similar meanings and uniqueness but finding ‘common ground’ in stories.

Within my initial reflections, oral art forms appeared ideally suited to contribute to the development of intercultural understanding in my classes in relation to identifying similarity and difference. However, I did not observe any evidence of cultural difference resulting in conflicting or contested beliefs or interactional challenges in the sharing of stories or other oral art forms, nor in the learner-teachers’ reflections. My lack of data in this regard is one of the significant reasons that led me to question the extent and efficacy of the nine week course in developing deeper intercultural understanding. I determined that the new cultural awareness that occurred was largely of a superficial nature.

6.4.2 Spaces for Intercultural Exploration

Cyberspace, virtual reality and internet communication have become important spaces for intercultural communication. However, I believe that the continuation and coexistence of the creation of cultural spaces through human interaction is crucial - a space that “takes account of local values, practices and convictions” (Richter, van der Walt and Visser 2004: 7). In this section of the study I discuss the importance and nature of spaces where human interaction is linked to
intercultural encounters. My discussion centres on consideration of two specific drama spaces. These are linked to articulating the characteristics of spaces that lend themselves to intercultural communication.

The arts have long been identified as having substantial ability “to open up cross-cultural communication and intercultural understanding” (Donelan 2009: 23). Drama, while able to take on various shapes and forms, is always “tuned into the social and cultural mores of its times and contexts” (O’Toole, Stinson & Moore 2009: 197).

Where I believe authentic intercultural communication took place in this study was within the drama sessions where spaces were opened up for values, beliefs and ideas to be explored. This occurred within drama contexts that were ‘open’ and not linked to any particular cultural domain and where oral art forms played a supportive role as one of the conventions used within the drama process. An example in this study of a drama space of this nature was when the task focused on the creation of a new society on a new planet; here learner-teachers were able to ‘think from within a dilemma instead of talking about a dilemma’ (Heathcote 1984).

The fictional ‘as-if’ context was based around the idea that an ‘International Institute of Aeronautics’ had discovered a new planet that had potential for habitation, and they had selected a number of people from a variety of cultures and contexts to participate in the setting up of a new society for future inhabitants.

In planning for this context I focused on drama strategies and conventions which were specified within the course outline. I also selected this particular context to explore the theme of identities and values with the learner-teachers. This selection provided an opportunity for creating and performing praise poems, which were part of my research agenda. My motivation for using this particular drama context is articulated within the following extract from my meta-journal.
Planning for Intercultural Understanding

I have discovered that linking drama and oral art forms to particular cultural groupings brings with it the danger of essentialism and an encouragement of a deficit perspective of culture. I think that I need to find a less direct and more subtle way of developing intercultural understanding. In planning for this context I want to find one that will discourage a deficit view of culture and will encourage learners to think about culture and values in a multi-dimensional way. I want the learner-teachers to develop an understanding that within cultures there could be multiple identities and within individuals there could be multiple cultural influences. I think I need to place the drama in an ‘as if’ context that isn’t too close to home and that will provide the learners with room to explore values and identities. I think the context of a new society will work. It will be worthwhile to get the classes to establish a new society so that I can find out what they value and prioritise as essential for a society they will live in. Through this ‘as if context’ I feel we will be able to explore identities and learn about the values that are meaningful to this diverse group of learner-teachers. I am also hoping that there will be some real areas of difference amongst participants.

Meta-journal (06/04/2009).

I have included a comprehensive plan of the process drama centred on establishing a new society. I have provided details of the various activities, drama conventions and pedagogical reasons for the activities in the appendix (see Appendix I: THE NEW SOCIETY DRAMA: 335 - 336). I have included this plan in the appendix to provide further clarification of the fictional drama context, parts of which I have reflected on below.

Reflections on a New Society

In both classes I had to work hard to get ‘buy in’ from the learner-teachers regarding ‘going to another planet’. They raised interesting issues and concerns about the secret mission and asked a number of questions about who I was, about the mission, their
families, work and remuneration while on the planet. While some learner-teachers, especially in Class C, were ready to ‘go’ immediately others needed reassurance and more information. Some asked questions that indicated that they were highly suspicious of my role and agenda.

My response to a question asked in Class D, ‘What if I don’t want to go?’ was to urge them ‘not to miss this once in a life-time opportunity’ and to explain to them that ‘we really need their skills and expertise’. A few learners said they were afraid of going to a new planet. I assured them that they would be perfectly safe and ‘it was their choice – so if they really felt they didn’t want to go then they could monitor our progress and be in contact with us from earth. I thought some of the learners in Class D would take up this option but interestingly none of them did and we all went on the journey.

Apart from John and a few of his mates (Class D) who don’t seem particularly interested in anything at all most of the learner-teachers were busily, actively and productively engaged in the role tasks and talking to each other about their ‘drama’ identities. While creating identity badges and filling in application forms certainly facilitated the exploration of identities and were useful in generating a variety of ideas and responses it was extremely time-consuming....The unintentional outcome of the letters left behind for loved ones and the presentation of two or three words from other people’s letters accompanied by a movement were ‘real’ feeling cultural and familial perspectives embedded within these letters written in role....

The participants were allowed to take one object, besides clothes and food, that they thought would be useful on the planet and one value that they considered essential for the new society. My intention was to get the learner-teacher to identify, and speak about, a value that is important to them and identify a resource that may be useful in dealing with difficulties in a new society.

I thought that the objects told me quite a lot about who they are and what they value. Some brought photo albums with them because they didn’t want to forget their families and friends... a hammer because it would be very useful and practical... a tape-recorder
to record the beginnings of the new society... a beer-making kit because partying is important... a first aid kit... a portable ‘dunny’...

Throughout the process of setting up guidelines, rules and structures for the new society I tried to get them to think more critically and articulate what they meant by the various values. The variety of other experiences within the drama such as the ‘graffiti’, gossip mill and pieces of forum theatre to try and overcome some of the problems in the new society all contributed to the deeper exploration of a number of issues such as consumerism, conservation, power and contrasting belief systems within the society. The praise poems and chants in the launching of the society worked extremely well to encapsulate the hopes and aspirations for the new society embedded in what the learner-teachers themselves considered valuable.

Field-notes, week 5 semester 1 2009 (02/04/2009) reflected on in Meta-journal (06/04/2009).

I considered the process of “buying in and commitment to the metaphoric experience” (Saxton and Miller 1996: 23) that drama requires to be crucial. This is not only to establish the drama context but also to get the learner-teachers to invest sufficiently in the context, to seriously consider the values and beliefs that would be important for this new society.

As Saxton and Miller state (1996: 19), drama processes are concerned with “building collective vision” which is informed by, and informs, the people involved in the drama who have created a community. I believe that the learner-teachers negotiated personal and cultural differences within the collective vision of a new society. I learned from this experience that, while oral art forms can be used as a convention to enrich the drama process and add another dimension, it is the drama context itself that best supports intercultural understanding.

I am mindful of some of the issues raised earlier in terms of the potentially problematic nature of the term transformation. However, within these drama spaces there were shifts and changes in terms of cultural perceptions and
understandings. Borrowing from the terms ‘perspective transformation’ (Mezirow 1991) and ‘transportation’ (Nicholson 2005), I believe that what occurs through drama processes, as was evident to me within these drama spaces I have described, is multi-perspectival transportation.

Laidlaw (2005: 144) points out “complex interconnections and interrelations” are revealed within spaces of reflection. Many of the learner-teachers in class reflected readily within the fictional drama contexts, or when drama conventions were used, but did not engage in reflective conversations at the end of drama processes. For some, it was reluctance or disinterest. For others, it was because they were unused to reflective conversations within educational experiences (Miller and Saxton 2009). Booth (1999: 54) acknowledges the difficulties people have in reflecting and believes that a lot of people may “have an ingrained bias” against reflecting as they feel their opinions and ideas are “not worth noticing”.

Though verbal reflection was generally something that was not readily embraced, or participated in by all class members, these were instances of comments from the learner-teachers in the class reflections. I wrote their words down as we reflected in both class groups at the end of the second session of the new society drama in 2009. Three are from learner-teachers who I did not interview and one from a learner-teacher that I did interview.

**Julie:** In the drama I was able to say what I think is important in society and what I would change if I could.

**Sandra:** In a fantasy world it was easy to say how we feel about the wrongs and rights of society.

**Lucy:** I think we learned that each person has their own beliefs which we need to respect.

**Anne:** We learned about ourselves and others, understanding of each other and different ways of thinking.

Class reflection recorded in field-notes, week 5 semester 1 2009 (02/04/2009).
I tried to provide a balance between continuing to challenge the learner-teachers’ values and ensuring that my own ideological positions did not dominate, overly influence learner-teachers’ views or “close down student engagement and substantive learning” (Grady 2000: 7). For this reason I sometimes deliberately articulated contradictory viewpoints which sometimes led to interesting debates and sometimes had unexpected consequences as can be seen from the extract below.

**Drama is Killing Me**

This is the second time I have been killed in a drama!! The first time was in 1986, when as a learner-teacher I made a group of grade 7’s who were in role as slaves, so angry that they decided to kill me off without my prior knowledge. This time at least I was warned and politely asked permission if it was ‘Ok’. A group of learner-teachers were presenting a part of ‘a day in the life’ of the new society and wanted in their scenario to get rid of me. They branded me as a ‘dictator’ who had ‘too much control just because I had initiated the trip to the new planet’...

Field-notes, week 5 semester 1 2009 (02/04/2009) and Meta-journal (06/04/2009).

Educational spaces which lend themselves to effective intercultural exploration and communication appear to share certain characteristics such as comfort, ambivalence and inclusion. This appears to be the case whether referring to the ‘third space of enunciation’, as articulated by Bhabha (1991; 1994; 1996), or any other enabling space including, Foucault’s ‘hetertopias’, or multi-layered, multi-dimensional spaces of meaning, (1986) and bell hook’s ‘homeplaces’ which is “…that inclusive space where we recover ourselves” (1990: 152).

My understanding of the third space is informed by my readings of Bhabha (1994; 1996) as well as other authors (for example Taylor 1995; Zhang 2008) whose interpretations have been helpful in conceptualisation. It seems to me that the ‘third space of enunciation’ is a literal and figurative, physical, mental
and spiritual, public and private place of ‘discursive ambivalence’ (Bhabha 1994). Within this shared space, socio-cultural groups encounter each other, interact, dialogue, debate, move between and across cultural borders and engage in “a process of negotiation and translation between different discourses” (Zhang 2008: 16). They are spaces where identities may be forged and where marginalised voices can be heard.

The new society drama and the drama reflected on below where the learner-teachers took on roles as elders provided such a third space for participants. Within both drama frames comfort, ambivalence and inclusion were evident. This is apparent within my descriptions of, and reflections on the ‘elders’ drama.

**The Elders Drama**

*I made use of the exact wording from ‘Ghamka’, from time to time during the drama to introduce my role as chief, their roles as the elders, the problems of drought and so on. Even though the pre-text is from a particular tribe I have found that, in creating the tribe and the elders with classes it ends up being a non-specific tribe that is unique to the participants in the class. This allows for a more open context and the inclusion of the class members’ ideas. It results in their collective creation of a tribe and way of life based on a fusion of their knowledge, experiences and beliefs about tribes-people.

We started with developing the various roles as elders of this particular tribe. I asked questions like; Think about who you are in the tribe, how are you related to the rest of the tribe, what work did you do when you were a young member of the tribe, what special memories do you have of events that have taken place as members of the tribe, what is your function now, what are your special talents that you bring to the tribe...Then the learner-teachers sat on chairs in circles in groups of approximately six. They each had a turn to be in the hot-seat while the other members of the groups asked questions... to make them think more carefully about their specific roles as elders.*
From the focus, the kinds of questions being asked and the seriousness with which the ‘elders’ were considering the questions and responding to them, I could see that this was working well. The different greetings for each ‘elder group’, the gestures and chants, the group names and the ‘hot-seating’ all contributed to the learner-teachers familiarity and comfort with their roles and learner-teachers’ building of the nature of the tribe and the relationships within the tribe...

This class really set up the space in a way that signalled the perceived authority and relationships between the different groups of elders as they placed themselves in various ways and levels, nearer, or farther away from the ‘sacred tree’ and the river. ...It was a slow start and I had to demonstrate by bringing my gift ‘of being able to listen and the wisdom to heed the advice of the elders’ and then most of the learner-teachers brought their gifts and strengths within the ritual that started the meeting....

‘It has been two moons since we sent our bravest warriors to the other side of the mountain [to ask for help in this drought] they have not returned... What do we do great elders?’... Within the solving of this problem we were exposed to shamans, enticing food from recipes passed down from generation to generation, dancing girls, weaponry and masks... influenced by different experiences and cultural identities.

We were exposed to peaceful and violent solutions to the problems, contradictions between different solutions from healers, medical practitioners, traditional spiritual leaders and different prayers... Within the conscience-alley and the open-door techniques, I the chief came closer and closer to making an ultimate decision with the help of the elders. I did not want to close off the possibilities entirely and reduce it to only one solution so I suggested a plan of action based on about four of the most strongly agreed on solutions.... There was a little disagreement on this and I tried to get the ‘voices of all the elders in the important decisions that will influence the future of our tribe’...I led the class through a process of creating a wax mould of the ‘elder’ they were in the drama, walking around the mould and ‘stepping’ into the mould. Walking around the ‘museum where the artefacts and history of the tribe is kept’ one half at a time while the other half displayed the wax figures of the tribe helped the learner-teachers to focus again on who was in the tribe.
Some just walked around quickly while some took their time and commented on who the various elders might be...The creation of ‘film-footage’ which documented the tribe’s history and what happened to the tribe as a result of the decisions that were made led to examining the consequences of decisions and resulted in all sorts of interesting conversations and debates around accurately depicting our fictional tribe’s history....

From field-notes week 3 semester 1 2009 (19/03/2009) and meta-journal (23/03/2009).

This drama is based on a South African pre-text ‘Ghamka Man-of-Men’ (Merchant 1997). A pre-text is a stimulus for drama which may be a number of sources including a “... story, an idea, an object, or an image” (O’Neill 1995: 19). O’Neill states that a pre-text is used as a “holding form for any meanings to be explored” (1995: 22). Parts of the ‘Ghamka’ story that I used have the potential to be interpreted in multifarious ways and are therefore ideal for the exploration of different interpretations based on the learner-teachers’ backgrounds and experiences.

Bhabha (1994: 37) explains that within the third space cultural meanings and symbols have no “primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew”. This was certainly the case where I ‘appropriated’ meanings and symbols from a South African context which were then ‘translated’ and ‘read’ from the perspective of a group of diverse learner-teachers at an Australian university.

6.4.3 Connectivity and Dialogue

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<td>Dialogical selves</td>
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Meta-journal (05/06/2009).
The concept of dialogue, discussed in Chapter 3, although helpful within intercultural communication, is certainly not new and can be traced back to at least the times of Plato. The changing nature of the world has led to increased dialogue and connectivity between countries and cultures. This also leads to greater dialogue and connectivity within individual people where “[d]ifferent cultures come together and meet each other within the Self” (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 35).

Finding Connections

*During the reflection phase, I read extracts from the text ‘Ghamka’ to the learner-teachers and we reflected on some of the differences and similarities Although the story is centred around, Ghamka, who eventually becomes the chief of a Khoi tribe living in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, the learner-teachers found a number of connections between their interpretations and solutions and the original story. ...The differences also generated lively dialogue and evaluation of their and other solutions....*

Meta-journal (24/03/2009).

The reflection process described in my meta-journal extract above was a vital part of the process. Reflection is a crucial aspect of any learning process and opportunities should be provided for learner reflection to explore experiences, challenge current beliefs and develop new understanding. It an essential aspect of learning through drama experiences and, as Heathcote explains, without it “there is no learning from the experience” (Heathcote 1984: 209). In drama, reflection transports the implicit experience into “explicit knowledge” (O’Toole and Dunn 2002: 9). Through placing drama and everyday life together, reflecting from one to the other, it is possible to simultaneously learn both about drama and wider social and cultural perspectives (Williams 1983).

My notion of identifying and sharing culturally specific oral art forms to support intercultural understanding resonates with Neelands’ (2002: 46) assertion that “cultural literacy”, the challenge of inclusivity and representation of “different
collective identities, different cultural, linguistic and narrative resources” are vital ingredients of a new basic “humanising curriculum” required in a changing world.

Through this study I have re-discovered that it is the dialogical experience that lends itself to connectivity and the exploration of different cultural resources. Edmiston (2000) points out that values and worldviews are internalised and formed through dialogical discourse (as opposed to conversation) within drama spaces. He points out that in “dialogising discourses we can stand outside and evaluate the assumptions” that underscore particular perceptions and worldviews (2000: 73).

So, in exploring the life of elders in a tribe of our creation and subsequently comparing this to a narrative text about a group of elders within a different place, time and context, the learner-teachers and I found connectivity and “our common humanness within the very otherness” (O’Toole, Stinson & Moore 2009: 203). Since culture can be seen as porous and permeable and people generally have multiple group identities, within an ‘open’ context, the learner-teachers were free to draw on multiple cultural backgrounds and experiences and personal and role identities to engage in dialogue, connect with the context and develop “embodied intercultural understanding” (Donelan 2009: 24).

6.4.4 Building Up a Repertoire of Resources

**By-product of this Study**

The learner-teachers repeatedly referred to the success of the engaging with oral art forms in terms of providing them with useful classroom resources. My intention was to focus on learning and teaching within a tertiary environment. However classroom resources for teaching within diverse communities and educational environments have become an important by-product of this study. I have written this sonnet based on some of the reasons why the learner-teachers and I felt practical activities and resources to be important.
The learner-teachers and I supported and acknowledged the importance of classroom resources. The various oral art forms accessed within the study were felt to be helpful by the participants in providing resources that could promote intercultural understanding. Teachers need to select strategies and resources that are relevant to their learners (Duncum 2002) and those teachers limited to mono-cultural experiences are not equipped for “teaching in multicultural classrooms” (McFee 1995: 190). Within any learning and teaching environment there is a need to provide “culturally responsive curriculum” (Veblen, Beynon and Odom 2005) and resources that “reflect the dynamic cultural landscapes in which young people live” (Nicholson 2000: 160). As Joseph (2009: 150) states, “... demographic changes in our classroom” require us to build up valuable pedagogies that ensure that we are “catering for and taking advantage of individual and cultural differences in learning”.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) website (2010) refers to the Australian curriculum as being guided by the ‘Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young People’ (2008). Within
this declaration is the broad goal (goal 1) that; “Australian Schooling promotes equity and excellence (2008: 7). One of the ways in which this goal is seen to being achieved is to “ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity”.

The learner-teachers interviewed were aware of the demands that would accompany their teaching within Australian schools in the future and the need for teaching resources that would suit the needs of diverse groups of learners. Some of the particular comments made by learner-teachers regarding resources were:

Jane: Oral art forms can be used as resources to convey events in, for example, history in a more expressive and interesting way.
Interview 6 semester 1 2009 (14/07/2009).

Candice: The communities and schools we will be teaching in are quite diverse and so we need diverse resources.

Stephanie: We can go into schools equipped with a set of drama skills and different art forms that will help us to provide different cultural experiences.
Interview 7 semester 1 2009 (14/07/2009).

This study shows that the learner-teachers viewed working with various oral art forms in the drama course as beneficial for building up a repertoire of diverse sources. In addition I viewed this opportunity to trial a repertoire of oral art form resources as valuable for my tertiary teaching and learning as well as for future learners who may benefit from an increasingly diverse repertoire.

My experience of teaching and writing textbooks has shown me, it is easy and comfortable for teachers to uncritically make use of resources whether they fit the educational environment or not. Increasingly collecting lesson activities and ideas is sometimes equated with being a good teacher with the focus being on the technical and material aspects of teaching as opposed to philosophies and beliefs that underpin teaching and learning processes. A major difficulty with an
over-emphasis on lesson activities is that teachers become “operatives” who are there to “implement” as opposed to “create” (Carr & Kemmis 1986: 47).

Therefore, within this study I tried to preface the learner-teachers’ use of oral art forms in their future classrooms with discussions. These discussions focused on the promotion of the idea of accumulating a variety of resources but considering the use of these resources within “intertextually complex, interactionally dynamic and locally situated” educational spaces (Kamberelis 2001: 85).

6.4.5 Fantasy and Reality

Process Drama “...enables participants to look at reality through fantasy to look below the surface of actions to their meaning” (Wagner 1998: 8). An interesting distinction existed within learner-teachers’ views of the use of fantasy and reality. Below are examples of three different views from interviews conducted in 2008.

**Jenny:** You have to know what your purpose is. There are different forms (or contexts) which have different outcomes. Reality and fantasy are both just as important as each other. Fantasy is abstract ... so it’s easier for children to express themselves and take it in different directions. Fantasy can take you wherever you want. The more close it is to reality the more it helps student to reflect on emotions and act them out in real contexts.

Interview 1 semester 2 2008 (29/08/2008).

**Phoebe:** I like activities you can fantasise. One’s where you are out of the ordinary. It’s a lot harder when it’s everyday things like Grandma or family dramas. I find it easier, fun and more exciting to get into a fantasy character rather than a realistic character. There’s more room to move. You can use your imagination.

Interview 2 week 6 semester 2 2008 (03/09/2008).
Michelle: *Children can learn real life skills in realistic contexts. ‘Real’ contexts lead to motivation and ‘real’ learning.*

From interview 5 week 9 semester 2 2008 (29/10/2008).

This was a topic that was raised particularly within a Class B discussion and subsequent interviews. The discussion that took place in Class B provided me with an opportunity to link the notions of fantasy and reality to cultural dimensions. Using South African iintsomi I drew the learner-teachers’ attention to the intertwining and co-habitation of fantasy and reality. For instance, within familiar everyday worlds such as a farmer and his wife going to visit their neighbour, chants may be a response to a fantastical creature within the same story. The discussion also extended to Marshall’s statement that the idea of drama being about imagination “may run contrary to an Indigenous perception of reality” (2004: 58).

Toye and Prendiville (2000: 64) state that “…taking on a fictional position provides distance”. In addition to the cultural aspects mentioned above, the discussion on fantasy and reality also provided me with an opportunity to get this group to understand and talk about the notion of distancing or being ‘protected into emotion’ in drama (Bolton 1979; O’Toole 2009; Jackson 2007).

O’Connor (2009: 588) states that when the role that is taken on is “distanced from the core event... participants are safely able to feel and express the emotion of the event”. While he talks of time and connection providing this distance, I found in this study that fantasy was able to provide this distance as well. I do not see fantasy and reality as exclusive concepts, and as ‘narrative constructs’ they can be interconnected and jointly embedded in stories. So, as in the example of establishing a new society on a new planet the interrelationship and ‘distancing’ can be in the form of fantasy based on reality or reality introduced or embedded in fantasy.
6.5 DISCUSSION

In the final discussion I consolidate and consider my discoveries and reflections in relation to intercultural communication.

This action research study demonstrated to me that the sharing of stories was a worthwhile activity. It led to a cross-cultural exchange which contributed towards learner-teachers getting to know more about their fellow classmates. It also led to learner-teachers discovering the uniqueness as well as the commonalities of stories and the interrelatedness of similarity and difference.

I found that the learner-teachers’ storytelling and sharing of cultural experiences, when viewed in isolation, did not contribute in any deep or meaningful way to their intercultural understanding. However, the data revealed that these experiences did have some impact in the short term and may have the potential to contribute to transformation in the long term as part of a range of intercultural experiences; however this would require a longer time-frame than a nine week drama course.

A further potential contribution of this study, repeatedly mentioned by learner-teachers, was the possibilities of using oral art forms in their classroom teaching in the future which could then have an impact on intercultural understanding. The learner-teachers felt that the drama course had provided them with a number of classroom activities that could potentially promote intercultural understanding.

In the drama course which is the focus of this research it was possible for me to give the learner-teachers an opportunity to experience South African oral art forms first-hand. My knowledge of, and passion for, isiXhosa oral art forms contributed to my being able to guide the learner-teachers towards an understanding of these forms. Within the field of ‘development’ various authors (including Nelson and Wright 1997; Chambers 1997) articulate a distinction between instrumental and transformative paradigms. Applying this theory, my attempts to get the learner-teachers to participate in oral art forms that have
been pre-selected by me would be regarded as instrumental while participation in forms that participants decide on would be regarded as potentially transformational.

Contrary to my expectations, the use of oral art forms that I decided on and had direct or indirect knowledge of was far more effective in promoting intercultural understanding than when I tried to get learner-teachers to identify and select their own culturally specific oral art forms. Yet, because there was a distinct focus on oral art forms from a particular country and culture, dialogical tensions and intercultural connectivity required for intercultural communication were not evident. It felt, at times, that these art forms were on show as even though the learner-teachers did participate in the oral art forms they were still chiefly presented to them.

Where I observed actual intercultural communication and understanding occurring was within drama spaces as “seedbeds of cultural creativity” (Nicholson 2005: 129) where the learner-teachers and I used oral art forms to support and enrich the drama processes. This was where, as well as commonality, there were contested, contradictory, ambivalent and different interpretations within the drama situations. Wood and Hicks (2002: 93) believe that ambiguity, such as was encountered within these drama contexts, is essential within educational enterprises. I discovered the enabling power of not linking the fictional drama contexts to any particular cultural domain, even when the pre-text was highly specific. I rediscovered the sometimes difficult but absolutely crucial role of verbal reflection at the end of drama sessions.

There were aspects that emerged from this study that I consider worthwhile within the pursuit of intercultural communication and understanding. The participants were exposed to stories and traditions which may have impacted to some degree on cross-cultural awareness and understanding. However, overall, I felt that much of this research did not contribute significantly to a pedagogy of intercultural understanding. This was due to a lack of time and my sense that many of the activities in this research presented to the learner-teachers the outer ornamental view of the oral art form rather than learner-teachers
experiencing the inner complex view. This was largely when specific oral art forms were the focus and played a central, rather than a supportive role.

The four ways of knowing outlined by Heron and Bradbury (2008), contributed to my understanding and articulation of oral art forms, drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding. Experiential knowing was evident within my descriptions of the “direct face-to-face encounters” with learner-teachers that took place (Heron and Reason 2008: 367). Presentational knowing grounded in my experiential knowing was expressed through analogies, poems and stories. Propositional knowing as the “intellectual knowing of ideas and theories” was used in the reflections and discussions within this and other chapters of the study (Heron and Reason 2008: 367). Practical knowing or know-how is expressed through the actions taken to enhance the learning and teaching that took place in this study.

6.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter I discuss my attempt to build intercultural communication and understanding through oral art forms. I begin by illustrating how stories were used within intercultural encounters and reflect on their contribution to the learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding. I then examine the impact of the use of South African oral art forms and multi-layered story-telling on participants’ intercultural learning.

I then discuss further issues that contributed to the level of effectiveness of the intercultural encounters in the four tertiary drama education classes. These include: similarities, diversity and difference; spaces for intercultural exploration; connectivity and dialogue; building up a repertoire of resources; and fantasy and reality. I consolidate the discussion of my findings about intercultural encounters within the closing discussion in this chapter.

In the next chapter, Chapter 7, I conclude my research story with my main findings from this study and some recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION TO MY RESEARCH STORY

The form of an experience...is not linear nor merely logical, but emerges out of a dynamic process in which a sentient human organism relates meaningfully to his [sic] total environment

Barone (1978: 34).

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I summarise my research and present the conclusions that I have reached within this practitioner-led action research. Throughout the study I have been concerned with the role of oral art forms within a nine week drama course that was designed for pre-service tertiary learner-teachers. My central research question was: What role can culturally specific oral art forms play in supporting drama pedagogy and learner-teachers’ intercultural understanding? I was able to investigate intercultural encounters and identify potential cultural sources of oral art forms because of the diverse backgrounds of the 83 learner-teachers who participated in this research.

My rationale for the study included:

- An increase in “potential users of higher education” (Murray and Lawrence 2000: 5) resulting in a need to find alternative educational approaches that suit the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.
- A need for more arts-based research (Eisner 2005) and identified gaps in research relating to cognitive development and pre-service teacher education within educational drama (Anderson 2004; Caterall 2002; Shu and Chan 2007; Hundert 1996).
My focus on investigating how to engage with oral art forms was embedded within my discoveries, as a teacher-researcher, about my own assumptions and about the, at times, challenging nature of using these forms within a tertiary environment. Some of my most deeply held beliefs about learning and teaching have been brought into question in this study. These include my belief in ‘learning by doing’ or active participation with adult learners and socio-constructivism. My research has led me to interrogate active participation more carefully and to reflect on whether socio-constructivism may be the best fit for all educational contexts.

In my research I have drawn on literature from a number of fields and areas including: Action Research (for example Kemmis 2009; Somekh 2006; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead 2003; Macintyre 2000; Cherry 1999); Arts-based Research and Narrative Inquiry (for example Eisner 2001; Barone 2005; Polkinghorne 1995; Blumenfeld-Jones 1995; Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul 1997; Conle 2001; Doyle & Carter 2003); Learning and Teaching Theories (for example Kolb 1984; Mayer 2004; Jarvis 2010; Rossiter and Clark 2007; Palmer 1998); Drama Education (for example O’Toole 2009; Nicholson 2005; O’Neill 1995; Miller and Saxton 2009; Caterall 2007); Oracy and Oral Art Forms (for example Gilles and Pierce 2003; Wagner 1998; Finnegans 2001; Chinyowa 2007; Groenewald 2001; Seda 2001; Mpola 2007); Education Policy and Higher Education (for example James 2007; Murray and Lawrence 2000; Cumming 2006; Karumanchery and Portelli 2005; Levin and Greenwood 2006); Postcolonial Theory (for example Bhabha 1996; Spivak 2004; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000; Fuller 2000; Hoogvelt 1997); Cultural Theory (for example Eagleton 2000; Hountondji 2002; James and Biesta 2007; Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner 2007), Intercultural Communication (for example Bharucha 1993; Fennes and Hapgood 1997; Barna 1997; Bates 2005; Donelan 2009); and Constructivism and Socio-Constructivism (for example Vygotsky 1978; Bruner 1986; von Glasersfeld 1991; Mercer and Fisher 1997; Wood 1998; Phillips 1995).
7.2 CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In each chapter I concentrate on a particular aspect, or topic, that I considered to be crucial in exploring and examining my central research question.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview of a Research Story
I position myself, my knowledge interests and my educational philosophy within the investigation. I delineate personal and professional motivating influences for my topic selection, key terms and the potential value of the study. I conclude the chapter by outlining the structure of the thesis and the issues and ideas discussed in each of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Research Characters and Setting
In this chapter I record the stated familial and cultural identities, views and attitudes of the learner-teachers involved in this study. I provide information pertaining to the drama course and research framework including: arts-based research as an alternative reporting form; data generating and data analysis techniques; and ethical considerations. I distinguish between participatory, technical and practical action research and clarify my particular use of practical action research. I give an account of the action research process in this study that consisted of three cycles.

Chapter 3: Oral Art Forms and Cultural Complexities
In this chapter I draw from postcolonial, feminist and transnational cultural theory in linking the terms hybridity, essentialism, choice and globalisation to learner-teachers’ prior oral art form experiences and definitions of their cultural identities. I argue for the place of oracy and oral art forms within tertiary environments. I also reflect on the assumptions that I brought to the research process.

Chapter 4: Tensions and Climax within the Research Story
I consider the interplay between a research and a teaching agenda within a university environment and examine the resultant tensions between my dual
roles as teacher and researcher. I argue that where such tensions occur preference needs to be given to the teacher role even though this may mean losing potential research opportunities. I discuss the complexities and nuances of power and articulate some challenges encountered within the sharing and use of oral art forms. I explore some gaps between constructivist ideals and classroom practice.

Chapter 5: The Drama Pedagogy Story Strand
I describe and discuss particular ways in which my use of oral art forms was more or less successful within the nine week drama courses. I reflect on learner-teachers’ experiences of engaging with oral art forms in relation to: differing attitudes towards drama and oral art forms; some learner-teachers’ reluctance and others’ keenness to participate and perform; the importance of familiarity and comfort in sharing and using oral art forms; the impact of learning potential and styles; the role of the facilitator; oral art forms as engendering multi-modal construction of meaning; and the place of oral art forms as drama conventions and within fictional drama contexts.

Chapter 6: The Intercultural Encounters Story Theme
I begin by presenting and reflecting on how stories were used within the intercultural encounters in my nine week drama course. I then examine the impact of South African oral art forms and multi-layered storytelling on intercultural communication and understanding. I discuss further issues that contributed to the level of effectiveness of the intercultural encounters in this study including: similarities, diversity and difference; spaces for intercultural exploration; connectivity and dialogue; building up a repertoire of cultural resources; and fantasy and reality.

Chapter 7: The Research Story Resolution and Conclusion
I present my outcomes and findings linked to my research questions and objectives. I discuss the implications of this practical practitioner-led action research study, make recommendations for further research, share my
reflective-practitioner’s journey in narrative form and conclude my research story.

7.3 MY OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

The only real difference between many personal theories and formal theories is that formal theories have been dressed up and know which fork to use (Taylor 2006: 20).

The questionnaires completed by the learner-teachers at the start of the action research process provided me with some useful background information. The questionnaire responses impacted to some degree on the choices I made within the action research cycles and resulted in my asking some follow-up questions within the learner-teacher interviews. These follow-up questions guided me towards particular outcomes and findings. However, it was largely my analysis and interpretation of my field-notes and meta-journal extracts as well as the learner-teachers’ interview responses that led me to the significant outcomes and findings recorded in this chapter.

I have collated and summarized what I view to be my key outcomes and findings. I have discussed them under the headings: Engaging with Culturally Specific Oral Art Forms; Drama Pedagogy and Intercultural Understanding; and Other Significant Findings.

7.3.1 Engaging with Culturally Specific Oral Art Forms

The first of my two research objectives, as stated in Chapter 2, was to identify ways in which I could facilitate learner-teacher engagement with oral art forms in my teaching of a nine week drama course. Within the context of this study I discovered that oral art forms should be carefully and specifically selected rather than attempting to draw broadly from the backgrounds and experiences of research participants.

The selection of oral art forms should be grounded in the facilitator’s own experiences and expertise and her/his knowledge of potential cultural resources
and forms within particular learning environments. In Chapter 1 of this document, I discussed the need to link learning to learner-teachers’ ‘knowledges’. Through this study I came to realise that finding and using learner-teachers’ ‘knowledges’, embedded within oral arts forms, requires facilitator awareness of these various ways and forms of knowing.

*I thought that the drama classroom would be filled with ‘dream-time stories’ (from my meta-journal).*

I discovered that culturally specific oral art forms, excluding South African examples, were extremely hard to identify and access with the groups of learner-teachers, despite the potential promise of oral art forms within a richly diverse cultural context. This was for a variety of reasons including; cultural sensitivities and perceived cultural taboos; learner-teachers with migrant backgrounds or international students following an agenda of assimilation, or fitting in. My mistaken assumption that oral art forms would come flooding in from learner-teachers arose from my lack of knowledge of the learner-teachers and insufficient time needed to gain the participants’ trust. I also discovered confusion or a lack of clarity about the nature of oral art forms within contemporary Australian society.

In an Australian context I discovered the complexity of cultural protocols around indigenous oral art forms. There is a strong emphasis on Indigenous Australians being cultural guardians, custodians and interpreters (Drama Australia 2007; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocol 2007). Such aspects as protection of culture, sustaining the secrecy of certain cultural practices and “regulat[ing] how stories and information is presented” is considered crucial (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocol 2007: 1). The difficulty of using and sharing Indigenous Australian oral art forms stemmed from; learner-teacher perceptions that indigenous cultural practices could only be performed by those with indigenous roots; and a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders within the groups of learner-teachers in this study.
Issues relating to assimilation and a desire to fit in emerged for the learner-teachers at various stages within this study. This occurred in the discussions relating to the perceived discrepancies in background information I obtained from the questionnaires (Chapter 3) and in learner-teachers’ focus on western narratives in an attempt not to stand out and to be a part of what they considered to be the socio-cultural milieu of an Australian university environment (Chapter 4). This desire of some learner-teachers to assimilate contributed to my challenges in encouraging them to identify and engage with oral art forms. I believe, in some cases, this prevented learner-teachers from sharing what could have been potentially rich and unique oral art forms.

My assumptions that learner-teachers would be able to share a wide repertoire of culturally specific oral art forms stemmed from my prior experiences within a different tertiary education context. I lacked an understanding of Indigenous Australian cultural protocols and practices as well as assimilation issues as discussed above. I assumed that learner-teachers would all be willing to share their own oral art forms; and I failed to realise that they would not all be confident to perform the task, or aware that they, in fact, had oral art forms to share.

When I embarked on the research I did not sufficiently take into account the complex cultural dimensions that the participants brought to the process. Differing pre-conceptions about teacher and student roles linked to cultural influences, I believe, impacted on the difficulties they encountered in engaging with oral art forms. For instance, the role of students in group discussion, which could result in the identifying of various oral art forms, may be seen by some students from a Chinese background as a “fruitless” waste of time which could expose them to the risk of “learning errors from their peers” (Jin and Cortazzi 1998: 105).

The tensions I encountered in this study have made me more empathetic towards the first year teachers, that I have taught in the past, who tell me that they often abandon their ideals and disregard teaching practices encountered at university for more traditional teaching practices. Despite the tensions I
encountered and my temptation to abandon the philosophical framework on which my teaching and research was based, I continued with the action research occupying the difficult dual role of teacher-researcher and pursuing active learning and teaching strategies.

Phoebe: You gave us so many ideas to work with. Like the storytelling and different types of narratives (from learner-teacher interview 2).

I found that effective strategies for facilitating learner-teacher engagement with oral art forms were providing practical examples and experiences; working with learner-teachers to create their own contextual definitions; and drawing their attention to some oral art forms that may be within their frame of reference and they would be able to share.

My sharing of traditional South African stories, poems and storytelling practices with the learner-teachers was particularly helpful in enabling learners to understand the term oral art forms and the characteristics of these South African forms as well as to find further appropriate forms. As the learner-teachers were unfamiliar with the term ‘oral art forms’, through demonstrating South African examples practically and guiding them towards a definition of oral arts forms I was able to provide some instructional ‘scaffolding’ for the learner-teachers (Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976) which aided them in their understanding. Learner-teachers in this study confirmed that it was through practical exploration in class that they began to understand what could constitute oral art forms.

I also discovered that since it was extremely challenging and time consuming to get learner-teachers to share culturally specific oral art forms, an effective strategy was to refer participants to oral art forms that I believed they were familiar with such as football chants and children’s playground chants and rhymes. At times this required discussion and gradual changing of learner-teachers’ perceptions about what constituted oral art forms such as bedtime stories and playground rhymes.
I have been trying to get students to identify culturally specific stories. Today it happened (from my field-notes).

The challenge of finding ways for the learner-teachers to identify oral art forms before I could even begin to explore their role within drama pedagogy and their connection with intercultural understanding strengthened the action research process. Quick, easy answers, in my view would have resulted in ‘surface’ as opposed to ‘deep’ learning. I considered the products that I suggested, in the form of oral art forms that learner-teachers could relate to such as football chants and playground games and calls, well worth the effort. The learner-teachers did eventually share stories from diverse cultural origins and different versions of stories with similar messages or themes. These stories provided useful resources for the learner-teachers as future primary classroom teachers.

I don’t even really see myself having a cultural identity (from a questionnaire response 2008).

The learner-teachers’ stated prior experiences of oral art forms varied considerably and provided useful background information for my study. What I found particularly interesting in relation to their prior experiences at the beginning of this research was the acknowledgement and affirmation of cultural identities ‘other’ than ‘Australian’ and a perceived lack of cultural identity as ‘Australians’. At the beginning of the action research cycles, learner-teachers who classified themselves as Australians either believed that they had no cultural identity or that an Australian identity constituted what was borrowed from ‘other’ cultures.

Stephanie: We wanted to participate but it was difficult when people where not taking it seriously (from learner-teacher interview 7)

I found that reactions and attitudes towards oral art forms differed substantially from class to class, and amongst individual learner-teachers within those classes. There was a direct correlation between learner-teachers’ positive attitudes towards play, acting and drama and their willingness to engage with oral art forms. Power dynamics within the class groups and peer pressure also
impacted directly on the learning and teaching environment as well as indirectly on the learner-teachers’ levels of engagement with oral art forms.

7.3.2 Drama Pedagogy and Intercultural Understanding

The second of my two research objectives, as stated in Chapter 2, was to examine the potential for using oral art forms to support drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding. I established that it is possible, and can be highly effective, to use oral art forms to support drama pedagogy in tertiary teacher education. However, both negative and positive factors emerged in relation to their use. I also found that oral art forms enabled cross-cultural exchange but, within the context of this study, could result in superficial levels of intercultural understanding.

Candice: Shy students don’t want to act (from learner-teacher interview 7). The introduction of oral art forms impacted negatively on some tertiary learner-teachers as these genres are highly performative and did not suit some learning styles. Introducing these forms was detrimental to some learner-teachers’ experiences and understanding of drama pedagogy in these teacher education classes. It appeared that shy, reluctant learners while able to respond within the non-threatening environment of a less performative drama space could be intimidated by oral art forms that require overt acting skills and were of an exhibitional nature. Other learner-teachers within this study embraced the performance opportunities that oral art forms provided.

I should have known from my experience and years of drama teaching that it wouldn’t work (from my meta-journal). Another factor that impeded the positive role of oral art forms within these drama education classes was when I contrived to link academic texts to oral art forms within drama frames resulting in inauthentic fictional ‘as if’ contexts. The academic texts did not lend themselves to ‘the voluntary suspension of disbelief’ (ascribed to Coleridge) as the texts did not support believable drama metaphors or fictional situations.
Candice: They worked because we are familiar with them (from learner-teacher interview 7).
A major factor contributing to oral art forms supporting drama pedagogy was the learner-teachers’ comfort, familiarity and interest in the particular oral art forms. I discovered that culturally familiar forms were effective in motivating learner-teachers to participate and in assisting them to understand drama concepts. I found that the learner-teachers’ interpretation and re-interpretation of texts from the class reader using culturally familiar forms within multi-modal forms of communication and expression helped them to acquire an understanding of drama pedagogy.

Phoebe: It made me think about information in a different way (from learner-teacher interview 2).
I discovered that engaging with and performing oral art forms can lend itself particularly to multi-modal communication and can be used to support the acquisition of multiliteracies in the classroom. These were two areas that learner-teachers found helpful when considering the use of oral art forms for future primary classroom use.

Candice: I liked the practical, activity-based way the course was structured (from learner-teacher interview 7).
Learner-teachers believed that oral art forms could contribute to drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding in two distinct ways. These were to aid the learner-teachers with their own learning about drama and to provide them with potential resources and activities within primary school classrooms. They felt that the practical base of the course and the range of oral art forms they experienced had equipped them with useful classroom resources or what Jarvis (2010: 262) refers to as an essential “body of practical knowledge”.

Michelle: Oral art forms encourage body learning (from learner-teacher interview 5).
As Nicholson (2005: 57) states “physical embodiment… is integral” to drama as an art form. Oral art forms, in conjunction with drama processes, provided further ways of exploring embodied knowledge and linking cognitive concepts to
body images. For example, within the context of a children’s playground the learner-teachers created a series of still-images that represented different stages in dramatic play scenarios. Each still-image was given a ‘voice’ in the form of a repetitive chant to explain particular features of dramatic play. I found that this linking of images to such concepts as dramatic play and requiring learner-teachers to provide voices for these images through oral art forms worked very well in supporting drama pedagogy. In addition they provided spaces within which more reluctant learner teachers felt safe to explore.

Jenny: Different storytelling scenarios were an effective tool in helping cultures relate to each other (from learner-teacher interview 1).

I believe that intercultural communication and understanding was enhanced by the learner-teachers engaging with and sharing culturally specific oral art forms. There were aspects of the intercultural classroom encounters that were worthwhile within the confines of what could be realistically achieved within 36 hours of learning and teaching. I also believe that the intercultural dialogue and exchange within the drama course had the potential to contribute to transformation, or multi-perspectival ‘transportation’ (Nicholson 2005) as part of a range of intercultural experiences.

The data showed that learner-teachers felt that their experiences of oral art form contributed to their intercultural understanding. However, I found that the learner-teachers’ sharing of stories and exploration of oral art forms was predominantly at the level of cross-cultural exchange within this research. The study illustrated the difficulties of achieving deep intercultural understanding in a tertiary drama course. The bringing of learner-teachers and their experiences together “from different cultures does not guarantee success” (Morgan 1998: 228) and “understanding is a gradual process...time is a critical condition in modifying...perceptions” (Robinson 1988: 3). However, I believe that their experiences within the nine week course may contribute to intercultural understanding over time, if supported by learner-teachers’ complementary learning or life experiences as part of a gradual, accumulative transformation process (Mezirow 1997).
Stephanie: You made a daunting task more comfortable. I ‘was in the shoes’ of someone in South Africa (from learner-teacher interview 7).

My knowledge of, and passion for, isiXhosa oral art forms contributed to my ability to guide the learner-teachers towards an understanding of these forms. My sharing of oral art forms familiar to me was more effective in promoting intercultural understanding than when I tried to get learner-teachers to select and share their own culturally specific oral art forms. Yet, because there was a distinct focus on oral art forms from a particular country and culture it felt, at times, that these art forms were on show or occurred at a relatively superficial level as in a cultural ‘show and tell’ day or what McMahon refers to as ‘stomp, chomp and dress-up activities’ (McMahon 2003). Although there was learner participation, the demonstration of isiXhosa oral art forms was through my mono-logical rendition as opposed to dialogical experiences that are required for intercultural communication. This added to my sense of the superficiality and ‘show-like’ nature of these experiences.

I had absolutely no idea how complex and controversial the term ‘culture’ could be (from my meta-journal).

My own intercultural understanding was developed throughout this reflective practitioner research. I gained a rich understanding of the challenges that are evident in such an investigation in an Australian context when encountering such issues as appropriation, land and sacred rites. I learned that my use of the terms ‘own’ and ‘other’ culture was simplistic and reductive and that I had grossly underestimated the complexities, nuances and ambivalences of culture and cultural identity. I found that, like any construction of meaning within a socio-constructivist framework, culture is defined and re-defined within specific contexts, settings and environments.

Ruth: In a drama it was easier to create our chants. It made sense to us and we enjoyed it (from learner-teacher interview 5).

I discovered that when oral art forms were used as a drama convention within a process drama context or where the learner-teachers became familiar with particular oral art forms within a fictional drama context and then used them
outside the drama frames to link them to academic texts they most effectively contributed to supporting drama pedagogy.

*Julie:* *In the drama I was able to say what I think is important in society and what I would change* (from class reflections).

Through the action research process I began to understand that I needed to find drama contexts and ways of engaging with oral art forms that would encourage learner-teachers to think about culture and values in a multi-dimensional way. I wanted the learner-teachers to develop an understanding that within cultural domains there could be multiple identities and within individuals there could be multiple cultural influences. I found that drama contexts provided a framework for intercultural communication and understanding within contested, contradictory and ambivalent interpretations of human experience. This was particularly so when the drama contexts were not tied to any particular cultural domain or setting. The drama processes were the vital ingredient when I structured the classes in this way. In these cases the oral art forms were effective in enriching the drama processes and supporting intercultural encounters.

My experiences in this study confirmed that drama contexts are also the essential ingredients for learner-teachers’ engagement in decision-making. I had initially assumed that I could establish a sharing and enabling power relationship that would enable the learner-teachers to participate in decision-making about the direction and content of the drama course. This assumption was based on my prior experiences of learning and teaching within an environment where my relationship with learner-teachers occurred over a period of four years and where I encountered the same learner-teachers for a number of hours each week across different subject areas. The learner-teachers in this action research were reluctant to make decisions outside drama processes and contexts whereas inside the drama frames they continually engaged in decision-making. As Edmiston (2003: 225) argues, in role within drama contexts “we frame events differently so that our power and authority relationships are changed”.
7.3.3 Other Significant Findings

Not knowing when the wolf will turn will cause tension (from my field-notes).

When learning styles and preferences were discussed with the learner-teachers some expressed a desire for the inclusion of less active participation and more transmission modes of learning within the course. Learner-teachers’ responses in relation to preferred learning styles led me to question my emphasis on active, discovery learning rather than on valuing learners’ cognitive engagement through less physical action. I found that that there is perhaps a need for me to provide fewer physically active experiences within my learning and teaching in a tertiary environment. On the other hand, active physical embodiment of knowledge was a valuable and worthwhile aspect of the learning that took place within this study with some learner-teachers expressing their appreciation of the practical and active nature of the course.

There was learner-teacher support for both direct instruction and for active participation in the learning process. Some learner-teachers favoured a stronger emphasis on the facilitator’s supplying knowledge while others leaned more towards their own construction of knowledge. Fortunately for my morale and sense of identity as an educator the findings in this research do not require me to abandon socio-constructivism. In a sense, the findings in this research both endorse and raises questions about constructivism.

Australian learner-teachers are extremely adept at verbally conveying their thoughts and ideas. South African learner-teachers work well with their bodies but they don’t always use their heads (from my meta-journal).

My findings endorse the view that learning styles may be linked to cultural influences and prior educational experience; consequently particular approaches to learning and teaching may suit particular educational contexts. This research points to a need for a more critical interrogation of pedagogical practices within different educational settings and the broadening of learning and teaching to include different kinds and ways of constructing knowledge. As
Nicholson (2005: 38) states, there is not one preferred pedagogy that “might be universally effective, or universally appropriate”.

### 7.4 RESEARCH REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.4.1 Action Research Processes

*One of the strengths of collaborative research is that reflection can be collaborative too* (O’Toole 2006: 150).

I consider the action research process that I embarked on as a teacher-researcher within this study to have been valuable. It was a means of interrogating and reflecting on my learning and teaching and a way of evaluating the usefulness of oral art forms within drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding. The practical action research model I used was one of a “family of practices of living inquiry” that constitute action research (Reason and Bradbury 2008: 1). It allowed for the inclusion of the learner-teachers’ voices within the research findings which I considered extremely important.

I feel that I learned a great deal through the positive and negative tensions that arose from my dual status as both teacher and researcher. This was despite the fact that the dual role was not always a mutually beneficial one. However, this study confirmed for me that collaborative research projects, that is where more than one person initiates and drives the action research process, are essential if the action research is to be authentically participatory. This process could occur within communities of practice, or cross-disciplinary collaboration. The advantages of collaborative research projects are the opportunity for more equal distributions of status and power, for communal reflection and for planning and working drawing from different strengths and perspectives. Inter-subjective research practices and partnerships with the potential for collective reflective conversations within arts research communities could lead to more cohesive frameworks for reflective inquiry and “evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of reflective practices” (Burnard 2009: 10).
So, my recommendation is where co-generative action research is sought there is a need to ensure that the research takes place within a collaborative framework, where there is sufficient time to build strong relationships within a research team. The research participants also need to be equally committed to the research process and have a genuine interest and stake in the research. Some of the ways that this is possible in tertiary classes are through: engaging colleagues within the same field or discipline, or across disciplines, in collaborative projects; working with practitioner-researchers with similar research interests and forging ongoing school and/or community partnerships over longer time-frames that may result in longitudinal studies.

7.4.2 Oral Art Forms

Across cultures we have imagined, understood and communicated through the creation of expressive images (Brown, Imms, Watkins and O’Toole 2009: 132).

From my experiences and observations within this study I would recommend that extensive research takes place on the availability of human resources within particular education settings before embarking on processes that require engaging with culturally specific oral art forms. By this I mean that once a learning site has been identified prior research needs to take place in relation to experts in appropriate oral art forms that may be drawn into the process and what other resources there may be that would guide the selection of oral art forms.

Furthermore, I suggest that learning experiences and pedagogical processes could be broadened to include culturally specific expressive forms and images from various modes and arts disciplines such as painting in visual arts. I believe this to be applicable and valuable within an Australian environment since Australian Indigenous arts disciplines, like South African Indigenous arts forms are interconnected and not separate entities.

There is a need for careful planning and an awareness by the facilitator of when sufficient trust and confidence has been built up within the group for oral art forms to be introduced. The facilitator needs to ensure a time-frame that is
extensive enough to be able to gradually expose learners to oral art forms when they have had a sufficient grounding in drama practice based on less potentially threatening experiences. As longer time-frames are not necessarily available within tertiary drama courses, there is a need to re-consider what can best be taught within a limited time-frame. In this study some aspects of the course needed to be cut to cater for the learner-teachers’ expressed desire to explore multi-layered storytelling more fully.

7.4.3 Research Poems

*Poetic approaches ...can communicate emotionally charged moments in our professional and personal lives* (Prendergast 2010: 82).

Within this research I employed colloquial and ‘poetic’ writing styles that I hoped would be accessible to an assortment of audiences including those not involved in education, academia or research. Of all the different writing styles I used I found research poems to be particularly helpful although I did feel at times there was a need to over-analyse them due to the nature of the written report that is shared with a critical audience. The research poems assisted me in capturing my thoughts, feeling, ideas and experiences as a reflective practitioner. They helped me to employ a presentational form that shifted “beyond the purely representational” (Denzin 2003: xi; Haseman 2009).

The poems I wrote during the study, not all of which I shared within this research report, were useful to me in a number of ways. They were helpful in introducing and guiding discussion within the writing up of my thesis. They also encapsulated emotions, tensions and findings in my meta-journal as I experienced them within the action research process. I would strongly recommend research poems to any researcher who is reflecting within cognitive and aesthetic domains.
7.4.4 Improving Research Processes

In a society much given to offering painless ways to do hard things – lose 20 pounds in three weeks... it is worth emphasizing that writing takes great effort and dedication (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul 1997: 7).

Near the beginning of the research process I was given the advice to ‘just keep writing, write as much and as often as you can’. This was sound advice and being someone who loves writing I found this an exciting prospect. For the most part, I wrote constantly and I continually reflected on, revisited and reworked my writing. However, there were times within the pursuit of this research that I forgot this sound advice, immersed myself into the reading aspect of the research or focused too heavily on writing about other people’s ideas and what I had read. My recommendation here is to myself, for my next research project and to those who may be starting out on a PhD journey and are focusing on narrative forms of inquiry. There is a need to provide oneself with a daily space for simply writing and allowing thoughts, opinions and ideas to flow freely without being preoccupied with who might be responsible for these opinions or where these thoughts may come from.

With regard to the improvement of other aspects of the research process I believe that a formal piloting of my questionnaires would have been useful and would perhaps have assisted with some of the challenges surrounding the use of the terms oral art forms and ‘own’ and ‘other’ cultures. While I believe questionnaires to be worthwhile and have had past experiences with the effectiveness of projective techniques, in this research they had limited usefulness. As with other sections of the questionnaire I really only found the projective techniques to be helpful in providing me with background information relating to the learner-teachers in this study.

Time and circumstances permitting, a post-research questionnaire for learner-teachers might have been helpful in generating data and reflecting on the research process. This process may have provided me with a more balanced view of participants since those learner-teachers who were interviewed within this research were those who were positive about oral art forms and their
experiences in the drama course. In spite of my difficulty in obtaining negative data, I believe the interviews contributed significantly to the insights I gained within this study. The viewpoints and opinions expressed by the interviewees were instrumental in the development of my understanding of the role that oral art forms play within drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding.

Compiling field-notes and keeping a meta-journal was valuable and helpful in addressing the key question which drove this research. I could perhaps have focused more carefully on particular aspects that I wanted to observe in the classes each week. Also, notwithstanding researchers’ strong encouragement and defence of personal accounts within arts-based research (Leggo 2008; Diamond and Mullen 1999) entries within my meta-journal could be construed as self-indulgent, rather than critically reflective at times.

7.4.5 Recommendations for Future Research

You really have a responsibility... to open the gate for the next person to investigate the field, or for your own next project (O’Toole 2006: 150).

My recommendations for future research identify areas that may be of interest to other researchers but they are also what I intend to pursue within my own future research. The learner-teachers’ continual references to the usefulness of oral art forms as practical activities for primary classrooms point to the need for an investigation into the use of oral art forms linked to exploring the potential of promoting and improving literacies with young learners. The multi-modal learning that took place within the limited scope of this research has fuelled my interest in exploring literacies and oral art forms through computer technology and new media with young learners. According to Carroll and Cameron, digital spaces are “already places of meaning making and identity production” (2009: 296). A future research topic could be an investigation into meaning-making and literacies through connecting oral art forms to new media. Research could also be conducted into broadening and extending the repertoire of oral art forms and other arts forms of expression that could function as potential drama conventions and techniques. This research could be collaboratively conducted with drama practitioners from different countries and educational environments.
During the initial stages of my research I wished to explore ways of promoting academic writing through the use of oral art forms. This did not occur for a variety of reasons including the scope of my research being too broad and my selected learning and teaching setting for this research not being conducive to such as study. This is still a potential avenue of investigation particularly as the learner-teachers felt that the exploration of oral art forms should be more directly linked to their written assignment tasks.

Other avenues that need to be researched are; comparative studies of learner-teacher and educators’ experience and use of oral art forms within different social, cultural and economic educational environments; the use of oral art forms within different phases and locations of education (for example primary or secondary schools or in community settings). This research could be extended to examine the use of oral art forms to support drama pedagogy with more mature, possibly, postgraduate students in a university environment.

7.5 MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

The I as an author can imagine the future, reconstruct the past and describe himself or herself as an actor (Hermans 1996: 32).

It seems fitting to include words from my meta-journal that were written in story form throughout my research journey and consolidated here within a research story.

**Finding the Inner Chamber**

Once upon a time I arrived, as a keen and enthusiastic, scholar in a familiar, unfamiliar village that I had physically and spiritually travelled very far to reach. Now in this village, although there were many enticing events and novel sites to see I did not look around much at first. Instead I made my way straight to the famous cave of PhD studies and began searching for information that would lead me to the inner chamber of 80 000 lights. I was so excited to be on this journey that I tried to cover as much distance and direction in the cave as possible.
My enthusiasm led me down interesting pathways into parts of the cave that were richly informative and into multiple chambers that had the most amazing and spectacular array of stalactites and stalagmites. Though many of these pathways led further away from the chamber of 80 000 lights on which I was supposed to be focussed. As I continued on my initial solo exploration into the dark bowels of the PhD cave, though there were guides whom I could call out to from time to time, loneliness and claustrophobia began to creep in. I realised that, to reach the inner chamber, I needed human contact, I needed other voices and I needed to acquaint myself with the surrounding village.

So, I began to divide my time between exploring the village, observing and then working with a class of learner-teachers in the village and looking for the inner chamber. The village artefacts and learner-teachers’ voices unearthed many reasons why I had not been successful in my quest in finding the inner chamber. This included a host of assumptions I had about the direction of the cave journey, what I would find inside the cave and the equipment I would need to light up the 80 000 lights within this chamber.

Far better equipped and no longer relying only on my own knowledge and instincts I continued my journey. I used different torches to light my way and carefully marked and recorded where my journey had taken me so that each time I entered the cave I could see where I had been previously and where I would still have to explore. Some days the journey was clear and smooth and I covered large sections of the cave without getting stuck or lost. On other days I came across deep personal, professional or informational puddles that ranged from irritating little pools of water through muddy, murky puddles that took me a long time to wade through what felt to me like sinking sand.

When I started out on my journey I thought it would take me 18 months at the most to complete. My perception that I was an experienced cave explorer perhaps made me an arrogant scholar. It may have been possible for me to find the chamber of the 80 000 lights more quickly but the journey would not have been as rich and satisfying as it has been. The changing of the guides at the mouth of the PhD cave was both highly fruitful and painfully frustrating. It led me to valuable perspectives, crucial insights and
different routes to reach the inner sanctum of the cave. It also misled me into more impersonal paths that deterred me from my preference for a pathway to the inner chamber that would be marked with my personal crest. At times, I found myself at various dead-ends in the cave and at times the guides led me to the most exotic and unfamiliar sights and sounds within my cave experience.

As I got closer to the 80,000 lights so the journey became less exciting and it seemed as if I would never reach the end. The lights seemed to be getting further and further away. I had to stop and remind myself of all my exciting discoveries along the way and of the pleasure I would feel when I stood in the centre of the inner chamber and admired the 80,000 lights.

Once upon a time, I have arrived in the chamber of 80,000 lights. To me it is a beautiful cave and most of the lights are shining brightly and illuminating this inner prize. There are still some lights that are a little dim and not as bright as they could possibly be and some that may not be working at all. But mostly I am proud of them and of the journey that has brought me to this particular place...

Meta-journal compilation (14/06/2010).

7.6 CONCLUSION

This study examined oral art forms and their role within drama pedagogy and intercultural encounters. My findings in this study indicate that oral art forms can be useful in supporting drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding provided that the facilitator builds on diverse participants’ pre-existing familiarity with oral art forms. There also needs to be an appreciation of the limits of the support that these oral forms can provide on their own, or within a relatively short time-frame.

The study has provided me with an understanding of the use of oral art forms within teaching and learning. I have identified both viable strategies for their
use as well as ways in which they can be detrimental to drama pedagogy or provide superficial intercultural understanding. I have learned a great deal, in terms of identifying and overcoming the challenges and obstacles to finding and sharing oral art forms. I have found a more efficient framework for exploring oral art forms, through my discovery that they are best placed as drama conventions and a re-affirmation that they work most successfully within drama frames. However, the role of oral art forms is an area that I believe requires further investigation and examination within various educational settings and contexts. Particularly as, although action research processes may “contribute to theories of action”, they need to be and are “open to being confirmed or disconfirmed in other situations” (Orton 1994: 93).

In the introductory chapter of this research I articulated the need to find alternative educational approaches, particularly approaches that are not transmission-based, that encourage active learning and are not exclusively western views. Within this research, I discovered that there was learner-teacher support for the inclusion of transmission-based approaches within a drama education course. Due to my commitment to learning by doing, my pedagogical approaches were not as balanced, eclectic and open to all kinds of possibilities as I had presumed them to be. Through my sharing of South African oral art forms I introduced a non-western dimension to the drama course but I did not easily manage to access learner-teachers’ local knowledge.

In this research I have come to understand that, while there was a positive attitude towards oral art forms amongst many of the learner-teachers and they can certainly be used as an alternative teaching strategy, there is a need to find alternative strategies that suit a variety of learning styles within a tertiary learning environment. These include approaches that may promote transmission-based learning and that are grounded in catering for the needs and perspectives of an increasingly diverse yet ‘globalised’ student population.

I trust that this study will be beneficial to drama practitioners and educators involved in education at tertiary institutions. I hope that other educators will be sufficiently interested in this research to explore the potential of culturally
specific oral art forms and to share and expand the repertoire of available drama conventions from diverse cultural and contextual terrains.

As Lean, Moizer, Towler and Abbey (2006: 232) state:

> Some lecturers appear not to be confident about how students will react to such [experiential] approaches and how successful these techniques will be... some academics feel experiential approaches to be 'nonacademic' and less suited to university-level education than more theoretically based approaches.

It is my hope that the findings from this study will promote greater confidence in alternative approaches to learning and teaching, assist to dispel a belief that experiential learning is not ‘academic’, and encourage others to continue to research alternative approaches and techniques that will be beneficial in a tertiary learning environment.

I believe that this study contributes to an understanding of different knowledges and ways of knowing. This is achieved through my attempts to access local and global knowledges within the exploration of oral art forms and through the various forms of presentation and representation used to share and reflect on my research experiences.

Undoubtedly there were some difficulties, frustrations and challenges highlighted within my research story concerning my attempts to use oral art forms to support drama pedagogy and intercultural understanding. In addition my discoveries and findings contained tensions and contradictions. Interweaving of artistic expression, maintaining academic rigour and allowing room for explicit, as well as tacit, intuitive knowledge was far more complex and challenging than I imagined. Action research with its focus on both practical problem solving and the capacity to generate texts for the art education research community” is a demanding process (Levin 2008: 670).
Nevertheless, for me it was largely an exciting, interesting and fruitful part of my research story. I believe that my account of these experiences of trying to build intercultural understanding using drama frames may “offer useful markers” within, what Greenwood suggests is “only a partially chartered field” with “no comprehensive maps, recipes or models” (2007: 140).

The story began with some life experiences within a South African context that led me to believe that oral art forms could play a role in learning and teaching. The story has continued in Australia, where while not all my attempts at encouraging learner-teachers to engage with and use oral art forms have been successful, I have seen glimpses of possibilities which have led me to consider options, in the form of future research, for the next part of my story. In the spirit of this story and the influences of South African oral art forms, I will end with phrases from South Africa related to my storytelling practices. They indicate the end of this particular episode of my research story.

*Fluit fluit my storie is uit*

*Phela phela ngantsomi*

*That is the end, the end of my story.*
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